Harbourside Business Park

Ecological Update and Proposed Switch Building

The Countryside and Wildlife Team of Neath Port Talbot CBC have undertaken an ecological survey and assessment of an area of land near to Port Talbot docks, which is to be prepared for future development. The site is located between the old Court building and the new Justice Centre, off Cramic Way.

Original site status

The site is over 5km from the nearest statutory designated sites at Margam Moors SSSI, Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir SSSI and Crymlyn Burrows SSSI. A number of water based sites that meet the criteria as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation are however within 300m. A large number of records for protected and priority species within 1km of the site were reported as part of the desk study, some of which were considered to have potential to be present on site. The extended Phase 1 habitat survey undertaken confirmed that the site meets the criteria as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) for Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land (OMHPL). This is also listed as a priority habitat under S7 of the Environment Act (Wales) 2016.. The survey also noted Small Blue, a protected butterfly species, which is a primary indicator for SINC status. The site was also the subject of a Reptile survey (where a small population of Slow worm was recorded) and has been assessed in relation to suitability for other species, and particularly noted potential for invertebrates such as Shrill Carder Bee.

The loss of the SINC habitat on site and habitat supporting protected and priority species was considered to be the main likely impact from the scheme. Additionally, the potential to kill or injure reptile species afforded protection under legislation.

A number of mitigation measures, including habitat replacement, seeding and planting of plug plants along with habitat manipulation methods for reptiles were proposed to offset the reported likely impacts. The proposed layout of the scheme also had the potential to increase the ecological value of the area through removing non-native invasive species, planting/seeding species into areas which are currently un-vegetated (road/hard standing) to attract invertebrates and birds, plus providing reptile refugia/hibernaculum.

With the implementation of the mitigation and enhancement proposals the scheme was able to bring an improvement in the quality and ecological connectivity in the long-term.

In the short-term the scheme resulted in a loss of SINC habitat, however with the mitigation measures proposed there was an overall gain of SINC habitat in the long-term.

Current site status
The site was cleared of vegetation in 2020 and appropriate measures were undertaken to protect reptiles.

Two mitigation areas were proposed to mitigate for the habitat loss caused by the development of the site.

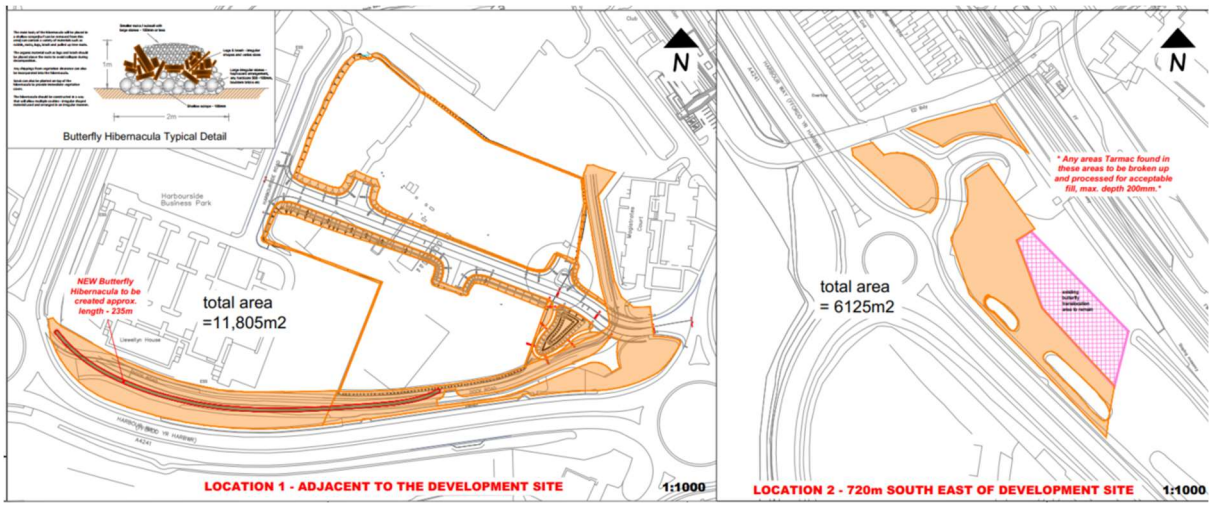

Figure 1- Mitigation areas for development

Overall there was an increase in SINC quality habitat in the area. The habitat creation proposals were undertaken at the same time as the completion of the proposed development. 10 years of management and maintenance has also been put in place – see Harbourside Enabling Works, Biodiversity Mitigation Strategy (January 2021) for full details of the planting and management that has been put in place.

Monitoring

NPTC Biodiversity Unit undertake the monitoring as prescribed in the Biodiversity Mitigation Strategy and Year 1 was undertaken in 2023 by Megan Price and Chloe Angelone.

A site walkover of both areas was undertaken to assess the condition of the created and enhanced habitats to inform further management.

Location 1 – Habitat creation on this site is considered to have been successful. The verges along the new road system and SUDs features have taken very well and the wildflowers are thriving. Since plating there have been unusual weather patterns, prolonged hot and dry

spells followed by spells of intense rainfall. This has hindered how the vegetation has grown however, taking into account this factor (which is unable to be mitigated for) the site is progressing as it should.

Regular maintenance has been undertaken in consultation with Megan Price and buddleia has been removed from the verges where it started to grow along with a small path of Himalayan Balsam that was found on one of the development platforms in 2022. This has been treated and was not present in 2023.

The Kidney Vetch planting which was undertaken has also been successful and there is a healthy population of Kidney Vetch present. This was undertaken to encourage Small Blue butterfly to utilise the site. No sign of small blue butterfly was found on the site during monitoring.

Figure 2- Location 1

Location 2 – has not been as successful at establishing as Location 1, however, this is likely due to weather conditions that have been recorded and is not concerning at the moment. It is not considered remedial measures need to be undertaken at the moment.

The wildflower growth has not been as successful as was expected, however the target species are present on the site, there is more dock and other more ruderal species that are currently dominant. It is expected that over the next couple of years that this trend should alter through management and the wildflowers that are present should be able to thrive.

Due to the state of the vegetation at location 2, shrill carder bee and small blue monitoring was not undertaken.
This will be undertaken once the site vegetation reaches a stage where it is suitable to be surveyed.

SWITCH Building Development

There is now a proposal to build the development referred to as the SWITCH building on the site. This current proposal does not fit within the development platforms that were originally constructed and which the biodiversity mitigation was designed and planted around.
As this development is happening relatively soon after the construction of the original site with the development platforms, it is not considered that there will be a significant short or long term loss of SINC quality habitat as a result of this development.

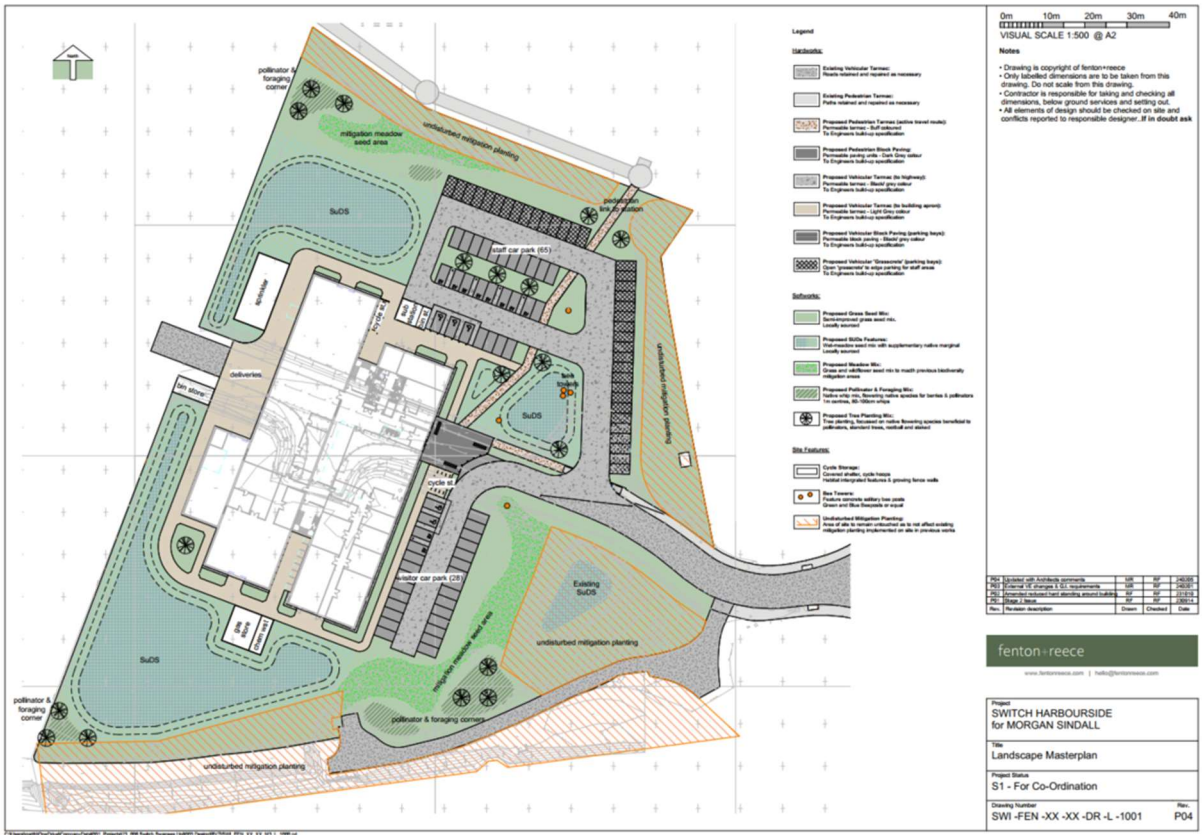

Figure 3- SWITCH building landscape masterplan

There will be a loss of the verges which have been planted up as wildflower verges as well as some of the SUDs features. Figure 3 shows the undisturbed mitigation planting which will remain untouched during development (appropriate protection measures will be put in place to protect these features – to be decided later in the planning process). The loss of verges which will occur will be mitigated for by the mitigation meadow seed areas shown on Figure 3. The same species mix will be used as was used in the original mitigation areas.

Additional SUDs features will be implemented on the site and these will be appropriately planted up. All landscaping and species mixes used on the site will be pollinator friendly and appropriate to the site, its previous SINC status to ensure that there is no loss of habitat in the wider area.

A Biodiversity Mitigation Strategy will be developed for this site to ensure long term success of the habitats that will be created.