Harbourside Strategic Employment Site (Platform Preparation) Ecological Update February 2021

by

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DECLARATION

The information, advice and opinions which we have prepared and provided is true, and has been prepared and provided in accordance with the CIEEM's Code of Conduct. We confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional bona fide opinions.

Signed:

Miss Megan Price – Consultant Ecologist, NPTC

The following report is considered a reasonable and true representation of the ecological situation on the site assessed. The report is however just a snapshot assessment therefore the authors are unable to guarantee that all biodiversity interest has been identified. In addition, if works are not undertaken as programmed re-assessment will be required. The survey information is considered applicable for one year from the date of the survey. The mitigation proposals are only applicable to works undertaken prior to the reptile hibernation season, if site clearance works are to be undertaken during winter months the mitigation proposals will need to be re-visited.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

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 the presence of Local Biodiversity Action Plan habitat (Previously Developed Land of Biodiversity Interest) which also meets the criteria as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and as a habitat listed under (S7 Environment Act 2016 formerly S42 NERC). The survey also noted Small Blue, a protected butterfly species, which is a primary indicator for SINC status. The site is 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/Local Biodiversity Action Plan 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 are proposed to offset the reported likely impacts. The proposed layout of the scheme also has 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 it is considered that the scheme will bring an improvement in the quality and ecological connectivity in the long-term. In the short-term the scheme will result in a loss of SINC habitat, however with the mitigation measures proposed it will result in an overall gain of SINC habitat in the long-term.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 SITE LOCATION

The Countryside and Wildlife Team of Neath Port Talbot Council were asked to undertake an ecological survey and assessment of an area of land near to Port Talbot docks, which is to be used to accommodate new business platforms. The location of the site is shown on Figure 1.

The site is located south of the Port Talbot Parkway station, between the rear of the Old Magistrates Court, and the new Court building.

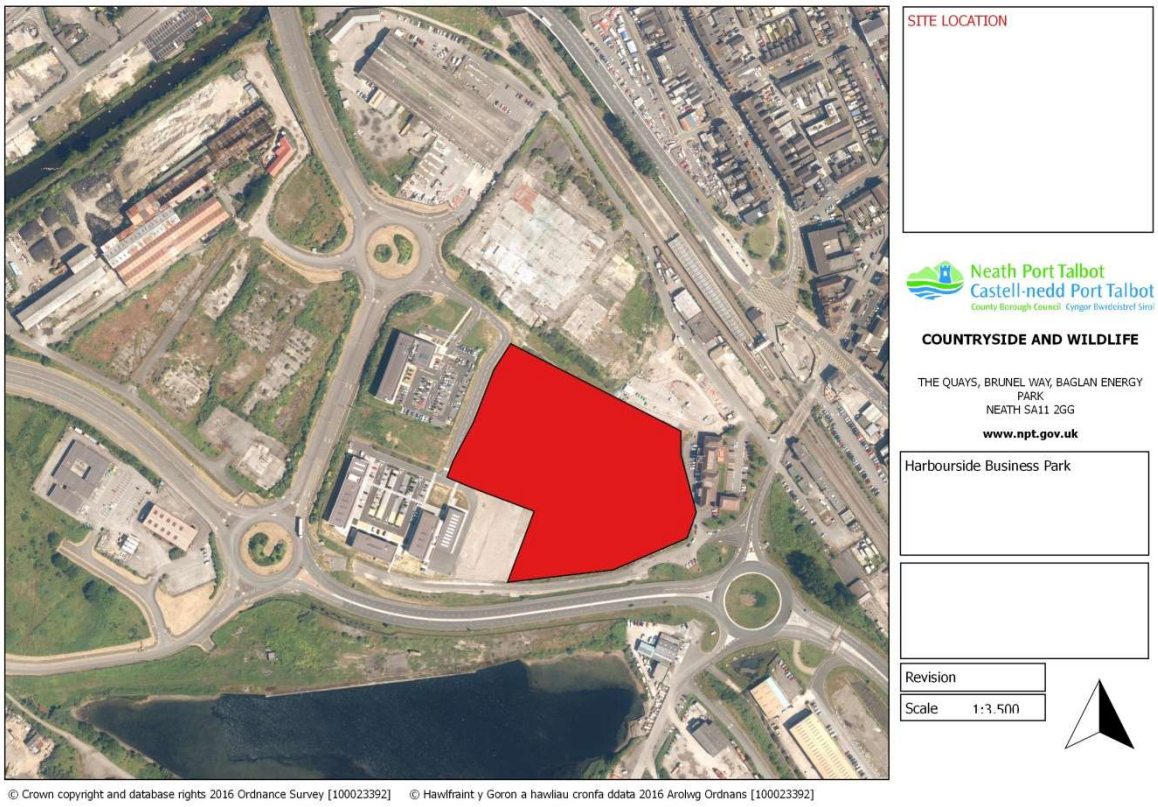

Figure 1: Site Location

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

The development will involve:

- Construction of new road infrastructure and the upgrading of substandard roads to serve new business development sites
- Remediation of contamination and other site constraints to an area of 3.0 ha to create a site that is ready for development
- Flood mitigation works including the installation of additional drainage measures

Initial preparation will include clearance of vegetation, waste materials, existing hard-standing and fences.

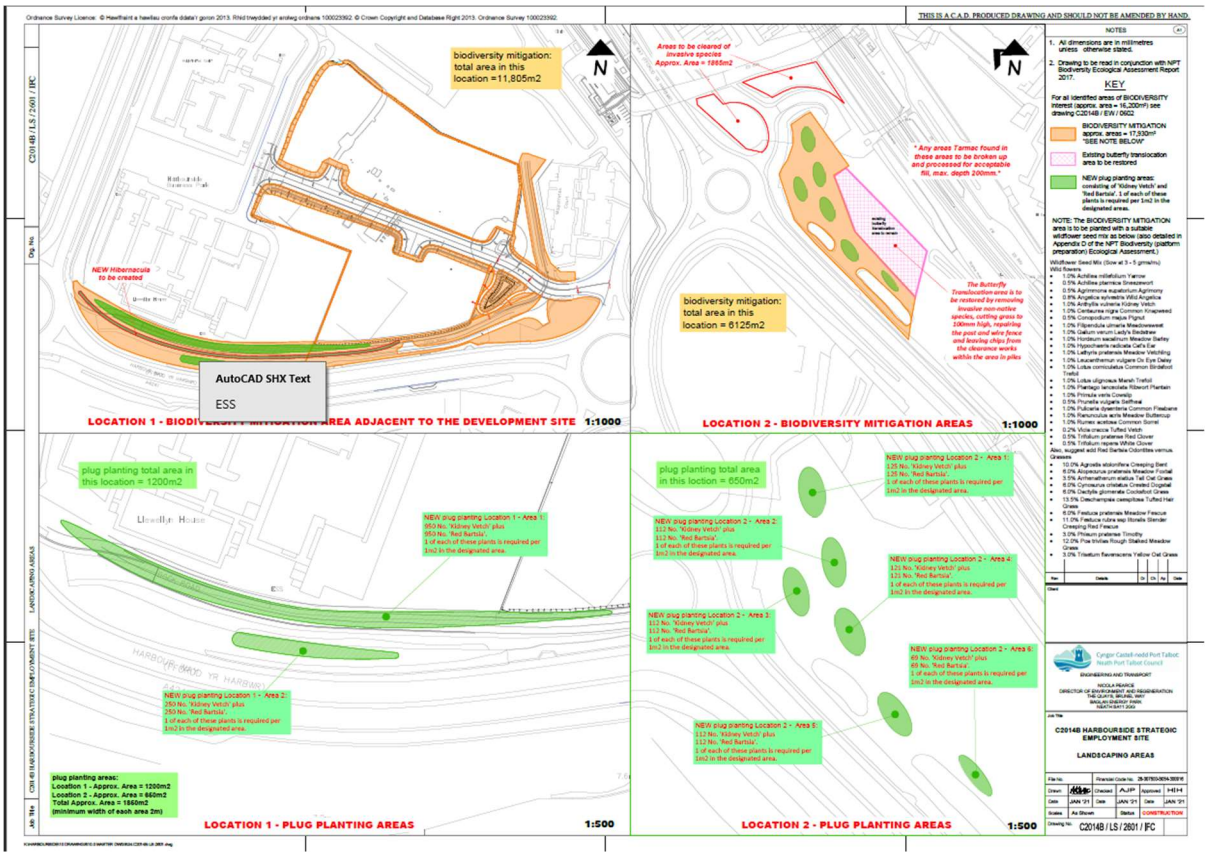

FIGURE 2: Indicative Development Scheme Layout and Biodiversity Mitigation Areas

1.3 CLEARANCE OF SITE

Harboursite Strategic Employment Site (Platform Preparation) Ecological Assessment November 2019 (Neath Port Talbot CBC) details the results of the survey work undertaken on the site prior that was used to inform the site clearance work that was undertaken to ready the site for development.

A toolbox talk was given by Megan Price to the Andrew Scott contractors undertaking the site clearance on the 22nd September 2020. The clearance was undertaken in a phased method to ensure that any reptiles present were encouraged to move off the site towards suitable habitat.

Phase 1

- The vegetation on site will be cut to a height of 300mm above ground and left for 24 hours. Cutting/strimming will be undertaken for the majority of the site in a north west to north east direction to allow any animals to move towards suitable habitat off-site. All cutting/strimming will be supervised by the ECoW. Any reptiles/other animals discovered will be carefully captured and moved to adjacent suitable habitat.

Phase 2

- Vegetation throughout the remaining area of the site will be cut/strimmed to a height of 100mm above ground and left for 24 hours. Cutting should be undertaken in the same direction as previously and towards existing suitable habitat off-site. All cutting/strimming will be under supervision of the ECoW. Any reptiles/other animals discovered will be carefully captured and moved to adjacent suitable habitat.

Phase 3

- Remaining vegetation will be reduced down to ground level and left for 24hours. Cutting should be undertaken in the same direction as previously and towards existing suitable habitat off-site. All cutting/ strimming will be under supervision of the ECoW. Any reptiles/ other animals discovered will be carefully captured and moved to adjacent suitable habitat.

Competed

- The site can now be prepared for the works.

- All storage of materials, such as soils, rubble etc. will be placed within the site compound, on bare ground away from adjacent off-site habitat. This will ensure that such storage does not attract animals, such as reptiles, as refugia/hibernacula. All locations will be agreed with the ECoW.

The site clearance was completed by the 27th October 2020. Due to the size of the site and staff issues the clearance took longer than expected, however it was cleared according to the agreed methodology and is now ready for the construction of the development platform.

Megan Price undertook the role of ECoW and attended site on a regular basis to ensure the clearance was undertaken in accordance with the agreed clearance methodology.

1 adult slow worm was found on the 7th October 2020 when a pile of rubble was dismantled by hand, the slow worm was moved to a safe area away from the clearance works.

1.4 HABITAT MITIGATION PLAN

The scheme will involve the short-term loss of SINC habitat. Mitigation for habitat loss will be provided by newly created biodiversity mitigation areas (figure 2) being planted with a suitable wildflower seed mix which includes invertebrate-friendly species with the addition of the specific species that are particularly attractive to Small Blue Butterfly and Shrill Carder:

Kidney Vetch	*Anthyllis vulneraria*
Red Bartsia	*Odontites vernus*

The species listed above will also be plug planted in the newly created areas to provide immediate replacement for the habitat that will be lost.

Red bartsia may possibly be unavailable at the time of planting, if this is the case alternative species such as common restharrow (*Ononis repens)* or field scabious (*Knautia arvensis)* will be substituted.

Following planting and establishment the planted areas will be put into an appropriate management regime.

Harbourside Enabling Works, Biodiversity Mitigation Strategy (WSP, January 2021) contains details of the biodiversity mitigation strategy agreed to compensate for the loss of habitats caused by the development works – this mitigation plan will be conditioned and followed.

The Biodiversity Mitigation Strategy also details management and monitoring of the created biodiversity areas to be undertaken by the Biodiversity Team at NPTC, this will be undertaken over the next 10 years following the creation of the biodiversity areas in 2021.

7 REFERENCES

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