Port Talbot: River Afon Riverside

Full Planning Application: Planning Statement

23 Dec 2024



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1. Introduction and Background

1.1. Purpose of the Statement

This Planning Statement has been prepared to accompany a full planning application for re-landscaping of the public realm proposed at the River Afon Riverside Park area, Port Talbot, which sits in a prominent location on the opposite river bank to the Princess Royal Theatre, Civic Centre, and the Aberafan Shopping Centre. The Riverside Park area (the 'site') is a linear riverside space which currently acts as an amenity and green space, as well as an active travel corridor. A previous placemaking review of the town centre has highlighted this site as having a large potential for improvement which could be to the benefit of local people, and integrate multiple opportunities for improvements to nature, play, travel, business use and events, as well as for general amenity use. The site is shown in Figure 1 below.

The proposed changes have been designed to improve the public realm and desirability of the area for static use, and includes:

- Refinement of landscape areas for pedestrian and other active travel circulation;
- Introduction of informal play areas;
- Improvement of the quality of areas of 'soft' vegetated landscape;
- Addition of rain gardens

Figure 1: Application boundaries.

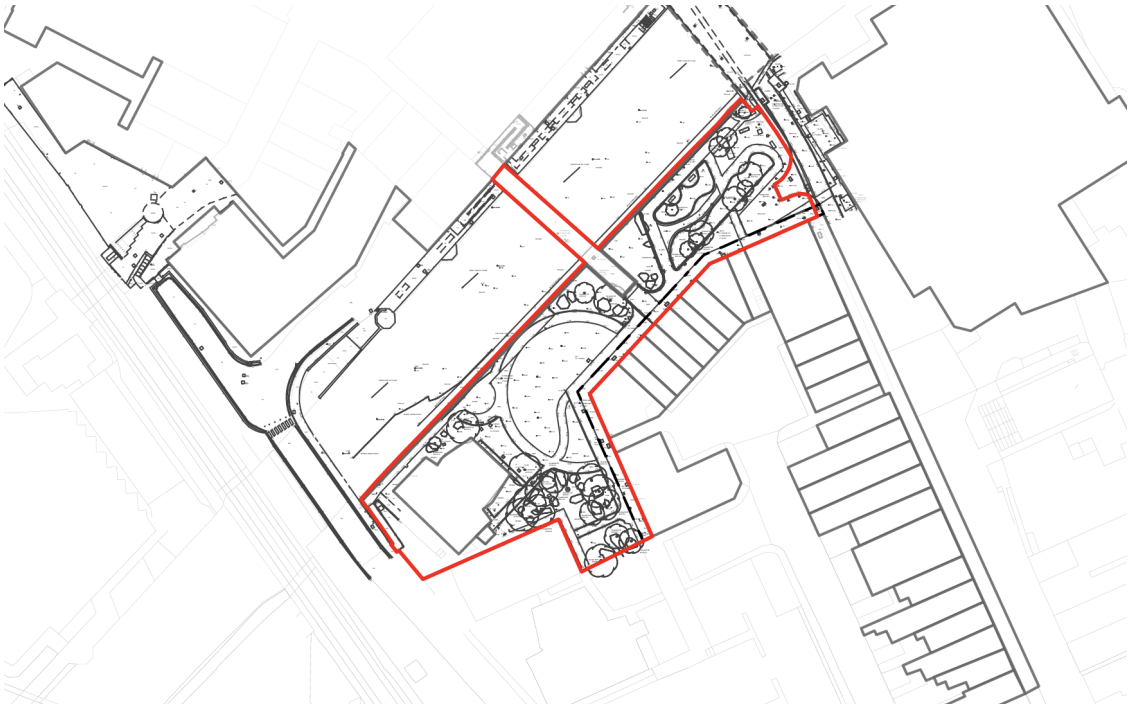




Figure 2: Illustrative Masterplan.

The planning application is accompanied by the following plans and reports:

- Site Location Plan
- Existing Site plan
- Proposed Site plan
- Topographic surveys
- Existing site sections
- Proposed site sections
- Proposed levels plan
- Drainage details
- Lighting Plan & LUX mapping
- Landscape strategy plan
- Hard & Soft landscape plans (Various)
- Proposed boundary treatment plan
- Tree removal/ protection plan
- Design Statement
- Green Infrastructure Statement
- Archaeology Desktop Report
- Drainage Strategy
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Bat Surveys)
- Flood Consequences Assessment
- Tree Survey, AIA & Tree Protection methods

2. Site and Development Description

2.1. Site Description

The site is a publicly accessible landscaped area of the riverside in Port Talbot centre, which sits on the southern bank of the River Afan between the Aberfan Shopping Centre to the north, the rest of the town centre to the south / east and bus station to the west. The site comprises an approximately 20-40m wide strip of land running along the southern/eastern bank of the River Afan. The north-eastern end joins the roadway linking the Civic Centre and Square to the station road highstreet, and its shops. At this end and adjacent to the site is the Aberavon Bridge crossing, designated as Grade II listed, which joins those two important areas of the town. At its south-western end, the site surrounds the Riverside Baptist Church before terminating at the roadway and church car park, with connections to the local bus station along that roadway, to the northwest. At the middle of its length the space is bisected by a modern pedestrian footbridge over the River Afan. This bridge connects both the site and an adjacent row of shops (to the south), over the River Afan, to the Aberafan Shopping Centre to the north. An aerial view of the site can be seen at Figure 3 below, and photographs of the site shown at Figures 4,5 and 6.

Figure 3: Aerial Site View. (image: Google Maps).

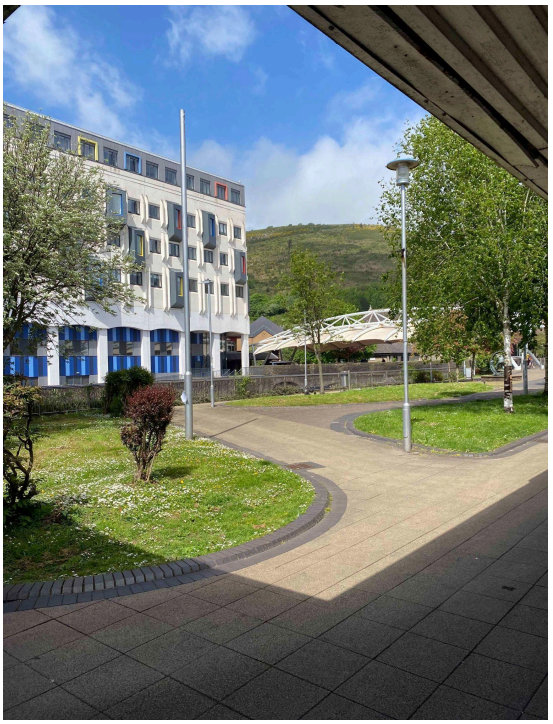


Figure 4 (top, left) View of the Riverside space from north bank.

Figure 5 (top, right) View looking across riverside space from shopping precinct.

Figure 6 (bottom, left) View looking across riverside space towards retail units.







2.2. Local Area Description

Port Talbot is an Industrial town which grew out of the needs of the copper coal and steel industries in the 19th and early 20th centuries. By the middle of the 20th century the steelworks had grown to become of international importance.

Today Port Talbot sits within the County Borough of Neath Port Talbot, an administrative district sitting within South West Wales, between the City and County of Swansea to the west and the County Borough of Bridgend to the east. The town has a population of around 50,000 and the wider Borough a population of around 140,000 people.

The town is bounded by the sea on one side and the mountains of Emroch, Dinas and Margam to the north, which give a spectacular backdrop. The M4 bisects the northeastern part of the town, providing access to Swansea within a 20-minute drive to the west and Cardiff within a 45-minute drive to the east. The town is also on the mainline railway, which offers access to the same destinations in 25 and 35 minutes respectively, while destinations further afield include Bristol and London.

The Port Talbot settlement structure is linear in form, generally sitting between the coast and the M4 corridor. The northern extremity is bounded by the River Neath, to the north of which sits Swansea University Bay Campus and Bay Field Hospital, and to the south of which sits Baglan Bay (a Strategic Employment Site), which is partially developed. The steelworks dominate the southern end of the town. The town also accommodates a hospital, retail park, and other leisure/ cultural facilities, including the Aberavon Beach.

The town centre is located to the north of the steelworks and is focused on the key commercial streets of Station Road and Forge Road. The town centre is anchored by the Aberfan Shopping Centre, Tesco Superstore, Civic Centre and PRT which are in the north of the town centre. The town centre has a modern railway station, which is located in the south of the centre and a bus station in the north of the centre (it is located to the west of the development site). A bus interchange is also located adjacent to the railway station.

Within the town, the green infrastructure is minimal and there is very little continuity between the spaces, or opportunity for those visiting the town to sit and enjoy the outdoors, except for the seating provided by the shops along the high street. Residential areas envelop the centre and steelworks to the east and north.

Figure 7: Aerial view of the wider area (image: Google Maps).



2.3. Proposed Development Description

The proposed development is a Levelling Up Fund scheme that has successfully secured funding. The vision for the development as included in the funding submission was as follows:

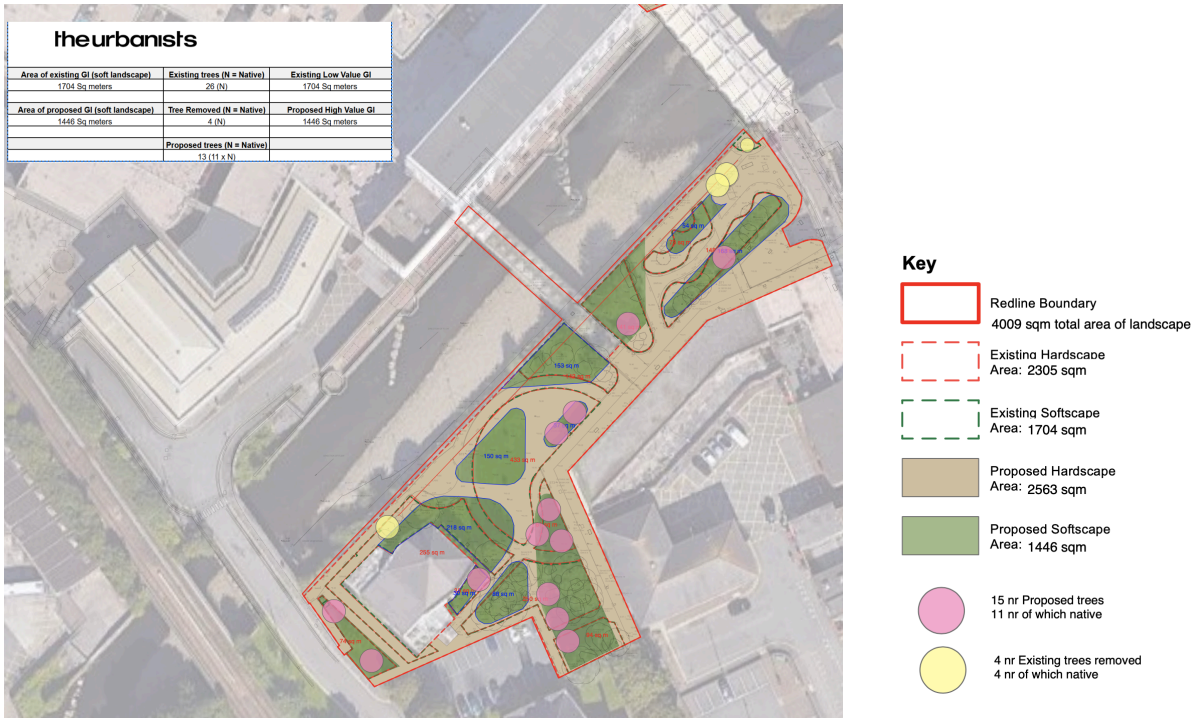
"To create a considered sequence of vibrant green spaces centred around the River Afan for Port Talbot's local community and visitors to enjoy. Bringing to the town, a richness and diversity that will create new popular destinations that enhances the town's vitality and supports its local businesses"

Proposals for the Riverside are as set out below:

- Creating a new open space which significantly increases the quality of green and non-green spaces, and creates a more inviting space and a destination for the town;
- Incorporating multi-use spaces for seating, and informal play;

- Orientating the design/ layout towards the adjacent riverside and shopping areas.
- Planted rain gardens to enhance drainage;
- Use of features to create informal play spaces and formal seating and multi-use areas;
- Extending the new green space towards the Civic Square to enhance the setting of the Aberavon Bridge;
- The layout of the space is used to better enable sustainable mode movements, and meet the accessibility needs of all; and
- The refurbishment of the adjacent River Afan footbridge, by removal of its canopy and any required reinforcement work required.

Figure 8: Green Infrastructure Plan.



Where possible elements of the existing space will be retained, including riverside railings, and some riverside lighting. The adjacent footbridge is also proposed to be retained, but will have its canopy removed and be refurbished as required. The current public nature of the space is not proposed to change, and adjacent businesses will have their accesses maintained.

3. Planning History

The only planning application recorded online for the Riverside Park area is set out below.

> **P2001/0872:** Riverside Park Statue. Approved 4.10.01

A separate planning application for the redevelopment of the Civic Square nearby has been submitted, and includes the extension and refurbishment of the Princess Royal Theatre.

> **P2024/0685:** The refurbishment of the Princess Royal theatre and civic square, including extension of the theatre. Decision Pending.

4. Planning Context

The site lies within the Local Planning Authority (LPA) of Neath Port Talbot Council, and therefore the national and local planning contexts more generally applicable are:

- Legislation
- National Planning Policy and Technical Advice Notes (TANs); and
- Local Development Plan and supplementary planning guidance.

The specific relevant contexts for the proposed development as a whole are the following:

Legislation:

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Planning Act 2008

Planning Act Wales 2015

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Active Travel (Wales) Act (2015)

National Development Framework

Future Wales - the National Plan 2040 (Feb 2021)

National Planning Policy and Guidance:

Planning Policy Wales, Edition 12 (February 2024)

TAN 4: Retail and Commercial Development (2016)

TAN 5 Nature Conservation and Planning (2009)

TAN 12 Design (2016)

TAN 15 Development, Flooding and Coastal Erosion (2021)

TAN 16: Sport, Recreation and Open Space (2009)

TAN 18 Transport (2007)

Local Planning Policy and Guidance:

Neath Port Talbot CBC Adopted Local Development Plan (2011- 2026)

Replacement Local Development Plan (2023-2038)

Biodiversity and Geodiversity (May 2018)

Pollution (October 2016)

Design (July 2017)

The Historic Environment (April 2019)

Open Space and Greenspace (July 2017)

4.1. Procedural Legislation

The following legislation below sets out the material considerations for planning permission. This legislation is of particular importance in terms of ensuring sustainable development and managing the interests of both current and future generations.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, sets out the requirements of LPAs to consider the longer term impacts of the decisions made, in order to work better with communities to deliver a sustainable outcome and prevent on-going issues such as poverty, climate change and health inequalities.

The Planning Act (Wales) 2015 states that Local Planning Authorities must exercise their function in relation to the determination of planning applications "... as part of carrying out sustainable development in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

2015, for the purposes of ensuring that the development and use of land contribute to improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales."

The Act puts in place seven well-being goals. The Act makes it clear that the listed public bodies must work to achieve all of the goals. The goals are identified in the image below.

Figure 9: The Wellbeing Goals.



The Future Generations Act defines Sustainable Development in Wales as: "The process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals."

The Sustainable Development Principle sets out how public bodies are required to work to apply sustainable development. These include, looking longer term to ensure that the needs of future generations are met without compromise, to meet their own needs. It also includes taking an integrated approach so that public bodies use the well-being goals to guide their

objectives. Other key elements are involving a diversity of the population in the decision making, and working in a collaborative way to find shared solutions. Another way to work sustainably is to understand the root causes of issues to prevent them from occurring.

Active Travel (Wales) Act (2015)

This act set out that Welsh ministers must publish annual reports on the amount of active travel journeys made in Wales. There is also a requirement for Local Authorities to identify and plan for active travel routes and increase the provision for walking and cycling, and encourage users to rely less on cars. Local highway authorities are required to give greater consideration to walkers and cyclists and provide greater infrastructure provision for them. The act also highlights the need to build connections between key sites such as workplaces, hospitals, schools and shopping areas, with active travel routes.

4.2. 4.2 National Policy

The following national-level policies are further material considerations and set out how the above legislation should be interpreted and applied in planning permission decisions.

Planning Policy Wales (2024) Ed. 12

The national planning policy context for the development is provided by Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12) and Future Wales: The National Plan 2040. Collectively, these documents provide the guide to ensure the delivery of sustainable development proposals. This is achieved through improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of current, and as required by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, future generations.

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12) (PPW) is the Welsh Government's land use planning policy for Wales. The primary objective of PPW is to ensure the planning system contributes towards the delivery of sustainable development, and improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, as required by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act. PPW names placemaking as the process of creating sustainable places and maximising wellbeing. PPW identifies key planning principles to include: growing our economy in a sustainable manner; delivering educational facilities; creating healthy and accessible

environments; sustaining communities; and, maximising environmental protection and limiting impact.

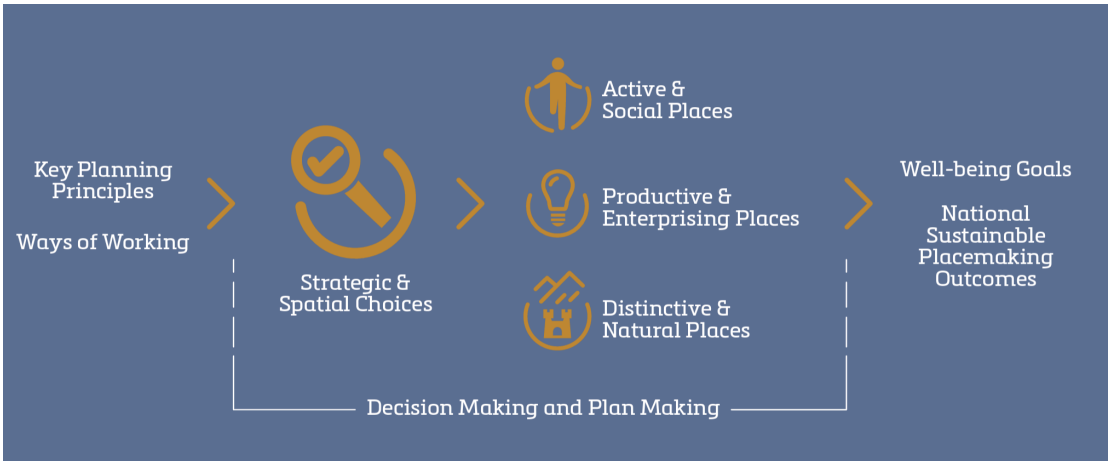
These principles are then underpinned by National Sustainable Placemaking Outcomes which interrelate.

It also sets out the four key themes which contribute to placemaking thus:

- Strategic and spatial choices, including how to achieve good design that enables access and inclusivity, environmental sustainability. Respect for local character and how it contributes to the surrounding area; and healthier places, including enabling opportunities for outdoor activity and recreation.
- Active and social places are those which promote social, environmental and cultural wellbeing by providing well-connected communities. It also includes encouraging the multiple use of open space and facilities, where appropriate, to increase their effective use.
- Productive and enterprising places, including the promotion of healthy lifestyles, and physical and mental health and wellbeing, provision of integrated green infrastructure and resilience to climate change. The overall focus is around making places easy to walk and cycle around; accessible by public transport; and minimising the use of non-renewable resources.
- Distinctive and natural places, including the need to conserve and enhance the historic environment and its assets; protecting and enhancing green infrastructure assets and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity; protection of trees and woodland where they contribute towards the ecological, character or green infrastructure functionality of an area; and to integrate Sustainable Drainage Systems to minimise flood risk and maximise other benefits.

The way these different principles, themes and targets integrate when considering planning proposals is summarised in Figure 13 below. That is, the first consideration is how the proposals contribute towards strategic and spatial choices; then how they contribute towards active and social places, productive and enterprising places and distinctive and natural places. The conclusion of this process should result in a proposal that contributes towards a sustainable place and achieving the well-being goals and sustainable placemaking outcomes.

Figure 10: Applying PPW principles in decision-making.



Each theme contributes in different ways to the placemaking outcomes. Residential development generally falls under the active and social places theme, which includes the key placemaking outcomes of: integrated green infrastructure; resilient to climate change; promotes physical and mental health and wellbeing; unlocks potential and regenerates; convenient access to goods and services; minimising the need to travel; appropriate development densities; makes best use of natural resources; feels safe and inclusive; provides equality of access; and embraces smart and innovative technology.

The promotion of Active Travel is prominent in PPW; it highlights the important role of the planning system in promoting and supporting the delivery of Active Travel and creating the right environment and infrastructure to make it easier for people to walk and cycle. The Active Travel Act 2013 makes walking and cycling the preferred option for shorter journeys, particularly everyday journeys, such as to and from a workplace or supermarket or in order to access health services.

Active Travel is integral to placemaking, creating life and activity in public places and providing the opportunity to meet people; it is a key component for sustainable places delivering social, economic and environmental benefits, therefore, new development must be fully accessible by walking and cycling.

Figure 11: Active and Social Outcomes (P.42 PPW 12).



The updated chapter 6 has been initially set out in guidance, titled 'Addressing the nature emergency through the planning system: update to Chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales'. This has now been incorporated into the Edition 12 of PPW.

The main changes to policy requirements, being:

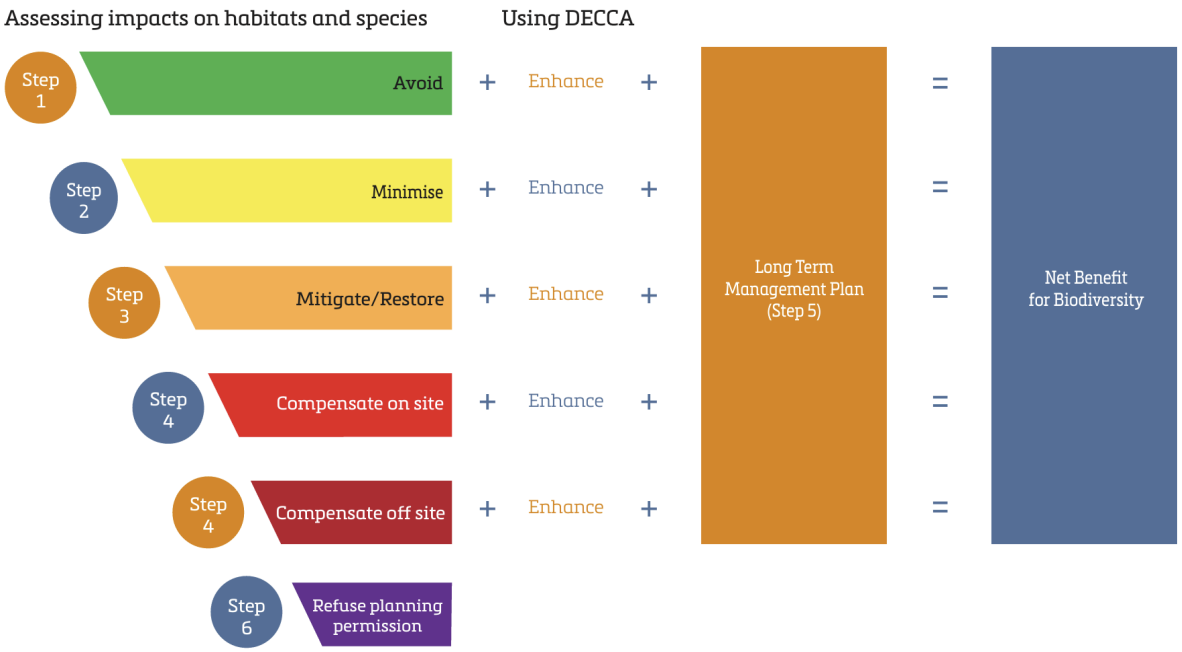
Green Infrastructure: A stronger emphasis would be placed on a proactive approach, covering cross-boundary consideration, identifying key outputs of green infrastructure assessments, the submission of proportionate green infrastructure statements with planning applications and signposting Building with Nature standards.

Net Benefit for Biodiversity and the Step-wise Approach (see Figure 15 below): Off-site compensation is acknowledged as a last resort, and the need to consider enhancement and long-term management at each step is recognised. Green Infrastructure statements are set out as a requirement to demonstrate the 'step-wise approach' i.e. avoid, minimise, mitigate/restore, compensate on-site, compensate off-site. This links to the DECCA framework of ecosystem resilience to evidence adequate enhancements (Diversity, Extent, Condition, Connectivity and resultant Adaptation/resistance/recovery aspects).

Trees and Woodlands: a close alignment is taken with the step-wise approach, as well as promotion of new planting as part of development based on securing the right tree in the right place. For any trees that may be removed as part of a proposed development,

consideration of their GI value including carbon, landscape amenity and ecological resilience sets a baseline from which a proportionate ratio of planting compensation shall be considered. Furthermore, the prescribed minimum ratio or areas of tree cover to compensate for any tree/woodland loss should be regarded.

Figure 12: Summary of the Step-Wise Approach.



Future Wales - The National Plan 2040

Future Wales - The National Plan 2040 was adopted in February 2021 as the national development framework setting the direction of development in Wales to 2040. The National Plan provides a strategy to address key national priorities through the planning system, including developing a vibrant economy, developing strong ecosystems, achieving decarbonisation and climate-resilience and improving the health and wellbeing of communities.

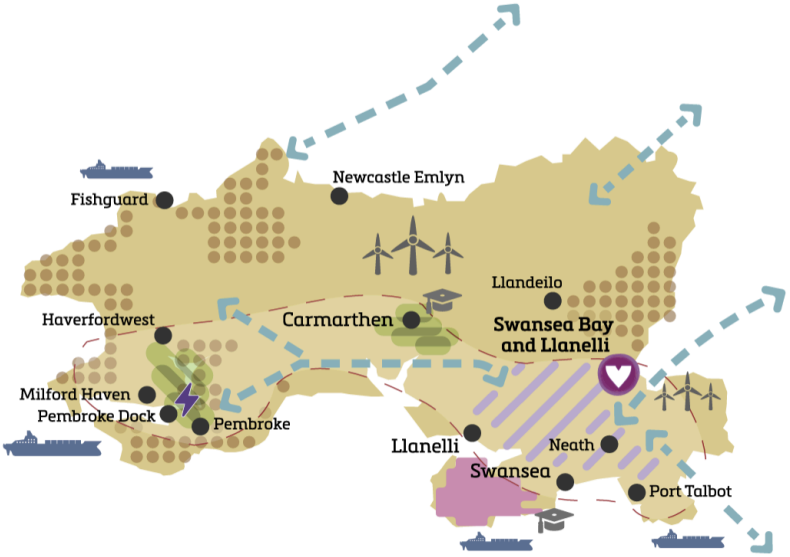
It sets out 11 outcomes of Future Wales comprising the vision for Wales in 2040. The aim is for a Wales where people live:

- In connected, inclusive and healthy places;

- In vibrant rural places with access to homes, jobs and services;
- In distinctive regions that tackle health and socio-economic inequality through sustainable growth;
- In places with a thriving Welsh Language;
- In towns and cities which are a focus and springboard for sustainable growth;
- In places where prosperity, innovation and culture are promoted;
- In places where travel is sustainable;
- In places with world-class digital infrastructure;
- In places that sustainably manage their natural resources and reduce pollution;
- In places with biodiverse, resilient and connected ecosystems; and
- In places which are decarbonised and climate-resilient.

Future Wales divides Wales into 4 regions with Port Talbot falling within the South-West Region, as covered by the Regional Strategic Diagram below. It also shows that Port Talbot is included within the national growth area.

Figure 13: South-West Region Strategic Diagram (p.145).



Future Wales also provides a series of national policies (ch.4, Strategic and Spatial Choices), the following are pertinent to the proposed development:

- Policy 1 – Where Wales would grow;
- Policy 2 – Shaping Urban Growth and Regeneration – Strategic Placemaking;
- Policy 3 – Supporting Urban Growth and Regeneration – Public Sector Leadership; and
- Policy 6 - Town Centre First;
- Policy 8 - Flooding;
- Policy 9 – Resilient Ecological Networks and Green Infrastructure;
- Policy 12 – Regional Connectivity; and
- Policy 28- National Growth Area- Swansea Bay and Llanelli

Policy 1 identifies that South Wales is a key location for future growth and Policy 2 sets out the need to create spatial frameworks to achieve the placemaking aims of the Wales planning system.

Policy 2 also sets out the importance of incorporating the Strategic Placemaking Principles in development proposals: mixtures of uses; a variety of housing; walkable scales; increased densities in towns and cities; integration with street networks; plot-based development; and green infrastructure.

Policy 3 sets out how the Welsh Government would play an active, enabling role to support the delivery of urban growth and regeneration. It details that the Welsh Government would assemble land, invest in infrastructure and prepare sites for development. Policy 3 also explains how local authorities and other public sector bodies would work together to unlock the potential of their land and support them to take an increased development role.

Policy 6 sets out that significant new commercial, retail, health and leisure facilities must be located within town and city centres to ensure they have good access by public transport to

and from the town, and where appropriate the wider region. An approach must be used to inform the identification of the best location for these developments.

Policy 8 explains how flood risk management enables and supports sustainable strategic growth and regeneration. Opportunities for multiple social, economic and environmental benefits must be maximised when investing in flood risk management infrastructure. It must be ensured that projects do not have adverse impacts on international and national statutory designated sites for nature conservation and the features for which they have been designated.

Policy 9 explains the importance of identifying areas which should be safeguarded and created as ecological networks for their importance for adaptation to climate change, for habitat protection, restoration or creation, to protect species, or which provide key ecosystems services, to ensure they are not unduly compromised by future development; and also the importance of identifying opportunities where existing and potential green infrastructure could be maximised as part of placemaking, requiring the use of nature-based solutions as a key mechanism for securing sustainable growth, ecological connectivity, social equality and well-being.

Policy 12 emphasises the importance of Active Travel and explains how planning authorities must plan the growth and regeneration of the National and Regional Growth Areas to maximise opportunities arising from the investment in public transport.

Overall, Swansea Bay and the Llanelli area will be the primary growth area for the region. The aim is to promote and enhance the area's strategic role and ensure key investment decisions support places within the National Growth Area.

Technical Advice Notes (TANs)

Technical Advice Notes should be read in conjunction with Planning Policy Wales (PPW). TANs should be taken into account by the local planning authorities in the preparation of Development Plans. They may be material to decisions on individual planning applications and would be taken into account by inspectors and the Welsh Government in the determination of appeals and called-in planning applications. The following TANs are relevant to the proposed development:

Technical Advice Note 4: Retail and Commercial Development (2016)

This Technical Advice Note provides guidance on retail and commercial development. It sets out the objectives which are to promote viable urban and rural retail and commercial centres, as the most sustainable locations to live, work, shop, socialise and conduct business; to sustain and enhance retail and commercial centres vibrancy, viability and attractiveness; and improving the access to and within retail and commercial centres by all modes of transport, especially active travel methods.

Technical Advice Note 5: Nature Conservation and Planning (2009)

This Technical Advice Note provides advice about how the land use planning system should contribute to protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geological conservation. It brings together advice on sources of legislation relevant to various nature conservation topics which may be encountered by local planning authorities. The key principles of planning for nature conservation are set out followed by advice about the preparation and review of development plans, including the relevant statutory requirements.

Technical Advice Note 12: Design (2016)

The revised TAN aims to equip all those that are involved in the design of development with advice on how sustainability, through good design, may be facilitated through the planning system. It sets out the core design principles that any development proposal must follow to help create a sustainable environment and exhibit a high level of design quality. These are structured via the five following key objectives of good design:

- Access - Ensuring ease of access for all;
- Character - Sustaining of enhancing local character; promoting legible development; promoting a successful relationship between public and private space; promoting quality, choice and variety; and promoting innovative design;
- Community Safety - Ensuring attractive, safe public spaces and security through natural surveillance;
- Environmental Sustainability - Achieving efficient use and protection of natural resources and enhancing biodiversity; and,

- Movement - Promoting sustainable means of travel.

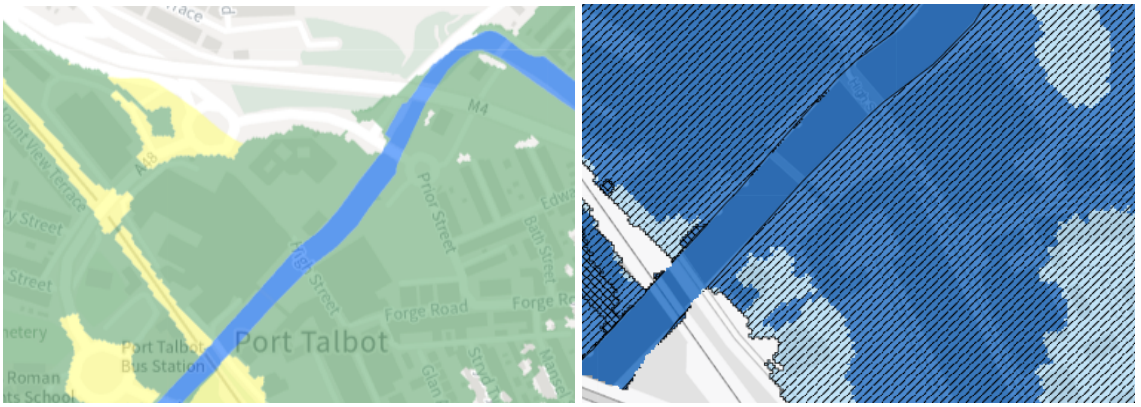
Figure 14: Objectives of Good Design.



Technical Advice Note 15: Development, flooding and coastal erosion (2021)

This TAN provides technical guidance which provides a framework for areas at risk of flooding from rivers, sea and surface water and those areas at risk of coastal erosion. It also provides advice on the consequences of the risks and adapting to and living with flood risk. The TAN sets out how a consideration of flooding and coastal erosion can help to achieve principles to develop sustainable places that are resilient to these impacts. It also sets out how to prepare for climate change including increases in sea level and the intensity of storm events.

Figures 15 and 16: Showing the Development Advice Map (left) and the Flood Map for Planning (right).



Technical Advice Note 16: Sport, Recreation and Open Space (2009)

This TAN aims to further integrate the links between health and wellbeing, sport and recreational activity and sustainable development in Wales. This document sets out the importance of ensuring that adequate land and water resources are allocated for formal and informal sport and recreation.

Technical Advice Note 18: Transport (2007)

This TAN recognises that the Integration of land use planning and development of transport infrastructure has a key role to play in addressing the environmental aspects of sustainable development. It states PPW and the Wales Transport Strategy both aim to secure the provision of transport infrastructure and services, which improve accessibility, build a stronger economy, improve road safety and foster more sustainable communities. This includes integration of transport and land use planning.

4.3. Local Development Plan Policy

Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan

Local policies further set out how the national policy and legislative materials considerations should be interpreted and applied in a local context, and are also a material consideration in any planning application decision. The development plan for the site is the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (LDP), which was adopted in January 2016. The LDP provides the local policy on which decisions on development are to be made.

LDP Policy	Detail
SP1 - Climate Change	Sets out how development will be managed to address the causes and consequences of climate change, including through managing the pattern of development to promote sustainable travel patterns, reduce dependence on the car, and minimise flood risk and the fragmentation of habitats.
SP2- Health	Seeks to improve health outcomes through a range of measures, including the co-location of jobs and facilities, and the provision of employment opportunities.
SC1- Settlement Limits	Governs the type of development that can take place within and outside of settlement limits.
SP5- Development in the Coastal Corridor Strategy Area	Outlines the growth strategy for the Coastal Corridor, including the promotion of mixed-use regeneration in Port Talbot.
OS2- Protection of Existing Open Space	Seeks the protection of existing open space.
R2- Proposals within Retail Centres	Permits proposals for retail, and community and leisure uses in retail centres, provided that they integrate with and strengthen the layout, retail character and pedestrian flows of the centre. Promotes the

LDP Policy	Detail
	redevelopment of derelict, underused and vacant land for uses which would have social, community or regeneration benefits.
EN7: Important Natural Features	Seeks to manage the impact of development on important natural features such as trees and watercourses, with adverse impacts only permitted where full account has been taken of the features and tier value, retention and protection sought and where loss is unavoidable, mitigation measures put in place.
SP16: Environmental Protection and EN8: Pollution and Land Stability	Seek the protection and where feasible improvement of air, water and ground quality, with proposals likely to have an unacceptable impact on health, biodiversity or local amenity not permitted.
TR2: Design and Access of New Development	Sets out that development will only be permitted where the use of the highway network is not compromised, appropriate levels of parking and cycling facilities are provided, safe access and servicing is maintained and development is accessible by a range of means.
SP21: Built Environment and Historic Heritage	Seeks the conservation and enhancement of built environment heritage through encouraging high quality design, safeguarding features of historic and cultural importance.
BE1: Design	Sets out a series of design criteria proposals are expected to follow, relating to contextual design, materials, safety, integrated transport, efficient use of resources, limiting run-off and inclusive access.

Figure 17: Showing the LDP proposals map of the site.



The grey highlighted area on the map indicates areas of Town Centre, Policy R2/1. The yellow shaded areas indicate Primary Shopping Streets, Policy R2/3.

There is a Replacement Local Development Plan (2023-2038) which is currently being prepared and will gain more weight as it progresses through preparation. The current programme is anticipated to be as follows:

- Pre-Deposit (Preferred Strategy) Consultation (Regulation 15) - November- December 2024
- Deposit Consultation (Regulation 17) - November- December 2025
- Independent Examination (Regulation 23) - September 2026-December 2026
- Adoption - April 2027.

4.4. Supplementary Planning Guidance

Supplementary Planning guidance provides further supporting information on how to respond to key policies of the Development Plan. Those relevant to the proposed development include:

- The Open Space & Greenspace SPG (July 2017) sets out information in respect of open space provision in Neath Port Talbot and the relevant matters to take into account. The SPG addresses the national and local policy context, the implementation of open space policies and guidance on open space provision.
- The Biodiversity and Geodiversity SPG (May 2018) provides information and guidance setting out the expectations on all development proposals to protect, conserve, enhance and manage important habitats, species and sites of geological interest.
- The Design SPG (July 2017) provides information in respect of design issues in Neath Port Talbot and sets out the relevant matters that will need to be taken into consideration when developments are being planned in the County Borough.
- The Historic Environment SPG (April 2019) gives an overview of the historic environment of Neath Port Talbot and outlines the planning policy protections that are in place to safeguard and conserve as far as possible the historic assets of the County Borough. This is supplemented by a Schedule of Buildings of Local Importance.

5. Planning Assessment

The documents and plans accompanying this full application are those considered key to establishing the acceptability in principle of the development. In association with the relevant legislation, policy, guidance and additional information, those documents and plans should be relied upon to decide the planning application.

The relevant legislation, national guidance, national planning framework, local development plan and supplementary guidance, and other relevant information have been highlighted previously in this statement. A consideration of them in the context of the proposed development is found below.

5.1. Principle of Development

The proposals include the enhancement of the Riverside Park through refining the landscape areas and pedestrian / other sustainable mode circulation, the location of informal play opportunities, an increase in soft landscaping quality and implementation of SuDS features. This upgraded park area will create a destination as well as a more direct and level access between existing retail areas and the wider town. By improving this area, it accords with the spatial strategy of reinforcing the vitality and viability of existing centres and maximising accessibility by sustainable transport modes. The scheme would also create more multifunctional green infrastructure and an enhancement to ecological resilience and a net benefit for biodiversity. New hardstanding extents would also allow more multifunctional community or commercial use. Therefore, in principle this development would be acceptable in terms of planning policy at national, regional and local level.

5.2. Flood Risk

The drainage infrastructure has been integral to the overall design of the proposals, as well as being a part of the wider green infrastructure strategy. The landscaping proposals as prepared incorporate the required level of sustainable drainage to reduce any potential surface water flood risk on-site.

The site lies within Flood Zone 3 which gives a combined 1% risk of flooding from rivers and sea including the impacts of climate change. The site is also within the TAN 15 defended zones which benefits from Risk Management Authority flood defences, in this case it defends against Rivers. It follows the minimum standard of protection to 1 in 100 years for rivers. The

features within the site, including planting, would generally be resilient to the levels of potential flooding that could occur.

5.3. Access, Movement and (Cycle) Parking

The proposals will enhance the ease with which people can move as pedestrians or by other sustainable modes, to and away from existing commercial and cultural facilities within the town centre. The public realm interventions are designed with a view to making it easier to move to and through the wider town centre by foot, bicycle and wheelchair. In particular, changes to the bridge access in the Riverside Space will enable more direct and level access to the adjacent bridge, and across the site between the bus station, Civic Centre, Aberafan Shopping Centre and Station Street.

The improvements to the riverside area will reinforce the role of the existing centre at the heart of the community, and contribute towards its ongoing health to the benefit of those who do not own a car; as well as potentially incentivising non-car travel and reducing traffic for those that do drive. The creation of the proposed new pocket park along the riverside, including new informal play spaces, flexible spill-out space and more inviting linkages to the bus station, will broaden the range of users and activities undertaken and expand the programme of activity throughout the day. The increased use would help to provide a better sense of safety and community. Therefore, the proposed development is inherently sustainable, in accordance with strategic placemaking objectives.

5.4. Ecology and Trees

PPW outlines the key role green infrastructure plays in shaping places, our well-being, maintaining biodiversity and urban resilience. The protection and enhancement of biodiversity needs to be carefully considered alongside society's needs. When done well, both can benefit in parallel. Planning also has a key role in reversing the ecological decline, through delivering net gain in any development proposals, through innovative, nature-based solutions. Policy OS2 seeks to resist the loss of open space unless it is surplus to requirements or compensatory space can be provided.

The proposals will involve the creation of amended soft landscaping with a more varied native and wildlife friendly non-native planting mix, designed to achieve a net benefit for biodiversity as well as an ecosystem resilience enhancement. The proposals will also create more multi-functional spaces, with riverside space serving as a transitory space, a space for

relaxation, a play space, and a place for potential events or local business use. The landscaping proposals will incorporate features to create informal play opportunities.

Tree loss has been minimised as much as possible and the landscape for the design meets the requirement for a minimum of 3:1 replacement planting as set by Planning Policy Wales.

While there would be some minor loss of green-space because of the proposal this is of low quality and would more than offset by the enhancement of species diversity and condition of habitats proposed. These habitats would also enhance the connectivity of this green, riverside, corridor.

A preliminary ecological appraisal of the site has confirmed the low value of the existing site, and bat surveys at the nearby civic square suggest a likely low value for any protected species.

A Green Infrastructure Statement and the Arboricultural Impact Assessment have been prepared to assess the impact of the scheme and illustrate in more detail the green infrastructure enhancement made. The landscape design details the extensive landscape enhancements that will be made as part of the proposals.

A significant number of easements, including a gas main, run across the site are, and as such the proposed planting is curtailed in some areas due to this restriction. Similarly, there are existing lighting impacts across the site, and proposed new lighting would only notably impact areas away from the more sensitive river corridor edge.

5.5. Design and Placemaking

TAN 12 identifies that well-designed areas are distinctive, yet respect local character; promote layouts which encourage communities and accessibility; focus on the quality of places and make the most efficient use of land. As set out above the scheme is deemed to meet each of these requirements.

PPW sets out the strategic placemaking strategies that are essential components for developing a sustainable place, to incorporate the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects and its relationship with the surrounding area. PPW also sets out the objectives for Good Design, these principles have been achieved through design team collaboration and are set out below:

Access:

As outlined above, the proposals will enhance existing commercial and cultural opportunities within the existing town centre. This will ensure the existing facilities are accessible by affordable and sustainable transport modes and, through reinforcing the role of the existing centre at the heart of the community, contribute towards its ongoing health to the benefit of those who do not own a car.

The public realm interventions are being designed with a view to making it easier to move to and through this part of the town centre by foot, bicycle and wheelchair. In particular, changes to the bridge access in the Riverside Space will enable more direct and level access to the bridge itself and across the area, between the bus station, Civic Centre, Aberafan Shopping Centre and Station Street.

Character:

The works to the Riverside Park will enhance the setting to the existing Grade II* listed Aberavon Bridge, through the reorientation of the space to better connect to the surrounding areas. This will include use of landscape bunds to orientate focus and views, reduce hard surfacing and enhance the riverside setting.

This effect will be reinforced through better connecting the civic square and riverside space to the river itself and framing views to the hills beyond, enabling the user to better orient themselves in the landscape, and opening up views and vistas of key local features.

Community Safety:

The improvements to the PRT should reinforce the night-time economy of Port Talbot, attracting more users for different reasons throughout the day and night. The potential for pop-up uses of the Riverside space could help reinforce this effect. The landscaping improvements would also help facilitate the access for the nearby theatre users to public transport, or active travel in the local area. The creation of a well used active travel corridor, as well as a place to linger and play, means that the Riverside area should be well surveiled by the public. The area will also encourage its use by a wide range of people, so no one group is likely to dominate the space and make it feel unwelcoming or unsafe. By making the space more attractive, and welcoming, it is hoped that this achieves a level of use that perpetuatesthe use by the wider local community and a sense of ownership.

Environmental Sustainability:

The proposals will encourage more efficient use of an existing resource - the public spaces - within the town centre, which is inherently more sustainable. The landscaping proposals will introduce more soft landscape, greener elements, which will reinforce biodiversity and the ecological value of the spaces overall.

Movement:

The scheme will increase activity within a highly accessible location by a range of sustainable and active transport modes. The associated public realm enhancements - including improved pedestrian and cycle connections to and from public transport links - will further reinforce this effect, creating a virtuous cycle to reinforce the sustainability of the location overall. The provision of cycle parking nearby in the Civic Square would further help achieve this.

6. Conclusion

The proposed development would be considered highly desirable in the context of planning policy and national guidance. The regeneration of the riverside park would bring much needed revitalisation to Port Talbot town centre. It would also tie in with the proposed scheme at the nearby Civic Square and Princess Royal Theatre. The location and features of the development would represent the efficient use of land and the proposed design will deliver a high-quality development that demonstrates placemaking in practice and delivers sustainable outcomes. Based on a review of planning policy it is considered that the development meets national and local policy guidance relating to green infrastructure and biodiversity, sustainable and active travel, and residential amenity. To conclude, the proposed development has established itself in principle as being acceptable, and as such it is considered that the grant of planning permission would be appropriate.