

TAI TARIAN LTD

SANDFIELDS PHASE 2, PORT TALBOT

UPDATED PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

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UPDATED PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL REPORT

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SUMMARY

Bay Ecology was commissioned Tai Tarian Ltd to undertake an updated ecological appraisal of a parcel of land containing three separate residential flat complexes and two semi-detached houses along with their accompanying curtilage, which contained garages and storage units located in Sandfields in Port Talbot. The project will involve a combination of retro fit to existing flat complexes and newly constructed flats.

A desk top search confirmed that the site did not contain any statutory or non-statutory conservation designations. No records of protected species were associated with the site footprint. However, multiple records were identified within a 2km radius.

The updated field survey conducted at the site footprint identified the parcel of land as being comprised of a limited range of habitats dominated by buildings, hard standings, amenity grassland and marginal introduced ornamental shrubs. The hard standing, buildings, amenity grassland and marginal shrubs were of very limited botanical and ecological interest. However, the buildings were identified as supporting nesting birds; whilst the shrubs were also considered to be suitable nesting habitat. The building, hard standing, areas of grassland are to be affected by the refurbishment works. The loss of the amenity grassland will be offset by botanically diverse SuDS seeding/planting, whilst the ornamental shrub loss will be offset by soft landscaping of benefit to wildlife.

The updated building inspection conducted onsite identified that Carmarthen House, Coronation House, Cardigan House, Garages and Semi-detached property were still generally in a good condition with limited potential bat roosting features were associated with missing & broken roof tiles and damaged mortar between the red bricks. The series of single dusk emergence surveys conducted at each structure by Bay Ecology in 2022 identified no emerging bats, with only individual foraging and commuting Common Pipistrelle identified across site. The results from these surveys are still valid and on this basis, it is considered that the proposed works will not require further surveys or a European Protected Species (EPS) derogation licence. However, it is recommended that a precautionary approach to the roof strip and demolition be adopted.

Multiple nesting Starling and House Sparrow were recorded in the structures; whilst the marginal scrub was also considered to be potentially suitable nesting bird habitat. The proposed refurbishment, demolition and vegetation clearance works should be undertaken outside the bird-breeding season (i.e. clearance between September and March inclusive) or preceded by a visual check for nesting birds. To offset the loss of nesting bird habitat it is proposed that at least 22 No. Starling Boxes and 22 No. House Sparrow Terraces will be fitted on the northern and eastern elevations of the structures.

To enhance the biodiversity onsite 12 No. Swift Boxes and 10 No. bat boxes will be erected on the gables ends of the structures and any soft landscaping will incorporate species of known wildlife benefit.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Bay Ecology was commissioned Tai Tarian Ltd to undertake an updated ecological appraisal of a parcel of land containing three separate residential flat complexes and two semi-detached houses along with their accompanying curtilage, which contained garages and storage units located in Sandfields in Port Talbot (Grid Ref: SS 74647 89759) (Appendix I). The project will involve a combination of retro fit to existing flat complexes and newly constructed flats.
- 1.2 The site footprint was still dominated by the three residential flat complexes and two semi-detached houses and the associated infrastructure. Carmarthen House is the southernmost flat complex, which is a three storey L-shaped structure with a four storey central section all of which possessed pitched roofs. Coronation House is the central flat complex, which is a three storey inverted L-shaped structures with a four storey central section. Cardigan House is the northernmost block of flats, which is a three storey rectangular shaped complex. The semi-detached houses were located at the eastern extent of the southernmost block of flats, which also possessed a pitch roof. The structures were generally in similar state of repair to the 2022 survey. A number of detached and terraced garages & storage units were located at the rear of the residential units at the eastern extent of the site that were still in a state of disrepair. The habitats within the site boundary are dominated by buildings, hard standing and amenity grassland (lawn areas) that were botanically more diverse in marginal areas. The parcel of land is approximately 1.35 ha and is surrounded by residential properties to the north with commercial retails properties located to the south and east. The Afon Lido football club and ground was located immediately east of site; whilst Aberavon beach was located approximately 85m south of site. Recently refurbished blocks of flats (converted as part of a first phase works in the area) were Immediately located north west of site. Generally the site was an isolated feature with limited connectivity offering very limited foraging and commuting habitat.
- 1.3 This report provides a summary of the updated preliminary ecological appraisal conducted in May 2024 and includes recommendations on any ecological constraints/ opportunities associated with the proposed development project.

2.1 METHODOLOGY

- 2.2 In order to establish the baseline ecological conditions on site and in the adjoining habitats, a combination of desk-based consultation and walkover survey were undertaken in May 2024.

Desk study

- 2.3 This element of the work included a review of the original PEA report (BE, 2022) and an internet data search to identify any records of rare, protected or notable flora and fauna within the proposed development site boundary and surrounding 1 km area.

Extended Phase I Habitat Survey

- 2.4 Fieldwork was undertaken on the 23rd May 2024 by a suitably qualified ecologist and followed standard Phase 1 Habitat Survey protocol (JNCC 1990) as amended by the Institute of Environmental Assessment (1995). All habitats within the proposed development site were classified (See Appendix II for Phase 1 habitat map). All habitats considered having potential to support rare, protected or otherwise notable species of flora and fauna were noted, as were any direct signs of these species (e.g. Badger setts and dung-pits). The survey also incorporated a subjective, ground-based assessment of the potential of mature trees or structures on site to support roosting bats.
- 2.5 During the field survey, any trees immediately adjacent to the site were assessed for their potential to support roosting bats and were categorised in relation to the bat roosting features (BCT, 2023). The categories are as follows:
- Known or confirmed roost
 - High Roost Suitability – A tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats (PRF-M) on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.
 - Moderate Roost Suitability – A tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.
 - Low Roost Suitability – A tree of sufficient size and age to contain Potential Roosting Features (PRFs) but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential. The tree only contains PRFs that are suitable for individual or small numbers of bats (PRF-I).

- 2.6 Additionally any species listed as a pernicious weed under Schedule 9, Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were also noted during the field survey. Examples of such species include Japanese Knotweed *Fallopia japonica* and Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*.

Daytime Inspection

- 2.7 The ecological appraisal comprised of an external inspection of the structures. In order to establish the potential presence of roosting bats (or nesting birds) at the building, the survey aimed to identify:
- if bats are, or have been, present within the building and, if so, which species are present;
 - the type of roost (e.g. day roost, feeding perch, night roost, hibernaculum);
 - how bats use the buildings (e.g. location of, exit and entrance points to potential roosts);
- 2.8 External surveys at the site involved the use of binoculars and ladder to identify possible access/entry points into the buildings and aimed to identify any evidence of use by bats such as droppings, staining, prey remains etc. The survey was undertaken from ground-level around the exterior of the buildings; and was assisted by the use of close-focus binoculars and a high powered torch (1 million candlepower). No internal inspection of the structures was conducted.
- 2.9 The surveyor searched for roost evidence (droppings, staining, scratch marks, etc.) as described above and an assessment of the buildings potential to support nesting birds was also undertaken. The scope of the bat inspection survey was based on guidelines published by the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT)(2023).

3.0 RESULTS

Desk study

- 3.1 As part of the Phase 1 refurbishment of the Sandfields residential flat complexes Hawkeswood Ecology conducted a desk top search of bat survey reports conducted in the area, which identified two Common Pipistrelle day roosts and an unidentified bat day roost within 2 km of the site. The reports also contained records of foraging/commuting Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule and Myotis species. Hawkeswood Ecology also possessed records for Common Pipistrelle approximately 1 km west of the site from 2015. The suite of bat surveys identified by Bay Ecology in 2022 also identified individual Common Pipistrelle foraging and commuting around the structures.
- 3.2 An internet data search for protected species within a 2km radius of site identified records that were dominated by Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* records, which is consistent with the built-up environment with residential gardens. Individual records of Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* and Adder *Vipera berus* were identified. However, there was no habitat connectivity to the site footprint.

Field Survey

Overview

- 3.3 The results of the day-time inspection are summarised in the following sections:

Fauna

- 3.4 In the course of the survey, a search for field signs of protected or notable species was undertaken and the potential of the habitats to support these species considered. In the context of this report notable species were those considered to meet any of the following criteria:
- Species protected by British or International law;
 - Environment (Wales) Act Section 7 Priority Species or local BAP species;
 - Nationally rare or nationally scarce species;
 - Species of Conservation Concern (e.g. JNCC Red List, RSPB/BTO Red or Amber Lists)

Bats Building Inspection

Carmarthen House External Inspection

3.5 As identified within the 2022 PEA Carmarthen House was the southernmost residential flat complex, which is L-shaped with a three storey pebble dashed sections located at the southern (Cover Photo) and northern extent with two central four storey central pebble dashed spine located towards the centre of the 'L'(Photos 1 & 2) with a red brick flat roof stairwell structure (Photo 3).

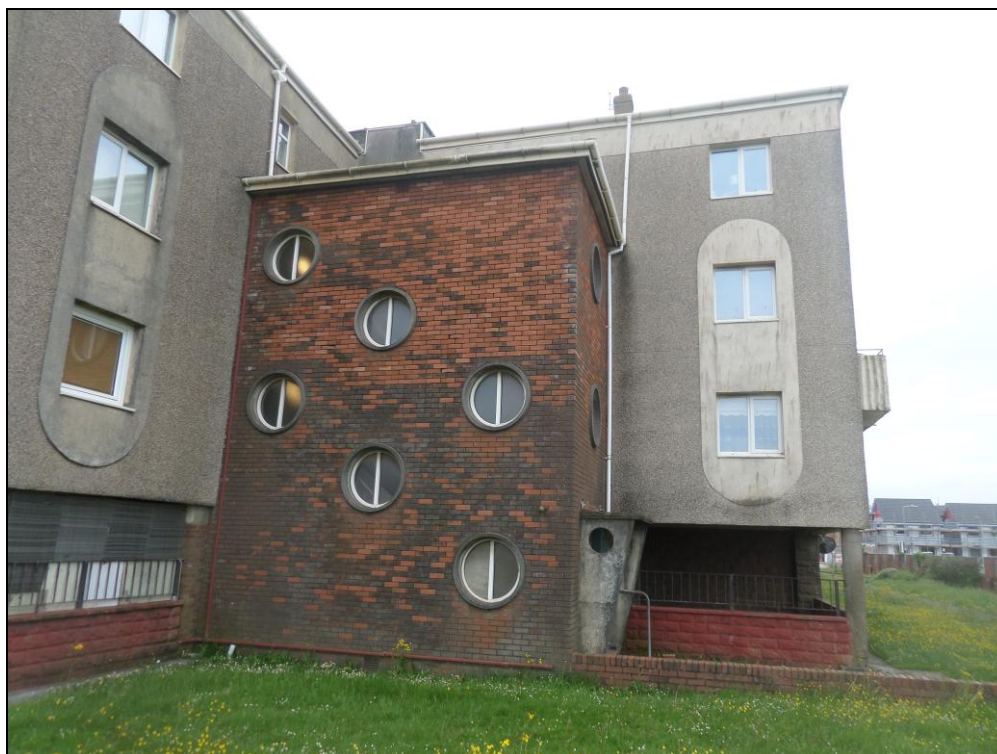
Photo 1: Southern extent of Carmarthen House (view looking north east).



Photo 2: Rear of armarthen House (view looking south).



Photo 3: Red brick stairwell block with porthole windows (view looking south east).



3.6 In the subsequent years post 2022 PEA (BE, 2022) the structure hadn't deteriorated further with the same limited potential bat roosting features associated with missing mortar beneath ridge tiles on the rear roof

aspects (Photo 4), as well as missing pointing between the red brick on the western stairwell block (Photo 5).

Photo 4: Missing mortar beneath ridge tiles on rear aspects of roofs (view looking north west).



Photo 5: Missing pointing between red brick on stairwell (view looking south east).



Coronation House External Inspection

- 3.7 As identified within the 2022 PEA Coronation House was the central residential flat complex, which is an inverted L-shaped with a three storey pebble dashed sections located at the southern and northern extent of the building, with a central four storey central pebble dashed spine located towards the centre of the inverted 'L'(Photos 6).
- 3.8 In the subsequent years post 2022 PEA (BE, 2022) the complex hadn't deteriorated further with the same limited potential bat roosting features that were generally associated with missing and dislodged roof tiles (Photo 7 & 8).

Photo 6: Coronation House complex (view looking north).



Photo 7: Dislodged roof tile on eastern pitch of southern complex arm (view looking west).



Photo 8: Missing roof tile on northern pitch of western complex arm (view looking south).



Cardigan House External Inspection

- 3.9 As identified within the 2022 PEA Cardigan House was the northernmost residential block of flats that is a three storey pebble dashed rectangular structure with a pitched roof and red brick chimneys (Photo 9).
- 3.10 In the subsequent years post 2022 PEA (BE, 2022) the complex hadn't deteriorated further with the same limited potential bat roosting features that were generally associated with missing roof tiles (Photo 10).

Photo 9: Cardigan House's southern elevation (view looking north).



Photo 10: Missing ridge tile located on western gable end of Cardigan House (view looking north).



Two Semi-detached Houses External Inspection

- 3.11 As identified within the 2022 PEA the two semi-detached houses were located at the south eastern extent of site located adjacent to Carmarthen House (Photo 11). The two storey structures were pebble dashed with rubber roof sheeting and uPVC front porch (south western elevations), window frames, doors, fascias and rainwater goods.
- 3.12 In the subsequent years post 2022 PEA (BE, 2022) the complex hadn't deteriorated with no obvious potential bat roosting features evident.

Photo 11: Southern elevation and eastern gable end of semi-detached properties (view looking north west).



Garages & Storage Units

- 3.13 As identified within the 2022 PEA a number of detached garages were located along the eastern extent of site at the rear of Coronation and Cardigan House (Photos 12). The garages were of varying construction which included prefabricated concrete panels and breeze block & brick walls all of which had mono pitched roof with varying asbestos and corrugated metal roof sheets.
- 3.14 In the subsequent years post 2022 PEA (BE, 2022) the structures had not appeared to deteriorate further with potential access points still evident beneath the roofs were evident on all of the structures.
- 3.15 As identified within the 2022 PEA a row of garages and storage units was located at the rear of Carmarthen House (Photo 13). The rendered single storey structures possessed wooden and metal garage doors, with a combination of corrugate metal and fibreglass roofs with wooden fascias.
- 3.16 In the subsequent years post 2022 PEA (BE, 2022) the garages hadn't deteriorated further with gaps still located beneath the fascias and access points. However, the eastern broken windows had been boarded up.

Photo 12: Detached garage located at rear of Cardigan House (view looking west).



Photo 13: Row of garages and storage units at rear of Carmarthen House (View looking north west).



Complex Summary

3.17 In general the structures had not deteriorated further post 2022 PEA (BE, 2022) with no evidence of roosting bats identified externally. The suite of dusk emergence surveys conducted by Bay Ecology at the structures in 2022 identified no roosting bats with only individual Common Pipistrelle bats identified foraging around the structures. The results from the dusk surveys are still valid at the time of writing the report.

Birds

3.18 During the survey multiple active Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (Photo 14) and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Photos 15 & 16) nests were identified on each of the structures with young Starlings also identified being fed by their parents in the site curtilage. Starling and House Sparrow are listed as Red and Amber on the Birds of Conservation Concern Wales 4 (Johnstone et al., 2022).

Photo 14: Location of Starling nest above porch on Cardigan House.



Photo 15: Location of House Sparrow in soffit of Carmarthen House.



Photo 16: House Sparrow below flue on Carmarthen House.



Reptiles

- 3.19 The site was still considered to be an isolated feature with no connectivity to suitable common reptile habitat; and the amenity grassland onsite was regularly managed with a very short sward length, and as such the grassland and marginal ornamental shrubs were considered unsuitable habitat for common reptile species.

Habitats:

- 3.20 As identified within the 2022 PEA the site footprint was dominated by buildings, hard standing and amenity grassland areas (lawned areas). In the 2022 PEA the survey was conducted during a prolonged dry period of weather and after the grass had been mown resulting in a short sward length. However, the grass had yet to be cut prior to the 2024 updated PEA (Photo 17).
- 3.21 The grassland was generally of limited botanical interest and was comprised of such species as Annual Meadow Grass *Poa annua*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Hawkbit *Leontodon* sp. and Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*. However, the margins were becoming more diverse with species such as Soft Brome *Bromus hordeaceus*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, *Brassica* sp. and Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*. In the sandier areas of soil in the margins coastal species such as Buck's-horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus* and Wall Barley *Hordeum murinum* were evident. The amenity grassland located in the front curtilage of Carmarthen House was bordered by ornamental shrubs (Photo 18).

Photo 17: Amenity grassland areas located west of Carmarthen House (view looking east).



Photo 18: Ornamental shrubs located south of Carmarthen House (view looking south).



4.0 LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND PLANS

- 4.1 The following international, national and local legislation and planning policies relating to nature conservation and biodiversity are considered of relevance to the current proposals.

Environment (Wales) Act, 2016

- 4.4 Part 1 of the Environment Act Wales' came into force in May 2016 and sets out the approach to planning and managing natural resources at a national and local level with a general purpose linked to statutory 'principles of sustainable management of natural resources' defined within the Act.

Section 6 - Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty

- 4.5 Section 6 of the Act places a duty on public authorities to 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity' so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In so doing, public authorities must also seek to 'promote the resilience of ecosystems'.

Section 7 - Biodiversity lists and duty to take steps to maintain and enhance biodiversity

- 4.6 This section lists living organisms and types of habitat in Wales which are considered of key significance to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in relation to Wales. The Welsh Ministers are required to take all reasonable steps to maintain and enhance the living organisms and types of habitat included in any list published under this section, and encourage others to take such steps.

Planning Policy Wales (2021)

- 4.7 This document set out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government with Chapter 6 relating to Distinctive and Natural Places and in particular Section 6.4 Biodiversity and Ecological Networks, which states how the planning system has a key role to play in helping to reverse the decline in biodiversity and increasing the resilience of ecosystems, at various scales, by ensuring appropriate mechanisms are in place to both protect against loss and to secure enhancement. Addressing the consequences of climate change should be a central part of any measures to conserve biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems.
- 4.8 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (Section 6 Duty). This duty applies to public authorities in the exercise of their functions in relation to Wales and will help maximise contributions to achieving the well-being goals.
- 4.9 The planning system must help to reverse the decline in biodiversity and increasing the resilience of ecosystems, at various scales, by ensuring appropriate mechanisms are in place to both protect against loss and to secure enhancement. Addressing the consequences of climate change should be a central part of any measures to conserve biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems.
- 4.10 In fulfilling this duty, planning authorities must have regard to the list of habitats and species of principal importance for Wales, published under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 201.
- 4.11 The broad framework for implementing the Section 6 Duty and building resilience through the planning system includes addressing:
- Diversity;
 - Extent;
 - Condition;
 - Connectivity;
 - Adaptability to change.

Future Wales the National Plan 2040

- 4.12 Future Wales – the National Plan 2040 is our national development framework, setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040. It is a development plan with a strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy, achieving

decarbonisation and climate-resilience, developing strong ecosystems and improving the health and well-being of our communities.

Policy 9 – Resilient Ecological Networks and Green Infrastructure

To ensure the enhancement of biodiversity, the resilience of ecosystems and the provision of green infrastructure, the Welsh Government will work with key partners to:

- identify 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
- identify 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.

- 4.13 Planning authorities should include these areas and/or opportunities in their development plan strategies and policies in order to promote and safeguard the functions and opportunities they provide. In all cases, action towards securing the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity (to provide a net benefit), the resilience of ecosystems and green infrastructure assets must be demonstrated as part of development proposals through innovative, nature-based approaches to site planning and the design of the built environment

Local Planning Policy

- 4.14 The LDP for Neath Port Talbot was adopted in 2016 superseding the Unitary Development Plan, and provides the basis for decisions on land use planning in the County Borough up to 2026. Policies of relevance to the development include:

Policy SP 15

Biodiversity and Geodiversity. Important habitats, species and sites of geological interest will be protected, conserved, enhanced and managed through the following measures:

1. *The identification of the following Internationally and Nationally designated sites within the County Borough to enable their protection:*
 - (a) *Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Ramsar Sites;*
 - (b) *Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);*
 - (c) *National Nature Reserves (NNRs).*
2. *The identification and protection of sites of regional and local importance;*
3. *The protection of important natural heritage features.*

Policy EN 6

Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites Development proposals that would affect Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs), sites meeting SINC criteria or sites supporting Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) or S42 habitats or species will only be permitted where:

1. *They conserve and where possible enhance the natural heritage importance of the site; or*
2. *The development could not reasonably be located elsewhere, and the benefits of the development outweigh the natural heritage importance of the site. Mitigation and/or compensation measures will need to be agreed where adverse effects are unavoidable.*

Policy EN 7

Important Natural Features Development proposals that would adversely affect ecologically or visually important natural features such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows / field boundaries, watercourses or ponds will only be permitted where:

1. *Full account has been taken of the relevant features in the design of the development, with measures put in place to ensure that they are retained and protected wherever possible; or*
2. *The biodiversity value and role of the relevant feature has been taken into account and where removal is unavoidable, mitigation measures are agreed.*

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The updated field survey conducted at the site footprint identified the parcel of land as being comprised of a limited range of habitats dominated by buildings, hard standings, amenity grassland and marginal introduced ornamental shrubs. The hard standing, buildings, amenity grassland and marginal shrubs were of very limited botanical and ecological interest. However, the buildings were identified as supporting nesting birds; whilst the shrubs were also considered to be suitable nesting habitat. The building, hard standing, areas of grassland are to be affected by the refurbishment works. The loss of the amenity grassland will be offset by botanically diverse SuDS seeding/planting (Appendix II & III), whilst the ornamental shrub loss will be offset by soft landscaping of benefit to wildlife.

Bats

- 5.2 The updated building inspection conducted onsite identified that Carmarthen House, Coronation House, Cardigan House, Garages and Semi-detached property were still generally in a good condition with limited potential bat roosting features were associated with missing & broken roof tiles and damaged mortar between the red bricks.
- 5.3 The series of single dusk emergence surveys conducted at each structure by Bay Ecology in 2022 (BE, 2022) identified no emerging bats, with only individual foraging and commuting Common Pipistrelle identified across site.
- 5.4 The results from these surveys are still valid and on this basis, it is considered that the proposed works will not require further surveys or a European Protected Species (EPS) derogation licence. However, it is recommended that a precautionary approach to the roof strip and demolition be adopted given the itinerant nature of some common bat species identified within the bat activity surveys i.e. Pipistrelle species. The possibility that the structure could potentially be utilised by individual bats on an irregular or occasional basis during future bat activity seasons could not be ruled out (highly unlikely) and a precautionary approach as follows would be appropriate:
- Builders advised prior to the start of works of the low risk that bats (or birds) could be present and the action to take should a bat be discovered (see below);
 - Removal of roof features to be undertaken by hand or using hand-tools (e.g. crowbars etc.);
 - In the unlikely event that a bat were discovered, all works would cease immediately and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) or the project ecologist contacted for advice on how to proceed.
- 5.5 The survey findings and recommendations described above are considered to provide sufficient information to demonstrate to the local authority that the Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) of bats in the immediate local area would not be adversely affected by the proposed works.

Reptiles

- 5.6 The site was still an isolated feature with no connectivity to suitable reptile habitat that was dominated by hard standing and amenity grassland; and as such the site was considered to be unsuitable for common reptile species.

Birds

- 5.7 Multiple nesting Starling and House Sparrow were recorded in the structures; whilst the marginal scrub was also considered to be potentially suitable nesting bird habitat. Given The proposed refurbishment, demolition and vegetation clearance works should be undertaken outside the bird-breeding season (i.e. clearance between September and March inclusive) or preceded by a visual check for nesting birds. All wild birds are protected against killing and injury under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and their nests against damage or destruction whilst in use or being built. To offset the loss of nesting bird habitat it is proposed that at least 22 No. Starling Boxes and 22 No. House Sparrow Terraces will be placed on the northern and eastern elevations of the structures (Appendix III).

Other Considerations

- 5.8 To enhance the biodiversity onsite 12 No. Swift Boxes and 10 No. bat boxes will be erected on the gables ends of the structures and any soft landscaping will incorporate species of known wildlife benefit (Appendix III).

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APPENDIX I PHASE 1 MAP

APPENDIX II PROPOSED SITE PLAN

APPENDIX III MITIGATION & BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN