

Green Infrastructure Statement:

Minor Development

Site Address: Gilfach yr Haidd Farm, Ystalyfera, SA9 2BE

Proposed Development:

Siting of off-grid low-impact One Planet Development dwelling, tied to OPD management plan, Change of use from agriculture to One Planet Development including erection of polytunnels, processing shed, log store/solar mount. Provision of a hardstanding and access track (retrospective) and siting of containers (retrospective) with roof cover between.

Site description: Part of two fields consisting of poor quality acid grassland.

Surrounding Area description: The site is located on an area of upland ridge within the South Wales Valleys approximately 0.7km from Ystalyfea. The land was historically part of a larger farm holding and was used as pasture for rearing sheep. See aerial image in Figure 1 below.

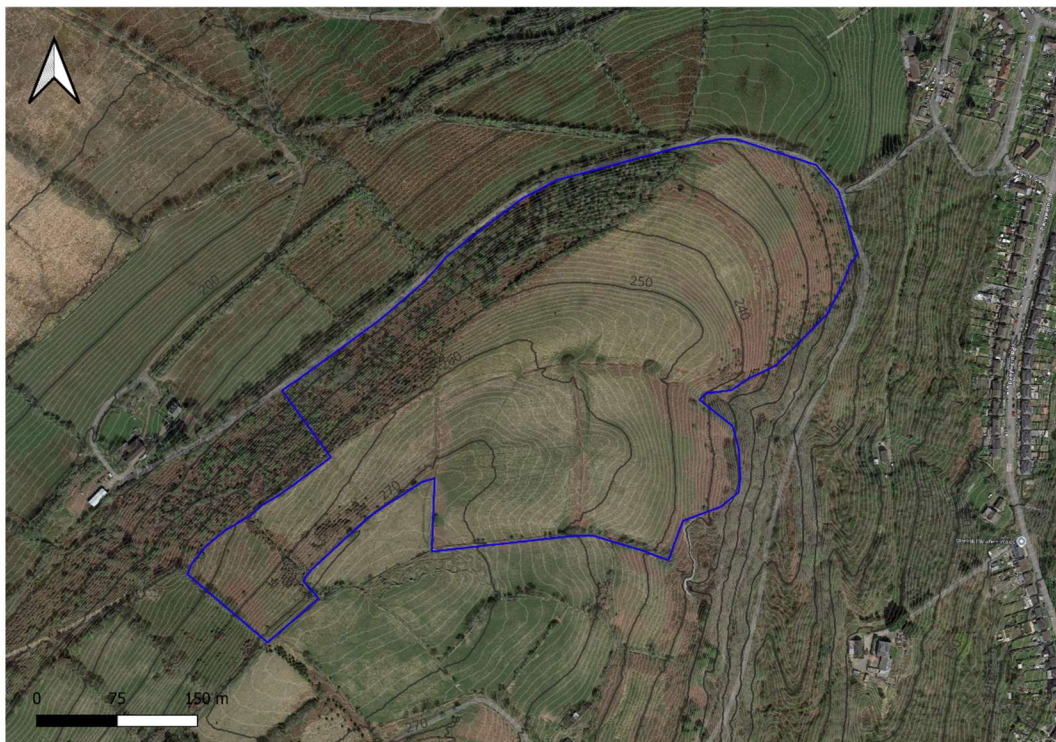


Figure 1: Aerial view of Gilfach yr Haidd Farm

There are areas of existing woodland to the north of the site. The land drops away to the valleys to the north, south and east.

Current Ecology

The Gilfach yr Haidd Farm PEA report has identified the habitats in the site area and immediately adjacent to the site. These are as follows.

Habitats within the OPD site:

- Species poor semi-improved acid grassland

Habitats close to the OPD site:

- Scattered trees
- Defunct species-poor hedge (hazel, hawthorn, birch, blackthorn, ash and oak)
- Intact species poor hedge (south of the OPD site, species as above)

Habitats on the remaining land in our ownership:

- Conifer Plantation (diseased larch)
- Broadleaf woodland
- Newly planted broadleaf woodland
- Species poor semi-improved acid grassland
- Dense bracken
- Bracken scrub
- Scattered trees
- Defunct species-poor hedge
- Intact species poor hedge

To the north, west and east of the site within the rest of the farm land there is further semi-improved grasslands, bracken and more defunct species-poor hedge and a large area of new woodland planting.

Development Impacts:

Development is located on existing poor quality acid grassland (identified as Area 1 within the PEA, Field 3 in the OPD Management Plan). Small section of pasture will be removed to accommodate the ancillary buildings (50 m²). The access and hardstanding has already been constructed. Trees and existing hedge boundaries unaffected. No external lighting is proposed, and therefore no impacts beyond the limited localised issues under the buildings.

A key feature/requirement of One Planet Developments is that they demonstrate ecological and landscape enhancements which are tied to a site Management Plan (MP)

For the full details of the proposals and the ecological improvements to be delivered by the development this GI statement should be read in conjunction with the Gilfach yr Haidd Farm OPD Management Plan, its appendices and the following drawings:

- Drawing number P125-P-600 existing land management
- Drawing number P125-P-601 Proposed land management

The PEA notes the following impacts.

‘The development will not result in any adverse impacts to statutory or non-statutory nature conservation sites.

The development may result in adverse impacts to the following habitats and/or species:

- *Habitats of value – No parts of the site are currently considered to be of international, national, regional, district value or high local value or local value for wildlife. Whilst the loss of the on-site habitats would be unlikely to have a significant impact outside of the context of the site, it would nevertheless be desirable that the impacts be either minimised or appropriately mitigated where possible; and*
- *The proposed development will involve the clearance of an area of acid grassland within Area 1. However, the grassland did not meet the criteria of seven indicator species to be considered a ‘good’ example of this type of grassland. It only contained five species at the time of the survey: sheep’s sorrel, sheep’s fescue, heath bedstraw, tormentil and pignut.*

Provided appropriate precautionary, mitigation and compensation measures detailed in Section 4 (of the PEA) are implemented, the development is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts to any protected sites, habitats and species.’

Biodiversity Enhancements Proposed

Proposed Ecology Enhancements

- Species poor semi-improved acid grassland. Will be managed by a mixture of grazing by ruminant animals and strip grazing by pigs which will break up the surface improve the structure and increase the species diversity. The areas thus turned will be enhanced with a seed mix as recommended in the PEA.
- Scattered trees. will be managed and maintained. Bat boxes will be erected in two larger trees.
- Defunct species-poor hedge will be thickened and replanted with a mixture of hazel, hawthorn, elder, dog rose, guelder rose, goat willow, rowan, birch, holly, honeysuckle, blackthorn and oak. A 2m buffer zone will be maintained adjacent to any hedgerow.
- Intact species poor hedge will be thickened and replanted with c A 2m buffer zone will be maintained adjacent to any hedgerow.
- The hazel that is retained and planted will be coppiced.
- Conifer Plantation (diseased larch) will be maintained as standing deadwood with limited extraction.
- Broadleaf woodland will be maintained with individual trees selectively coppiced as required to improve the mix of canopy cover and to facilitate planting to create a diversity of age in the trees.
- The newly planted broadleaf woodland provides compensation/mitigation to address any negative impacts of the OPD. It will be checked and maintained with action taken as required to control weeds and pests as per the PEA recommendations.
- The dense bracken area of field 4b will be maintained and left to provide habitat for the badgers. A 30m buffer zone will kept around the badger sett.
- Bracken scrub will be allowed to regenerate.
- SuDs features. The pond at the ned of the chain of reedbeds will be planted with a native species -rich aquatic plug plants and a native species rich marginal seed mix and native shrubs as per the recommendations in the PEA.
- Two hibernacula will be provided for reptiles in fields 3b and 4c as per the specifications in the PEA.
- Two bat boxes will be provided on the dwelling as per the specifications in the PEA.

We will enhance the habitats for birds as follows:

- The land will be traditionally farmed and woodlands will be created and well managed.
- We will increase the presence of young trees significantly.
- We will introduce more wildflowers.
- Our land management plan intends to increase the soil's health, which will result in an increase in invertebrates which could provide an invaluable source of food for birds.
- The land is currently classed as 'semi-improved grassland' and this will be transformed into a rich biodiverse landscape which will be more suitable to sustaining Barn Owls.
- We will make and install a Barn Owl nesting box in the container tent barn and bat boxes to support local populations.
- We will allow our hedgerows to grow taller and wider. According to DEFRA: 'It is estimated that every year a hedgerow is left uncut it will gain two species of breeding bird'.

There has been a severe decline in pollinator populations throughout Wales over recent years. According to the Welsh Government's 'The Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales' there are four main reasons for this, and we have commented below on how Gilfach yr Haidd Farm will do its part in reducing these:

- Land use intensification
 - Gilfach yr Haidd Farm will be highly biodiverse making it quite the opposite to what is classed as 'land use intensification' where as much of one species is forced to grow within a certain area. We will encourage companion planting creating plant communities which have mutual benefits to each other.
- Habitat loss and fragmentation
 - We will create new habitats that will increase the amount of wildlife corridors.' This will link habitats thus reducing 'fragmentation'. We will also create many new habitats.
- Disease
 - An increase in pollinator populations have been found to help reduce diseases and pests.
- Agro-chemicals
 - We will not use damaging agro-chemicals only organic compost and fertilisers.
- Climate change

- We will live a sustainable life on Gilfach yr Haidd Farm and fight climate change through living to and exceeding the requirements of an OPD lifestyle.
- The highly biodiverse habitats that we will create will support an abundance of pollinating insects, re-wilded areas, the wildflower meadows, in the diverse hedgerows and amongst the willow (which flower early providing an excellent source of nectar for bees).
- The wildlife pond will be useful for supporting the larva of many species. The compost will support larva of many species as they will feed off the rotting organic matter.

Conclusion.

It is considered that subject to the above, that the proposed development would maintain and enhance biodiversity, build resilient ecological networks and deliver net benefits for biodiversity by:

- Restoring and adding to the existing species-poor hedgerows with native species;
- Improving the quality of existing species-poor semi-improved acid grassland;
- Planting new areas of broadleaf woodland;
- Two new ponds with areas of reedbed;
- Two bat boxes; and
- Two reptile hibernacula.

Thus improving:

- ecological connectivity,
- the quality of the existing habitats on the site
- introducing new habitats adding to the diversity of habitat on the land

Thus ensuring that any adverse environmental effects are minimised, and the unavoidable loss of small areas of poor quality semi-improved acid grassland are fully mitigated and compensated for.

Signed W Knight

Dated. 24th September 2025