



**Gilfach Yr Haidd Farm,
Ystalyfera**

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (v4)

September 2025

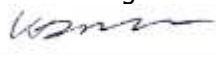
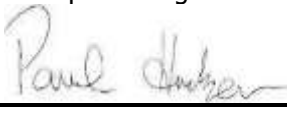
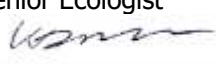
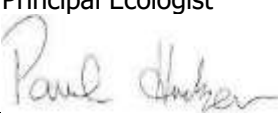
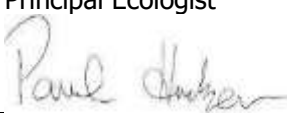
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Document Verification Table

Gilfach Yr Haidd Farm, Ystalyfera Preliminary Ecological Appraisal				
Revision	Date	Prepared by	Checked by	Verified by
1.0	18 October 2024	Kelly Brown Senior Ecologist 	Isabel Humphries Assistant Ecologist 	Paul Hudson MCIEEM Principal Ecologist 
2.0	16 December 2024	Kelly Brown Senior Ecologist 	Paul Hudson MCIEEM Principal Ecologist 	Paul Hudson MCIEEM Principal Ecologist 
4.0	17 September 2025	Ella Newmarch Assistant Ecologist 	Paul Hudson MCIEEM Principal Ecologist 	Paul Hudson MCIEEM Principal Ecologist 

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Summary

Brief and Site Location	Acer Ecology Ltd were commissioned to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal of land at Gilfach Yr Haidd Farm, Ystalyfera, SA9 2BE (Ordnance Survey Grid Reference centred at: SN 7599 0929).
Development Proposals	The proposed development works comprise the building of an eco-friendly dwelling in compliance with the Caravan Act 1969 and within the ethos of the One Planet Development (OPD) scheme and Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (July 2010). The development is proposed within Area 1, the pastoral grassland within the west of the site, which includes an eco-friendly residential dwelling along the western aspect and a small holding comprising no-dig permaculture horticulture along the southern boundary, a polytunnel in the south-western aspect, livestock grazing to comprise heritage pigs including weaners and adults throughout the area and a grey water system in the centre of the southern boundary. Area 2 can be incorporated into the final plans as compensation for the loss of grassland habitat within Area 1 if required. Correspondence with the client on the 11th November 2024 states '<i>we are going to be existing completely off-grid for electricity, water, wood fuel and sewage. We will be growing most of our own food and will grow pigs and poultry to make ends meet. The caravan we will construct will be as impact free as possible and as efficient as possible and will be built with hand and solar powered tools, no heavy plant will be involved.</i>' The site is split into two areas: • Area 1 comprises a pastoral field used to graze sheep at the time of survey which was bounded by defunct hedgerows on the boundaries with bracken on the peripheries; and • Area 2, a pastoral field to the east of Area 1, comprises a pastoral field which was used to graze sheep at the time of survey. It was bounded by defunct hedgerows on the boundaries with bracken on the peripheries and broadleaved woodland adjacent to the eastern aspect outside of the landownership boundary.
Impacts to Key Receptors	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 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 are implemented, the development is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts to any protected sites, habitats and species.
Required Actions	The following provisional recommendations have been developed based on the development proposals available at the time of writing. They may be subject to change upon receipt of the final design: Precautionary Measures: • The retained trees adjacent to the construction areas will be protected and securely fenced-off with appropriate temporary and permanent fencing; • Any removal of acid grassland and dense bracken works in Area 1 should be carried out outside of the bird nesting season (March to September inclusive); • A CEMP should be produced which can be secured as a planning condition after planning consent has been granted. • An active main sett is present on the eastern aspect of Area 2 outside of the development area therefore a 30m buffer zone should be implemented around the sett. The proposed greywater system in the centre of the southern boundary of Area 1 lies over 150m west of the badger sett. A pre-commencement badger survey should be conducted prior to works starting on site. During the construction phase any steep-sided holes left open overnight are equipped with a mammal ladder; and

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	- Measures to prevent direct impact to reptiles, hedgehogs, polecats and weasels should concentrate primarily on minimising the risk of causing death and injury to individuals during any vegetation clearance, via the implementation of 'species deterrence' measures in the run-up to the commencement of vegetation clearance works within the northern aspect of the site on site. Compensation and Enhancement Measures: - Broad recommendations include hedgerow and acid grassland retention and enhancements, integrated bat boxes, reptile hibernacula and SuDs enhancements.
Licensing Requirements	None required.
Conclusions	Provided the precautionary and mitigation measures detailed in Section 4 are implemented, the development is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts to any protected sites, habitats or species. The site's ecological value will not represent a fundamental constraint to the proposed development.

1. Introduction

1.1. Brief and Site Location

Acer Ecology Ltd. were commissioned by Simon Cometson to conduct a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of land at Gilfach Yr Haidd Farm, Ystalyfera, SA9 2BE, within the boundary Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (Ordnance Survey Grid Reference centred at: SN 7599 0929)¹. The assessment documents the baseline ecological condition of the survey area, which is shown by the red line boundary on Plan 1. Designated sites, habitats, protected and notable species of conservation interest that could be affected by the proposed works are identified, and subsequent recommendations provided.

This assessment will provide initial recommendations based on the development proposals available at the time of writing. They should be revised upon finalisation of the design.

1.2. Site Description

The proposed development site measures approximately 4.1ha in total and is comprised of two areas. Area 1, approximately 2.1ha, is a pastoral field within the west of the site. Area 2, approximately 2.0ha, is a pastoral field east of the Area 1. The site is situated in a rural landscape, approximately 0.39km west of the village of Ystalyfera. The development site lies within a wider farm which totals 32 acres of pastoral farmland used to graze sheep. Additionally, the River Twrch is 1.15km east of the site. The land lies on a hill sloping south-east at 269-255m above sea level.

1.3. Proposed Works

The proposed development works comprise the building of an eco-friendly dwelling in compliance with the Caravan Act 1969 and within the ethos of the One Planet Development (OPD) scheme and Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6: planning for sustainable rural communities (July 2010).

A planning application is yet to be submitted. The development is proposed within Area 1, the pastoral grassland to the west of the site, and includes an eco-friendly residential dwelling along the western aspect and a small holding comprising no-dig permaculture horticulture along the southern boundary, a polytunnel in the south-western aspect, livestock grazing (comprising of heritage pigs including weaners and adults throughout the area) and a grey water system within the centre of the southern boundary. Area 2 could be incorporated into the final plans to provide compensation for the loss of grassland habitat within Area 1, if required. Correspondence with the client on the 11th November 2024 states *'we are going to be existing completely off-grid for electricity, water, wood fuel and sewage. We will be growing most of our own food and will grow pigs and poultry to make ends meet.'*

¹ Latitude and Longitude: 51.76861487, -3.79815898 / what3words: adapt.innocence.prowling

The caravan we will construct will be as impact free as possible and as efficient as possible and will be built with hand and solar powered tools; no heavy plant will be involved.'

For development proposals see Drawings 3 and 4: Proposed Block Plans.

1.4. Scope of the Study

The study comprised the following:

- A desk study to identify existing information on statutory and non-statutory sites of nature conservation interest, and records of notable or protected habitats or species within the site and its surrounding area;
- A Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the site, extended to search for evidence of, and potential for, protected fauna; and
- Identification of potential ecological constraints to the proposed development and assessments of impacts including appropriate mitigation measures where necessary.

1.5. Reporting

This report aims to:

- Outline the methodology used during the survey;
- Present the baseline ecological information;
- Provide an ecological evaluation of on-site habitats, including an assessment of the potential for protected species;
- Assess the potential impacts of the proposed development on ecological receptors;
- Assess the potential ecological constraints to the proposed development; and
- Provide recommendations for further survey, avoidance, mitigation and enhancement where appropriate.

2. Methods

2.1. Scope of Assessment

This assessment has been undertaken following the approach detailed in the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's 'Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland' (CIEEM, 2018). The assessment has focussed on 'Important Ecological Features' that are present within the 'Zone of Influence' of the project. Important Ecological Features, as detailed in Box 14 of the CIEEM's Guidelines comprise:

- Habitats and Species of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Wales;
- Legally protected species; and
- Red Listed or rare species (based on Red Data Book lists, Birds of Conservation Concern and species considered to be nationally rare/scarce).

The Zone of Influence (ZoI) is the area over which a development proposal could have an influence on ecological features. The ZoI will vary for different features, although the ZoI for this proposed development comprises the land within the red line boundary and immediately adjacent habitat features.

2.2. Desk Study

2.2.1. Protected Sites, Habitats and Species

Existing information on designated sites and protected species was obtained from the sources detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Sources of Data

Source	Data	Radius of Search
Natural resources Wales (NRW) Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Layers	Statutory and non-statutory nature conservation designated sites	Ramsar/Special Area of Conservation (SACs)/Special Area of Protection (SPAs)/Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Local Nature Reserves (/LNRs), Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, (ASNW), Restored Ancient Woodland Sites (RAWS) and Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) - 2km ² SACs (designated for bats) - 10km
South East Wales Biological Records Centre (SEWBRc)	Protected species records (SEWBRc unique reference: 0245-202) Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)	1km. 1km.

All available records of bat roosts, badger, dormouse, amphibians and reptiles were considered. For other species, only records collected within the last 10 years were considered relevant.

The protected species search of 1km is considered appropriate. Page 15 of CIEEM's Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals states that 'Existing ecological information for the site and adjacent areas should extend to at least 1km from the site boundaries (or 0.5 km for sites of approximately 1 ha or less). The search for desk study information will need to extend further beyond the site boundaries to ensure that all information of relevance to the assessment has been collected. In this instance a 1km data search for protected species is considered appropriate.

2.2.2. Landscape Context

The site and wider landscape were assessed and characterised using aerial images, Ordnance Survey maps and SEWBRc data. The presence of off-site features and habitats, which add to the ecological value within the wider area (for example, ponds within 0.5km of the site) were identified. Where appropriate, such features were scoped into the detailed assessment of impacts presented in Section 3.

2.2.3. Ancient Woodland

Although ancient woodland is not a designated site as such, it is often listed as a designated site due to its ecological significance and associated protection. Ancient woodland has therefore been included within the non-statutory designated site section of this report.

2.2.4. Planning Authority

The Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Planning portal² was consulted to determine if any previous survey information was available for the site, or immediate surroundings.

2.3. Field Study

2.3.1. Personnel

The field survey was undertaken in fair weather on the 28th June 2024 by Kelly Brown³.

2.3.2. Vegetation and Habitats

The vegetation and habitat types present within the survey area were categorised and mapped in accordance with the standard⁴ The UK Habitat Classification (version 2) codes (UK Hab 2023). Dominant and conspicuous plant species were recorded for each habitat. Target notes were used to record information on features of ecological interest, such as evidence of, or habitats with potential to support, protected species, or where any features of interest too small to map were recorded. Following the completion of the survey, a colour-coded habitat plan was digitised using QGIS to show the extent and distribution of the different habitat types present within the site (see Plan 3).

² <https://planningonline.npt.gov.uk/online-applications/>

³ Kelly holds a Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC) Level 4 botanical qualification and holds NRW survey licences for bats, dormice and great crested newts.

⁴ Some additional categories were also used if applicable e.g. broadleaved trees indicated by green filled circles rather than using secondary codes.

Hedgerows within the site were not formally assessed against the definitions within the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, as this was beyond the scope of the assessment.

Invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9⁵ of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), such as Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*, giant hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* and Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* were also noted during the survey, if present.

2.3.3. Protected and Notable Species

Evidence of, and habitats with, potential to support protected or notable species were noted, especially species meeting any of the following criteria:

- Listed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) [‘CHSAEU’] Regulations 2019;
- Listed under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 as being of principal importance for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in Wales;
- Listed as a local priority for conservation, for example in the relevant Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP);
- Red Listed using International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) criteria (e.g. in one of the UK Species Status Project⁶ reviews, in the Species of Conservation Concern Red, Amber or Near Threatened List⁷, Birds of Conservation Concern in Wales⁸, or, where a more recent assessment of the taxonomic group has not yet been undertaken, listed in a Red Data Book);
- Listed as a Nationally Rare or Nationally Scarce species (e.g. in one of the Species Status Project reviews) or listed as a Nationally Notable species where a more recent assessment of the taxonomic group has not yet been undertaken; and/or
- Endemic to a country or geographic location (it is appropriate to recognise endemic sub-species, phenotypes, or cultural behaviours of a population that are unique to a particular place).

Only those species with potential to be present on-site are mentioned within this report. The methodologies used were as follows:

Birds

Any birds observed during the field survey were recorded, in addition to features capable of supporting nesting birds (e.g. trees, hedgerows, buildings, bramble, ruderal vegetation and rough grassland etc.). The site was also assessed for its actual and potential suitability to support Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) Schedule 1 species.

⁵ Schedule 9 species of plants and animals are ones that do not naturally occur in Great Britain but have become established in the wild and represent a threat to the natural fauna and flora.

⁶ The Species Status project is the successor to the JNCC’s Species Status Assessment project, providing up-to-date assessments of the threat status of various taxa using the internationally accepted Red List guidelines (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1773>).

⁷ Eaton *et al.* (2015) Birds of conservation concern 4: the population status of birds in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. British Birds 108: 708-746.

⁸ Johnstone, I. and Bladwell, S. (2016) Birds of Conservation Concern in Wales 3: the population status of birds in Wales. Birds in Wales 13 (1).

A comprehensive bird survey, such as a breeding bird survey, was not undertaken as this was beyond the scope of the assessment.

Bats

Preliminary Ground-level Roost Assessment

A preliminary ground-level roost assessment of the trees within the survey area was undertaken, looking for features that bats could use for roosting (Potential Roost Features⁹ (PRFs)) and evidence of bats (i.e. droppings in, around or below a PRF; odour emanating from a PRF; audible squeaking at dusk or during warm weather; or staining below the PRF). A systematic inspection was carried out around all accessible aspects of the tree, from both close to the trunk and further away. A high-powered torch (Clulite), an endoscope (Snake vision), binoculars and a ladder were used as appropriate during the survey. The location of the trees surveyed are shown as target notes on Plan 5.

The trees were assessed for their suitability to support roosting and hibernating bats in accordance with Table 4.2 of the Bat Conservation Trusts Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (Collins, 2023) whereby trees were categorised into the following categories:

- None – Either no PRFs in the tree or highly unlikely to be any;
- FAR – Further assessment required to establish if PRF are present in the tree; or
- PRF – A tree with at least one PRF present.

Where possible, PRFs were further categorised in accordance with Table 6.2 of the above survey guidance as detailed below:

- PRF - I - PRF is only suitable for individual bats or very small numbers of bats either due to size or lack of suitable surrounding habitats;
- PRF – M - PRF is suitable for multiple bats and may therefore be used by a maternity colony; and
- PRF – U - Unknown if PRF could only be used by individuals or could be used by multiple bats, and therefore, used as a maternity roost.

Buildings Assessment

There are no buildings present within the survey area, therefore a building assessment was not carried out.

Terrestrial Habitat Assessment

A preliminary assessment of the value of the site for bats (and any potential roost sites therein) was made in accordance with Table 4.1 of the Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists (Collins, 2023) (see Appendix 5

⁹ Potential Roost Features that bats may use identified by Andrews include: woodpecker-holes; squirrel-holes; knot-holes; pruning-cuts; tear-outs; wounds; cankers; compression-forks; butt-rots; lightning strikes; hazard-beams; subsidence-cracks; shearing cracks; transverse cracks; welds; lifting bark; frost-cracks; fluting and ivy.

and 6). The assessment was based on the relative abundance and quality of habitat features within the site, and surrounding landscape, suitable for roosting, foraging and commuting bats.

Landscape features suitable for foraging and commuting bats include linear landscape features such as watercourses, transport corridors (e.g. roads, sunken lanes railways), walls, hedgerows, coppice, woodland fringe, tree lines, ditches and areas of scrub and pasture.

Dormice

The habitats on site including the grassland are not suitable for supporting dormice, the hedgerows are largely defunct with poor connectivity to the wider landscape. Therefore, no adverse impacts are envisaged to occur. This species is therefore not mentioned further in this report.

Furthermore, no woodland or hedgerows surrounding the site will be cleared. In addition, no records of dormice within 1km of the site were provided by SEWBRc. Therefore, no adverse impacts to this species are envisaged to occur. This species is therefore not mentioned further in this report.

Great Crested Newts

The survey area was appraised for its suitability to support great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* (GCN). The assessment was based on guidance outlined in the Herpetofauna Workers' Manual (Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 2003) and the Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook (Langton, Beckett & Foster, 2001).

Ordnance Survey maps and aerial images of the land surrounding the site were consulted to determine if any waterbodies or watercourses were present within the site or within 0.5km of it. Two watercourses were identified within the study area (see Plan 5). However, flowing water is considered to be unsuitable for supporting GCN (English Nature, 2001). These watercourses are therefore deemed unsuitable for supporting GCN.

All flowing water courses and standing water bodies within 0.5km of the site are separated from the site by hard barriers, therefore, terrestrial migration of GCN to the proposed development site is considered unlikely and were not included in this assessment.

Considered in addition to the absence of records of GCN within 1km of the site, the likelihood of GCN being present on site is considered to be negligible. No adverse impacts to GCN are therefore anticipated and this species is not mentioned further in this report.

Otters, Water Voles and White-Clawed Crayfish

The nearest suitable watercourse for otters is the Afon Twrch, approximately 936m south-east of Area 2 within proposed development site. This watercourse is separated from site by the town of Ystalyfera to the north and east of the site. Due to the urbanised nature of the areas surrounding the development site and this watercourse, there is negligible likelihood of otters, water voles or white-clawed crayfish being present within the site, and they are not mentioned any further in this report.

Badgers

Earth embankments, wooded copses, hedgerows and dense bramble beds are habitat features that often contain evidence of badgers *Meles meles*. Where present on-site and within a 30m buffer adjacent to the site, these and other suitable habitat features were searched for such evidence. Where present, the location of badger signs such as setts, runs, dung pits or latrines, prints, hair and foraging snuffle holes, were recorded.

Setts recorded were classified as active, partially used or disused in accordance with the published criteria set out in *Surveying Badgers* (Harris, Cresswell & Jefferies, 1988):

- **Active setts** are in regular use and are clear of any debris or vegetation although they may not have been recently excavated, they will have some of the following features, well-worn paths, spoil mounds, footprints or fresh bedding outside the entrance and/or footprints leading in;
- **Partially used holes** are not in regular use and have vegetation or debris such as leaves and twigs in the entrance. Partially used holes could become used after only a small amount of clearance; or
- **Disused setts** have not been used for some time and are partially or completely blocked, with substantial excavation required to allow reoccupation.

In addition, an attempt was made to characterise setts as either main, annex, subsidiary, or outliers in accordance with guidance given in *Surveying Badgers* (Harris, Cresswell & Jefferies, 1988):

- **Main setts** are large, with many well-used entrance holes and abundant signs of use, including long-established paths to and from the sett, areas of spoil from diggings and nearby dunging sites. They are occupied continuously throughout the year, and are where the cubs are most likely born. There is only one main sett per social group of badgers;
- **Annexe setts** occur in close association with the main sett, normally between 50 and 100m away and are connected to the main sett by clear well-used pathways. If a second litter of cubs is born, this may be where they are reared;
- **Subsidiary setts** usually consist of up to five holes, and are not in continuous use. They are often not active all year round; or
- **Outlier setts** consist of one to three holes. They usually have small spoil heaps indicating that they are not very extensive underground. They are used only intermittently throughout the year.

Reptiles

An assessment of the suitability of on-site habitats to support reptiles was made. Reptiles require a diverse range of habitats to meet their needs such as hedgerows, scrub, rough grassland, woodpiles, rubble, banks and compost heaps. The potential of the site to provide hibernation opportunities and spring/summer/autumn habitat was also assessed, with reference to guidance provided in the *Herpetofauna*

Workers' Manual (Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 2003), the Reptile Management Handbook (Edgar, Foster & Baker, 2011) and the Reptile Mitigation Guidelines Technical Note TIN 102 (Natural England, 2013). The following factors were considered: vegetation type and structure; insolation (sun exposure); slope aspect; topography; surface geology; habitat connectivity; habitat size; prey abundance; refuge opportunity; hibernation opportunity; egg-laying potential for grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*); public pressure; percentage of shade; levels of disturbance and management regime.

A targeted presence/likely absence reptile survey was not undertaken as it was beyond the scope of this assessment.

Hedgehogs

The site's potential to support hedgehog was assessed using guidance on habitats of importance in Hedgehogs and Development (People's Trust for Endangered Species, 2022)¹⁰ with the following habitats particularly favoured: dense scrub to build hibernation nests in during the winter; short grass to forage in for invertebrate prey; longer grass to forage in and to make nests in during the summer; areas of leaf litter to collect and use for hibernation nests; log piles and decaying vegetation to forage in and hibernate in; and hedgerows and boundary vegetation that are important corridors for travel and nesting sites.

Other Species

General habitat suitability and incidental sightings of other animal species were also noted.

2.3.4. Assessment of Ecological Value

The value of the habitats and features of the site have been provisionally evaluated and graded in accordance with the Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the United Kingdom and Ireland (CIEEM, 2018). The level of value of specific ecological receptors is assigned using a geographic frame of reference, i.e. international value being most important, then national, regional, county, district, local and, lastly, within the immediate zone of influence of the site only. Brief descriptions of how Acer Ecology interprets these categories are set out in Appendix 3.

Potential impacts on important ecological features (species, habitats and ecosystems¹¹) are identified and assessed. Mitigation measures have been devised following the mitigation hierarchy and appropriate mechanisms for securing mitigation measures have been identified.

2.3.5. Limitations

General Temporal Limitations

Any ecological survey can only identify what was present on-site at the time the survey was conducted and habitat usage by species can change over time.

¹⁰ <https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PTES-BHPS-Hedgehogs-and-development-guide-2022.pdf>

¹¹ The 2018 EcIA Guidelines from CIEEM make it clear that an EcIA should consider the impacts upon ecosystems, as well as habitats and species. Statements to this effect are found throughout the document including in sections 1.3, 1.9, 2.3, 4.1 and 4.8 etc.

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Incomplete Survey Information

Full surveys for the protected species listed previously have not yet been carried out. For some species of fauna for which evidence has been found or which are considered likely to occur on site, further targeted survey is advisable at a more appropriate time of year (see Section 4).

Tree Assessments

As detailed in Figure 1 of Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists (Collins 2023), tree surveys should preferably be undertaken when no leaves are present on the trees. This was not possible in this instance due to the survey being conducted in June when trees still hold the majority of their leaves. This is not considered a significant constraint as a thorough and robust inspection of the trees was still possible.

3. Baseline Ecological Conditions, Evaluation and Development Impacts

The baseline conditions and evaluation of the *in-situ* habitats and the actual/potential presence of protected species are discussed in this section. Potential impacts on protected sites, *in-situ* habitats and protected or notable species arising from the proposed development are identified, including both direct and indirect impacts and those associated with construction and operational stages.

A summary of relevant legislation and planning policies relating to protected sites, habitats and species is provided in Appendices 3 and 4.

3.1. Statutory Nature Conservation Designated Sites

Statutory Sites (SACs or SSSIs) Designated for Bats within 10km of Site

No SACs or SSSIs specially designated for bats lie within 10km of the site.

RAMSARs, SPAs, SACs, SSSIs, NNRs, LNRs, National Parks and National Landscapes within 2km of Site

The proposed development site lies within 2km of the following statutory sites:

Table 2: Statutory Sites Designated Within 2km

Site Name and Designation	Description	Distance and Direction from Development Site	Development Impacts
Gwrhyd Meadows SSSI ¹²	An extensive series of meadows and wet pastures situated on the south-east facing slopes of Cefn Gwrhyd some 4km north of Pontardawe. A wide range of grassland and wetland communities occur within the forty-one enclosures that make up the complete site. These include dry hay meadows, acid grasslands, rushy pastures with purple moor grass, as well as both base-poor and base-enriched wetlands. Small stands of wet heath occur in several fields along with occasional patches of bracken and broadleaved scrub. More extensive tracts of oak woodland occur towards the centre of the site and these are augmented by the numerous hedgerow trees that still remain on the upper slopes. Several small watercourses drain towards the adjacent river and	2.04km south-west	Considering the distance between the designated site and the proposed development site, the nature of its designating features, the somewhat limited ecological connectivity, and the small-scale of the proposals, no adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of the development.

¹² https://naturalresources.wales/media/641082/SSSI_0349_Citation_EN001af1d.pdf

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	provide additional habitat for birds and invertebrates. Notable plant species recorded from Gwrhyd Meadows include whorled caraway <i>Carum verticillatum</i>, meadow thistle <i>Cirsium dissectum</i>, petty whin <i>Genista anglica</i>, dyer's greenweed <i>Genista tinctoria</i>, saw-wort <i>Serratula tinctoria</i>, ivy-leaved bellflower <i>Wahlengbergia hederacea</i> common butterwort <i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i>, great burnet <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>, autumn lady's-tresses <i>Spiranthes spiralis</i>, marsh valerian <i>Valeriana dioica</i> and royal fern <i>Osmunda regalis</i>. The first five of the species listed occur in some considerable quantity across the site.		
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3.2. Non-statutory Nature Conservation Designated Sites

SINCs

The proposed development site lies within 2km of the following non-statutory sites:

Table 3: Non-Statutory Sites Designated Within 2km

Site Name and Designation	Description	Distance and Direction from Development Site	Development Impacts
NPT Watercourses	NPT does not provide citations for watercourses.	Site is within SINC.	To prevent impacts to the NPT Watercourses SINC, a CEMP will be required as outlined within Section 4.
NPT Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland	NPT does not provide citations for woodlands.	0.19km to the south-east of the site.	Considering the distance and poor connectivity between the designated woodland and the proposed development site, alongside the woodland compensation outlined in Section 4, no adverse impacts are anticipated.

Ancient Woodland Sites

The following table shows the ancient woodland sites within 2km of the site:

Table 4: Ancient Woodland Sites Within 2km

Ancient Woodland Site	Number within 2km of Site
Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) ⁷³	39
Restored Ancient Woodland Sites (RAWS) ⁷⁴	10

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Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) ⁷⁵	Two
Nearest Area of Ancient Woodland	An unnamed area of ASNW located 0.19km to the south-east of the site.
Development Impacts	None, due to the small-scale nature of the works. They are therefore not mentioned further in this report.

3.3. Habitats and Vegetation

The site is split into two areas. Area 1 comprises a pastoral field, used to graze sheep at the time of survey, which was bound by defunct hedgerows on the boundaries with bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* on the peripheries. Area 1 is the location of the main development footprint. Area 2 comprises a pastoral field to the east of Area 1 and is also a pastoral field which was used to graze sheep at the time of survey. It is bound by defunct hedgerows on the boundaries with bracken on the peripheries and broadleaved woodland adjacent to the eastern aspect, outside of the landownership boundary. The results of the general survey of habitats and vegetation are shown on Plan 5. A botanical species list is provided in Appendix 4.

The site consists of the following elements which are described in detail below. These comprise:

- Acid Grassland (G1);
- Dense bracken (g1c); and
- Other hedgerow (H2b);

3.4. Habitat Descriptions

3.4.1. Acid Grassland (g1)

There are two areas of acid grassland, one within Area 1 and one Area 2:

- **Area 1:** The grassland comprised semi-improved acid grassland which was species-poor at the time of survey. The grassland was dominated by grasses with very little herb cover with an average sward height of 20-50cm. The species comprised frequent Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, and common sorrel *Rumex acetosa* with occasional small cats-tail *Phleum bertolonii*, sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, common mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, field woodrush *Luzula campestre* and lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* and rare yarrow *Achillea millifolium*, common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and pignut *Cenopodium majus*.
- **Area 2:** The grassland comprised semi-improved acid grassland which was species-poor and in a similar condition to Area 1 at the time of survey. The grassland was dominated by grasses with very little herb cover with an average sward height of 20-50cm. The species comprised abundant sheep's fescue with frequent Yorkshire-fog, common sorrel, heath bedstraw and sweet vernal grass

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with occasional marsh thistle, yarrow, lesser stitchwort, tormentil, red clover *Trifolium pratense* and rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus* with rare common bird's-foot trefoil, black knapweed *Centurea nigra* and heather *Calluna vulgaris*.

Photo 1: Acid Grassland within Area 1



Photo 2: Species Composition of the Grassland in Area 1



Photo 3: Acid Grassland within Area 2



Photo 4: Species Composition of the Grassland in Area 2



3.4.2. Dense Bracken (g1c)

Dense bracken, approximately 2-5m wide, was present on the peripheries of Area 1 and Area 2. The dense bracken present along the western boundary of Area 2 is approximately 15m wide. The dense bracken along the eastern aspect of Area 2 is approximately 20-30m wide, surrounding a large main badger sett.

There was a small area which comprised bare ground within the bracken along the western boundary of Area 1 within the development footprint of the proposed residential dwelling. Other species in this area included frequent sheep's sorrel, and occasional Yorkshire-fog and marsh thistle.

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Photo 5: Dense Bracken along the Western Boundary of Area 1



Photo 6: Dense Bracken along the Eastern Boundary between Area 1 and Area 2



Photo 7: Cleared Area along the Western Boundary of Area 1 which Comprises the Development Footprint of the Proposed Dwelling



Photo 8: Dense Bracken surrounding the Badger Sett on the Eastern Aspect of Area 2



3.4.3. Other Hedgerow (h2b)

Defunct hedgerows were present on the boundaries of Area 1 and Area 2 which included very few sparse native trees. These hedgerows showed no signs of recent management. The trees which were present were semi-mature and overgrown. A row of mature hazel *Corylus avellana* was present along the southern boundary of Area 1, adjacent to the proposed location of the grey water system. A mature ash *Fraxinus excelsior* was present in the south-eastern corner of Area 2. A row of three mature oak trees *Quercus robur* was present along the northern boundary of Area 2 which had signs of damage by lightning. The hedgerow species comprised occasional hazel, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, birch *Betula pendula*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, ash and oak.

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Photo 9: Defunct Hedgerow along the Southern Boundary of Area 1



Photo 10: Line of Mature Oaks along the Northern Boundary of Area 2



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Table 5: Habitats Recorded on Site				
Phase 1 Habitat	UK Habs Habitat	Description	Ecological Value	Development Impacts
Dense Bracken (A2.1)	Dense Bracken (g1c)	On the peripheries of Area 1 and Area 2. See Section 3.4.2.	Site value	Areas of the western and southern aspects of Area 1 will be lost to facilitate the development. A majority of this habitat will be retained and managed as part of the proposals as outlined in Section 4.
Acid Grassland (B6)	Acid Grassland (g1)	A majority of the habitat present within the site boundary. See Section 3.4.1.	Site value	Areas of the western and southern aspects of Area 1 will be lost to facilitate the development. A majority of this habitat will be retained, enhanced and managed as part of the proposals as outlined in Section 4.
Intact Species-poor Hedgerow (J2.1.2)	Other hedgerow (h2b)	On the southern and northern boundaries of Area 1 and Area 2. See Section 3.4.3.	Site value	This habitat will be retained and enhanced as part of the proposals. These recommendations are outlined in Section 4.

3.5. Invasive Plant Species

No invasive species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were recorded during the site visit.

3.6. Protected and Notable Species

3.6.1. Notable Plant Species

Data Trawl Results

SEWBRc returned records of 21 (including species regarded as 'Locally Important', LBAP species and UK Red Data Book-listed species).

One priority plant species were recorded within 1km of the site, namely bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. However, bluebell is mainly protected from sale via its listing under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

One plant listed as species of conservation concern were recorded within 1km of the site, namely northern yellow-cress *Rorippa islandica*.

Six plant listed as locally important species were recorded within 1km of the site, namely: fragrant agrimony *Agrimonia procera*, greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*, common slender eyebright *Euphrasia micrantha*, water avens *Geum rivale*, yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon subsp. Montanum* and knotted pearlwort *Sagina nodosa*.

Field Survey Results

No plant species, which individually are considered to be of either of national, regional or local significance were recorded on the site.

SINC Assessment

The species recorded during the survey have been assessed against the indicator species list for lowland dry acid grasslands within the Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales.

The guidelines state:

'The following should be considered for selection:

- *all examples of unimproved acid grassland*
- *all examples of semi-improved acid grassland which retain a relatively high diversity of indicator species*

Acid grasslands are comparatively scarce in the lowlands, being restricted to areas of nutrient-poor acidic soils, and frequently occur on old colliery tips. They are more characteristic of the uplands where they

occur over extensive areas, although many of these have been subject to agricultural improvement or are in deteriorating condition due to neglect. Acid grasslands are characteristically rather poor in terms of plant species-diversity, but unimproved swards often support characteristic plant species, as well as a range of other wildlife including scarce or rare species. 'Unimproved' in this context refers to swards, which contain a high proportion of the species listed as community constants or preferential associates of the relevant NVC community as described by Rodwell (1992). A list of species indicative of unimproved acid grasslands is given in Table 4. A site should be considered for selection if 7 or more of these species are recorded'.

During the survey five indicator species of acid grassland were identified within the grassland within Area 1 including sheep's sorrel, sheep's fescue, heath bedstraw, tormentil and pignut. Four indicator species were identified within the grassland within Area 2 including sheep's fescue, heath bedstraw, tormentil and heather. Some areas of the grassland had locally frequent heath bedstraw at the time of survey in both Area 1 and Area 2.

Therefore, at the time of survey, the areas of acid grassland did not meet the criteria of seven indicator species. The survey was conducted in June (2024) which is within the optimal survey period for botanical surveys.

3.6.2. Birds

Desk Study Results

SEWBRc returned records of 21 priority bird species within 1km of the site, namely: skylark *Alauda arvensis*, kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, pied flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*, brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, leach's petrel *Hydrobates leucorhous*, herring gull *Larus argentatus*, linnet *Linaria cannabina*, red kite *Milvus milvus*, house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, wood warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, dunnoek *Prunella modularis*, bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, redwing *Turdus iliacus*, song thrush *Turdus philomelos*, ring ouzel *Turdus torquatus*, and barn owl *Tyto alba*.

19 birds listed as species of conservation concern were recorded within 1km of the site, namely: common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, long-tailed tit *Aegithalos caudatus*, mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, meadow pipit *Anthus pratensis*, swift *Apus apus*, grey heron *Ardea cinerea*, greenfinch *Chloris chloris*, dipper *Cinclus cinclus*, whitethroat *Curruca communis*, swallow *Hirundo rustica*, lesser black-backed gull *Larus fuscus*, grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, green woodpecker *Picus viridis*, goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, sand martin *Riparia riparia*, woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* and mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus*.

SEWBRc also returned 20 birds listed as locally important species within 1km of the site, namely: sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, buzzard *Buteo buteo*, goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*, jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*, blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, house martin *Delichon urbicum*, great spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, goosander *Mergus merganser*, pied wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*,

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piebald wagtail *Motacilla alba*, great tit *Parus major*, coal tit *Periparus ater*, chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*, nuthatch *Sitta europaea*, siskin *Spinus spinus*, tawny owl *Strix aluco*, blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* and wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*.

No birds listed as other bird species (i.e. invasive species) were recorded within 1km of the site.

Field Survey Results and Evaluation of Ecological Value of Site for Birds

A low number of birds were recorded on site, including blackbird *Turdus merula*, blue tit *Parus caeruleus* and robin *Erithacus rubecula*.

Area 1, where the footprint of the development is contained, comprises a pastoral field with areas of dense bracken and defunct hedgerows which provide suitable habitat for ground nesting birds including skylark and stonechat which are known to inhabit upland areas. There is a collection of overgrown hazel coppice in the south-eastern corner of Area 1 which has potential to support nesting birds including blue tit, great tit and wren. However, the hedgerows and bracken will be retained and enhanced as part of the proposals. Area 2 comprises similar habitat to Area 1 with denser stands of bracken and more trees on the boundaries, which provide additional suitable nesting habitat for common woodland species and ground nesting birds.

Impact Assessment of Proposed Development on Birds

The following direct impacts to nesting birds may occur as a result of the development:

- All of the hedgerows within the site will be retained and enhanced with native species as part of the proposals. Small areas of acid grassland and dense bracken may be removed to facilitate the development, which will result in the loss of some suitable nesting habitat;
- Death or injury to adults or destruction of nests during vegetation clearance to enhance the site for biodiversity post-development. However, such impacts can be avoided by timing works so that they occur outside of the nesting bird season (September to February inclusive), and by adopting sensitive working practices as detailed in Section 4; and

The following indirect impacts to nesting birds may occur as a result of the development:

- Habitat degradation; and
- Increases in disturbance levels.

3.6.3. Bats

Desk Study Results

SEWBRc returned two records of bats foraging or commuting within 1km of the site. These included an unidentified pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus species* and brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*.

There were no records of bat surveys having been previously undertaken on sites of the same postcode on the Neath Port Talbot Council planning portal.

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Field Survey Results and Evaluation of Ecological Value of Site for Bats

Trees

All of the trees within the survey area were assessed for their suitability to support roosting bats. The majority of scattered trees were semi-mature in age with low numbers of PRFs. They have therefore not been included in the table below.

The trees marked TN03, TN08 and TN09 on Plan 5 supported a number of PRFs, however, these trees lay outside of the development footprint. These have been described in detail in the table below and numbered on Plan 5, which should be read in conjunction with this section of the report.

Table 6: Trees Assessed for Bat Suitability

No.	Description	Size	Evidence of Roosting Bats	PRF	Suitability for Roosting Bats (Collins 2023)	Impact of Development
T1 (TN03) (Photo 13)	Mature silver birch approximately 12m in height.	50cm	None	Wound in stem at 0.5m on northern aspect.	PRF Present (Unknown)	The tree will be retained.
T2 (TN08) (Photo 14)	Mature oak, approximately 15m in height.	80cm	None	Large wound in stem, likely from lighting impact. From ground level to 10m.	PRF Present (Unknown)	The tree will be retained.
T3 (TN09) (Photo 15)	Mature oak, approximately 15m in height.	100cm	None	Large wound in stem, likely from lighting impact. From ground level to 10m.	PRF Present (Unknown)	The tree will be retained.

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Photo 13: T1 on the Southern Boundary of Area 2



Photo 14: T2 on the Northern Boundary of Area 2



Photo 15: T3 on the Northern Boundary of Area 2



Potential Tree Roosts

T1-3 have been assessed as containing PRFs which may support roosting bats. If proposals change, and they are required to be removed to facilitate the proposals, further assessment will be required.

Foraging and Commuting Habitat

Area 1 and Area 2 comprise acid grassland with defunct hedgerows on the boundaries. The site is located on a hill over 200m above sea level which is likely to be exposed to strong winds for a majority of the year. Therefore, overall the site provides low potential to support foraging and commuting bats. The Afon Twrch, which lies approximately 0.94km south-east of Area 2, provides high-quality habitat for foraging and commuting bats within the wider landscape, however this is separated from the site by the town of Ystalyfera. Overall, Area 1 and 2 provide low potential to support roosting bats.

Impact Assessment of Proposed Development on Bats

The following direct impacts to bats may occur as a result of the development:

- T1-T3 are proposed for retention. However, if plans change, the felling of the trees on site could result in the death, injury, or disturbance to any bats present at the time of works, or the loss of potential roost sites. In that scenario, further surveys would be required as detailed in Section 4.

The following indirect impacts to bats may occur as a result of the development:

- T1-3 are proposed for retention. However, there is a risk that they may be subject to root damage as a result of heavy plant movement over the roost protection area, or accidental damage during general construction activities. T1-3 have been assessed as containing PRFs and therefore protective barriers will be installed prior to any site work, to ensure that no such inadvertent impacts occur (see Section 4). These will be established in line with the tree root protection zones detailed in the arboriculture report that has been produced for the site. If an adequate barrier cannot be established around T1-T3, these trees will require further survey, as detailed in Section 4;
- Due to the change of use of the site, increases in artificial lighting levels will be significant, both during the construction phase and the operational phase of the development. If this lighting envelops the retained hedgerows and trees of the site, it could adversely affect foraging and commuting bats. A sensitive lighting strategy is outlined in Section 4.

3.6.4. Dormice

Desk Study Results

SEWBRc returned one dormouse record within 1km of the site, in a hedgerow on the eastbound side of the A48, 0.76km to the south-west of the site dating from 20/10/2011.

Field Survey Results Evaluation of Ecological Value of Site for Dormice

No signs of dormice were recorded during the survey. The boundary hedgerows contain very little tree cover, most of which is confined to the southern boundary of Area 1 and Area 2 and the northern boundary of Area 2, which comprises three mature oak trees. Both areas have poor connectivity to high-quality habitat for this species (i.e. parcels of broadleaved woodland). Hazel is present in the south-eastern corner of Area 1, however, this is isolated within the landscape and is largely overgrown and derelict, which reduces the suitability for dormice as they prefer the new growth of woody vegetation that arises after woodland management such as coppicing¹³ rather than overgrown derelict coppice due to the decrease of invertebrates and foraging resources once the canopy has closed at maturity.

¹³ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/animals/mammals/hazel-dormouse/>

Impact Assessment of Proposed Development on Dormice

The likelihood of dormice being present on within Area 1 or Area 2 is considered to be negligible and no adverse impacts are subsequently anticipated.

3.6.5. Badgers

Desk Study Results

SEWBRc did not return any records of badgers from within 1km of the site.

Field Survey Results

A main badger sett (entry points marked TN04, TN05 and TN06 on Plan 5) was recorded within dense bracken on the eastern aspect of Area 2. Foraging signs including snuffle holes (TN01, TN02 and TN07) were recorded in both Area 1 and Area 2 at the time of survey.

Evaluation of Ecological Value of Site for Badgers

The main sett was active at the time of survey with six to eight entry holes identified, however, this is likely to be larger than identified as it was located within dense bracken at an average height of 1m at the time of survey. The grassland within Area 2 is likely to be an important foraging resource for the inhabitants of the sett and the grassland within Area 1 is likely to be used for foraging on a regular basis as well. However, the grasslands within Area 1 and Area 2 form a small part of the foraging resources available within the wider landscape. The current proposals include the construction of a single residential dwelling on the western aspect of Area 1 which lies approximately 230m west of the active sett entrances. The development area is separated by an existing fence line and dense bracken which is likely to shield the development from the sett post-development. The closest part of the proposals comprises the grey water system which is proposed to sit over 150m west of the sett, which is separated from the development footprint by the existing fence line which will be unlit.

Photo 16: TN01 - Snuffle Hole along the Southern Boundry of Area 1



Photo 17: One of the Active Holes within the Main Badger Sett on the Eastern Aspect of Area 2



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Photo 18: One of the Active Holes within the Main Badger Set on the Eastern Aspect of Area 2



Photo 19: TN07 a Snuffle Hole along the Northern Aspect of Area 2



Photo 20: One of the Active Holes within the Main Badger Set on the Eastern Aspect of Area 2



Impact Assessment of Proposed Development on Badgers

No works are planned within 30m of the sett. The grassland within Area 2 may be subject to ecological enhancement as part of the proposals which will temporarily disturb the sett. No grassland enhancements or bracken control should take place within 30m of the sett. If works are required within this area, these may need a licence to proceed.

If works were to be required within a 30m of the sett, the following direct impacts to badgers may occur:

- Death or injury during bracken control works; and
- Sett destruction.

The following indirect impacts to badgers may occur as a result of the development:

- Light disturbance; and
- Increases in disturbance levels.

3.6.6. Reptiles

Desk Study Results

SEWBRc returned one record of a reptile within 1km of the site, a grass snake *Natrix helvetica*.

Field Survey Results and Evaluation of Ecological Value of Site for Reptiles

The acid grassland and dense bracken within Area 1 and Area 2 provide suitable habitat to support common species of reptile including adder. The area within the development footprint (the western aspect of Area 1) has been subject to previous clearance and comprises abundant bare ground which provides suitable basking opportunities, alongside the hedgerow and tree bases which provide suitable hibernacula.

Impact Assessment of Proposed Development on Reptiles

The following direct impacts to reptiles may occur as a result of the development:

- Death and/or injury and disturbance during the vegetation clearance;
- The proposed works will result in the removal of a small area of upland neutral grassland within the western and southern aspect of Area 1, which comprises high potential reptile habitat which may cause death or injury during vegetation clearance; and
- Habitat loss at a small-scale on a permanent basis.

The following indirect impacts to reptiles may occur as a result of the development:

- Increases in disturbance levels.

The proposed works will result in the loss of around 50% of the potential reptile habitat within Area 1 with potential for the loss of further areas of grassland due to the keeping of pigs on the land once operational. The hedgerows on the boundaries and the upland acid grassland within Area 2 will be retained and enhanced as part of the proposals. Clearance of the vegetation may therefore result in the accidental killing or injury of reptiles. Precautionary measures to minimise the impacts to reptiles are outlined in Section 4.

3.6.7. Other Mammals

Desk Study Results

SEWBRc returned eight records of other mammals within 1km of the site, comprising: seven common hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*, and one polecat *Mustela putorius* record within 1km of the site.

Field Survey Results

No incidental observations of notable mammals were recorded during the survey.

Evaluation of Ecological Value of Site for Other Mammals

All of the habitats present within Area 1 and Area 2 provide suitable habitat to support hedgehogs, polecats and weasels *Mustela nivalis*.

Area 1 and Area 2 have good connectivity between other areas of similar habitat within the wider landholding and the wider landscape. Additionally, the site is likely to form a small part of a wider foraging resource for mammals including weasel and polecat.

Impact Assessment of Proposed Development on Other Mammals

The presence of hedgehogs, polecats and weasels on site cannot be ruled out completely. Additionally, the site forms a small part of suitable habitat for hedgehogs, polecats and weasels within the wider landscape.

The following direct impacts to other mammals may occur as a result of the development:

- Death or injury during vegetation clearance; and
- Habitat loss at a small-scale on a permanent basis.

The following indirect impacts to other mammals may occur as a result of the development:

- Increases in disturbance levels.

The likelihood of impacts to potential hedgehog, polecat and weasel habitat on site is considered to be relatively low, given the extent of suitable habitat in the wider landscape and the lack of evidence of these species recorded during the survey.

3.6.8. Invertebrates

Desk Study Results

SEWBRc returned 50 notable invertebrate records from within the study area, comprising:

40 priority invertebrate species were recorded within 1km of the site, namely: grey dagger *Acronicta psi*, knot grass *Acronicta rumicis*, green-brindled crescent *Allophyes oxyacanthae*, ear moth *Amphipoea oculea*, dusky brocade *Apamea remissa*, garden tiger *Arctia caja*, mottled rustic *Caradrina morpheus*, broom moth *Ceramica pisi*, sallow *Cirrhia icteritia*, goat moth *Cossus cossus*, small square-spot *Diarsia rubi*, small phoenix *Ecliptopera silaceata*, September thorn *Ennomos erosaria*, dusky thorn *Ennomos fuscantaria*, August thorn *Ennomos quercinaria*, galium carpet *Epirrhoe galiata*, autumnal rustic *Eugnorisma glareosa*, marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*, garden dart *Euxoa nigricans*, white-line dart *Euxoa tritici*, small emerald *Hemistola chrysoprasaria*, ghost moth *Hepialus humuli*, rustic *Hoplodrina blanda*, rosy rustic *Hydraecia micacea*, shoulder-striped wainscot *Leucania comma*, rosy minor *Litoligia literosa*, stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*, brindled beauty *Lycia hirtaria*, v-moth *Macaria wauaria*, dot moth *Melanchra persicariae*, oblique carpet *Orthonama vittata*, powdered quaker *Orthosia gracilis*, white ermine *Spilosoma lubricipeda*, buff ermine *Spilosoma lutea*, anomalous *Stilbia anomala*, hedge rustic *Tholera cespitis*, blood-vein *Timandra*

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comae, cinnabar *Tyria jacobaeae*, oak hook-tip *Watsonalla binaria* and dark-barred twin-spot carpet *Xanthorhoe ferrugata*.

One invertebrate listed as species of conservation concern were recorded within 1km of the site, namely: *Riolus cupreus*.

Eight invertebrate listed as locally important species were recorded within 1km of the site, namely: silver-washed fritillary *Argynnis paphia*, red-necked footman *Atolmis rubicollis*, bleached pug *Eupithecia expallidata*, alder kitten *Furcula bicuspis*, Devon carpet *Lampropteryx otregiata*, double lobed *Lateroligia ophiogramma*, double-line *Mythimna turca* and scallop shell *Rheumaptera undulata*.

Field Survey Results and Evaluation of Ecological Value of Site for Invertebrates

No incidental observations of invertebrates were recorded during the survey. The acid grassland within Area 1 and Area 2 may be important nectar sources for a variety of bees and invertebrates. The hedgerows on the boundaries are likely to be important hosts for associated invertebrate assemblages.

Impact Assessment of Proposed Development on Invertebrates

The invertebrates using the site for habitat are unlikely to solely rely on the site for their continued survival. While some habitat loss will occur across the site, this can be more than offset by providing a range of new habitats within the development that will benefit invertebrates, plans for enhancement planting across the site have potential to greatly increase the floristic diversity of the site, therefore introducing more opportunity for a wider range of invertebrates to utilise the site post-development.

4. Required Actions and Conclusions

The following recommendations are likely to be secured through planning conditions. They have been developed based on the development proposals available at the time of writing. The implementation of these recommendations will ensure compliance with the Planning Policy Wales version 12 (Welsh Government, 2024)¹⁴, TAN 5 *Nature Conservation and Planning* (2009), Section 6 and 7 of the Environment Wales Act, 2016, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which has been updated by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) [CHSAEU] Regulations 2019 and Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2016)¹⁵.

The recommendations aim to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the environment and protected species, mitigate and compensate for losses where damage is unavoidable and promote opportunities to enhance biodiversity. There is a requirement that developments must provide net benefit for biodiversity.

4.1. Biodiversity and Ecosystem Enhancement Scheme/Green Infrastructural Plan

Local Authorities have a duty (known as the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty) under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. Section 6.4.12 of Planning Policy Wales states that *'Where biodiversity enhancement proportionate to the scale and nature of the development is not proposed as part of an application, significant weight will be given to its absence, and unless other significant material considerations indicate otherwise, it will be necessary to refuse permission'*.

Where possible the existing on-site habitat will be retained to ensure that species are not adversely affected by the development. Native species of local provenance grown in the UK will be used for any new planting on the site. A soft and hard landscaping plan has been provided to inform the Green Infrastructure Statement and demonstrate Net Biodiversity Benefit (NBB) and includes the following required elements:

- Detailed planting/sowing specifications including species, size, density spacing, cultivation protection (fencing, staking, guards) and methods of weed control;
- Details of any surfacing, boundary treatments and landscaping structures including design, location, hedgehog accessibility, size, colour, materials and openings;
- Details of planting of rainwater gardens and other sustainable urban features (if proposed);
- Details of the immediate and ongoing management of the site; and
- Details of the funding mechanisms in place so plan can be successfully implemented.

A biodiversity and ecosystem enhancement scheme has been laid out in the OPD management plan (2025), which will be implemented on site.

¹⁴ Planning authorities must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions ... and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems. Development should not cause any significant loss of habitats or populations of species, locally or nationally and must provide a net benefit for biodiversity.

¹⁵ https://www.npt.gov.uk/media/7321/ldp_written_statement_jan16.pdf?v=20170727124344

The Green Infrastructure Statement has been produced by Terra Perma (2025) for the site. This will ensure that all elements of green infrastructure are coordinated from the outset, so that biodiversity, trees, soils, landscaping, SuDS, amenity, access, recreation and climate change mitigation and adaptation are integrated into a scheme which delivers multiple benefits. The Green Infrastructure Statement will inform the design and layout of the scheme and details how a functionally connected habitat can be created or retained that will increase biodiversity. Key elements outlined in the Green Infrastructure Statement to meet the requirements include:

- 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.

4.2. Further Work

4.2.1. Tree Inspections for Bats

Current proposals avoid the felling of any trees presently on the site. If plans change and any trees within Area 2 (including T1 – T3) are to be felled, the trees will require an inspection for roosting bats by a licensed bat surveyor. During the inspection, the surveyor will look for features that bats could use for roosting (PRF) and evidence of bats (i.e. droppings in, around or below a PRF; odour emanating from a PRF; audible squeaking at dusk or during warm weather; or staining below the PRF). A systematic inspection of each tree will be carried out using aerial rope access with the use of an endoscope.

Where possible, PRFs will be further categorised in accordance with Table 6.2 of the above survey guidance as detailed below:

- PRF - I - PRF is only suitable for individual bats or very small numbers of bats either due to size or lack of suitable surrounding habitats;
- PRF – M - PRF is suitable for multiple bats and may therefore be used by a maternity colony; and
- PRF – U - Unknown if PRF could only be used by individuals or could be used by multiple bats, and therefore, used as a maternity roost.

All surveyed trees that are classified as having suitable PRFs for supporting roosting bats will be marked on a site plan.

4.2.2. CEMP

A CEMP will be produced as, due to the proximity of the Neath Port Talbot Watercourses SINC, there is a chance for impacts to the surrounding drains and potentially to protected species via mediums such as

pollution during the further construction phases. This can be secured by planning condition after planning consent has been granted.

The CEMP should include:

- General Site Management: details of the construction programme including timetable, details of site clearance;
- Details of site construction drainage, containments areas, appropriately sized buffer zones between storage areas (of spoil, oils, fuels, concrete mixing and washing areas) and any watercourse or surface drain;
- Resource Management: details of fuel and chemical storage and containment; details of waste generation and its management;
- Pollution Prevention: demonstrate how relevant Guidelines for Pollution Prevention and best practice will be implemented, including details of emergency spill procedures and incident response plan;
- Details of the persons and bodies responsible for activities associated with the CEMP and emergency contact details; and
- Landscape/ecological clerk of works to ensure construction compliance with approved plans and environmental regulations.

4.3. Precautionary Measures

4.3.1. Protection and Retention of Trees

T1 – T3 will be securely fenced-off to prevent accidental damage prior to commencement of construction work and treated in accordance with British Standard BS5837 (2012) *Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations*.

Where possible, any future developments will avoid the felling of these trees as this will help maintain ecological connectivity of the site, maintain its biodiversity value and reduce the potential requirements for further protected species surveys.

Examples of suitable fencing can be found in Appendix 7.

4.3.2. Timing of Works for Birds

Any removal of the acid grassland and dense bracken within Area 1 should be carried out outside of the bird nesting season (March-September inclusive). Alternatively, any works undertaken from March to August will be subject to a check for nesting birds by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to the works. If any active nests are found these will be protected, along with an appropriate buffer zone until the nesting is complete, and the young have fledged¹⁶.

¹⁶ Some bird species, especially raptors and owls remain dependent upon the nesting site after fledging and so depending upon the species the nest site may need to be protected for a period of time after fledging.

4.3.3. Good Construction Practice for Badgers

Due to the presence of the main badger sett within the eastern aspect of Area 2, which lies 140m east of the development area (Area 1) at the closest point, a pre-commencement badger survey should be conducted prior to works starting on site to check for badger setts which may be excavated within the site boundary prior to the development commencement.

No nighttime working is permitted. It is also recommended that during the construction phase any steep sided holes left open overnight should be equipped with a mammal ladder (a reinforced plywood board >60cm wide set at an angle of no greater than 30° to the base of the pit) to prevent entrapment. Additionally, at the outset of construction, the active sett which is to be retained should be enclosed by robust temporary fencing (supported chestnut paling or equivalent, with access through for badgers), and all construction personnel and vehicles prohibited from these enclosures.

It is recommended that any security fencing erected onsite is permeable to wildlife movement. A gap of at least 15cm should be left at regular intervals along the bottom of the fence under which a badger could pass. This will also make the site permeable to other small mammals.

4.3.4. Species Deterrence – Reptiles and Other Mammals

Measures to prevent direct impact to reptiles, hedgehogs, polecats and weasels should concentrate primarily on minimising the risk of causing death and injury to individuals during any vegetation clearance, via the implementation of 'species deterrence' measures in the run-up to the commencement of works onsite. Acid grassland vegetation will be strimmed or brush cut to a height of approximately 300mm during this period to make the area less suitable for reptiles, hedgehogs, polecats and weasels. Arisings will be removed immediately from site. The vegetation should be cut from north to south to encourage any active animals to move into the retained area of grassland within the southern aspect of the site. The remaining vegetation will be left for at least 48 hours and then cut down to near ground level and left for another 48 hours prior to works commencing. This should make the areas unattractive to these species prior to the works, thus encouraging them to leave the area. Mechanical clearance methods (e.g. gang mowing, flail-cutting etc.) will not be used (to avoid killing wildlife and committing an offence). Furthermore, features that could be utilised as refuges or hibernacula (e.g. log piles, earth mounds) should be de-constructed by hand.

4.4. Compensation Measures

4.4.1. Acid Grassland

The assessment of the acid grassland present within the site boundary against the SINC selection criteria for acid grassland shows that the grassland within Area 1 and Area 2 does not qualify as good quality acid grassland as the criteria of minimum of 7 indicator species was not met. The grassland within Area 1 contained five indicator species: sheep's sorrel, sheep's fescue, heath bedstraw, tormentil and pignut. Area 2 contained four indicator species including sheep's fescue, heath bedstraw, tormentil and heather,

however the grassland was in poor condition at the time of survey as there was a high cover of grasses due to agricultural improvements.

To compensate for the loss of species-poor acid grassland within the development footprint, if removal is required to facilitate the development, the retained areas of acid grassland within Area 1 and Area 2 could be enhanced. This can be done with a seed mix collected from rich areas of dry hay meadows, acid grasslands and rush pastures with purple moor grass habitats present within the Gwrhyd Meadows SSSI, which lies just outside 2km of the site adjacent to the western boundary. The seeds can be collected through brush harvesting¹⁷ a small amount in autumn to ensure local provenance with landowner permission. The retained area of acid grassland should be managed in an appropriate way to ensure that the grassland is not lost to successional tall herb and scrub communities through the implementation of low density grazing or a mowing regime.

Alternatively, the grassland could be enhanced with seed mix suitable for the local soil conditions and geology of the site to replace the seed mix proposed within the current Landscape Plan which is unlikely to be of local provenance. The type of ready-made mixtures which could be used include a Welsh meadow seed mix¹⁸ which is harvested from two hay meadows in West Pembrokeshire and North Carmarthenshire to ensure local provenance.

4.5. Enhancement Measures and Biodiversity Net Gain

4.5.1. Hedgerow Enhancement

New sections of native species hedgerow should be planted along all boundaries of Area 1 and Area 2 (apart from the eastern aspect where the 30m buffer should be implemented around the active badger sett) to ensure that there is no net loss of foraging and commuting habitat for bats in the long term and to provide a habitat corridor on the boundaries of the site. Some standard trees should be allowed to develop to provide continuous canopy cover around the site boundary to develop a more complex habitat in the long term; approximately 1 per 40m length of hedge.

The species planted should be proficient fruiting/nut bearing species which are known to benefit a range of species including dormice, birds and small mammals. The species should be native and of local provenance to provide a species-rich diversity. Species could include, but are not limited to: hazel, hawthorn, elder, dog rose, guelder rose, rowan, honeysuckle, holly oak, birch and goat willow. Due to the windswept landscape, it is recommended that fast growing species such as willow are used to ensure their longevity within the landscape. Hedgerows should be managed in an appropriate way to optimise their biodiversity value.

¹⁷ [Brush harvesting.p65 \(cieem.net\)](#)

¹⁸ <https://britishwildflowermeadowseeds.co.uk/products/welsh-meadow-seed-mix?variant=32619212701833>

The hazel within the south-eastern aspect of the Area 1, adjacent to the proposed grey water system, is derelict with no signs of coppice management in over 30 years. This should be bought back into coppice rotation¹⁹ to increase the suitability of the habitat for dormice.

4.5.2. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDs)

As of 7th January 2019, all new developments of more than one dwelling house or where the construction area is 100m² or more are required to have SuDS to manage on-site surface water (whether they require planning permission or not). These SuDS must be designed and constructed in accordance with the Welsh Government Standards for Sustainable Drainage²⁰.

The SuDs is likely to be in the form of the grey water system within the centre of the southern boundary of Area 1. There is scope to incorporate ecological enhancement measures into the design of the SuDs features without compromising its core function. The chosen waterbody could be planted with native species-rich aquatic plug plants²¹, a native species-rich marginal seed mix²², and a selection of native shrubs, which will serve several purposes: to shield the feature, creating an aesthetically pleasing screen; to enhance ground-water absorption; and to increase the ecological value of the retained boundary features.

In order to prevent the gradual encroachment of scrub into the SuDs, an active management regime will be required in which thinning and removal of scrub occurs every three years. In order to avoid the risk of adversely affecting nesting bird species, the management will take place during November to February inclusive.

4.6. Sensitive Lighting Strategy

The lighting design for the site will be kept to the minimum level which meets the needs of security and health and safety. The unnecessary lighting of habitats which could potentially be used by bats, dormice, badger and otter such as nearby trees, hedgerows and watercourses etc. will be avoided.

External lighting will be minimised and installed at low-level only (i.e. no higher than eaves level and lower than 2.4m) and directed downward (i.e. below the horizontal plane with no upward tilt). Fully shielded lights with front and side hoods/shields or cowls will be installed to prevent upwards and horizontal light spill. The lighting source will not be visible.

Lighting will not be located in the vicinity of, or shine towards, the broadleaved woodland, lines of trees, and areas of scrub which surround the site, thus maintaining a 'dark corridor' and avoiding/minimising disturbance to commuting and foraging bats and dormice. Any security lights used will operate on a passive infrared (PIR) motion sensor sensitive to large objects only, to avoid constant triggers by bat passes and with timers set on a short duration (i.e. a maximum 'on' time of one minute) to reduce the amount of 'lit

¹⁹ <https://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/managing-woodlands-for-dormice-final.pdf>

²⁰ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/statutory-guidance.pdf>

²¹ [Plant Collections](#) | [Aquatic Plants for Margins](#) | [British Pond Plants](#)

²² [Welsh Meadow Seed](#) | [Packets](#) | [British Wildflower Seeds](#) | [British Wildflower Meadow Seeds](#)

time'. The lights will either have an integrated LED light source, or use LED bulbs. They will be low intensity (i.e. circa 11 watts) and have a warm white colour temperature of 3000K or less (ideally 2700K if commercially available). White, blue and green lighting sources including mercury or metal halide, CPO and CDO (ceramic discharge metal-halide) bulbs which have significant effect on bats will be avoided. See suitable lighting examples in Appendices 8 and 9.

4.6.1. Artificial Hibernacula for Reptiles

Provision of two hibernaculum within Area 1 or Area 2 will be incorporated into the proposals for the site. The hibernacula will measure approximately 2m in length, 1m in width and 1m in height. They will comprise bricks, stone and/or timber. The bank will be oriented so that it runs from east to west with the southern side of the bank finished with topsoil and seeded with a neutral wildflower mix or allowed to re-seed naturally. If a grading bucket is used to remove the topsoil from the location where the hibernacula is positioned, this can be relocated on the southern side. The northern side will be left with the rubble exposed to allow reptiles to enter the cavities within the bank. The bank will also encourage invertebrates, providing prey items for reptiles. In particular, leaving portions of the south-facing bank bare will encourage thermophilic (warmth-loving) invertebrates.

The construction of hibernacula will take place at the end of the construction phase. Materials necessary to create the refuge will be brought onto site.

4.6.2. Bat Roosting Opportunities

Bat roosting opportunities will be enhanced through the provision of two integrated Woodstone bat tubes and/or an integrated soffit box added into the design of the new building (within the soffits on the south-eastern aspect out of the prevailing winds). The bat roosting feature will be installed in unlit locations, in the vicinity of connective features to allow bats undisturbed dispersal to local foraging habitat.

4.7. One Planet Development Management Plan

As part of the One Planet Development (OPD) scheme, an OPD Management Plan has been drawn up which addresses the OPD essential criterion that: *"all existing semi-natural and other important habitats on the site are conserved and enhanced through appropriate traditional management."* This will be achieved via the use of livestock grazing to manage grasslands; organic, no-dig agricultural methods in the horticultural area; and following good practice guidelines for hedgerow management, including leaving them uncut as much as possible. See Gilfach yr Haidd Farm OPD Management Plan (2025) and Plan 7: Proposed Management Plan for further detail.

4.8. Longevity of Report

If development works do not begin within eighteen months to two years of the date of this report, an update survey is likely to be required in accordance with guidance from NRW²³, CIEEM (2019), and BS 42020:2013²⁴, to determine if conditions have changed since those described in this report.

4.9. Conclusions

Provided the measures detailed in Section 4 are implemented, and that the design continues to avoid affecting the PRFs identified in T1 - T3, the development is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts to any protected sites, habitats or species.

The site's ecological value will not present a fundamental constraint to the proposed development, although the measures outlined above will be required.

²³ As set out in Point 5 of the NRW *Bat Surveys - Frequently Asked Questions* and Point 4 of the guidance included within the NRW European Protected Species Development Application Form.

²⁴ As set out in Section 6.2.1, point 7 which states that ecological information should not normally be more than two/three years old, or as stipulated in good practice guidance).

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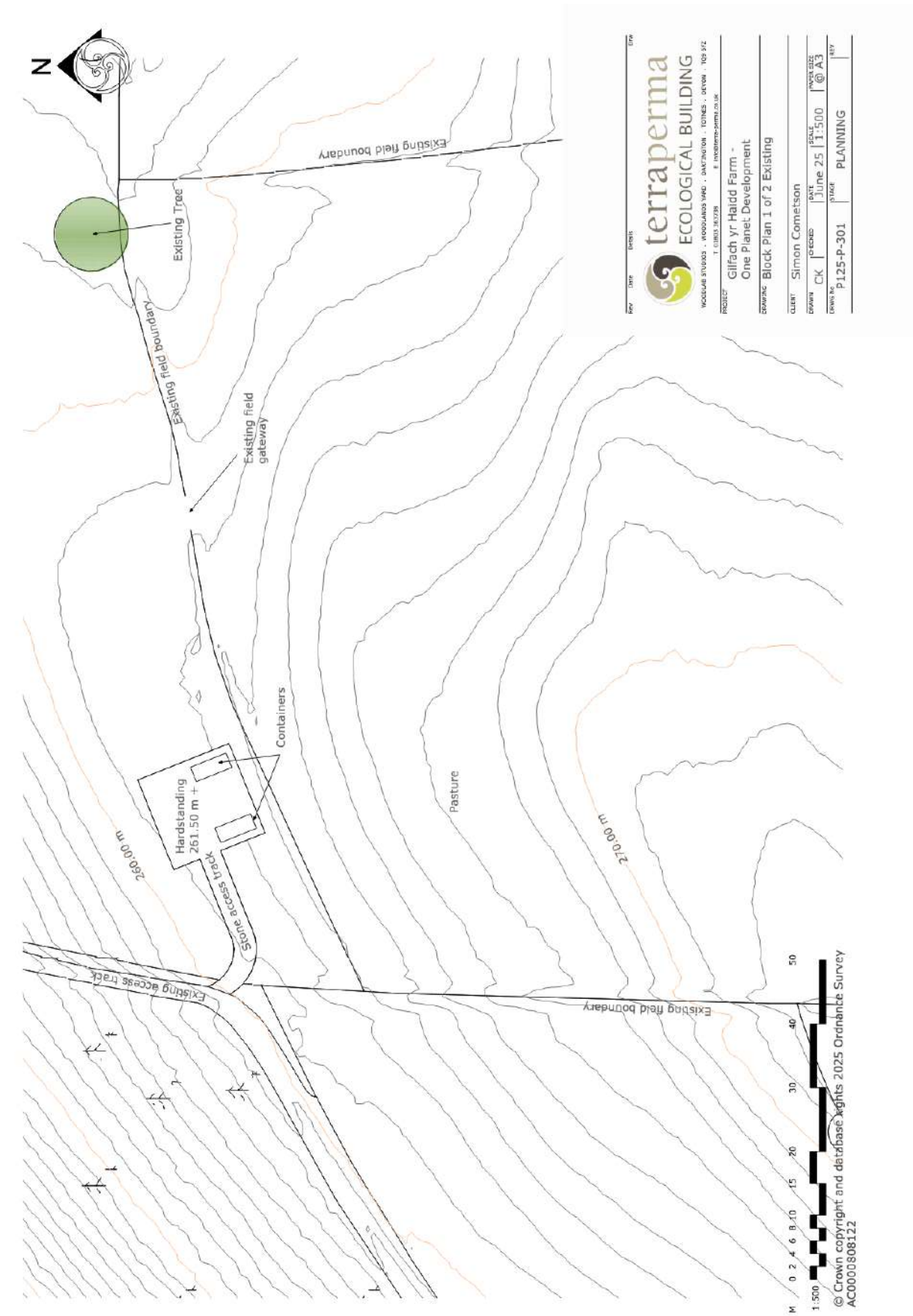
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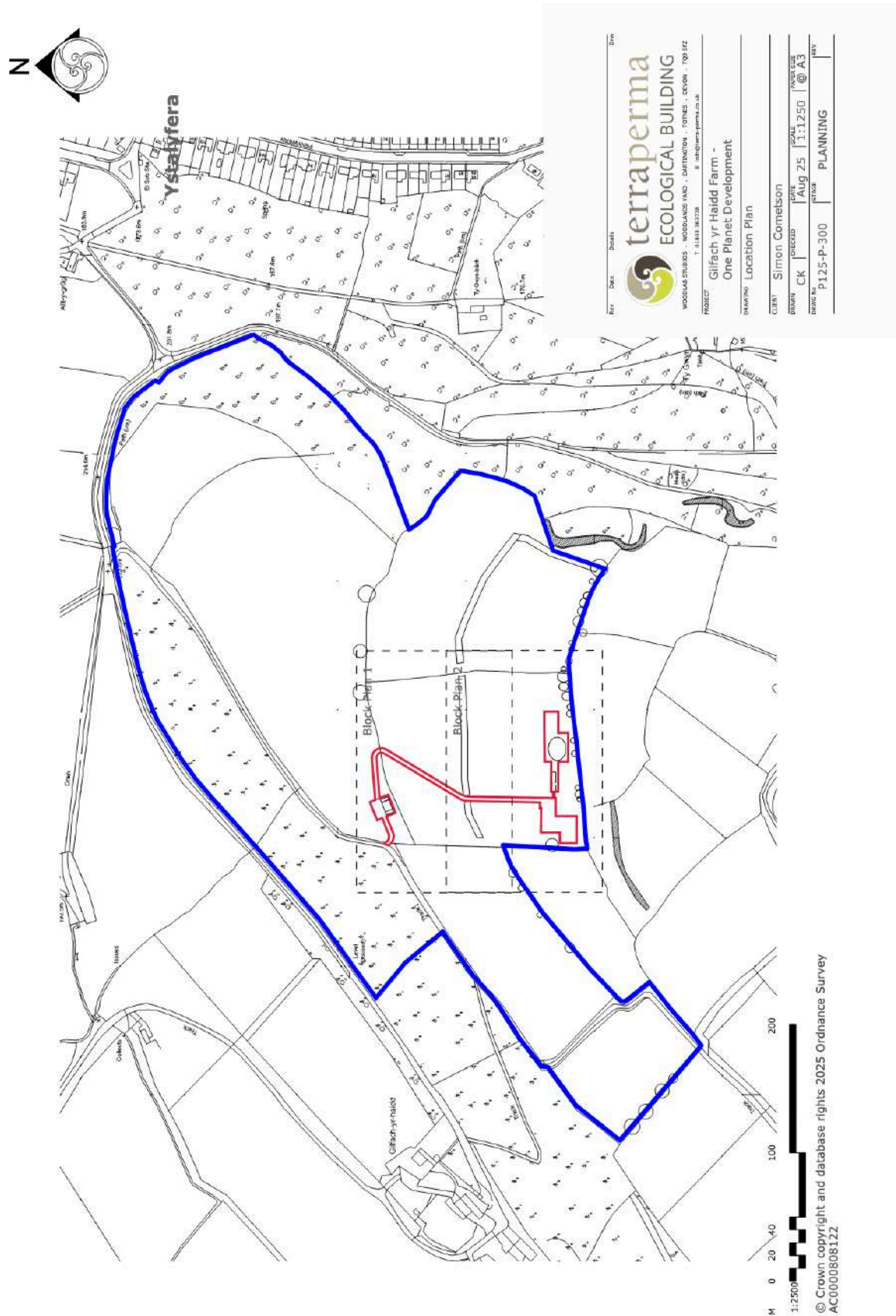
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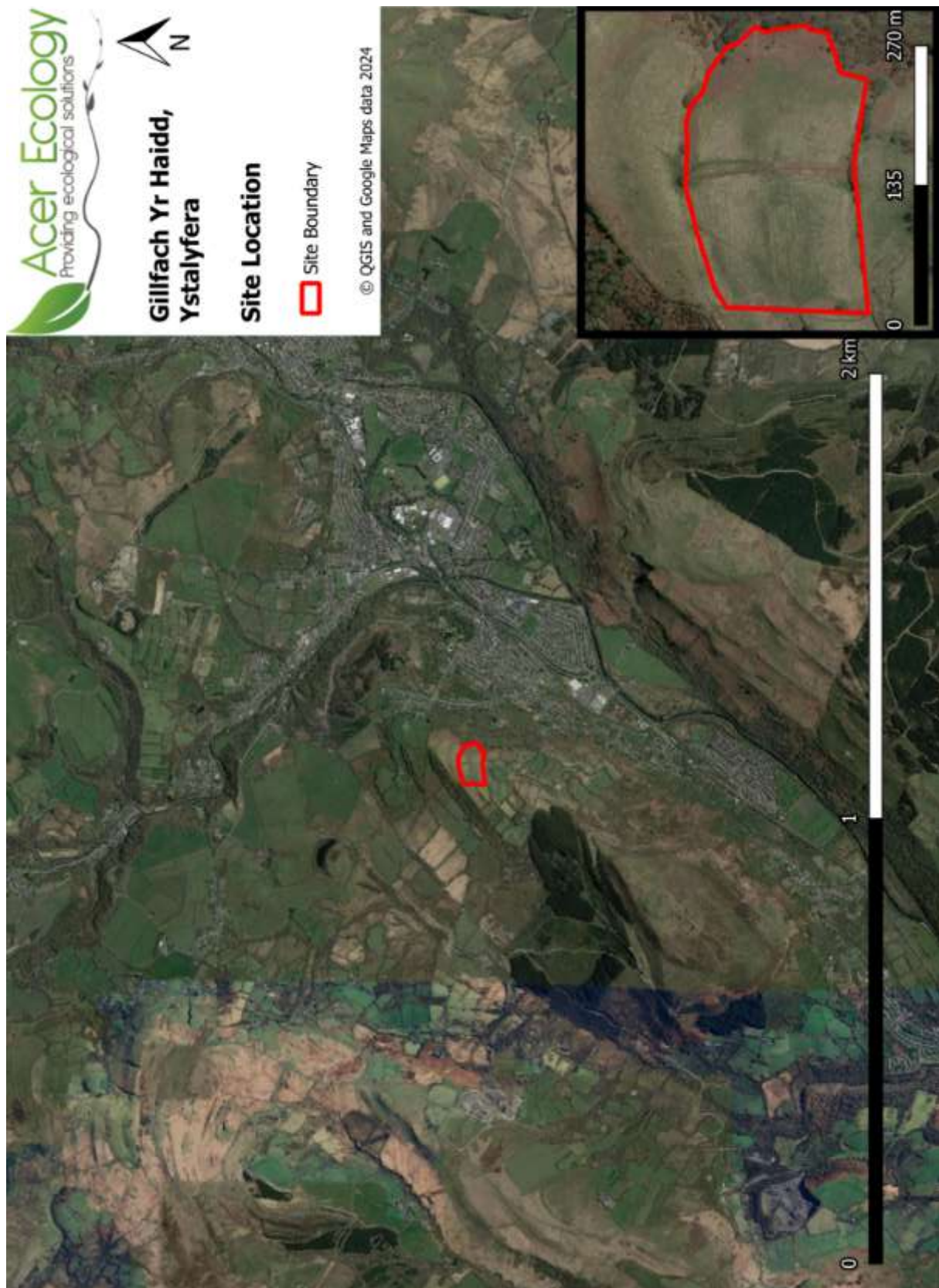
Drawing 1: Existing Block Plan 1



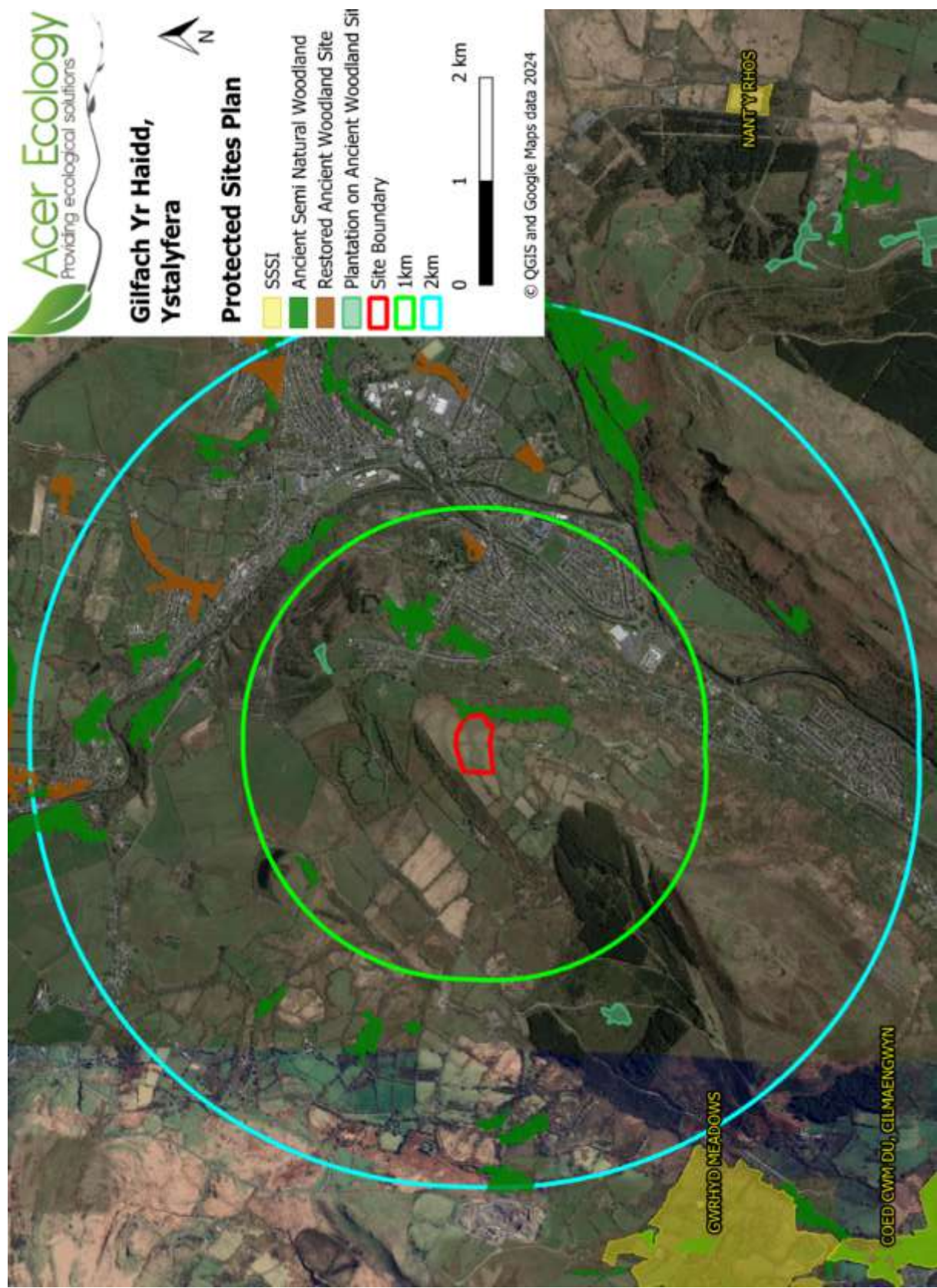
Plan 1: Location Plan



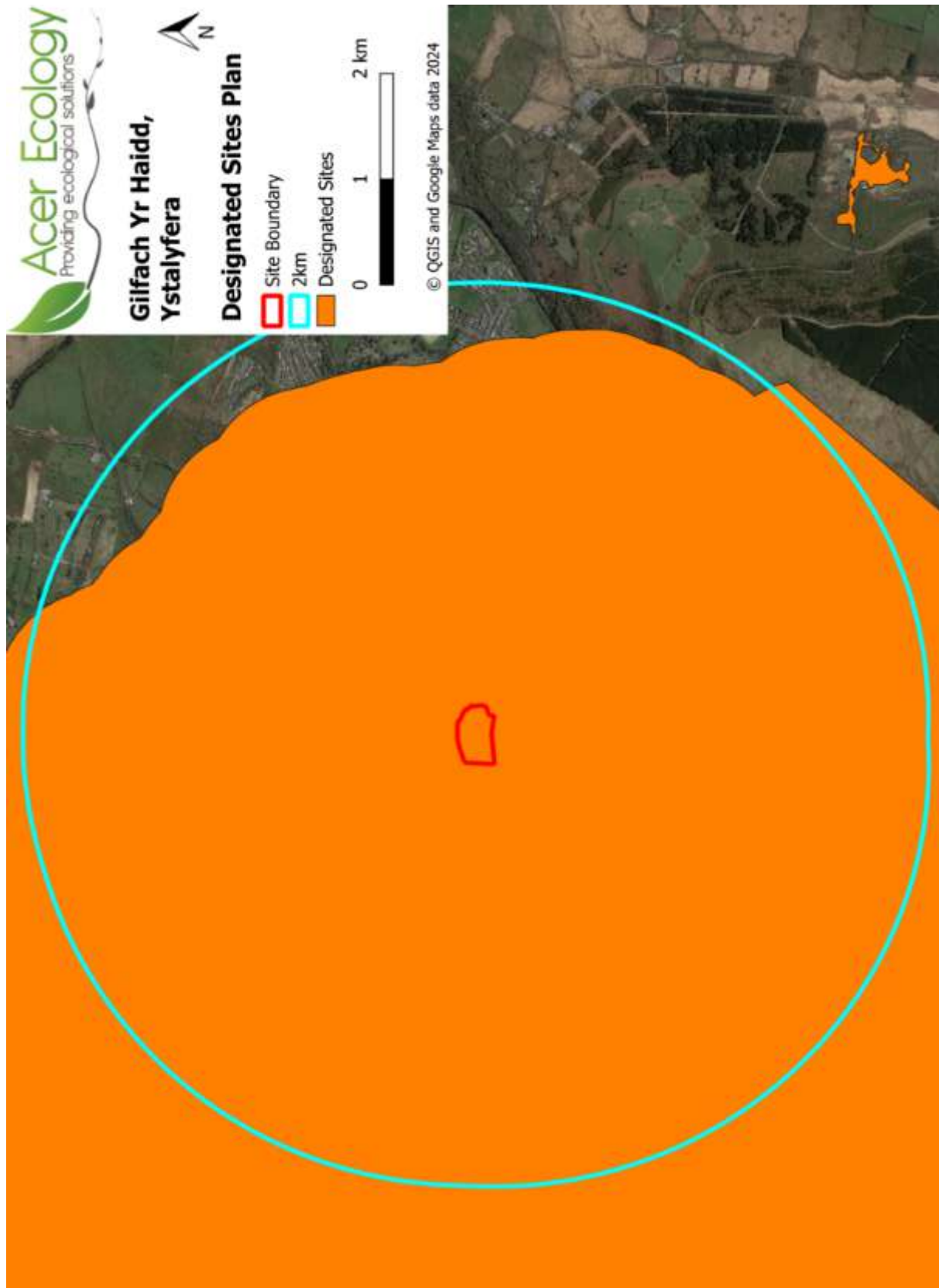
Plan 2: Site Location



Plan 3: Site Location and Protected Sites Within 2km



Plan 4: Site Location and SINCs Within 2km



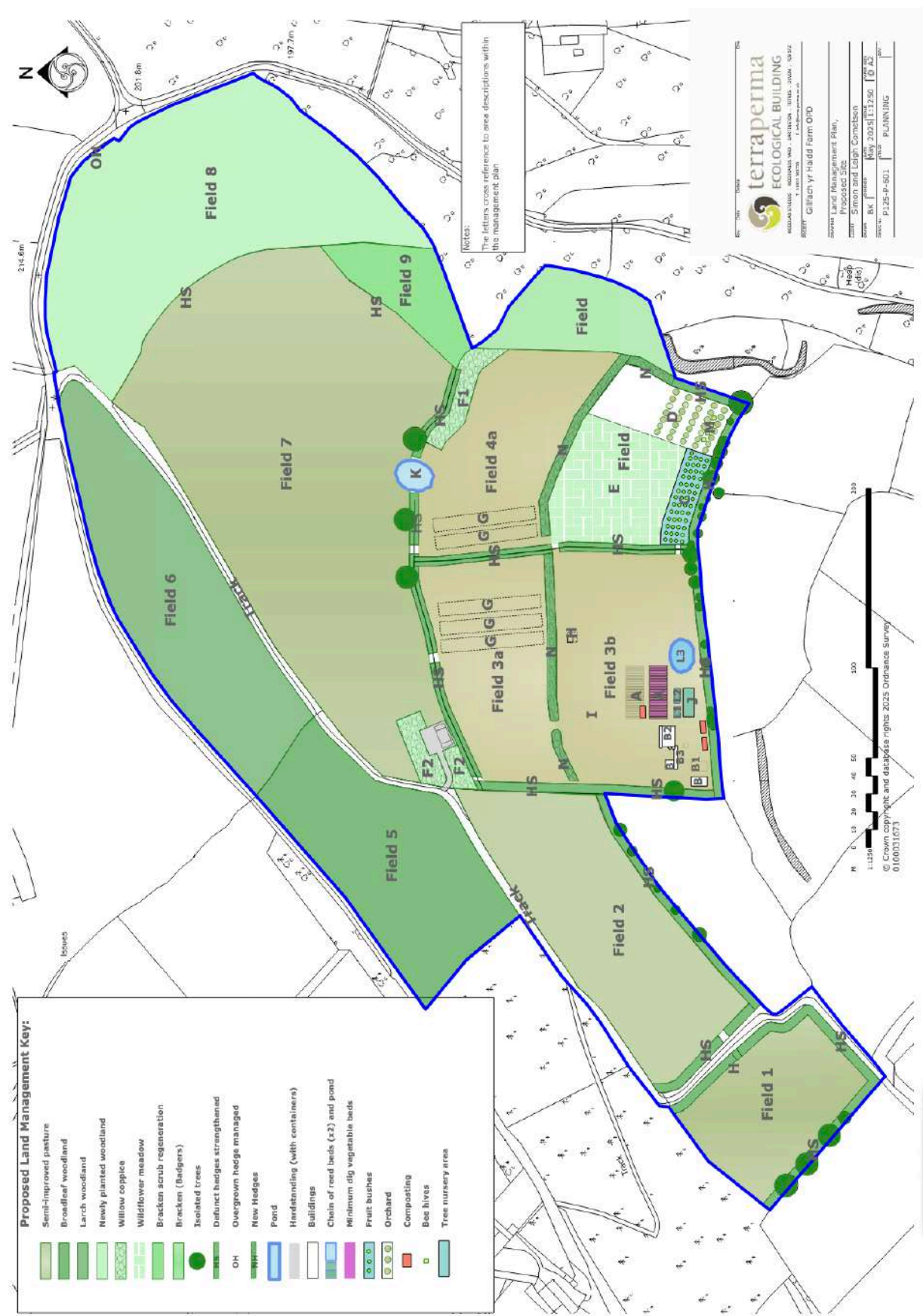
Plan 5: Location of Water Bodies Within 0.5km



Plan 6: Habitats and Vegetation



Plan 7: Proposed Management Plan



Appendix 1: Legislation and Policy Relating to Statutory and Non-Statutory Designated Sites and Planning Policy Relevant to Site

SINCs

SINCs are a class of nature conservation designations collectively referred to as 'Wildlife Sites'. Wildlife Sites are so-called 'third tier' sites, generally ranked below sites which are of international (first tier) or national (second tier) biodiversity significance, but which are considered to have '*substantive nature conservation value*' at the regional or district level. They are usually designated at the county or county borough level by the relevant local planning authority, and are recognised as a planning constraint in the relevant statutory development plan.

The framework for the identification and designation of 'Wildlife Sites' is set out in various Government documents, and is referred to in *Planning Policy Wales (2024)* and *Technical Advice Note (Wales) 5: Nature Conservation & Planning*. Defra published *Local Sites: Guidance on their identification, selection and management in 2006*²⁵.

Environment (Wales) Act 2016

The Environment (Wales) Act Section 6 duty, or the Biodiversity Duty, requires public authorities to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems. 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 2016.

The Section 6 duty requires that developments should not be permitted which result in net loss of value to biodiversity, and must seek to achieve biodiversity net gain. Where net loss cannot be achieved through avoidance or mitigation, compensation is required.

Future Wales - the National Plan 2040

Future Wales is the 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. Future Wales - the national plan 2040 is the national development framework and it is the highest tier plan, setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040. It is a framework which will be built on by Strategic Development Plans at a regional level and Local Development Plans. Planning decisions at every level of the planning system in Wales must be taken in accordance with the development plan as a whole.

²⁵ <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20111108175609/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/protected/localsites.pdf>

Planning Policy Wales (2024)

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 Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other key legislation.

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 12 (Welsh Government, 2024) states that planning authorities must follow a stepwise approach to maintain and enhance biodiversity and build resilient ecological networks by ensuring that any adverse environmental effects are firstly avoided, then minimized, mitigated, and as a last resort compensated for; enhancement must be secured wherever possible. The first priority for planning authorities is to avoid damage to biodiversity and ecosystem functioning. Where there may be harmful environmental effects, planning authorities will need to be satisfied that any reasonable alternative sites that would result in less harm, no harm or gain have been fully considered.

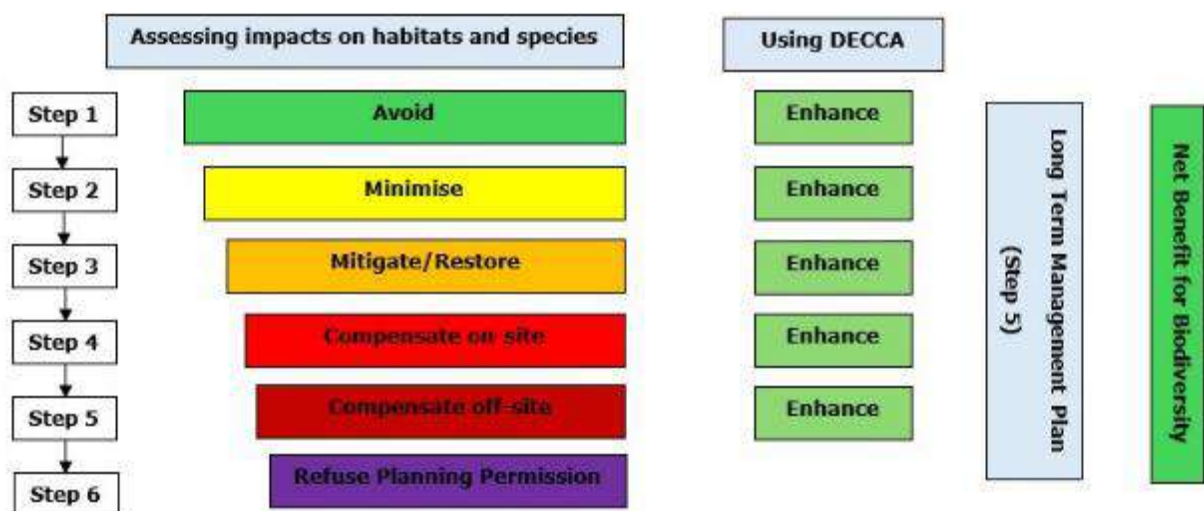
On 11th October 2023 Julie James MS Minister for Climate Change finalised policy for inclusion in the next iteration of Planning Policy Wales (version 12)²⁶. The new chapter 6 came into force with immediate effect. This was followed by the publication of version 12 of Planning Policy Wales in February 2024. The main changes to policy can be summarised as follows:

Green Infrastructure: stronger emphasis on taking a proactive approach to green infrastructure covering cross boundary considerations, 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: further clarity is provided on securing net benefit for biodiversity through the application of the step-wise approach, including the acknowledgement of off-site compensation measures as a last resort, and, the need to consider enhancement and long-term management at each step.

²⁶ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-10/annex-addressing-the-nature-emergency-through-the-planning-system.pdf>

The use of the green infrastructure statement as a means of demonstrating the stepwise approach is made explicit. The importance of strategic collaboration to identify and capture larger scale opportunities for securing a net benefit for biodiversity is recognised.



Trees and Woodlands: closer alignment with the stepwise approach, along with promoting new planting as part of development based on securing the right tree in the right place.

Technical Advice Notes

Planning Policy Wales is supported by a series of more detailed Technical Advice Notes (TANs), of which TAN 5: Nature Conservation and Planning (2009)²⁷ is of relevance.

Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2016)

Biodiversity net-gain policy is not specifically mentioned however policy EN 6 states that development must 'conserve and where possible enhance the natural heritage importance of the site or mitigation measures will need to be agreed'. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2014) focuses to 'achieve no net loss of listed habit and species, and a gain in the (perceived or actual) extent / population of listed habitats and species' (pg.15).

Relevant ecological policies include:

- SP15 Biodiversity and Geodiversity;
- SP16 Environmental Protection; and
- EN7 Important Natural Features.

²⁷ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/tan5-nature-conservation.pdf>

Biodiversity Net Gain

Paragraph 6.4.5 of Planning Policy Wales (PPW) 12 states that "*planning authorities must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. This means that development should not cause any significant loss of habitats or populations of species, locally or nationally and must provide a net benefit for biodiversity*" (NBB) and improve, or enable the improvement, of the resilience of ecosystems. This policy and subsequent policies in Chapter 6 of PPW 11 respond to the Section 6 Duty of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

DECCA is the framework that Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has developed for evaluating ecosystem resilience to demonstrate a net benefit for biodiversity (NBB)²⁸. This is based on the following attributes:

- Diversity, extent, condition and connectivity;
- Adaptability, recovery and resistance; and
- Aspects of ecosystem resilience.

To comply with these requirements the main ecosystems on site and within the zone of influence need to be identified and set out how the diversity, extent, connectivity and condition of those ecosystems will be maintained and enhanced post-development. Recent changes to Planning Policy Wales²⁹ mean that some additional guidance will be required.

²⁸ <https://cdn.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/media/693356/resilient-ecological-networks-practitioner-guide.pdf?mode=pad&rnd=132612537900000000>

²⁹ <https://www.gov.wales/addressing-nature-emergency-through-planning-system-update-chapter-6-planning-policy-wales>

Appendix 2: Protected Species Legislation Relevant to Site

Birds

All wild British birds (while nesting, building nests and sitting on eggs), their nests and eggs (with certain limited exceptions) are protected by law under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Included in this protection are all nests (at whatever stage of construction or use) and all dependent young until the nest is abandoned and the young have fledged and become independent. Particularly rare species such as barn owl (*Tyto alba*) are listed on Schedule 1 which gives them additional protection from disturbance whilst nest building, whilst near a nest with eggs or young, or from disturbing the dependent young.

Section 10.8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 state that Local authorities must use all reasonable endeavours to avoid any deterioration of habitats of wild birds.

Bats

All species of bats and their roosting sites are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which continues to apply in UK law through the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) [‘CHSAEU’] Regulations 2019.

All species of UK bats are designated as ‘European protected species’. Seven species of bat (soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*), Bechstein’s (*Myotis bechsteinii*), noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), lesser horseshoe (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) and greater horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*)) are listed under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 as being of principal importance for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in Wales.

Dormice

Dormice are a ‘European protected species’ and afforded full protection under UK legislation. Dormice are listed under section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 as being of principal importance for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in Wales. Since 2000, the UK population has declined by over a half (51%), decreasing on average by 3.8% per year (PTES, 2019).

Badgers

Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Protection applies both to the animal itself and to its nesting burrows (setts), and current interpretation of the Act also confers some protection to key foraging areas.

Reptiles

With the exception of smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*) and sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) (which are afforded greater protection), common reptiles are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and

Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). They are given so-called 'partial protection', which prohibits the deliberate killing or injury of individuals. The habitats of common reptiles are not specifically protected. These species are listed as priority species in Wales under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are listed as a Red List mammal species in Britain and are protected under Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). They are "protected from being killed or taken by certain methods under Section 11(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The methods listed are: self-locking snares, bows, crossbows, explosives (other than ammunition for a firearm), or live decoys. The species listed are also protected from the following activities: trap, snare or net, electrical device for killing or stunning, poisonous, poisoned or stupefying substances or any other gas or smoke, automatic or semi-automatic weapon, device for illuminating a target or sighting device for night shooting, artificial light, mirror or other dazzling device, sound recording, and mechanically propelled vehicle in immediate pursuit. They are also listed as priority species under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The legislation afforded to hedgehogs in Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 means that every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity³⁰. In effect, 'conserving biodiversity' includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.

Polecats

Polecats are afforded partial protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and are listed as priority species under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. They are listed under Schedule 4 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) ['CHSAEU'] Regulations 2019 which prohibits capturing or killing of individuals by certain means. This includes those which are "indiscriminate and capable of causing the local disappearance of, or serious disturbance to, a population of any species of animal listed in Schedule 4".

The legislation afforded to polecats in the Environment Wales Act (2016) requires all public bodies including Local Authorities to have regard for biodiversity conservation³¹ when carrying out their functions.

³⁰ Biodiversity conservation in respect to hedgehogs is interpreted as a commitment to restoring or enhancing their population.

³¹ Biodiversity conservation in respect to hedgehogs is interpreted as a commitment to restoring or enhancing their population.

Appendix 3: Definitions of Site Value

International Value

Internationally designated or proposed sites such as Ramsar Sites, Special Protection Areas, Biosphere Reserves and Special Areas of Conservation, or non-designated sites meeting criteria for international designation. Sites supporting populations of internationally important species or habitats.

National Value

Nationally designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), or non-designated sites meeting SSSI selection criteria (NCC 1989), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) or Nature Conservancy Review (NCR) Grade 1 sites, viable areas of key habitats within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Sites supporting viable breeding populations of Red Data Book (RDB) species (excluding scarce species), or supplying critical elements of their habitat requirements.

Regional Value

Sites containing viable areas of threatened habitats listed in a regional Biodiversity Action Plan, comfortably exceeding Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) criteria, but not meeting SSSI selection criteria. Sites supporting regionally significant areas of BAP habitats or large and viable populations Nationally Scarce species, or those included in the Regional Biodiversity Action Plan on account of their rarity, or supplying critical elements of their habitat requirements.

County Value/District Value

Site identified as a Site of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINC) at the district level; meeting South Wales Wildlife Sites Partnership (SWWSP) 2004 published designation criteria, but falling short of SSSI designation criteria, whether designated as a SINC or not. Ancient woodlands and sites supporting regionally significant areas of UK BAP habitat. Large scale examples of BAP habitats or areas supporting small populations of protected, UK BAP/ LBAP or threatened species (other than badger).

High Local

Habitats which just fail to meet Regional value criteria, but which appreciably enrich the ecological resource of the locality. Sites supporting species which are notable or uncommon in the county; or species which are uncommon, local or habitat-restricted nationally, and which might not otherwise be present in the area. Moderate scale examples of BAP habitats or areas supporting small populations of protected, UK BAP/LBAP or threatened species.

Local Value

Old hedges, woodlands, ponds, significant areas of species-rich grassland, small scale examples of BAP habitats or areas supporting small populations of protected, UK BAP/LBAP or threatened species. Undesignated sites or features which appreciably enrich the habitat resource in the context of their immediate surroundings, parish or neighbourhood (e.g. a species-rich hedgerow). Rare or uncommon species may occur but are not restricted to the site or critically dependent upon it for their survival in the area.

Site Value (within the immediate zone of influence)

Low-grade and widespread habitats. Woodland plantations, structured planting, small areas of species-rich grassland and other species-rich habitats not included in the UK or Local BAP.

Negligible

No apparent nature conservation value

Acer Ecology

Appendix 4: Species Recorded

All species recorded by Acer Ecology, 2024

Taxonomic Name	Common Name	W	LM	CG	LDA	PMG	PIL	TF	Status
<i>Phleum Bertolli</i>	Small cats-tail								
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg	Bramble								
<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Common sorrel								
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping bent								
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping buttercup								
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire-fog								
<i>Festuca ovina</i>	Sheep's fescue				LDA				
<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	Sheep's sorrel				LDA				
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot								
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	Common mouse-ear								
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	Sweet vernal grass								
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Foxglove								
<i>Gallium saxatile</i>	Heath bedstraw				LDA				
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken								
<i>Cirsium palustre</i>	Marsh thistle					PMG			
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil				LDA				
<i>Luzula campestre</i>	Field woodrush								
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	Soft rush								
<i>Stellaria Gramineae</i>	Lesser stitchwort								
<i>Achillea millifolium</i>	Yarrow								
<i>Conopodium vulgare</i>	Pignut				LDA				
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Bird's-foot trefoil								
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> agg	Dandelion								
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Black knapweed		LM						
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red clover								
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather				LDA				
<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	Rough hawksbit								
<i>Larix decidua</i>	European larch								
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn								
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Oak								
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Birch								
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash								
<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Blackthorn								
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel								
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy								
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Rowan								

Acer Ecology

'Habitat Indicator Species' Totals (Wales Biodiversity Partnership 2008³²)			1		6	1			
		W	LM	CG	LDA	PMG	PIL	TF	

Key to Indicator Species (Wales Biodiversity Partnership 2008)

W - Woodland, LM – Lowland meadow, CG - Calcareous Grassland, LDA – Lowland Dry Acid Grassland, PMR Purple moor-grass and rush pasture, PIL – Post Industrial Land, TF Species-rich Tillage Fields and Margins

WCA 5 – Species protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act

WCA 9 – Species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act

SINC Selection

Sites which support one primary species or five contributory species; or habitats which support eight lowland meadow, eight calcareous grassland, seven lowland dry acid grassland, twelve purple moor-grass and rush pasture or eight tillage field and margins indicator species, should be considered for SINC selection. Post-industrial sites supporting 20 or more indicator species from the combined post-industrial land, acid, neutral, calcareous and marshy grassland lists should be also considered for selection.

³² Wales Biodiversity Partnership (2008) Wildlife Sites Guidance Wales: A Guide to Develop Local Wildlife Systems in Wales. Wales Biodiversity Partnership/Welsh Assembly Government.

Appendix 5: Guidelines for Assessing the Suitability of Trees on Proposed Development Site for Bats

2023 Guidelines – Based upon Table 6.2 from Collins (2023)

Suitability	Description
None	Either no PRFs in the tree or highly unlikely to be any.
FAR	Further assessment required to establish if PRFs are present in the tree.
PRF	A tree with at least one PRF present.

PRFs can be further categorised according to the below:

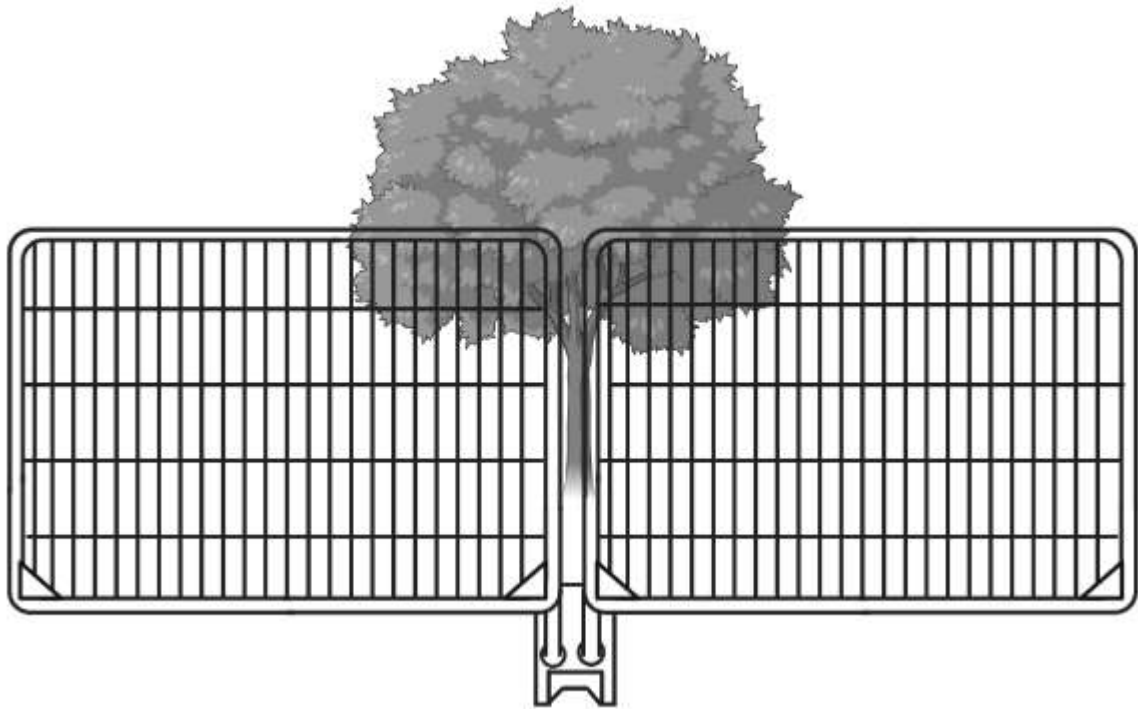
Suitability	Description
PRF - I	PRF is only suitable for individual bats or very small numbers of bats either due to size or lack of suitable surrounding habitats.
PRF - M	PRF is suitable for multiple bats and may therefore be used by a maternity colony.
PRF - U (T1 – T3)	Unknown if PRF could only be used by individuals or could be used by multiple bats and therefore used as a maternity roost.

Appendix 6: Guidelines for Assessing Potential Suitability of Proposed Development Site for Bats

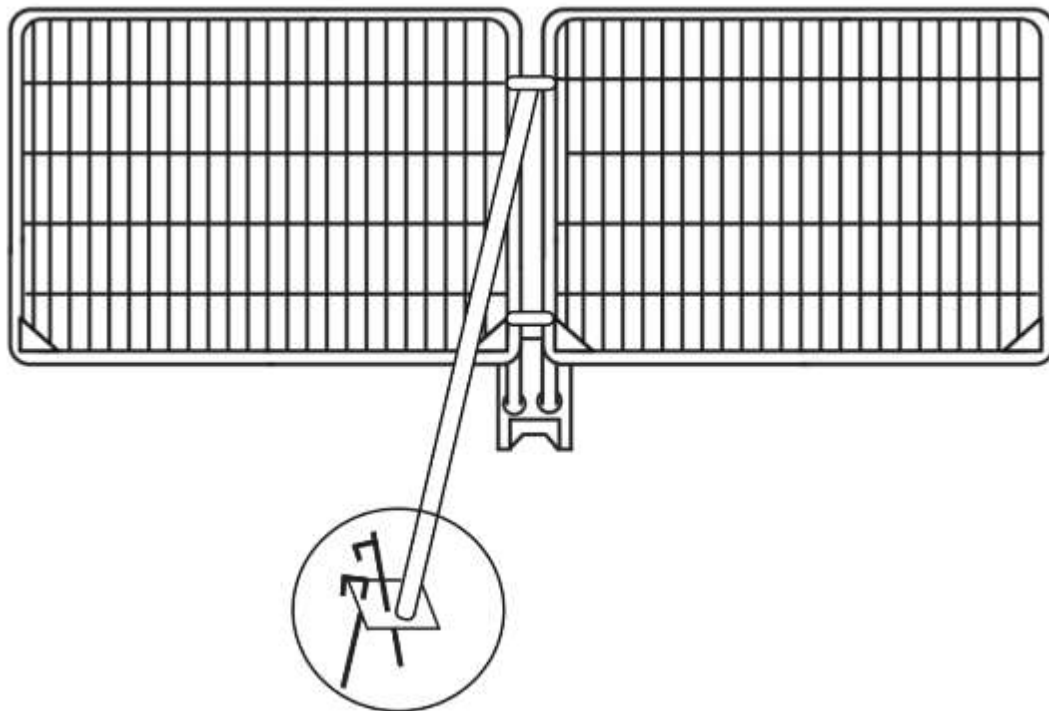
Table 4.1. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats, based on the presence of habitat features within the landscape, to be applied using professional judgement.

Potential suitability	Description	
	Roosting habitats in structures	Potential flight-paths and foraging habitats
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices/suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any commuting or foraging bats at any time of the year (i.e. no habitats that provide continuous lines of shade/protection for flight-lines, or generate/shelter insect populations available to foraging bats).
Negligible ^a	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used as flight-paths or by foraging bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains in order to account for non-standard bat behaviour.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically at any time of the year. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions ^b and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity and not a classic cool/stable hibernation site, but could be used by individual hibernating bats ^c).	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of bats as flight-paths such as a gappy hedgerow or unvegetated stream, but isolated, i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat. Suitable, but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a lone tree (not in a parkland situation) or a patch of scrub.
Moderate	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions ^b and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only, such as maternity and hibernation – the categorisation described in this table is made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for flight-paths such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens. Habitat that is connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland or water.
High	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions ^b and surrounding habitat. These structures have the potential to support high conservation status roosts, e.g. maternity or classic cool/stable hibernation site.	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by bats for flight-paths such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge. High-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by foraging bats such as broadleaved woodland, tree-lined watercourses and grazed parkland. Site is close to and connected to known roosts.
a Negligible is defined as 'so small or unimportant as to be not worth considering, insignificant'. This category may be used where there are places that a bat could roost or forage (due to one attribute) but it is unlikely that they actually would (due to another attribute). b For example, in terms of temperature, humidity, height above ground level, light levels or levels of disturbance. c Evidence from the Netherlands shows mass swarming events of common pipistrelle bats in the autumn followed by mass hibernation in a diverse range of building types in urban environments (Korsten <i>et al.</i>, 2016 and Jansen <i>et al.</i>, 2022). Common pipistrelle swarming has been observed in the UK (Bell, 2022 and Tomlinson, 2020) and winter hibernation of numbers of this species has been detected at Seaton Delaval Hall in Northumberland (National Trust, 2018). This phenomenon requires some research in the UK, but ecologists should be aware of the potential for larger numbers of this species to be present during the autumn and winter in prominent buildings in the landscape, urban or otherwise.		

Appendix 7: Protective Barriers



Wildlife barrier surrounding tree



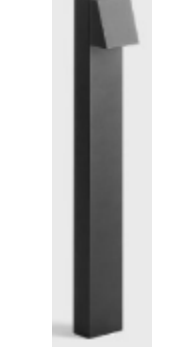
Stabilizer strut with base plate secured with ground pins
Redrawn by Acer Ecology Ltd after BS 5837:2012 Figure 1

“”

	Description
	Light fitting sourced from http://www.energylightbulbs.co.uk/products/single-outdoor-wall-with-pir-movement-sensor-stainless-steel?gclid=CLuf2c63hM4CFYVAGwod0sYPvg
	Light fitting sourced from https://www.screwfix.com/p/lap-bronx-outdoor-wall-light-black/7323r
	Lighting sourced from https://energylightbulbs.co.uk/outdoor-lighting/single-wall-lights/black-single-wall-lights/single-outdoor-wall-light-black-stainless-steel-https://www.darksky.org/our-work/lighting/lighting-for-industry/fsa/fsa-products/#!/Bronze-Outdoor-LED-Wall-Lantern-Sconce/p/50117847/category=12541418 teel-ip65-zlc076b
	Light fitting sourced from https://energylightbulbs.co.uk/outdoor-lighting/single-wall-lights/black-single-wall-lights/cone-shape-outdoor-wall-light-stainless-steel-black-finish-exterior-single-downlight-zlc068b
	Lighting sourced from https://www.dunelm.com/product/houston-outdoor-wall-light-1000189390?defaultSkuId=30730458
	Lighting sourced from https://www.lights.co.uk/lindby-jarte-led-outdoor-wall-light-23-9-cm-down.html?gclid=Cj0KCQiAys2MBhDOARIsAFF1D1cN-g6FdvDbjkJcq57t5Ym6RuP5BjinsVPsMI465W2D8SILoTRmA5kaAkHZEALw_wcB&qclsr c=aw.ds
	No longer available from previous stockist
	No longer available from previous stockist
	Lighting sourced from http://www.theopenboxshop.com/hampton-bay-lexington-collection-outdoor-rustic-bronze-led-medium-wall-lantern/ <u>Note: bulb is in unit above glass casing.</u>

A tool for finding 'bat-friendly' lighting is available at <https://www.darksky.org/our-work/lighting/lighting-for-industry/fsa/fsa-products/> although the majority of suppliers are based in America

Appendix 9: Examples of Suitable Bollard Lighting

	Manufacturer	Model	Description
	DW Windsor	Pharola DS	Specifically designed as a 'dark sky compliant' light, this bollard produces zero light above the horizontal plane, and is available with 3000K warm white lighting. For more details, visit: https://www.dwwindsor.com/products/pharola/pharola-ds/
	GHM-Eclatec	Trek	Lighting head and module in die-cast aluminium; polyester powder coating, any colour available. Available in 3000k. For more details, visit: https://www.ghm-eclatec.com/products/lighting/bollards/trek-bollard
	GHM-Eclatec	Taiga	Lighting head and module in die-cast aluminium; polyester powder coating, any colour available. Available in 3000k. For more details, visit: https://www.ghm-eclatec.com/products/lighting/bollards/taiga-led-bollard
	BEGA	77237	Cast aluminium, LED 300k, directs beam downwards. For more details, visit: https://www.bega.com/en/products/led-garden-and-pathway-luminaires-for-the-private-sector-77237/
A tool for finding 'bat-friendly' lighting is available at https://www.darksky.org/our-work/lighting/lighting-for-industry/fsa/fsa-products/ although the majority of suppliers are based in America			