Botanical Survey Report

Margam, National Grid Electricity Transmission

July 2025

Prepared for:
National Grid Electricity Transmission

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Project Number:
331201497

Revision	Description	Date	Author	Quality Check	Independent Review
1.0	First Issue	July 25	AG	HE	HE
2.0	Update following client comments	July 25	HM	HE	HE

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 Stantec UK Limited (Stantec) was commissioned by National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) to undertake a botanical survey of an area of land owned by NGET at Margam, Neath Port Talbot; hereafter referred to as 'the Site'.

1.2 Context to Study

1.2.1 A preliminary habitat survey was carried out in November 2024 to classify the habitats present on within the Site and in land to the south owned by BOC Ltd according to 'UK Habitats' and 'Phase 1 Habitat' survey methodology; the UK Habitats data was collected to inform NGET's own policy requirements to consider Biodiversity Net Gain calculations for development using the Biodiversity Metric. To fulfil the requirements of Neath Port Talbot Council, habitat data was also collected in Phase 1 Habitat Survey Methodology and it is this latter habitat mapping which is presented in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, which covers both the NGET land and the land to the south owned by BOC (Stantec, 2024). The 2024 survey was conducted outside the growing season, and whilst the majority of the habitats present on Site were readily identifiable, some areas required further, more detailed survey during the growing season. This NVC survey therefore focusses on the habitat parcels within the NGET land which were displaying transitionary features during the 2024 survey, with a view to confirming their conservation status and habitat classification.

1.3 Site Location and Description

1.3.1 The Site is located in Margam, Port Talbot, at approximate central grid reference SS 78000 85000. The Site comprises an existing substation to the east of the Tata Steel Works and Network Rail railway line; the Site also lies to the south of the Tata Steel Sports and Social Club (golf course), to the west of woodland and to the north of the BOC Ltd works area and fields owned by BOC Ltd. Beyond the immediate Site surroundings, the M4 corridor lies to the east, Swansea Bay lies to the west, Eglwys Nunydd Reservoir to the south and Margam town to the north. The location of the Site is shown in **Figure 1**.

1.4 Description of Works

1.4.1 The Site and the BOC land are proposed for an extension to the existing substation and associated cabling works, with the substation extension proposed to the east of the existing substation within the Site and cabling works passing through the Site and the BOC land. The proposed substation extension and associated works within the Site will be progressed under a planning application. The cabling and associated temporary works to link the proposed new substation extension at Margam to the Port Talbot Steelworks will be progressing under NGET's permitted development rights

1.5 Historic Project Understanding

1.5.1 The Site was subject to a successful prior planning application for a new substation within NGET land which received planning consent in 2009. However, the development was not progressed by NGET. A suite of ecological surveys, including habitat surveys, were completed during the course of 2008 to inform the planning application. The results of the survey work were presented within the Margam 275kV Substation Environmental Report (National Grid, 2009).

1.6 Report Objectives

1.6.1 The purpose of this habitat report is to

i. Set out the methods for the field survey.

ii. Detail the results of the field survey and, where necessary adjust the ecological baseline and assessment of habitat value of the Site to reflect the findings of this detailed botanical survey.

iii. Discuss the value of the habitats on the Site in the context of the Site and local area, with reference to the field survey results.

iv. Provide recommendations for future management of the Site with reference to survey findings.

2 Methods

2.1 Study Area

2.1.1 The Site is the land owned by NGET that is the location for the Proposed Development. The survey addressed the swamp/grassland habitats within the Site boundary, and in particular the Units labelled 33, 34 and 35, which could not be conclusively assigned to a specific habitat type in the Preliminary Ecological Assessment.

2.2 Desk Study

2.2.1 This study makes refence to the preliminary habitat survey carried out in November 2024 (as reported in Stantec, 2024) and discusses any adjustments/changes to the habitat classifications or evaluations therein, that have resulted from this more in-depth survey. Consideration is also given to the designation information for the Junction 38 Wetland Complex Site of Importance for Nature Conservation which lies within the Site (**Appendix A**)

2.3 National Vegetation Classification Survey

2.3.1 A National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey was conducted according to industry standard guidance and methodology (Rodwell, 1991, 1995, 2000). The NVC survey focussed on the habitat parcels within the NGET land which were displaying transitionary features during the 2024 survey, with a view to confirming their conservation status and habitat classification. Sampling of the reed dominated areas was also undertaken. In each identified habitat block, five 2 x 2m quadrats are placed to provide a good cover of the area. Within each quadrat, all vascular plant species were identified and assigned a percentage cover.

2.3.2 The data were then analysed and matched to the relevant NVC community and sub-community using the keys provided in the British Plant Communities Volumes 2, 4 and 5 (Rodwell, 1991,1995, 2000). The data were also run through MAVIS (CEH, 2016). MAVIS is a program that assigns vegetation data to a number of different classification systems including NVC, based on the 'goodness of fit' with published community types in Rodwell (1991, 1995, 2000).

2.4 Survey Limitations

2.4.1 Much of the Site has a high-water table, dominated by tall reedbeds, and as such is not safely accessible in places. However, there were sufficient vantage points around the Site to provide a comprehensive overview of the Site. Furthermore, the more transitionary areas of the vegetation that had previously been identified as requiring further scrutiny were directly accessible such that there were no constraints to the placement of the quadrats for the purposes of the NVC survey.

2.4.2 The 'Early Works' area could not be accessed, for the survey and has anyway been modified by the ongoing work. This area was identified during the 2024 Phase 1 Survey as reed dominated habitat (interspersed with dense scrub but it also encroaches partially onto Unit 35). It is assumed for the purposes of this assessment that the habitats that were accessible during the survey are representative of the habitats within the Early Works area, and the data has been extrapolated to cover the whole Site.

2.5 Survey Dates, Condition and Personnel

2.5.1 The NVC Survey was undertaken on 24th June 2025 by Anna Gundrey MCIEEM, a professional ecologist and botanist who has 29 years of habitat surveying experience, and Dominic Hill Graduate CIEEM, an ecologist who has eight years' experience. Weather on Site was overcast and damp, but with no precipitation that would impede the survey.

2.6 Report Qualification

2.6.1 All survey work and reporting were undertaken by experienced and qualified ecologists, in accordance with the Code of Professional Conduct of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (CIEEM, 2022).

2.6.2 The survey described here was undertaken in accordance with the best practice methodologies current at the time of commissioning. Site circumstances, scientific knowledge or methodological requirements can change during the course of a project, and these external factors may impact on the scope of subsequent work requirements.

2.6.3 Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the presence of plants such as the time of year, and ground conditions. This survey was conducted at an optimal time of year.

2.6.4 It should be noted that all ecological surveys have an expected validity period owing to the tendency of the natural environment to change over time. This validity period varies depending on the ecological feature and is also dependent on the degree of change in a site's management and overall landscape ecology. Where the potential for change is considered to be relevant to the Site, it is highlighted within the report below.

2.6.5 This report does not purport to provide detailed, specialist legal advice. Where legislation is referenced, the reader should consult the original legal text, and/or the advice of a qualified environmental lawyer.

3 Results

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 A description of each habitat type and NVC classification is provided below.

3.1.2 This is followed by a discussion of how the classification fits with the broader habitat descriptions (UKHabs and Phase 1) that have previously been used to define the vegetation on the Site. The Site has previously been mapped with discrete polygons per habitat type (1 – 61). The polygons or 'Units' references (see **Figure 2**) have been used to allow cross referencing with previous habitat descriptions.

3.1.3 The 'Phase 1 Habitat Survey' map, taken from the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (Stantec, 2025) showing the survey area is provided in **Appendix B**.

3.1.4 The species lists for the surveyed habitats are provided in **Table C.1** (**Appendix C**).

3.1.5 Photographs showing each of the survey areas described below is provided in Appendix D.

3.2 Reed Dominated Areas (Units 5,7,24,26,27,30,36,38,40 and 61)

3.2.1 The majority of the Site is overwhelmingly dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis.* The species dominates to the extent that most sample quadrats yield 100% cover of reed. Other species that rarely occurred and at very low levels were creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, marsh thistle *C. palustre*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, nettle *Urtica dioica* and great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*. In wetter areas, such as along ditches, yellow flag *Iris pseudocorus*, hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* or reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* are locally abundant.

3.2.2 The plant community that best fits (with a 64% fit) this reed-dominated habitat is *S4 Phragmites australis Swamps and Reed-beds*. This community is characterised by an overwhelming dominance of common reed, with no other species attaining more than occasional frequency overall.

3.2.3 Since the original (November 2024) survey some of the reed-dominated areas have been removed as a result of Permitted Development works within the Site. Given observations from the 2024 survey and the NVC survey undertaken of reed dominated areas outside the Permitted Development works areas, it is considered that the results of the 2025 NVC survey can also be extrapolated to those reed-dominated areas observed in November 2024.

3.3 Sedge Dominated Areas (Units 33 and 34)

3.3.1 In the south east corner of the Site (Units 33, 34, 35) the dominance of common reed reduces, with cover becoming occasional at most. In this area, there is a patchwork of two distinct vegetation assemblages. Units 33 and 34 are sedge dominated (described below) and Unit 35 is tall herb-dominated described in Section 3.4.

3.3.2 Units 33 and 34 are dominated by greater pond sedge *Carex riparia*. The proportion of the sedge present in every sample quadrat was c. 90%, with the only other constant species being marsh horsetail *Equisetum palustre* (at <1% cover). Bistort *Bistorta officinalis* and bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara* were present in four out of five quadrats, and meadowsweet was recorded in three quadrats. Other less regularly occurring species were great willowherb, reed sweet-grass, sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, hemp-agrimony *Eupatorum cannibinum* and creeping thistle.

3.3.3 Considering the sedge-dominated areas in isolation, the best-fit plant community is '*S6 Carex riparia Swamp*', (with a 52% fit) because of the overwhelming dominance of greater pond sedge. This is a community found in the agricultural lowlands of Wales and England,

occurring along rivers and drainage ditches, where the soils are moist but the water-table falls below the surface.

3.4 Tall Herb Dominated Areas (Unit 35)

3.4.1 These areas form a mosaic with the sedge-dominated areas and the surrounding reed-dominated habitat. There is minor variation across the area, with localised stands of false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, patches of dense meadowsweet, and occasional clumps of purple moor-grass, but overall, the assemblage is similar throughout.

3.4.2 The most prominent species was hemp-agrimony, with approximately 40 -80% cover across all five sample quadrats. Wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, marsh horsetail and sharp-flowered rush also occurred in every quadrat. Other frequent species were bistort, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, cleavers *Galium aparine*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, hogweed and nettle.

3.4.3 This habitat does not fit well with any NVC community, with scores of 45% fit to the Open Vegetated habitat '*OV26c Epilobium hirsutum Community: Filipendula ulmaria – Angelica sylvestris sub-community'* a 42% fit to the swamp habitat '*S26 Phragmites australis – Urtica dioica Tall-herb Fen'* or 41% fit to the Mire habitat '*M27b Filipendula ulmaria – Angelica sylvestris Mire: Urtica dioica – Vicia cracca sub-community''*.

3.4.4 Open vegetation communities are defined in Rodwell (2000) as 'weed' communities, and OV26 is described as being confined to fertile soils that are kept moist around fens, ponds and ditches. The community occurs in swamps, in zonations and mosaics that are determined by the position of the groundwater table (Rodwell, 2000).

3.4.5 The S26 swamp habitat is marked by the characteristically patchy local dominance of a variety of tall herbs and dicotyledons, typically forming a chequered canopy (Rodwell, 1995). It is a habitat of nutrient-rich conditions, and its distribution can often be related to the eutrophication that may follow the drying and disturbance of fen surfaces or the contamination of ground water by agricultural run-off or pollution (Rodwell, 1995).

3.4.6 The M27b is a community where bulky herbs form the majority of the canopy, with grasses, sedges and rushes reduced to being occasional at most. It is a habitat of moist, nutrient rich neutral soils and as with OV26, occurs on the silting margins of streams and along ditches (Rodwell, 1991).

3.5 Consideration of Combined Habitats (Units 33, 34 and 35)

3.5.1 When all quadrats recorded within the Sedge-dominated and the Tall-herb dominated areas are run through MAVIS as a single group, a 59% fit to both *OV26* and *S26,* and a 58% fit to *M27b* plant communities is assigned.

3.5.2 This higher percentage fit suggests that the two areas may be better considered as a single community rather that a mosaic of two distinct habitats. However, the fact that three disparate communities all achieve a relatively high fit, demonstrates that that the habitat present is not readily definable. This reflects the results of the Phase 1 and 'UK Habitats' surveys undertaken in November 2024 which, based on the descriptions in the respective handbooks, defined these units respectively 'Marshy Grassland' and 'Other Swamps'.

3.6 Discussion and Conclusion

3.6.1 As discussed in the Ecology Technical Note submitted with the EIA Screening for the Proposed Development (Stantec, 2025), historical imagery shows that the Site has been transitioning from grazing marsh to swamp habitat over the last 20 years, presumably as agricultural management has ceased and drains have become blocked. On wetter areas, common reed has spread and become overwhelmingly dominant creating the characteristic

S4 habitat, but on areas where the water table is lower the plant community is still in transition as reflected by the patchy nature of the vegetation cover, with expanses of dominant greater pond sedge giving way to stands of meadowsweet, and mixed patches of bulky herbs such as fleabane. The habitat has characteristics of three different plant communities but lacks the constant occurring species that define each of the assemblages: It lacks the nettle and greater willowherb that defines OV26; the common reed and nettle of S26; and the meadowsweet of M27.

3.6.2 It is concluded that whilst the habitat that covers Units 33-35 cannot be definitively defined according to established plant classification methodologies, it has ecological value by virtue of its species-richness and variety. It therefore makes a valuable contribution to the habitat assemblage at the Site and together with the more widespread common reed swamp habitat it meets the criteria for the Section 7 Priority habitat '<u>Reedbeds</u>' BRIG (Maddock, 2011) which encompasses associated habitats with which reedbeds form a mosaic, stating that '*They [reedbeds] tend to incorporate areas of open water and ditches, and small areas of wet grassland and carr woodland may be associated with them*.' As such, it also adds to the diversity of wetland habitats that comprise the '*Junction 38 Wetland Complex' Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)*, and as such is an important component part.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Further Survey

4.1.1 No further survey is required to define the wetland habitats on Site. Whilst Units 33-35 do not sit comfortably into a single plant community description, this is a result of the transitional nature of the developing/transitionary habitat rather than a lack of survey in the appropriate season.

4.2 Habitat Classification

4.2.1 It is recommended for the purposes of habitat classification in terms of both 'Phase 1' and 'UK Habs' methodologies, that the Units 33-35 are grouped with the wider common reed-dominated habitat. This would place all wetland (discounting scrub and open water) units as the Phase 1 habitat 'F1 Swamp' and the 'UK Habs' habitat ' F2e Reedbeds'. As such wetland habitats should be considered as the Section 7 Priority Habitat 'Reedbeds' and valued as such.

4.3 Habitat Management

4.3.1 Given the findings of the botanical survey, the following provides recommended management suggestions, mindful of the current value of the habitats and the habitats for which the SINC was designated:

- Management of site drainage and ditches to enable improved water level management across the Site. Management should aim to maintain a hydrological balance that supports the persistence of the wetland habitat complex, while also enabling the positive management of drier, more floristically diverse marshy grassland communities.

- Actively manage the dynamic balance between reedbed, marshy grassland, and encroaching scrub and young trees, ensuring the maintenance of habitat diversity and preventing the dominance of any one habitat type to the detriment of others.

- Implement monitoring to inform adaptive management responses to the two points above in relation to the habitats within the Site.

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Wales Biodiversity Partnership Wildlife Sites Guidance Wales- A Guide to Develop Local Wildlife Systems in Wales

6 Figures

Figure 1 Site Location Plan

Figure 2 Habitat Unit Locations

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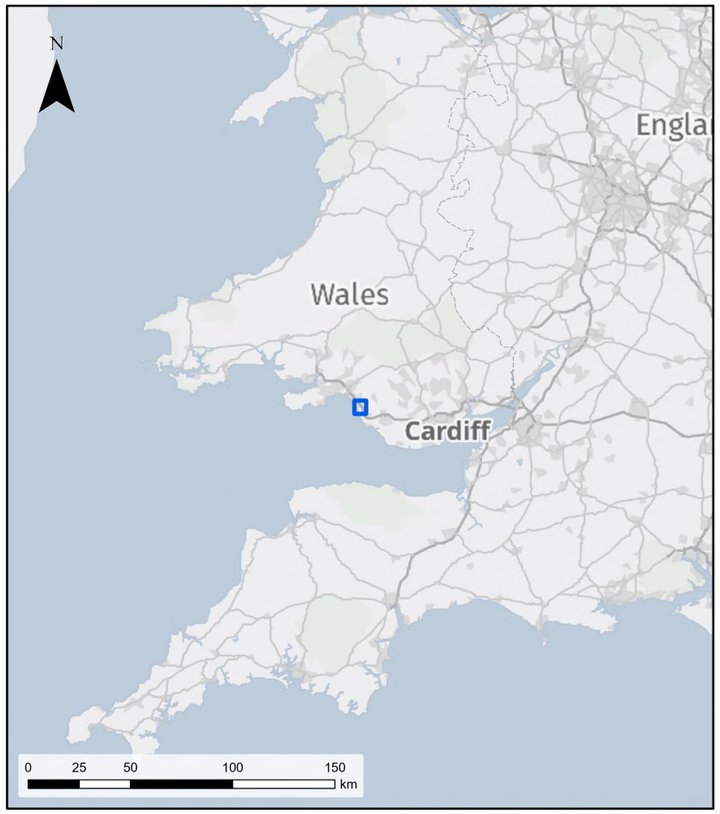

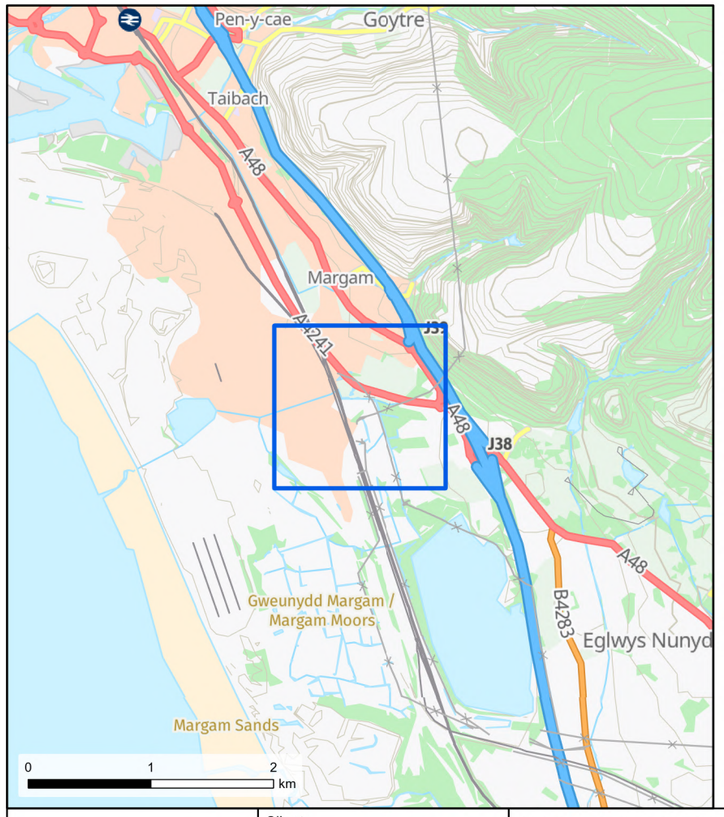

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MARGAM PORT TALBOT

Site Location Plan

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MARGAM PORT TALBOT

Habitat Unit Locations

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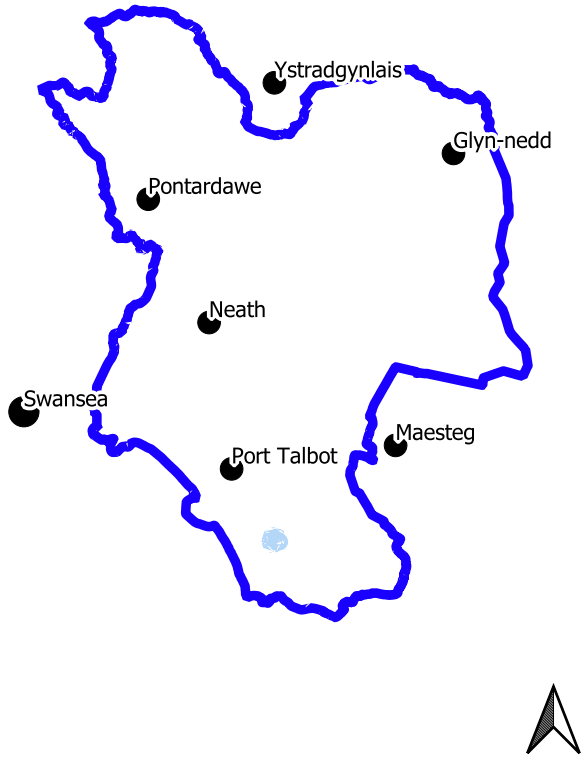
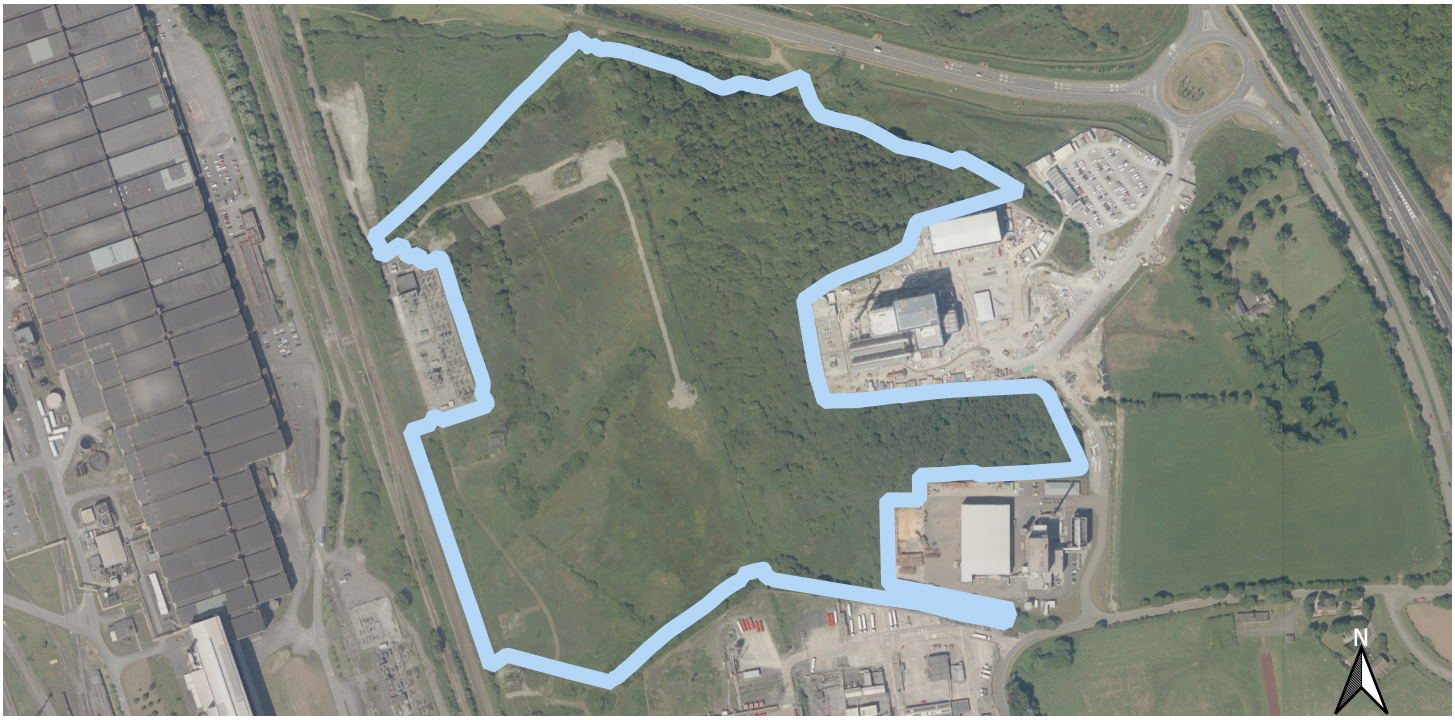
Appendix A J38 Wetland Complex Site of Importance for Nature Conservation

JUNCTION 38 WETLAND COMPLEX

Reference No: NPTSINC057
Ward: Margam
Grid ref at centre: SS7874586334
Area (ha): 20.47

Reason for selection:
H1:3 Native woodland
H9:2 Lowland Fen
H9:3 Purple moor-grass and rush pastures





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SITE OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

JUNCTION 38 WETLAND COMPLEX

Site Description:

This is a cohesive wetland site comprised of wet woodland, reed beds, ditches, and marshy grassland. Some drier areas support indicators of the neutral grassland NVC type MG5. Much is known about this site because it has been included in several planning applications over recent years. The site is located to the rear of Port Talbot Steelworks near Junction 38 of the M4 motorway. Margam Moors SSSI is approx 800m south west of the site, and is fairly well connected by the network of drains and ditches in the area. Eglwys Nunydd SSSI is about 750m directly south of the site and is designated due to the waterfowl populations it supports and as a SINC (NPTSINC056) it additionally includes the surrounding wetland and scrub habitats. The area is very wet but is occasionally grazed by cattle. There is a National Grid substation directly west of the site and high voltage power lines cross the site in several directions; resilience clearance works are undertaken under these pylons on a fairly regular basis.

Qualifying features

H1:3 Native woodland - A semi-natural woodland with a wet woodland component
H9:2 Lowland Fen
H9:3 Purple moor-grass and rush pastures 20/12

Important species

Species recorded: Water vole, Otter, Grass snake, Common lizard, Reed bunting, Cetti's warbler

Management Recommendations

The western field may one day be managed by the Wildlife Trust as part of a package related to the proposed development of fields to the north. There is Rhododendron in the wet woodland which should be eradicated.

Last surveyed: Surveyor: Author: ER

To be read in conjunction with Wildlife Sites Guidance Wales (WBP 2008) and the NPT amendments. This area has been designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. This does not formally protect the site or place any restrictions upon the landowner. Neath Port Talbot Council's Countryside & Wildlife Team will endeavour to support and encourage activities that maintain and enhance the biodiversity interest of the land; where funding is available, funds may be provided to facilitate these activities. The information given is used to ensure that nature conservation is taken into account in planning decisions. The designation itself does not confer any rights of access to the site and places no restriction on the management of the land.

Appendix B Phase 1 Habitat Survey Plan (Stantec, 2024)

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MARGAM PORT TALBOT

Phase 1 Habitat Survey

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Appendix C Species Lists

Table C.1. Species List

	Sedge dominated Units 33 and 34 area					Herb rich area Unit 35					Reed-dominated areas					
Species	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Extras in Reedbed**
Forbs																
Angelica sylvestris						6	5	5	10	15						
Bistorta officinalis		1	1	1	9	20		1	15	3						
Cirsium arvense				1		5	3		1							p
Cirsium palustre								5	10		1					p
Epilobum hirsutum				1					1	5						p
Equisetum palustre	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1						
Eupatorum cannibinum		1				40	78	49	3	5						
Filipendula ulmaria	8	5	7							26						p
Galium aparine						1	1		1	1						
Galium palustre									1							
Heracleum sphonylium						5		10	2	1						p
Iris pseudocorus									5							p
Lathyrus pratensis						1	1	5		15						
Lotus pedunculatus						5	1	1								
Lythrum salicaria																p
Oenanthe crocata																p
Pulicaria dysenterica						10	5		40							
Rumex sanguineum									1							
Solanum dulcamara	1	1	1	1					1			1				
Urtica dioica						1		1	1	1						p
Dicots																
Alopecurus pratensis						1	1	10		20						
Arrhenatherum elatius										1						
Carex hirta								1								
Carex riparia	90	90	90	90	90		1									
Glyceria maxima				5												
Holcus lanatus							1	1								
Juncus acutiflorus		1				1	2	5	3	5						
Juncus effusus						1		5	4							
Molinea caerulea						2										
Phragmites australis											99	99	100	100	100	
Poa trivialis										1						

Appendix D Photographs

Photo 1. Reed dominated area that covers the majority of the Site	Photo 2. Mosaic of habitats with Early Works Area defined by fence to right of image
Photo 3. Sedge-dominated area	Photo 4. Tall herb dominated area