

GREEN INFRASTRUCTRE ASSESSMENT

The recent update to section 6 of the Planning Policy Wales requires on taking a proactive approach to Green Infrastructure (GI) 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.

The purpose of this report is to comply with section 6.2 Green Infrastructure published within Planning Policy Wales (2024), which states Planning authorities must, as part of adopting a strategic and proactive approach to green infrastructure, biodiversity and ecosystems resilience, produce up to date inventories and maps of existing green infrastructure and ecological assets and networks.

Green Infrastructure

Green Infrastructure is the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect places. Component elements of GI can function at different scales and some components, such as trees and woodland, are often universally present and function at all levels.

GI is capable of providing several functions at the same time and as a result offers multiple benefits, such as social, economic and cultural as well as environmental resilience. The components of GI, by improving the resilience of ecosystems, can result in positive environmental benefits to wellbeing including habitat creation and enhancement, connectivity, flood management, water purification, improved air quality, reduced noise pollution and local climate moderation, climate change mitigation and food production. These benefits are important in urban environments where they can facilitate health and wellbeing related benefits of open space, clean air and improved tranquillity, for example, as well as creating a sense of place and improved social cohesion. In addition, GI has a role in protecting local distinctiveness, providing economic benefits and social and community opportunities.



Native trees, hedges and shrubs known to benefit wildlife

Integrating Green Infrastructure and Development

The new updated Planning Policy Wales (PPW) states that the quality of the built environment should be enhanced by integrating GI into development through appropriate site selection and use of creative design. With careful planning and design, informed by an appropriate level of assessment, GI

can embed the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services into new development and places, help to overcome the potential for conflicting objectives, and contribute to health and wellbeing outcomes.

All planning applications should submit a GI Statement proportionate to the scale and nature of the development. Therefore, the site GI Statement will describe how GI has been integrated into the proposal.

Planning Policy Wales (2024)

The Planning Policy Wales (PPW) sets out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Assembly Government, and provides the policy framework for the preparation of local planning authorities' development plans.

Paragraph 1.2 states that 'The primary objective is to ensure that the planning system contributes towards the delivery of sustainable development and improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales, as required by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other key legislation and resultant duties such as the Socio-economic Duty. This addition to a well-functioning planning system is fundamental for sustainable development and achieving sustainable places.

Access - Paragraph 4.1.32 recognises that planning authorities must ensure new residential, retail and leisure services are highly accessible by walking and cycling.

Green Infrastructure - Paragraph 6.2.1 defines green infrastructure as a network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect places. Component elements of green infrastructure can function at different scales. At a local scale, it might comprise parks, fields, public rights of way etc. The planning system should protect and enhance green infrastructure assets and networks.

Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty (Section 6 Duty) - Paragraph 6.4.5 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.

Integrating Green Infrastructure and Development (Section 6 Duty) - Paragraph 6.2.12 states that 'A green infrastructure statement should be submitted with all planning applications. This will be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed and will describe how green infrastructure has been incorporated into the proposal. In the case of minor development this will be a short description and should not be an onerous requirement for applicants. The green infrastructure statement will be an effective way of demonstrating positive multi-functional outcomes which are appropriate to the site in question and must be used for demonstrating how the step-wise approach has been applied.'



Nature Conservation and Planning Technical Advice Note (2009)

The Nature Conservation and Planning Technical Advice Note (2009) supplementary advice note for the Planning Policy Wales provides advice about how the land use planning system should contribute to protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geological conservation. The document brings together advice on sources of legislation relevant to various nature conservation topics which may be encountered by local planning authorities. It sets out the key principles of planning for nature conservation, provides advice about the preparation and review of development plans, including the relevant statutory requirements, and addresses nature conservation in development control procedures. The note also deals with the conservation of internationally and nationally designated sites and habitats and also covers local sites and deals with the conservation of protected and priority species.



Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (2011-2026)

The Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan was adopted in 2016 and is the prevailing development plan for the County, with the following policies are considered to be relevant to your proposal:

EN6 Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites – Development proposals that would affect Regionally important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs), sites meeting SINC criteria or sites supporting Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) or S42 habitats or species will only be permitted where:

1. They conserve and where possible enhance the natural heritage importance of the site; or
2. The development could not reasonably be located elsewhere, and the benefits of the development outweigh the natural heritage importance of the site

Mitigation and/or compensation measures will need to be agreed where adverse effects are unavoidable.

EN7 Important Natural Features – Development proposals that would adversely affect ecologically or visually important natural features such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows / field boundaries watercourses or ponds will only be permitted where:

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

SPG relevant to the proposed development, which are available to download in full from the LPA website at <https://www.npt.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/supplementary-guidance/> are as follows:

- Biodiversity and Geodiversity (Adopted May 2018)

Project Overview

The application seeks full planning permission for a change of use from Class C3(a) to Class B1 use at Eagle House, 2 Talbot Road, Port Talbot Road, Talbot, SA13 1DH. The change of use only relates to Flat 9, which lies on the second floor of the building.

It should be noted that the site also subject to a planning approval (LPA ref: P2021/0856) to demolish the existing building and the construction of a new four-storey building for commercial and residential use consisting of 18 affordable housing apartments on upper floors with office/commercial units at ground floor. These works are now completed in January 2026.

The DECCA Framework and Net Benefits for Biodiversity

The DECCA framework is used for evaluating ecosystem resilience based on five attributes and properties specified in the Environment (Wales) Act. These are: Diversity, Extent, Condition, Connectivity and Aspects of ecosystem resilience.

A summary of the definitions is described below:

- Diversity: maintaining and enhancing diversity at every scale, including genetic, structural, habitat and between-habitat levels. This supports the complexity of ecosystem functions and interactions that deliver services and benefits.

- Extent: incorporating measures which maintain and increase the area of semi-natural habitat/features and linkages between habitats. In general, smaller ecosystems have reduced capacity to adapt, recover or resist disturbance.
- Condition: The condition of an ecosystem is affected by multiple and complex pressures acting both as short term and longer term types of disturbance. Both direct and wider impacts should be considered, for example avoiding or mitigating pressures such as climate change, pollution, invasive species, land management neglect etc.
- Connectivity: This refers to the links between and within habitats, which may take the form of physical corridors, stepping stones in the landscape, or patches of the same or related vegetation types that together create a network that enables the flow or movement of genes, species and natural resources. Developments should take opportunities to develop functional habitat and ecological networks within and between ecosystems, building on existing connectivity.
- Aspects of ecosystem resilience (adaptability, recovery and resistance): ecosystem resilience is a product of the above four attributes. Adaptability, recovery and resistance to/from a disturbance are defining features of ecosystem resilience.

The application site is located at the second floor of a nearly completed building and as such does not include any areas within of existing green infrastructure and as such the proposed change of use will not have any negative impact on existing ecological features through its development.

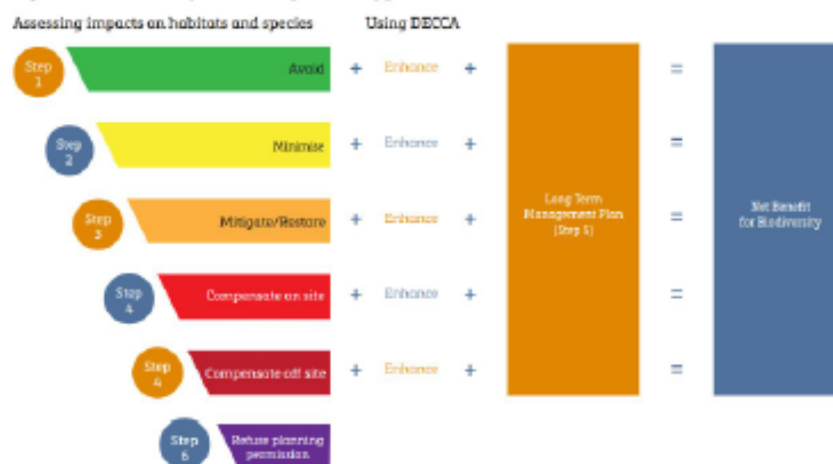
Demonstrating Net Benefits for Biodiversity [NBB]

As noted in the project overview section, it is noted that the site is subject to a planning approval (ref: P2021/0856) for the erection of the a new-four storey building. The planning application is approved on 22nd December 2022 subject to a number of planning condition and Condition 15 (Hard and Soft Landscaping Scheme) & 16 (Landscape Management Plan), which requires a hard & soft landscaping scheme and a landscape management plan to be submitted and approved by the LPA prior to the first beneficial use of the development.

A planning application has been submitted to discharge Condition 15 & 16 on 13th September 2024 and was given the reference number P2024/0585 and it is currently waiting for determination in accordance to the online portal. The application is supported by a landscaping proposal and a landscape management plan. According to the landscaping proposal, a vegetated swale and bioretention planting is proposed at the northern section of the site as part of the SuDS scheme. In addition, a separate planting area is proposed at the southern section of the site. It is therefore considered that the biodiversity has been enhanced on site and such features will be maintained in accordance to the landscaping management plan thereafter.

[illegible]

Figure 12: Summary of the Step-Wise Approach



Summary of the Step-Wise Approach taken from Planning Policy Wales, 12 Edition – February 2024.

The NBB for the site have been achieved through native species planting to the create new habitats for wildlife. It is considered that the submitted landscape proposal is proportional to the extent and impact of the development and contribute to a resilient and biodiverse ecological network.

Conclusion

The application site is located at the second floor of the building and as such no existing features which have been identified.

The development will not have any detrimental impact upon green infrastructure. The application site is also subject to another planning approval (ref: P2021/0856) and a landscape proposal and landscape management plan are required to submit to the LPA to discharge planning condition 15 & 16, which has been submitted (ref: P2024/0585) on 13th September 2024 and is waiting for determination. The submitted landscape proposal includes 2 no. planting area on site with native species planting, it is therefore considered that a net benefit on biodiversity is achieved for the whole site upon completion of the planting area.

In light of the above, it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with LDP Policies BE1 (Design), EN6 (Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites) and EN7 (Important Natural Features) and as such, is acceptable in regard to ecology, biodiversity and green infrastructure.