

the survival of its largely eighteenth-century landscape park, which is of great historic interest, in its original rural setting above Neath. It lies on the flank of the Vale of Neath, long famed for its picturesque beauty. The landscape of The Gnoll is exceptional for its combination of industrial and ornamental functions and for its strong visual relationship with the surrounding countryside..."¹³

- 2.3.34 There is a second, smaller registered park and garden within Neath Town Centre, at **Victoria Gardens**. The gardens are "a small, well preserved Victorian urban public park, with most of its original layout and features, including a fine bandstand and inclined beds used to display carpet bedding designs"¹⁴

Ecological designations

- 2.3.35 Ecological designations, although not specifically related to landscape amenity and not assessed within this report, are an indication of landscape value. Relevant ecological designations are shown on **Figure LA.02-2**.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

- 2.3.36 The **Fforest Goch Bog SSSI** is located, at its closest point, circa 2.9km northwest of the site.

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)

- 2.3.37 There is an extensive network of SINC habitats within Neath Port Talbot and the study area, primarily small blocks of **connecting habitat relating to small watercourses and areas of Ancient Woodland**.
- 2.3.38 There is a SINC abutting the eastern site boundary at **Cwm Bach**, covering the ancient woodland that follows the watercourse and connecting with a number of small, linear SINC that follow watercourses to the northeast of the site.
- 2.3.39 A further SINC abuts the western site boundary, following the **small watercourse** that forms the boundary and connecting with a number of other SINC watercourses to the northwest.
- 2.3.40 A linear SINC follows the course of the **Neath Canal** to the south of the site, along with nearby **Gnoll Estate woodlands** (contiguous with Ancient Woodland boundaries) and watercourses.
- 2.3.41 Other SINC are found in a **linked network** across the study area, particularly associated with small watercourses in the Clydach valley floor and sides to the northwest of the site and around Nant Rhos to the northeast of the site.

¹³ <https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/parkgarden/FullReport?lang=en&id=237> (Accessed July 2024)

¹⁴ <https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/parkgarden/FullReport?lang=en&id=251> (Accessed July 2024)

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Public access

2.3.42 Public rights of way and access land are shown on **Figure LA.03**.

Public rights of way and open access land

2.3.43 **Public Rights of Way** are located throughout the site and the 3km study area, connecting communities and villages, scattered farmsteads and local roads.

2.3.44 **Several Public Rights of Way cross the site**, connecting the site fields with residential areas to the south and west, and to Cwm bach and Cwm Gwladus to the east. A Public Right of Way which is a **footpath** follows the western boundary of the site, following the small watercourse to the rear of properties on Alexandra Road and connecting with a **bridleway** which follows the southern boundary of the site. The bridleway before turns south along an enclosed lane that cuts north-south, perpendicular to neighbouring streets in Rhydding. A section of **footpath** cuts broadly north-south through the central/ eastern part of the site, before turning eastward along the eastern part of the northern site boundary and cutting across sloping land above Cwm Bach. A further **footpath** cuts east-west through the eastern part of the site, linking the bridleway with Cwm Gwladus to the east. Adjoining this path to the south is a northeast-southwest **footpath** that runs through woodland in the southeastern part of the site.

2.3.45 Beyond the boundaries of the site, there are a number of other **Public Rights of Way**, primarily footpaths, cutting through residential communities in Neath and following minor lanes, connecting farmsteads and woodlands.

2.3.46 A small part of an area of **open access land** on uplands to the south of Mynydd Marchywel extends into the northern fringes of the study area, approximately 2.5km north of the site boundary.

Long Distance Footpaths (LDFP)

2.3.47 There are no Long Distance Footpaths within the 3km study area around the site and LDFPs have therefore been scoped out of the assessment.

National Cycle Routes (NCR)

2.3.48 Two National Cycle Routes cut through the study area. **National Cycle Route 46** follows the Neath Canal Towpath within the western part of the study area, connecting with **National Cycle Route 47** Tyn yr Heol Lock, approximately 1.3km southeast of the site boundary at its nearest point. West of the lock, National Cycle Route 47 follows the Neath Canal towpath, approximately 900m south of the site at its nearest point, turning south to broadly follow the course of the River Neath within the southwestern part of the study area. To the east, National Cycle Route 47 spurs off along Fairyland Road.

3.0 The proposed development

- 3.1.1 Details of the proposed development are provided in the supporting planning documents and drawings. This section describes the main aspects of the proposed development which could potentially affect landscape and/or visual amenity. It also identifies features of the proposals which will assist in mitigating adverse landscape and visual impacts.
- 3.1.2 The development of the site would comprise an 'Outline application (with all matters reserved except for access) for the construction of up to 250 residential dwellings, public open space, green infrastructure, a small flexible mixed-use/community space, sustainable drainage features, access arrangements, and all associated landscaping and infrastructure works'.
- 3.1.3 Access to the site would be via Daphne Road on the southern boundary of the site. The primary roads would connect the access point and link with the street network, which transect the site in a west-east direction.
- 3.1.4 The existing structure of mature hedgerows trees within and bounding the site would be primarily retained. Removal of short sections of field boundary hedgerows would be required in some locations to facilitate the development of residential blocks.
- 3.1.5 The ancient woodland that abuts the eastern boundary of the site would be protected through the creation of a 30m buffer to built development and a 15m landscape buffer treated as an ecotone.
- 3.1.6 Retained boundary vegetation along the northern, western and western part of the southern boundary would also be strengthened and protected through an ecotone buffer. Woodland planting is to be located in the northwest corner of the site, further strengthening the existing vegetation framework.
- 3.1.7 A series of public open spaces are located across the site, including a landscape based play strategy and play equipment within the different parts of the new neighbourhoods. A Hillside Park is provided within the centre of the site, centred around the existing retained trees and vegetation and incorporating equipped and informal play spaces and a kickabout area, along with a winding recreational footpath. Further formal public spaces are to be provided throughout the development, including several along the eastern boundary of the site, connected by a woodland trail, and others located at key locations and within the setting of existing retained green infrastructure. Retained and buffered structural vegetation on the southern boundary would be connected via a nature trail.

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Sources of Potential Effects on Landscape and Views

3.1.8 The main features of the development proposal which could potentially result in landscape and visual impacts are:

Construction Phase

- Temporary fencing/hoarding protecting the perimeter of each phase.
- The removal of some sections of hedgerow, tree lines and vegetation
- The clearance of material, the stripping of land.
- Activities and movement of large vehicles and equipment during the construction period, including construction vehicles.
- The construction of the residential development, access road and car parking, and other associated infrastructure.

Completion

- The change of use from existing pasture to a residential site.
- The introduction of buildings and hard landscape such as access roads, car parking, and other associated infrastructure within the landscape and to nearby views.
- The addition of drainage proposals within the site such as SUDs features.
- The impact of the proposed mitigation planting on landscape character and visual amenity.
- Occupation features such as vehicle movement within the site and street lighting.

4.0 Effects on the Landscape

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 This section deals with the effects on the landscape of the site and its surrounding context due to the proposed construction and occupation of the site.

Assessment Criteria

4.1.2 The assessment process follows the methodology for assessing effects set out in **Appendix 2**. The degree of the likely landscape effects of the proposed development is determined by relating the sensitivity of the receptors to the changes arising from the development proposals, and the degree and nature of the changes in the landscape arising from the proposals.

Landscape Baseline

- 4.1.3 The landscape baseline is a description and analysis of the existing landscape, against which the effects of the proposed development are assessed, first, by reference to landscape character assessments for the area in which the site is located, at national and local levels and then, from site-specific surveys and analysis carried out for the purposes of this assessment.

4.2 LANDMAP

- 4.2.1 Landscape Assessment, following the LANDMAP methodology, has been undertaken for Neath Port Talbot. The assessment uses the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) / Wales Landscape Partnership Group approach which separates the defining aspects of the landscape into five categories, or aspect layers: Geological Landscape, Landscape Habitats, Historic Landscape, Cultural Landscape Services, and Visual & Sensory. It considers the relationship that exist between people and places; how people have given meaning to places through time and how the physical landscape has shaped their actions, or how their actions have shaped the landscape.
- 4.2.2 Summarised descriptions for the most relevant aspect areas to the site and its context are outlined below for all five aspect layers. The findings of the LANDMAP studies have formed the basis of the landscape and visual baseline within this appraisal. **Table 1** below defines the criteria that LANDMAP uses for evaluating each aspect area.

Table 1 Criteria for evaluating LANDMAP Aspect Areas¹⁵

LANDMAP Evaluation	Definition
Outstanding	of international or national importance
High	of regional or county importance
Moderate	of local importance
Low	of little or no importance
Unassessed	insufficient information exists to evaluate

- 4.2.3 Characteristics of particular relevance to the site and its context are highlighted in bold. LANDMAP aspect areas for Historic Landscape and Visual and Sensory aspect layers are illustrated on **Figures LA.05**.

¹⁵ LANDMAP Methodology Overview, June 2017 <https://cdn.naturalresources.wales/media/681752/landmap-methodology-overview-2017-eng.pdf?mode=pad&rnd=131547814890000000>

Geological Landscape

- 4.2.4 **The site** is located within aspect area **Blaenhonddan** (NPTGL007), which is classified as **Upland plateau** (Level 3). The geographical and topographical character of the area is described as (question GL4) "NNE-SSW to N-S **sandstone ridge**, fault bounded to W, in E-W synformal core of **South Wales Pennant Formation Hughes Beds above Hughes/Wennallt coal. Large Gilfach quarry on plateau** forming top of ridge. Small area of boulder clay on E side. **Mine shafts and levels (disused).**"
- 4.2.5 The rarity/uniqueness (question GL31) of the area is evaluated as **moderate** and the overall evaluation (question GL33) for the area is also evaluated as **moderate**, due to the presence of "Hughes Beds sandstone ridge with coals."¹⁶
- 4.2.6 At close distance to the south boundary of the site lies aspect area **Mynydd Marchywel** (NPTGL008), which is classified as **Upland plateau** (Level 3). The geographical and topographical character of the area is described as (question GL4) "NE-SW ridge of S dipping **South Wales Pennant Formation** (Lower Pennant Measures) **sandstones with coals** forming W and E facing slopes, capped by resistant **Hughes Beds sandstones** to S. N-S and NE-SW faults. NW facing slopes **form steep side of Tawe valley**. Small area of **Productive Coal Formation mudstones** with coals in E. Bounded by NNW-SSE Nant Marl fault to E. Extensive boulder clay on dip slopes in **Clydach and Dulais valleys. Peat on higher slopes. Landslip into Tawe valley at Y Darren Widdon**, made ground on W slopes. **Ty Draw Brook into Tawe with stepped waterfalls over sandstones.**"
- 4.2.7 The rarity/uniqueness (question GL31) of the area is evaluated as **moderate** and the overall evaluation (question GL33) for the area is also evaluated as **moderate**, due to the presence of "South Wales Pennant Formation sandstones and coals in dissected ridge, with Y Darren Widdon landslip."¹⁷
- 4.2.8 At close distance to the western edge of the site lies aspect area **Rhos** (NPTGL006), which is classified as **Other** (Level 3). The geographical and topographical character of the area is described as (question GL4) "**N-S graben** (Duffryn and Rhydding, Cwm Felen faults) in **EW synformal fold** in **South Wales Pennant Formation sandstones with coals, forming valley feature** between Pennant plateau ridges, **dissected by N-S Clydach river**. Extensive cover of **boulder clay. Alluvium and patches of glacial sand and gravel in valley floor. Disused coal mines and shafts.**"
- 4.2.9 The rarity/uniqueness (question GL31) of the area is evaluated as **moderate** and the overall evaluation (question GL33) for the area is also evaluated as **moderate**, due to the presence of "Fault graben in South Wales Pennant Fm sandstones and coals."¹⁸

¹⁶ https://landmap-portal.naturalresources.wales/view_survey.php?survey_id=2451 [accessed July 2024]

¹⁷ https://landmap-portal.naturalresources.wales/view_survey.php?survey_id=2452 [accessed July 2024]

¹⁸ https://landmap-portal.naturalresources.wales/view_survey.php?survey_id=2450 [accessed July 2024]

Landscape Habitats

- 4.2.10 **The majority of the site** is located in the south of the unnamed aspect area **NPTLH036**, which is classified as **Mosaic** (Level 3). The key features that define the area's biodiversity character (question LH24) is the "**four separate geographical units** considered to be of similar character and value at the landscape level; very large area of **semi-upland farmland**, essentially **ffridd habitats**, on **rolling slopes**; **complex mosaic of mainly grassland enclosures** but with many other habitats; all essentially **circum-neutral or acidic** in character"
- 4.2.11 The **overall evaluation** (question LH45) for the area is **moderate** and is described as a "very large area of semi-natural "ffridd" habitats; BAP habitats present locally throughout; good range of associated species".¹⁹
- 4.2.12 A small part of the southern part of the site lies within the unnamed aspect area NPTLH086, which is classified as **Residential/ Green Space** (Level 3). The key features that define the area's biodiversity character (question LH24) is the "**large area of urban and suburban development**; **mostly houses with gardens**; also, **amenity areas, parks, roads, commercial premises, small factories, schools etc**; opportunities for **anthropophilic species**; wide range of **common flora and fauna** species present; **small remnant areas of semi-natural habitats locally**; Area comprises two separate parts"
- 4.2.13 The **overall evaluation** (question LH45) for the area is **low** and is described as a "garden areas collectively represent **a significant resource of habitats** but is **highly fragmented** and of very **variable quality**; not as valuable as equivalent areas of semi-natural habitat; **few rare species associated with urban areas**".²⁰

Historic Landscape

- 4.2.14 **The majority of the northern part of the site** is located within the west of the extensive aspect area of **Bryncoch Cilybebyll** (NPTLH040), which is classified as **Irregular Fieldscapes** (Level 3). The aspect area is described as (question HL4) "The Bryncoch Cilybebyll aspect area consists of a **broad saddle of land lying between the Neath (HL43) and Swansea (HL44) valleys**. **Mynydd Marchywel** (HL28) and the **Dulais Valley** (HL48) bound the aspect area to the east, whilst **Mynydd y Drumau** and the Unitary Authority boundary define the western limits. **Cilybebyll (HL25) is contained within this aspect area, to the north**, toward the Swansea Valley. The Bryncoch Cilybebyll aspect area is characterised by an **extensive enclosure of irregular shaped fields** interspersed with **ancient woodland**, particularly in areas around Cilybebyll, known to have had a **medieval history**, where a significant number of **clawdd type enclosure boundaries** survive. There are a number of significant **Bronze Age sites on Mynydd y Drumau** including **burial cairns**; a **ring cairn** and the **standing stone**

¹⁹ https://landmap-portal.naturalresources.wales/view_survey.php?survey_id=5834 [accessed July 2024]

²⁰ https://landmap-portal.naturalresources.wales/view_survey.php?survey_id=5791 [accessed July 2024]

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""**Carreg Bica**,"" which has important local **folklore** associations. Enclosures on the south side of Mynydd y Drumau, in particular, include some fine examples of".

- 4.2.15 The overall evaluation (question HL40) for the area is **outstanding**, as the aspect area "represents a **remarkably rich, multi-period landscape**, with particularly significant **concentrations of prehistoric monuments** and **medieval settlement features** on **Mynydd Drumau**." ²¹
- 4.2.16 **The western fringe of the site** is located within the aspect area of **Neath Port Talbot Urban Corridor** (NPTHL054), which is classified as **Other Settlement** (Level 3). The aspect area is described as (question HL4) "The area consists of the Neath Port Talbot **urban corridor from Margam in the south, northward to Neath**. This **entirely urban and industrial aspect area** includes Tailbach, Aberavon, Baglan and Briton Ferry. From Neath the aspect area diverges west toward Skewen, including the **comprehensive Roman and Medieval remains of Nidum and Neath Abbey**, and to the north and east including **Bryncoch, Cilfrew, Tonna and Aberdulais**. Although the aspect area is characterised as historically "**urban and industrial**" it also includes **fine examples of much older monuments**. **Roman Nidum and Neath Abbey** are extremely **important monuments**; the latter comprises **the most extensive abbey remains in Wales...**"
- 4.2.17 The overall evaluation (question HL40) for the area is outstanding, as the aspect area represents "an urban settlement/communications corridor of considerable historic importance, with evidence of occupation dating back to the Roman period, and including monuments of exceptional significance, namely, the Roman auxiliary fort of Nidum, the extensive remains of the Cistercian Abbey of Neath and the well-preserved remains of two nationally important industrial sites: the Neath Abbey Ironworks and the Aberdulais Tinplate Works." ²²
- 4.2.18 **The southeastern part of the site** is located within the aspect area of **Dulais Valley SW** (NPTHL074), which is classified as **Irregular Fieldscapes** (Level 3). The aspect area is described as (question HL4) "**Discontinuous area of similar landscape character and historical identity to the Dulais Valley**; please refer to HL048 for technical information."
- 4.2.19 The overall evaluation (question HL40) for the area is moderate, as the aspect area contains a "relatively modest scope of the archaeological record and the fact that the coherence of this upland landscape has been significantly disturbed by modern forestry plantation and the designed recreational landscape of the Neath Golf Course." ²³

Cultural Landscape Services

- 4.2.20 Cultural Landscape Services (CLS) now supersedes the Cultural Landscape aspect layer, which was updated in 2020. CLS responds to "Recent environment and well-being legislation and

²¹ [Landmap Portal \(naturalresources.wales\)](#) [accessed July 2024]

²² [Landmap Portal \(naturalresources.wales\)](#) [accessed July 2024]

²³ [Landmap Portal \(naturalresources.wales\)](#) [accessed July 2024]

developments in current thinking relating to culture suggest the dataset would benefit from a different approach to mapping if revisited..."²⁴ The data for CLS uses data from the other four aspect layers and provide no overall evaluations for each aspect area.

4.2.21 Refer to Visual and Sensory aspect areas below.

Visual & Sensory

- 4.2.22 The **majority of the site** is located within the south of the extensive aspect area **Clydach Valley** (NPTVS340), which is classified as **Open Upland Valleys** (Level 3). The aspect area is described as (question VS3) "**Broad upland valley** from approx 50m AOD to approx 230m AOD. A **mosaic of grazed land**, predominantly enclosed by **managed hedges**, at times appearing **over managed on lower ground**. There are **minor clumps of woodland** which **enhance the mosaic** and **provide some sense of enclosure**. There is a **scattering of settlements** through the area, many located close to the **A474 - the main access through the area**. A **number of minor roads and footpaths cross the area**. Areas of **pasture have degraded**, now dominated by **coarse grass and scrub**. The main detractor in the area is **Gilfach quarry**. The **open nature** of the area allows **wide panoramic views to surrounding high ground**".
- 4.2.23 The **scenic quality** (question VS46) of the area is evaluated as **moderate**, and **character** (question VS48) of the area is evaluated as **moderate**. The **overall evaluation** (question VS50) for the area is therefore **moderate** as evaluations are "consistently moderate"²⁵
- 4.2.24 **Adjacent to the site** to the west and containing a small part of the **western edge of the site**, is the aspect area **Neath** (NPTVS720), which is classified as **Urban** (Level 3). The aspect area is described as (question VS3) "**Series of settlements** located **around and straddling the River Neath**. The centre of Neath is a compact area of retail and dwellings, adjacent to the **historic castle**, on the south side of the river. The **River Neath and Tennant canal** has **no obvious relationship to the centre or surrounding settlements**. Outside of Neath centre **significant stone buildings line the roads in the valley bottom**, while behind them **newer developments sprawl up the valley side**. The new development has been **developed piecemeal in blocks**. **Commercial and retail development dominates the main traffic corridors**".
- 4.2.25 The **scenic quality** (question VS46) of the area is evaluated as **low**, and **character** (question VS48) of the area is evaluated as **moderate**. The **overall evaluation** (question VS50) for the area is therefore **low** as the "**location** of the town within the **Neath valley**, with associated **river and canal** provides the context for **strong character** in the area. The **distinct character**

²⁴ LANDMAP Cultural Landscape Services, Report No 336, prepared by E.K Naumann, Dr K Metcalf, Environmental Systems, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru/Natural Resources Wales

²⁵ https://landmap-portal.naturalresources.wales/view_survey.php?survey_id=1755 [accessed July 2024]

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of the centre is diminished by the overall impact of **sprawling surrounding development** which has **detractors** and fails to enhance the **valley sides**.²⁶

LANDMAP Summary

4.2.26 Table 2 below summarises the evaluations for each aspect area that the site is located in or closely adjacent to (overall evaluations are not provided for the Cultural Landscape Services Aspect Layer):

Table 2 Summary of LANDMAP

Aspect Layer	Aspect Area name and Unique ID	Classification (Level 3)	Overall Evaluations
Geological Landscape	Blaenhonddan UID: NPTGL007	Upland plateau	Moderate
	Mynydd Marchywel UID: NPTGL008	Upland plateau	Moderate
	Rhos UID: NPTGL006	Other	Moderate
Landscape Habitats	Unnamed UID: NPTLH036	Mosaic	Moderate
	Unnamed UID: NPTLH086	Residential/ Green Space	Low
Historic Landscape	Bryncoch Cilybebyll UID: NPTHL040	Irregular Fieldsapes	Outstanding
	Neath Port Talbot Urban Corridor UID: NPTHL054	Other Settlement	Outstanding
Cultural Landscape Services	Clydach Valley UID: NPTVS340	Open Upland Valleys	N/A
	Neath UID: NPTVS720	Urban	N/A
Visual and Sensory	Clydach Valley UID: NPTVS340	Open Upland Valleys	Moderate
	Neath UID: NPTVS720	Urban	Low

²⁶ https://landmap-portal.naturalresources.wales/view_survey.php?survey_id=1786 [accessed July 2024]

Contiguous LANDMAP Aspect Areas beyond the site

- 4.2.27 Aspect layers Geological Landscape, Landscape Habitats and Cultural Landscape Services are only considered above for aspects areas that the site is located in and immediately adjacent to²⁷.
- 4.2.28 Historic Landscape and the Visual and Sensory aspect layers are considered further below for all aspect areas within the study area that have a High or Outstanding evaluation that are also overlaps with the Zone of Theoretical Visibility plan (**Figure LA.05**) to have potential visibility of the proposed development.

Historic Landscape

- 4.2.29 Historic Landscapes Aspect Areas that are considered further include:
- NPTHL007. This aspect area is located circa 450m southeast from the site and has an overall evaluation of High. The character of the aspect area is described as Water and Wetland.
 - NPTHL039. This aspect area is located circa 1.1km southeast from the site and has an overall evaluation of Outstanding. The character of the aspect area is described as Irregular Fieldsapes.
 - NPTHL017. This aspect area is located circa 1.3km southeast from the site and has an overall evaluation of Outstanding. The character of the aspect area is described as Designed.
 - NPTHL055. This aspect area is located circa 1.9km southeast from the site and has an overall evaluation of Outstanding. The character of the aspect area is described as Regular Fieldscape.
 - NPTHL032. This aspect area is located circa 2.4km south from the site and has an overall evaluation of Outstanding. The character of the aspect area is described as Regular Fieldscape.
 - NPTHL043. This aspect area is located circa 1.4km east from the site and has an overall evaluation of Outstanding. The character of the aspect area is described as Communications.
 - NPTHL046. This aspect area is located circa 1.6km northeast from the site and has an overall evaluation of High. The character of the aspect area is described as Communications.

²⁷ In accordance with NRW Guidance Note 46.

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- Scoped Out Historic Landscape Aspect Areas include: SWNSHL413 and NPTHL048 as they have Unassessed, Low or Moderate overall evaluation.
- NPTHL028 is evaluated as High but does not overall with the ZTV and is therefore scoped out.

Visual and Sensory

- 4.2.30 Circa 1.4km northeast of the site is the aspect area **Dulais Valley** (NPTVS846), which is characterised as **Open/ Wooded Mosaic Upland Valleys** (Level 3). The aspect area is described as (question VS3) “**Upland valley** encompassing valley floor and predominantly **open landscape** on valley sides, ranging from approx 50m AOD at confluence with Neath to approx 220m AOD. A **wide, rolling, pastoral valley** with **significantly treed field boundaries** - many **grown out hedges** which are a strong element in this landscape. Although grown out hedges dominate on lower ground, the upper reaches of the valley sides are dominated by **drystone walls**. The trees produce a **sense of enclosure** and reduce views out. The pastoral picture of the valley creates a **settled character**. The settlement of **Crynant** sits mostly hidden in the valley bottom. A number of other **dwelling**s, primarily **farmsteads**, are scattered through the valley. The valley road [**A4109**] runs through this area along with a number of **minor roads, tracks** - also the mineral **railway line**. Riparian vegetation marks the line of the **river** as it winds down the valley. **Small-scale commercial** development in the valley bottom is a minor detractor.”
- 4.2.31 The **scenic quality** (question VS46) of the area is evaluated as **high**, and **character** (question VS48) of the area is evaluated as **high**. The **overall evaluation** (question VS50) for the area is therefore **high** as “This **enclosed heavily wooded pastoral mosaic** valley has high scenic qualities, presents **attractive views** both within at an **intimate scale** and also to higher ground around. **Minor detractors** exist but area not sufficient to significantly diminish the character. **Outgrown hedges** heighten the sense of enclosure provided by the topography. These elements create a **strong sense of place** in the valley bottom, **while clumps of woodland** retain the sense of **enclosure** on higher ground, and the change in boundary type provides **altitudinal distinction** and variety.”²⁸
- 4.2.32 Circa 2.5km south of the site at its closest point is the aspect area **Mynydd Dinas** (NPTVS187), which is characterised as **Hillside and Scape Slopes Mosaic** (Level 3). The aspect area is described as (question VS3) “**Scarp slope**, laying northeast of Port Talbot and running into **Afan valley** to the south (maintaining its steep slopes) and the **Neath valley** to the north (where it is becoming slightly less dramatic). The landform rises from approx 50m AOD to 258m AOD. The Scarp is **open on steeper ground** with **extensive bracken** cover and areas of **exposed rock**, while on lower ground, **gentler slopes** and **riparian corridors** are dominated by **deciduous woodland**. The western edge of the area abuts Baglan, Briton Ferry and the M4

²⁸ [Landmap Portal](#) (accessed October 2024)

and the area forms a **strong wooded backdrop** to these settlements and Port Talbot continuing the southern scarp. **Power lines** have created straight swathes through the woodland to the north which are **prominent to views from the M4 and northwest.**"

- 4.2.33 The **scenic quality** (quested VS46) of the area is evaluated as **moderate**, and **character** (question VS48) of the area is evaluated as **high**. The **overall evaluation** (question VS50) is therefore **high** as "The area forms an **attractive backdrop** to the settlements on the coastal plain with a strong character of **deciduous, coniferous woodland** and **bracken slopes** clothing a **dramatic landform**. As a landmark it forms a continuation to the **steeper southern scarp** and **defines the edge of the valleys** to the east." ²⁹.
- 4.2.34 Scoped Out Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas include: SWNSVS733, NPTVS658, NPTVS252, NPTVS431, NPTVS703, NPTVS752, NPTVS751, NPTVS252 as they are Unassessed or Low overall evaluation.

Local Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.2.35 The Neath Port Talbot "LANDMAP Landscape Assessment" was undertaken in December 2004³⁰ and forms Supplementary Planning Guidance. The assessment is based on the LANDMAP process and divides the county into 53 Character Areas. The vast majority of the site is located within **Character Area 39: Clydach valley, Cilybebyll and Cilffrew**. The key characteristics of the Character Area are described as:
- This **broad upland valley** ranging from approx 50m AOD to approx 230m AOD.
 - **Mosaic landscape** of **grazed land**
 - **Wetland vegetation** between Rhos and Bryncoch
 - **Enclosure dominated by maintained hedges**
 - **Scattering of settlements, close to the A474.**
 - **Gilfach quarry** is a **significant** detractor.
 - **Hamlet of Cilybebyll**, centred on the **Norman church**.

4.3 Site-Specific Appraisal

- 4.3.1 The following paragraphs provide descriptions of the site and should be read alongside Topography **Figure LA.04** and Site Photographs **Figures LA.09-1 and LA.09-2**.

²⁹ [Landmap Portal](#) (accessed October 2024)

³⁰ [spg_landmap_landscape_assessment_2004.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#) (accessed July 2024)

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The landscape, features, character, and aesthetics of the site

- 4.3.2 The site is located immediately adjacent to the settlement of Neath. The site is comprised of a series of broadly square shaped fields, located on the lower part of a rising landform at the confluence of the Clydach and Neath rivers. Field boundaries within the site include hedgerows, tree lines and groups of trees and dense vegetation belts. There is an area of woodland in the south of the site.
- 4.3.3 The southern perimeter boundary of the site abuts a small watercourse. The western part of the southern site boundary is formed by mature trees and linear tree groups with dense vegetation. The central part of the southern boundary abuts some farm buildings associated with Leios Farm and is formed by mature trees. The southeastern boundary is delineated by mature linear tree groups and hedgerow. There is an open section of perimeter boundary at the southeast corner of the site where it abuts residential property curtilages. The eastern site boundary borders dense trees within adjacent ancient woodland. The northeastern corner of the perimeter boundary is formed by mature trees and linear tree groups. A dense vegetation belt with trees forms the northern perimeter. The site abuts residential streets along its southern boundaries. Residential properties back on to the site boundary in places and there is a mixture of private curtilages and trees along the boundary. To the north, the site abuts regular shaped fields in rising landform. Leiros Farm lies to the west of the site.
- 4.3.4 The site is situated at the broadly at the end of a ridgeline that separates the Clydach and Neath river valleys. The wider topography is broadly formed by the wide Vale of Neath, which runs roughly east-west in the southern part of the study area and continues south to the Neath estuary at Baglan Bay. The Clydach River valley shapes the northern part of the study area, defined by the upland ridges Mynydd Drumau and Mynydd Marchywel, which run north-south through the northern half of the study area. The site is located at the southern tip of the ridge that continues north to Mynydd Marchywel. The tip of the ridge is southward sloping, and the site is located on its lower flanks. Site topography is therefore broadly southward sloping, rising to a high point of approximately 112m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and falling to a low point of approximately 83m AOD at the southern boundary of the site.
- 4.3.5 The settlement edge of Bryncoch, Neath is located to the south, on lower topography. The residential streets Alexander Road, Bittern Court and Swallow Tree Close wraps along the southern boundary of the site. The eastern part of the site is well accessed by several Public Rights of Way which follow internal field boundaries and connect with the nearby residential streets. The main part of the settlement of Neath is located further to the west and south. Settlement is characteristic of the wider 3km study area, including Neath, Bryncoch and the various linked communities that adjoin the town – such as Cadoxton-Juxta-Neath, Cilfrew, Tonna and the fringes of Skewen to the west. Residential streets follow sloping landforms. There are also some scattered farmsteads on the flanks of the valley ridgelines, mostly connected by the local road network.

- 4.3.6 The rising uplands of Mynydd Drumau and Mynydd Marchywel overlook the settlement within the valley floors and provide a dominant and dramatic upland backdrop.

Landscape character and aesthetics of the site

- 4.3.7 Sense of place within the study area is characterised by strong contrasts between settlement, rural valley and upland influences. Within the valleys there is a sense of enclosure, whilst the expansive uplands at Mynydd Drumau and Mynydd Marchywel to the north of the study area feel more remote. There is a settled, rural quality to the fieldscape at the ridge north of Rhydding/ south of Gilfach quarry where the site is located. Throughout, there are detractive views of human influences include urban development, pylon lines, motorway and other infrastructure, which again contribute to a sense of disunity.
- 4.3.8 The site generally has a rural character, with a degree of enclosure from woodland and mature trees. Glimpsed longer ranging views toward Neath are available from some places within the site, above and between tree canopies. The hedgerow and trees that surround and line the site provide a sense of enclosure, whilst the upland backdrop to the west at Mynydd Drumau provides a sense of openness and drama. Contrasting influences contribute to a settlement edge sense of place.

Landscape Value

- 4.3.9 The characteristics, sensitivities and guidelines in the existing character assessments at national and local level and the site-specific analyses carried out for the purposes of this LVApp were taken into account as indicators of the aspects of the landscape important to the character and evaluated according to the criteria in **Appendix 2, Table A2-1** in order to determine the value of the landscape receptors.
- 4.3.10 The features/elements/characteristics identified as important or “key” to the landscape character of the site are:
- Sloping landform
 - Field pattern defined by hedgerows, mature trees and linear woodland.
 - Recreational public access on footpaths in the eastern part of the site
 - Urban context within the Neath valley
 - Uplands backdrop to the west

4.4 Effects on the Landscape

- 4.4.1 This section examines the nature of the landscape effects arising as a result of the proposed development with reference to:
- effects on landscape fabric within the site, its features and qualities;

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- effects on landscape character, including consideration of effects on designated landscapes; and
- effects on the landscape setting of settlements, public rights of way and roads.

4.4.2 Landscape character is derived from the combination and pattern of landscape elements. The effects of proposed development on landscape character would arise from its relationship to these combinations and patterns, and thus the character of the landscape. Effects on the landscape features, qualities and character may occur where there are either direct or indirect physical changes to the landscape. Direct changes to landscape fabric would only occur within the application boundary.

4.4.3 The effect of the proposed development on landscape character will depend on key characteristics of the receiving landscape; the degree to which the proposed development is considered consistent with or at odds with them; and how the proposed development would be perceived within the setting, with perception being influenced by:

- the distance to the site;
- weather conditions; and
- the 'fit' of the proposed development within the landscape pattern and characteristics.

4.4.4 The LVApp assessments cover the following scenarios:

- Construction phase - this includes all clearance works, some tree and vegetation removal, and of the construction of the proposed residential development.
- Completion – the fully constructed and completed proposed residential development.

Sensitivity

4.4.5 Landscape sensitivity is a product of consideration of the value associated with the landscape receptor and its susceptibility to the changes likely to arise from the proposed development. Criteria for determining the landscape value and landscape susceptibility are set out in **Appendix 2**. For this appraisal, the assessment of sensitivity is based on bringing value and susceptibility considerations together in one combined step, in accordance with the criteria set out in **Appendix 2**.

4.4.6 The receptors, their value and susceptibility are set out in the following table, with the resultant judgement of their sensitivity to the proposed development:

Table 3 Susceptibility and Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors

Receptor	Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity
Sloping landform	High-medium value: reflective of the LANDMAP Geological Landscape and	Moderately susceptible to change due to the balance of	Moderate sensitivity

Receptor	Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity
	Visual and Sensory evaluations. The sloping hillside is locally distinctive and contributes to the setting of other areas	the landform remaining unaltered but its character as a setting to other areas would change	
Field pattern defined by hedgerows, mature trees and linear woodland	Medium-high value: reflective of the LANDMAP Landscape Habitats evaluation combined with Historic Landscape Evaluation. Non-designated landscape with varied condition - maintained and outgrown hedgerows, varied tree categorisation	Moderately susceptible to change due to the removal of some boundary vegetation, but many boundary features are likely to be retained	Moderate sensitivity
Recreational public access on footpaths in the eastern part of the site	Medium value: the landscape is the setting for recreational access where the landscape forms part of the experience	Moderately susceptible to perceptual change with the construction of the proposed development	Moderate sensitivity
Urban context within the Neath valley	Medium value: reflective of the low LANDMAP Visual and Sensory evaluation for Neath combined with higher evaluations for Historic Landscape Aspect Layer. Valley landscape subject to local designation (Green Wedge)	Low susceptibility to change due to contrasting influences in valley, accommodated within existing urban context. The type of development would not compromise the achievement of landscape planning policies relating to the site	Lesser sensitivity
Uplands backdrop to the west	High-medium: reflective of Visual and Sensory and Historic Landscape evaluations. Non-designated landscape	Low susceptibility to change as development would not add elements incongruous to landscape character. Large scale landscape with open views able to accommodate development	Moderate sensitivity

Magnitude of change

- 4.4.7 The magnitude of change considers the key features of the proposed development, as described in **section 3.0**, and the degree to which aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the landscape are altered by these changes or by the structures associated with the development.

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The magnitude of change is described and set out in **Appendix 3, Table Appendix 3.1. Table 4** below provides a summary of the assessments:

Table 4 Landscape receptors and magnitude of change summary

Landscape Receptor	Magnitude of Change
Sloping landform	During Construction: Small Completion: Small
Field pattern defined by hedgerows, mature trees and linear woodland	During Construction: Medium-small Completion: Medium-small
Recreational public access on footpaths in the eastern part of the site	During Construction: Small Completion: Medium-small
Urban context within the Neath valley	During Construction: Small Completion: Medium-small
Uplands backdrop to the west	During Construction: Small Completion: Small

Assessment of effects on the landscape

- 4.4.8 Consideration of the magnitude of the changes due to the proposals is combined with consideration of the sensitivity of landscape receptors affected by the proposals to assess the degree and nature of the effect at each stage of the proposed development from construction to completion.
- 4.4.9 Final conclusions about the degree of landscape effect, whether adverse or beneficial, relate the separate judgements about sensitivity of the receptors and magnitude of the changes, as illustrated in the indicative criteria shown in **Table A2-11**. The assessment is provided in **Appendix 3; Table Appendix 3.2** and a summary of the effects is provided below in **Table 5** below:

Table 5 Effects on Landscape Receptors

Landscape receptors and sensitivity	Effects during construction	Effects at completion
Sloping landform: Moderate sensitivity	Minor adverse	Minor adverse
Field pattern defined by hedgerows, mature trees and linear woodland: Moderate sensitivity	Moderate-minor adverse	Moderate adverse

Landscape receptors and sensitivity	Effects during construction	Effects at completion
Recreational public access on footpaths in the eastern part of the site: Moderate sensitivity	Minor adverse	Moderate-minor beneficial
Urban context within the Neath valley: Lesser sensitivity	Minor adverse	Moderate-minor adverse
Uplands backdrop to the west: Moderate sensitivity	Minor adverse	Moderate-minor adverse

5.0 Effects on Visual Amenity

5.1 Scope and Assessment Criteria

- 5.1.1 This section deals with the effects on visual amenity, arising from changes in the views available to people in the surrounding area.
- 5.1.2 The general methodology for assessing the effects in this report is set out in **Appendix 2**.
- 5.1.3 The degree of the likely visual effects of the proposed development is determined by relating the sensitivity of the receptors to the changes arising from the development proposals, and the degree and nature of the changes in the views available to people and in their visual amenity arising from the proposals.

5.2 Visual Baseline

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

- 5.2.1 A Zone of Theoretic Visibility (ZTV) plan has been generated by computer to identify the geographic extents within which views may be available of the proposed residential development within the 3km visual study area. The ZTV is calculated to the maximum height of the proposed two storey buildings at 10m Above Ordinance Datum (AOD) to represent the 'worst case scenario'. The viewer eye-height for the ZTV has been set at 2m above ground level.
- 5.2.2 ZTVs produced include screening features where features such as buildings and vegetation have been taken into account. The computer generated ZTV in **Figure LA.06** was calculated using LiDAR composite DSM (Digital Surface Model) with a spatial resolution of 2m, which includes heights of existing buildings and vegetation in the data. The screening effects of other surface features such as individual trees and hedgerows may not be picked up by the data.

- 5.2.3 **Figure LA.06** shows the predicted extent of the ZTV for the proposed residential development. It illustrates that the surrounding topography influences the potential visibility of the proposed development, notably the landforms of the Clydach and Neath River valleys, which define the study area. Visibility is generally available down the valley sides and from the valley floors, interrupted by built forms in the settlement of Neath and the surrounding communities. Beyond the valley side ridges such as Mynydd Drumau, visibility of the site is not available. The site is located at the confluence of the two river valleys, with broadly south-facing topography. As a result of this site topography visibility into the site from the north is not generally available, even at relatively close distance. The footprint of visibility for the scheme extends across the south of the 3km study area, beyond the settlement of Neath.
- 5.2.4 The screening effect of surface features such as buildings and vegetation would reduce the extent of visibility of the development across the study area. It is likely that the views of the development would be further limited by surface screening not included within the model, such as individual trees and hedgerows. Given the shallow nature of the topography within the study area, surface screening significantly reduces visibility.

Viewpoint study

- 5.2.5 A photographic survey was undertaken to identify the potential extent of the visibility of the proposed development by locating viewpoints available to sensitive receptors. To inform the initial viewpoint selection, a visual study area from the site was mapped showing the surrounding landscape designations, public access, landscape character, and the predicted ZTV for the proposed development. Potentially sensitive visual receptors within the study area include residents, users of public rights of way, visitors to sites of historic interest, and local road users.
- 5.2.6 Based on the collated data, initial representative viewpoint locations were selected that relate to the "receptors," that is, residents and users of the landscape, and locations from which they may have views towards or of the site. For each of the viewpoints, the precise location was chosen during the field studies to represent the most open view available subject to local features such as vegetation, buildings or localised topographic variation. From some locations, the ground level of the site may not be visible. However, due to the height of the proposed development, which may be taller than some surrounding features, viewpoint locations include areas where the proposed development may potentially be seen extending above intervening features.
- 5.2.7 A total of 9 views were photographed to illustrate the site and its appearance in publicly available locations. Of the nine views that were taken, six views were selected as the viewpoints representative of visual receptors. These views were taken forward for the visual amenity assessment. The viewpoint figures are presented on **Figures LA.08** and the locations are shown on **Figures LA.06**.

5.2.8 Context views are shown on **Figures LA.07** and the location also shown on **Figures LA.06**. Context views illustrate views where the site and/or the proposed development would be entirely or mostly screened from view or difficult to perceive, or where a more representative or similar view is included within the assessment.

5.2.9 **Table 6** below lists the six viewpoints, the location details, the receptors represented, and the reasons for selection.

Table 6 Viewpoint details

Viewpoint reference	Location	Approximate distance and direction from site	Receptors represented and reasons for selection
01	Wern Fraith, Neath, looking northeast toward the site	1.1km southwest	Residents, pedestrians, and road users. - The viewpoint represents a medium distance view, representing key receptors including residents within the existing settlement of Neath - The bare earth ZTV indicates theoretical visibility of the majority or a medium part of the proposed development from this part of Neath.
02	Near Dwr y Felin School, looking northeast toward the site	1.6km southwest	Pedestrians - The viewpoint represents a medium distance view, looking northeast toward the site from within the central part of the town of Neath - It is located between two Scheduled Monuments, nearby to the east and west - The bare earth ZTV indicates that a moderate part of the proposed development would be visible from this part of Neath
03	The Drive, west of Neath Abbey, looking northeast toward the site	2.2km southwest	Local road users, footpath users - The viewpoint represents a medium-long range view from the southwest, on elevated ground - Users of the local footpath network along a route accessible to the nearby school are represented - The bare earth ZTV indicates that the majority of the development would be visible from this location
04	Gnoll Country Park, looking northwest toward the site	1.7km southwest	Footpath users, road users accessing the Country Park - The viewpoint represents users of a well-frequented Country Park, at medium distance - The Country Park is a Registered Park and Garden

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Viewpoint reference	Location	Approximate distance and direction from site	Receptors represented and reasons for selection
			The bare earth ZTV indicates that the majority of the proposed development would be visible
05	Fairyland Road, looking northwest toward the site	1.8km southeast	Local road users, users of the National Cycle Route - The viewpoint represents a medium-long distance view from the southeast - It is located on the National Cycle Route 47, on the edge of Gnoll Country Park Registered Park and Garden - The bare earth ZTV indicates that a medium part of the proposed development would be visible from this location
06	Mynydd Drumau, looking southeast toward the site	2.4km northwest	Footpath users - The viewpoint represents a long range view from a locally significant area of uplands overlooking the town of Neath of the northwest - It is located close to a Scheduled Monument, on a bridleway - The bare earth ZTV indicates that the majority or a medium part of the proposed development would be visible from this area of upland

5.2.10 **Appendix 3, Table Appendix 3.3** provides a description of the landscape context at each of the six viewpoint locations and description of the existing view towards the site.

5.3 Visual receptors

5.3.1 The assessment of visual effects is described by considering how the different groups of “visual receptors” may be affected. The following is a review of the viewers (the visual receptors) and the views available to them at the selected representative locations:

People in settlements and residential properties

5.3.2 The main settlement area within the 3km study area is Neath and the linked communities of Bryncoch, Tonnau and Cimla, with small hamlets and farmsteads scattered throughout the study area. A representative sample of views from settlements have been taken forward to the assessment and include:

- Residents in Neath, represented by **viewpoint 01**, **viewpoint 02** and **viewpoint 03**