



Leiros Parc, Bryncoch, Neath

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

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Prepared on Behalf of Codi Group



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

- 1.1.1 Tir Collective is instructed by Codi Group to prepare this Landscape and Visual Appraisal which relates to a proposed residential development on land at Leiros Parc, to the north of Bryncoch, Neath, see **Figure LA.01** for site location.
- 1.1.2 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'.

1.2 Scope of the Assessment

- 1.2.1 This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVApp) provides an assessment of the effects of the proposed development, on the landscape of the site and its context. The design of the proposed development and the identification of mitigation measures incorporated within the design to minimise adverse effects, is informed by the findings of the assessment process as it progressed. In this LVApp, effects on features identified as important to the scenic quality, or effects on the landscape character of the site and its setting are assessed. Effects on peoples' views of the site and its setting, or visual amenity, are also assessed.
- 1.2.2 For the purposes of assessing the landscape and visual effects of this proposal, study areas have been defined:
- The site extends to the redline boundary as shown on **Figure LA.01**.
 - The wider landscape context extends 3km from the site boundary.
 - The visual study area extends 3km from the site boundary.
- 1.2.3 The objectives of the assessment are to:
- Describe and evaluate the landscape of the site and surrounding landscape context and the visual amenity of people in the surrounding area, which might be affected by the proposed development.
 - Examine the development proposals and analyse the potential effects on the landscape and visual amenity associated with the scheme's design.
 - Provide an assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development with integral mitigation measures in place.

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1.2.4 The LVApp is presented with separate sections dealing with effects on landscape, and effects on visual amenity. The LVApp is illustrated by plans and photographs (see **Appendix 1**), as follows:

- **Figure LA.01** Site Location
- **Figures LA.02** Designations
- **Figure LA.03** Public access
- **Figure LA.04** Topography
- **Figure LA.05-1 -LA.05-7** LANDMAP mapping information
- **Figure LA.06** Zone of Theoretical Visibility and Viewpoint Locations
- **Figures LA.07-1 – LA.07-4** Context Views
- **Figures LA.08-1 – LA.08-6** Viewpoints
- **Figures LA.09-1 and LA.09-2** Site Photos

1.3 Assessment Methodology

1.3.1 The methodology used for assessing the landscape and visual effects is based on the recommendations in **Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition**, published by The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment in 2013 (GLVIA3), as set out in **Appendix 2**.

1.3.2 The assessment process comprises a combination of desk studies and field surveys, with subsequent analyses, and involved:

- A review of landscape designations and planning policies for the landscape, and of other landscape studies relevant to the area, including LANDMAP assessment information and local landscape character assessments;
- A survey of the site and landscape context study areas and inspection of views of the site from publicly accessible viewpoints, including a photographic survey. The surveys were carried out by a Chartered Landscape Architect on 18th August 2024 during dry weather with good visibility;
- Evaluation of the features and elements of the landscape and their contribution to the landscape character, context and setting, based on these studies;
- Analysis of the development proposals and consideration of potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development;
- Assessment of the susceptibility and sensitivity of the landscape to the changes likely to arise from the development;

- Identification of the extent of theoretic visibility of the proposed development and viewers, their susceptibility and sensitivity, and view locations, supported by a viewpoint analysis; and
- Assessment of magnitude of change arising from the proposal, the degree and nature of effects on the landscape and on visual amenity with the mitigation proposals in place.

Assessment and Mitigation

- 1.3.3 The effects of the development, whether beneficial or adverse, may vary in nature and degree through its lifecycle and, where feasible, mitigation measures are proposed to be incorporated in the design of the development. Where design measures cannot address identified likely adverse effects, measures such as management of the construction and operational processes may be proposed. The purpose of mitigation measures is first, to prevent or avoid the potentially adverse effects identified, and if that is not possible, to reduce the potential adverse effect. Where adverse effects are unavoidable, the purpose is to offset or compensate for the effect.
- 1.3.4 Details of the criteria for assessing landscape effects and visual effects are set out in those respective sections.

Guidance

- 1.3.5 In addition to GLVIA3, the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note **LITGN, Visual Representation of Development Proposals**, September 2019¹ was referred to along with the following guidance:
- Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note **LITGN-2024-01 Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment** Third Edition (GLVIA3), published August 2024.
 - Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 02/21 **Assessing landscape value outside national designations**.
 - NRW LANDMAP assessment information and **Guidance Note 46: Using LANDMAP in Landscape and Visual Assessments**.
- 1.3.6 Relevant policy, landscape character assessments, and other contextual information sources were also referred to, including policies relevant to the landscape and visual amenity in national, regional, and local policy including the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan 2011-2026.

¹ The Landscape Institute Guidance Note, Visualisation of development, September 2019, on LI website: <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/visualisation/> [accessed March 2022]

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Photography

- 1.3.7 Photographs have a special role in describing landscape character and illustrating key views. In order for photographs to be representative and to create an image that is as similar as possible to that which is seen with the human eye, the Landscape Institute (LI) advises using a lens with a focal length equivalent to 50mm for a 35mm Single Lens Reflex (SLR) camera, and a horizontal field of view of a little under 40 degrees. The equipment used for the appraisal photography includes:
- A Canon EOS 5D Mark iii digital SLR camera with a full frame sensor;
 - Canon 50mm EF 1:1.8 II lens; and
 - Manfrotto tripod and panoramic head.
- 1.3.8 Photographs were taken with a focal length of 50mm.
- 1.3.9 Landscape photography includes wide angle or panoramic views requiring a sequence of photographs to be taken across the view. Where this approach is taken, a series of overlapping photographs are digitally spliced together in Photoshop CC using a cylindrical projection to provide a panorama approximating to the normal field of view in a landscape context. Where necessary, the contrast and brightness of individual photographs is slightly manipulated in order to create a consistent panorama without visible joins.
- 1.3.10 The viewpoint locations were established using a camera mounted GPS device and verified against Ordnance Survey grid reference and height above Ordnance Datum.

Weather

- 1.3.11 The weather is a factor affecting the assessment of, especially, visual impacts. The Met Office² publish average statistics for weather patterns for the region, monthly and annual, for maximum and minimum temperatures, days of air frost, hours of sunshine, amount of rainfall - both generally and the number of days when rainfall is above 1mm. For Pontarddulais, the nearest Climate station to where the site is located:
- Rainfall above 1mm per day, which limits visibility, occurs on an average of 153 days in the year, about 42% of the year
 - There are on average 24 days when air frost occurs, which can produce hazy conditions limiting visibility, about 7% of the year
 - There is an average of 1692 hours of sunshine per annum for the district, more than the Welsh average of 1530 hours.

² The data quoted are those for Mumbles Head, England SW & Wales S, obtained from The Met Office website: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/maps-and-data/uk-climate-averages/gcjm7j5g> [accessed November 2022]

2.0 Landscape Policies and Designations

2.1 National Planning policy

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040

2.1.1 Future Wales sets out the development plan for Wales, influencing “all levels of the planning system in Wales and will help shape Strategic and Local Development Plans.”³ The plan promotes development that enhances our wellbeing and our quality of life”⁴ and embeds the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The plan sets out development policies for Wales, dividing it into 4 regions: The North, Mid Wales, The Southwest, and The Southeast, the site is located in the southeast region.

2.1.2 The key policies that are of relevance to the proposed development include:

- **Policy 1 – Where Wales will grow** states “The Welsh Government supports sustainable growth in all parts of Wales. In three National Growth Areas there will be growth in employment and... investment in infrastructure. The National Growth Areas are:

Swansea Bay and Llanelli

[...]”

- **Policy 2 – Shaping Urban growth and Regeneration – Strategic Placemaking** states “The growth and regeneration of towns and cities should positively contribute towards building sustainable places... and integrated with Green and Blue Infrastructure.”

- **Policy 9 – Resilient Ecological Networks and Green and Blue Infrastructure** aims “To ensure the... provision of Green and Blue Infrastructure, the Welsh Government will work with key partners to:

[...]

... identify opportunities where existing and potential Green and Blue Infrastructure could be maximised as part of placemaking, requiring the use of nature-based solutions as a key mechanism for securing sustainable growth, ecological connectivity, social equality and well-being.

... In all cases, action towards securing the maintenance and enhancement of... Green and Blue Infrastructure assets must be demonstrated as part of development proposals through innovative, nature-based approaches to site planning and the design of the built environment.”

³ <https://gov.wales/future-wales-national-plan-2040-0>

⁴ Page 4, Future Wales The National Plan 2040

Planning Policy Wales

2.1.3 Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 12 published February 2024 sets out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government. Its primary objective is to ensure that the planning system contributes towards the delivery of sustainable development and improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, as required by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other key legislation and resultant duties such as the Socio-economic Duty.

2.1.4 PPW translates The Welsh Government's commitment to sustainable development into the planning system, to be taken into account when preparing development plans, so that it can play an appropriate role in moving towards sustainability. The key policies that are of relevance to the development include:

- **Chapter 2 People and Places, paragraph 2.1** states that "Everyone engaged with or operating within the planning system in Wales must embrace the concept of placemaking... in order to achieve the creation of sustainable places and improve the well-being of communities."

Paragraph 2.27 states "Planning authorities should ensure that social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits are considered in the decision-making process... to implement the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Sustainable Development Principle." A key factor is environmental considerations, with relevant questions listed as:

- "will important features of the natural and built environment be protected and enhanced;
- is environmental protection for people and natural resources, property and infrastructure maximised and environmental risks prevented or appropriately managed;
[...]
- will the causes and impacts of climate change be fully taken into account through location, design, build, operation...
[...]"
- In relation to green wedges, **Section 3: Strategic and Spatial Choices, paragraph 3.64** states "around towns and cities there may be a need to protect open land from development. This can be achieved through... local designations such as green wedges." It goes on to state that "green wedge policies should be reviewed as part of the development plan review process." i.e., green wedges may only be relevant for the current development plan period.
- **Paragraph 3.67** lists the purposes of Green Belt as:
 - prevent the coalescence of large towns and cities with other settlements;

- manage urban form through controlled expansion of urban areas;
 - assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - protect the setting of an urban area; and
 - assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- **Paragraph 3.68** goes on to state “**Green wedges** are local designations which essentially have the same purpose as Green Belts. They may be used to provide a buffer between the settlement edge and statutory designations and safeguard important views into and out of the area.” **Paragraph 3.69** goes on to state “The general policies controlling development in the countryside apply in a... green wedge but there is, in addition, a general presumption against development which is inappropriate in relation to the purposes of the designation.”
- Paragraph 3.71** states “To maintain openness, development within a... green wedge must be strictly controlled.”
- **Chapter 3 Strategic and Spatial Choices paragraph 3.9** states “The special characteristics of an area should be central to the design of a development. The layout, form, scale and visual appearance of a proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings are important planning considerations.”
 - **Paragraph 3.10** goes on to state “In areas recognised for their particular landscape or historic character and value, it can be appropriate to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness. In those areas, the impact of development on the existing character, the scale and siting of new development... will be particularly important.”
- In relation to healthier places, **paragraph 3.23** states “Green and Blue Infrastructure can be an effective means of enhancing health and well-being, through linking dwellings, workplaces and community facilities and providing high quality, accessible green spaces.”
- **Chapter 6 Distinctive & Natural Places, paragraph 6.0.2** states “The special and unique characteristics and intrinsic qualities of the natural and built environment must be protected in their own right, for historic, scenic, aesthetic and nature conservation reasons.”
 - **Paragraph 6.1.18** relates to **Historic Parks and Gardens** and states that “Planning authorities should value, protect, conserve and enhance the special interest of parks and gardens and their settings included on the register of historic parks and gardens in Wales” Paragraph 6.1.19 goes on to state that “The effect of a proposed development on a registered park or garden, or its setting, is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications”.

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- **Section 6.2 Green and Blue Infrastructure, paragraph 6.2.5** states “The quality of the built environment should be enhanced by integrating Green and Blue Infrastructure into development through appropriate site selection and use of creative design.”
- **Section 6.3 Landscape, paragraph 6.3.3** states “All the landscapes of Wales are valued for their intrinsic contribution to a sense of place, and local authorities should protect and enhance their special characteristics, whilst paying due regard to the social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits they provide, and to their role in creating valued places.” **Paragraph 6.3.4** goes on to state “Where adverse effects on landscape character cannot be avoided, it will be necessary to refuse planning permission.”
- **Paragraph 6.3.12** concerns **Special Landscape Areas (SLAs)** and states “Planning authorities should state which features, characteristics or qualities require extra protection, and explain how the policy or designation will achieve this protection. LANDMAP and any associated landscape character assessments (including the register of Historic Landscapes in Wales) should be used to inform local landscape policies and SPG, and to help identify or revise SLAs”. **Paragraph 6.3.13** goes on to state that “SLAs are non-statutory designations that define local areas of high landscape importance, which may be unique, exceptional or distinctive to the area”.
- **Section 6.6 Water and flood risk, paragraph 6.6.18** states “The provision of SuDS must be considered as an integral part of the design of new development and considered at the earliest possible stage when formulating proposals for new development.”
Paragraph 6.6.19 goes on to state “Design for multiple benefits and Green and Blue Infrastructure should be secured wherever possible...”

- 2.1.5 Planning Policy Wales is supplemented by 21 topic based Technical Advice Notes (TANs), of which the key elements of relevance to the landscape and visual aspects of the development are set out below:

TAN 5 Nature Conservation and Planning

- 2.1.6 In preparing planning applications, “all relevant information” should be included and “all material considerations addressed in the layout, design and related access, drainage and infrastructure. Landscaping proposals should be included together with any measures designed to avoid, mitigate or compensate for potential adverse effects on nature conservation. Any proposals for enhancement of nature conservation interests should also be included.”

TAN 12 Design

- 2.1.7 TAN 12 advocates a holistic approach to design, to meet the objectives of good design, set out in Figure 1, which include:

[...]

- Character: Sustaining or enhancing local character; Promoting a successful relationship between public and private space; Promoting innovative design; Promoting legible development; Promoting quality, choice and variety;

[...]

- Environmental Sustainability: Achieving efficient use and protection of natural resources; Enhancing biodiversity; Designing for change;

[...]

2.1.8 "Understanding the site and its immediate and wider context is the basis for a meaningful and sustainable design response," including appraising "character," including landscape character, skylines and vistas, prevailing uses, natural and cultural resources and locally distinctive features (4.3 - 4.8). The TAN makes reference to the information available in LANDMAP in addition to detailed site appraisals.

2.1.9 Paragraph 5.5.2 recognises that "good design will almost always be dependent on working within the natural constraints and the historic character of the landscape ... The aim should be to achieve good design solutions which maximise the natural landscape assets and minimise environmental impact on the landscape. It is particularly important that proposals to amend or create new landscape are not considered as an afterthought and that the long-term impact of development on the landscape is fully understood. The quality of implementation and the long-term management of changes implicit in planting schemes are fundamental to a scheme's success."

2.2 Local Planning policy

2.2.1 The site lies within Neath Port Talbot County Council. Planning policy for the area is provided by the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2011-2026⁵), adopted January 2016. The Council is in the process of producing the Replacement LDP up to 2038. Policies relevant to the site and the potential residential development and include:

Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2011-2026)

- **Policy SP3 Sustainable Communities** states that "The delivery of sustainable, healthy and cohesive communities and the conservation of the countryside will be promoted by:
 1. Defining sustainable communities and locations for development by the identification of a settlement hierarchy that reflects the role and function of settlements;

⁵ [ldp_written_statement_jan16.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#) (accessed June 2024)

2. Defining settlement limits within which development which accords with the settlement hierarchy will be permitted in principle;

3. Resisting inappropriate development outside settlement limits"

Policy EN2 Special Landscape Areas states that "In order to protect areas of high landscape quality, the following Special Landscape Areas are designated:

[...]

EN2/2 Dulais Valley

EN2/3 Vale of Neath

[...]

Development within the designated Special Landscape Areas will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that there will be no significant adverse impacts on the features and characteristics for which the Special Landscape Area has been designated"

- **Policy EN3 concerns Green Wedges** and states that "In order to prevent the coalescence of settlements and to protect the setting of urban areas, Green Wedges have been designated in the following locations... Alltwen/ Thos/ Bryncoch/ Neath/ Abbey/ Leiros Park... within these areas there is a presumption against inappropriate development."
- **Policy SP15 Biodiversity and Geodiversity** states that "Important habitats, species and sites of geological interest will be protected, conserved, enhanced and managed through the following measures:
 1. The identification of the following Internationally and Nationally designated sites within the County Borough to enable their protection...(b) Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)...3. The protection of important natural features;"
- **Policy EN6 Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites** states that "Development proposals that would affect...Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs...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."
- **Policy EN7 Important Natural Features** states that "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."

Policy SP21 relates to Built Environment and Historic Heritage, stating "the built environment and historic heritage will, where appropriate, be conserved and enhanced through the following measures:

1. Encouraging high quality design standards in all development proposals;
2. Protecting arterial gateways from intrusive and inappropriate development;
3. Safeguarding features of historic and cultural importance;
4. The identification of the following designated sites to enable their protection and where appropriate enhancement:

- (a) Landscapes of Historic Interest;
- (b) Historic Parks and Gardens;
- (c) Conservation Areas;
- (d) Scheduled Ancient Monuments; and
- (e) Listed Buildings and their curtilage"

- **Policy BE1 Design** states that "All development proposals will be expected to demonstrate high quality design which fully takes into account the natural, historic and built environmental context and contributes to the creation of attractive, sustainable places. Proposals will only be permitted where all of the following criteria, where relevant, are satisfied:

1. It complements and enhances the character and appearance of the site, building or area in terms of siting, appearance, scale, height, massing and elevation treatment;
2. It respects the context of the site and its place within the local landscape, including its impact on the important arterial gateways into the County Borough, its effects on townscape and the local historic and cultural heritage and it takes account of the site topography and prominent skylines or ridges;

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3. It utilises materials appropriate to its surroundings and incorporates hard and soft landscaping and screening where appropriate;

...

5. Important local features (including buildings, amenity areas, green spaces and green infrastructure, biodiversity and ecological connectivity) are retained and enhanced as far as possible;

6. It achieves and creates attractive, safe places and public spaces, taking account of 'Secured by Design' principles (including where appropriate natural surveillance, visibility, well lit environments and areas of public movement);

...

8. It uses resources, including land and energy, as efficiently as possible through: (a) Making the best and most efficient use of the land available through being of appropriate density taking into account the character and appearance of the area..."

- **Policy H1 Housing Sites** states that "Land is identified for residential development at the following locations:

H1/2 Leiros Park Extension"

The policy indicates an estimated 200 units within a site area of 12.2ha.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Landscape and Seascape Supplementary Planning Guidance, May 2018

- 2.2.2 Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's "Landscape and Seascape Supplementary Planning Guidance, May 2018⁶) describes **Special Landscape Areas** as "areas of high landscape quality, identifies using criteria set out in the Countryside Council for Wales Guidance Note 1 (2008) (now superseded by NRW LANDMAP Guidance Note 1". The SPG refers to Policy EN2 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2011-2026), confirming that "Policy EN2 sets out the approach to be taken to proposed developments within SLAs and is specifically focussed on the protection of landscape quality...developments within SLAs will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that there will be no significant adverse impacts on the features and characteristics for which the SLA has been designated".
- 2.2.3 In relation to **Green Wedges**, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's "Landscape and Seascape Supplementary Planning Guidance, May 2018⁷) refers to Green Wedges as "designated areas of countryside where development is more strictly controlled in order to

⁶ [spg_landscape_seascape_may18.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#) (accessed June 2024)

⁷ [spg_landscape_seascape_may18.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#) (accessed June 2024)

maintain openness and prevent the coalescence of settlements. PPW sets out the purpose of green wedges as being to:

- Prevent the coalescence of large towns and cities with other settlements;
- Manage urban form through controlled expansion of urban areas;
- Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- Protect the setting of an urban area; and Assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- Green wedges are therefore not primarily a landscape designation, but they can have an impact on the wider landscape due to their impacts on the form and setting of urban areas”.

2.3 Designations

2.3.1 Designations provide an indication of landscape value. They are areas that have been recognised for the scenic beauty and recreational potential of the landscape. Designations are shown on **Figures LA.02**.

National Parks/ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

2.3.2 There are no National Parks or AONBs (now known as National Landscapes) within or close to the 3km study area. National Parks and National Landscapes are therefore scoped out from further consideration in this LVApp.

Special Landscape Areas

2.3.3 Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are a non-statutory landscape designation applied by the local planning authority to define areas of high landscape importance within their administrative boundary.

2.3.4 Neath Port Talbot contains six SLAs, which are designated “in order to protect areas of high landscape quality”. The **Dulais Valley SLA** covers the northeastern part of the study area, extending to a distance of approximately 1.5km from the nearest part of the site boundary. Abutting it to the southeast is the **Vale of Neath SLA**, extending to a distance of approximately 1.6km from the site boundary and covering a part of the eastern edge of the study area.

2.3.5 The key characteristics and features of the **Dulais Valley SLA** are described within the Neath Port Talbot Landscape and Seascape Supplementary Planning Guidance⁸ as:

⁸ [spg_landscape_seascape_may18.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#) (Accessed July 2024)

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"stretches from the outskirts of Aberdulais in the south to Seven Sisters in the north. The SLA covers the valley sides to reinforce its visual context and therefore includes the unforested uplands of Mynydd Hirfynydd and Mynydd Marchywel as the backdrop to the valley. Areas of forestry plantation are included on both valley sides for coherence as it forms the same land mass and recognising that the appearance and biodiversity of this landcover can be enhanced through management. To the south-east the SLA links to the Vale of Neath SLA via a contiguous boundary (refer to SLA 3 below).

typical upland u-shaped glacial river valley creating a wide valley floor and predominantly open landscape on the valley sides...

It is a wide, rolling, pastoral valley with significantly treed field boundaries, many of these contain grown out hedges which are a strong element in this landscape on the lower ground whereas drystone walls are a landscape feature of the upper reaches of the valley sides.

Tranquillity is a key feature of the upper ridge areas supported by lack of development...

It is an evolved landscape containing evidence from prehistory, important Roman remains, open cast and forestry...

Although the historic context is mostly Roman, the landscape contains many examples of prehistoric land uses and the presence of sheepfolds indicates the importance of animal husbandry, in this area, in the post-medieval period. The ridge of Mynydd Hirfynydd has been a significant route through the landscape from the prehistoric period through into the medieval period, which is now used as an historic walk (Sarn Helen). It is also crossed by the long distance footpath St Illtyd's Way.

...the mining industry which until the 1980s visually dominated the visual and social landscape of the S Wales Valleys and provided a strong sense of place and cohesion to the valley."

- The Neath Port Talbot Landscape and Seascape Supplementary Planning Guidance describes the **Vale of Neath SLA** as:

"The Vale of Neath is similar to the south east valley side of the Dulais valley with its NE-SW fault controlled U-shaped broad glacial valley floodplain and channel, flanked by steep valley slopes. The area is a pastoral and deciduous mosaic providing diversity within the valley and contrasting with the heavily coniferous wooded nature of the upper slopes.

The broad floodplain makes the Neath valley distinctive from the Tawe or the Dulais. The topography and woodland cover on the northern and southern slopes of the Neath valley is a significant and dominant feature and provides coherence and integrity to the SLA.

The landscape contains many examples of prehistoric land use alongside the Roman camps and fortlets...

The SLA includes Cwm Gwrelych and Nant Llyn Fach SSSI and to the south east of the Selar opencast is the Graig-y-Llyn geological SSSI.

A strong sense of place, coherence, local distinctiveness and cultural identity combine to contribute to the special qualities of the Vale of Neath. From Aberdulais to Glynneath the Vale of Neath's topographical beauties have attracted painters including Turner, poets, photographers in large numbers over several centuries.

The upper reaches of the valley have a tranquil and remote feeling, removed from settlements and dwellings although this contrasts significantly with the valley floor which is an important communications corridor.

The unforested areas of the valley sides are primarily sheep grazed, and there is evidence of relict post-medieval fieldscapes within the forested areas. Footpaths, long distance paths to include St Illtyds Way and bridleways facilitate views across the valley.

Cut into the hillslopes of the valley, on both the north and south sides, are many small collieries, levels and quarries and Fynnon Oer windfarm lies to the south east of the SLA.

[...]"

Green Wedge

- 2.3.6 There are two areas of Green Wedge within the study area. Green wedges are described within Neath Port Talbot Landscape and Seascape Supplementary Planning Guidance⁹ as "designated areas of countryside where development is more strictly controlled in order to maintain openness and prevent the coalescence of settlements."
- 2.3.7 To the north of the settlement of Neath, the study area contains the **Alltwn/ Rhos/ Bryncoch/ Neath Abbey/ Leiros Park Green Wedge**, a small part of which extends into the northern edge of the site and covers a large area to the northwest. The Supplementary Planning Guidance states that the green wedge "covers an area of some 943 hectares and has an important function of preventing any further expansion of the urban area of Neath northwards. It is also intended to restrict the further southward expansion of Pontardawe and associated settlements...the Alltwn / Rhos / Bryncoch / Neath Abbey / Leiros Park Green Wedge stretches from Neath to Pontardawe and includes the small settlement of Fforest Goch which has a sporadic linear form along the main A474 that links Neath and Pontardawe and lies within the green wedge designation.
- 2.3.8 To the southeast of the settlement of Neath, the **Neath/ Tonna/ Cimla/ Efail Fach** green wedge extends to within 1km of the site at its nearest point. The green wedge "covers an area of some 482 hectares and is intended to prevent the coalescence of Neath and Tonna and prevent expansion of Neath (Cimla) towards Efail Fach. Significant parts of the green wedge

⁹ [spg_landscape_seascape_may18.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](https://www.npt.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-07/spg_landscape_seascape_may18.pdf) (accessed July 2024)

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are situated within SLA search areas and display some of the criteria necessary for SLA designation indicating that they are areas of high landscape value, although they are not within any designated SLA.”¹⁰

Ancient Woodland

- 2.3.9 The study area contains a number of Ancient Woodland blocks, primarily on valley slopes and flanks. The closest area of Ancient Woodland abuts the southeastern site boundary, comprising a linear area of **Ancient Semi Natural Woodland** that follows the watercourse **Cwm Bach**.
- 2.3.10 To the east of the site, the wooded slopes at Craig Gwladus comprised mixed Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site, Ancient Woodland of Unknown Category and Restored Ancient Woodland, extending to 240m from the eastern site boundary at its nearest point and reaching northward as far as Cilfrew.
- 2.3.11 Within the western part of the study area, there is a concentration of Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Restored Ancient Woodland and Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site at **Dyffryn Woods**, on the eastern side of Mynydd Drumau. The nearest parts lie approximately 1.3km from the site boundary and extent to the edges of the study area.
- 2.3.12 Within the southeastern part of the study area, there are some areas of Ancient Semi Natural. Restored and Plantation on Ancient Woodland site at Mosshouse wood and around the reservoir within the **Gnoll Estate Country Park**, approximately 1.5km southeast of the site boundary, connecting to a further block of Restored Ancient Woodland at Brynau Farm.
- 2.3.13 On the fringes of Neath, there is a linear area of Plantation on Ancient Woodland along the **Neath Canal** and an area of Ancient Semi Natural Woodland at **Tonna Basin**, approximately 1.7km from the nearest part of the site boundary and extending beyond the limit of the study area.
- 2.3.14 There is a further concentration of Ancient Woodland, largely Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site on the slopes to the south of the River Neath at **Wenallt Woods**, approximately 2.1km from the site boundary at its nearest point and extending beyond the limit of the study area to the east.
- 2.3.15 On the southern edge of the study area there is a block of Ancient Semi Natural Woodland at **Neath Castle**, approximately 2.9km south of the site boundary.
- 2.3.16 There are other **small and fragmented blocks** of Ancient Woodland within the 3km study area, generally located on small watercourses and comprising **Ancient Semi Natural Woodland**.

¹⁰ [spg_landscape_seascape_may18.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#) (accessed July 2024)

Historic and cultural landscape designations

- 2.3.17 The setting of historic and cultural designations is a consideration during the preparation of landscape and visual impact appraisals as these features inform the overall landscape character, quality and value of the area. The LVApp does not address the effects on heritage assets however it considers the contribution these features make to landscape value and scenic quality.
- 2.3.18 Relevant historic and cultural designations are shown on **Figure LA.02-1**.

Conservation areas and listed buildings

- 2.3.19 There is a single **Conservation Area** within the 3km study area, at **Neath Town Centre**, approximately 950m south of the site boundary at its nearest point. Neath Port Talbot Supplementary Planning Guidance: The Historic Environment (Consultation Draft – January 2019)¹¹ notes that within the Neath Town Centre Conservation Area “features of importance include the traditional commercial centre with some small shop units, the general market, public buildings, the castle, St Thomas’ Church, Victoria Gardens and other architectural features and structures”.
- 2.3.20 There is a **concentration of listed buildings within the Conservation Area**, including the Grade II* listed Old Town Church of Saint Thomas and Parish Church of Saint David, along with a significant number of other listed buildings and structures including market buildings, banks, public houses and other properties within the conservation area.
- 2.3.21 A second **Conservation Area** is located at **Tonna Canal Depot**, approximately 1.2km east of the site, described within Neath Port Talbot Supplementary Planning Guidance: The Historic Environment (Consultation Draft – January 2019) as “a small area around the Neath Canal at Tonna, including the restored canal depot and workshops, canal structures including lock and lock gates and the residential lock house property”. A number of the structures within the Conservation Area are listed.
- 2.3.22 Further **listed buildings are located within the settlement of Neath**, including a grouping at **Neath Abbey Ironworks** and around the **Tennant Canal**, and several others elsewhere within the town at chapels, churches, Almshouses, public houses and other properties.
- 2.3.23 Approximately 260m south of the site lies the **Church of Saing Cattwg**, which is Grade II* listed. There are a further three listed structures within its setting, including **gates, a milestone and monument** which are all **Grade II** listed. Approximately 250m northeast of the site there is a **Grade II listed limekiln near Neath Golf Course**.
- 2.3.24 Approximately 1.6km east of the site, there is a concentration of Grade II listed buildings associated with the **Tennant Canal, Aberdulais basin** and **Aberdulais Aqueduct**, which is

¹¹ [spg_historic_environment_jan19.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#) (Accessed July 2024)

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Grade II* listed. A number of further listed buildings are located at **Aberdulais Falls**, nearby to the north.

2.3.25 There are several listed buildings within the **Gnoll Estate**, including Grade II listed **Ivy Tower**, **Mosshouse Wood Cascade** a **Grotto** and **War Memorial Gates**, approximately 2km southeast of the site.

2.3.26 Other scattered listed buildings within the 3km study area are located beyond 2km of the site. Due to the separation of the listed buildings and the site and the settlements, topography and vegetation that surrounds them, they should be scoped out of the assessment as the new development would not detract from their value.

Scheduled Monuments

2.3.27 There are a number of **Scheduled Monuments** within the study area, the closest located at **Neath Castle** approximately 975m south of the site.

2.3.28 A further Scheduled Monument is located at **Neath Roman Site**, approximately 1.3km southwest of the site. Nearby to the west there is also a Scheduled Monument at **Court Herbert Cross and Grave Slab**.

2.3.29 **Neath Abbey Ironworks** is a Scheduled Monument, located approximately 1.8km southwest of the site. There is also a Scheduled Monument at **Neath Abbey Ironworks Dam**, approximately 1.3km west of the site.

2.3.30 There is a group of Scheduled Monuments at **Aberdulais Falls**, **Aberdulais Aqueduct** and **Aberdulais Basin**, in the eastern part of the study area approximately 1,6km from the site boundary.

2.3.31 Other scattered Scheduled Monuments within the 3km study area are located beyond 2km of the site. Therefore Scheduled monuments should be scoped out of the assessment due to the separation from the site and the settlements, topography and vegetation that surrounds them.

Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest

2.3.32 The statutory register of historic parks and gardens came into force on 1 February 2022, which replaced the non-statutory register. The statutory register does not impose any new legal restrictions on Wales' historic parks and gardens or introduce a new consent regime. Registered sites continue to receive the current level of protection through the planning system. The effect of a proposed development on a registered site or its setting may also be a 'material consideration' in the determination of a planning application.¹²

2.3.33 There are two **registered parks and gardens** within the 3km study area of the site. The largest being **The Gnoll**, located on a steep-sided hill on the east side of Neath. It is "registered for

¹² <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/placemaking/legislation-guidance/registered-historic-parks-and-gardens>