

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tregeles

SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site is located within the grounds of Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tregeles on St John's Terrace, Neath Abbey, and extends to approximately 0.72 hectares. The wider site comprises the existing school building and its associated curtilage including playgrounds, parking areas and grassed sports pitch. The proposed development area is situated to the north of the main school building and includes an existing 1940s classroom block, adjacent hardstanding currently used for parking, and a section of the playing field to the east.



The site lies within the defined Settlement Limit for Neath Abbey, as identified by Policy SC1 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (LDP) 2011–2026.

Access to the school is currently provided via two points from St John's Terrace: a pedestrian-only entrance and a combined pedestrian and vehicular access. The principal access point serving the site is located along the western boundary, whilst a secondary gated entrance is positioned within the south-western corner of the site.

The northern boundary of the site is defined by a raised embankment separating the school grounds from the adjacent railway line. The embankment is situated at a higher level than the application site and is densely vegetated, providing a significant degree of visual containment and screening.

The new teaching block will be located to the north-east of the existing school buildings (in front of the bank of trees to the right of the photo):



The wider site has recently been the subject of two related applications which support the current planning submission. The first, application ref. P2026/0236, relates to the prior notification for the demolition of the rear school block, boundary walls and cycle/car shelter, submitted on 14 April 2026. The second, application ref. P2026/0251, sought a Certificate of Lawful Use for a garden room located to the south of the eastern playing field.

The school is included within Neath Port Talbot Council's Schedule of Buildings of Local Importance SPG. The building is recognised for its local architectural and historic interest and is described as a small 19th-century school featuring two wings and an unusual square bell tower.

The surrounding area is predominantly residential in character, with a row of five terraced dwellings situated opposite the site on the western side of St John's Terrace. The eastern boundary is enclosed by fencing that separates the school grounds from the adjoining cemetery associated with St John the Baptist Church.

The site is accessed directly from the A4230 St John's Terrace, which provides a local connection between Neath Abbey and Skewen and serves as an established local centre corridor. Consequently, the school occupies a sustainable location within the settlement, with a range of services, facilities and public transport opportunities available within walking distance.

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

The proposed redevelopment is required to support the continued growth of the Welsh-medium primary school and provide facilities capable of meeting future demand.

In summary, the proposed works include:

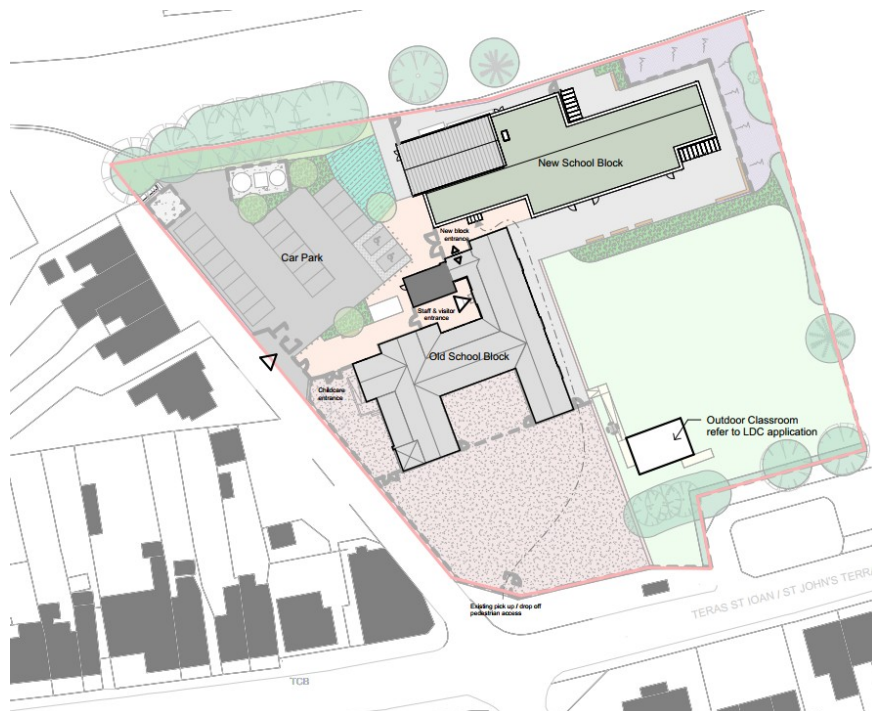
- Demolishing the outdated 1940s teaching block and metal car par structure
- Construction of a new single-storey teaching block.

- Provision of five additional classrooms and supporting facilities.
- Creation of covered outdoor learning and play areas.
- Reconfiguration of the existing access and parking arrangements.
- Provision of 20 marked parking spaces, including disabled bays.
- Installation of sustainable drainage features to address existing surface water issues including to playing field.
- New landscaping and biodiversity enhancements, including tree planting, rain gardens, wildflower areas and a biodiverse green roof.
- Retention of the majority of the site's open space and existing vegetation.
- Provision of ancillary facilities, including a cycle store, refuse store and fire safety infrastructure.

Extract from proposed elevations:



Extract from proposed block plan:



Alongside the new accommodation, the development will provide improved outdoor learning areas and drainage measures to address long-standing water retention issues on site.

Parking and access arrangements will be significantly improved through the provision of a redesigned car park with 20 formal spaces, including disabled bays. The proposal will improve vehicle circulation and manoeuvring within the site.

The majority of existing open space will be retained, with only a small area of low-value grassland and one tree being removed. In response, the scheme includes a range of landscaping and biodiversity enhancements, including replacement tree planting, species-rich grassland, rain gardens and a biodiverse green roof. Additional facilities, such as cycle parking, refuse storage and fire safety infrastructure, will support the day-to-day operation of the school.

NEGOTIATIONS

Throughout the course of the application discussions have been undertaken regarding the level of detail provided on the submitted drawings as well as playing field loss, contamination, drainage and retaining walls.

PLANNING HISTORY

P2026/0251 – Application for a Lawful Development Certificate (Proposed) for the construction of 1 no. single-storey detached classroom Lawful – Certificate issued – 20.05.26

P2026/0236 – Prior notification for the proposed demolition of a school block, boundary walls and bike/car shelter at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tregeles – Prior approval not required – 11.05.26

P2022/0928 – New play canopy at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tregeles, St Johns Terrace, Neath Abbey, Neath, Neath Port Talbot, SA10 7ND. Approved – 25.01.23

CONSULTATIONS

Environmental Health (Air) – No objection, subject to conditions.

Network Rail (Minerals) – No objection, subject to informative notes

Lead Local Flood Authority – No objection

Contaminated Land – No objection, subject to conditions

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust – No objection, subject condition

Building Control (Demolition) – Notified

Engineering and Transport (Design): No objection, subject to condition

Education Department – No response

Biodiversity – No objection, subject to conditions

Estates: Notified

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service - No objection

Gigabit capable broadband – No objection

Welsh Water – No objection, subject to condition

Environmental Health (Noise) – No objection, subject to conditions.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) – No objection, subject to conditions

Sport Wales – No objection, advise on total adequacy of sports pitch post development

Structures Section – No objection, subject to condition

Arboricultural Officer – No objection, subject to condition

Sustainable Transport (Active Travel) – No objection

Drainage – the proposed development would require SAB consent.

Network Rail – No objection, subject to conditions

REPRESENTATIONS

Neighbouring properties were consulted and a site notice was also displayed. In response, to date, 1 no. objection has been received:

1. Concerns regarding the impact of the proposed development on residential amenity, including potential loss of daylight, an overbearing effect, overlooking, increased noise and disturbance from school activities, and possible impacts from external lighting and plant equipment.
2. Concerns regarding existing traffic congestion, parking pressures and highway safety associated with school drop-off and pick-up times, with requests for additional parking restrictions and traffic management measures in the surrounding streets.
3. Requests for clarification on whether the development would result in an increase in pupil and staff numbers and the implications this may have for the capacity of the site and surrounding highway network.

4. Requests relating to the planning process, including a site visit from the objector's property, a meeting with the case officer, and provision of information in accessible formats due to the objector's visual impairment.

REPORT

The Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 places a duty on the Council to take reasonable steps in exercising its functions to meet its sustainable development (or wellbeing) objectives. This report has been prepared in consideration of the Council's duty and the "sustainable development principle", as set out in the 2015 Act. In reaching the recommendation set out below, the Council has sought to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

National Planning Policy:

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 is the national development framework, setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040. The development plan sets out a strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy, achieving decarbonisation and climate resilience, developing strong ecosystems and improving the health and wellbeing of our communities.

The following policies are of particular relevance to the assessment of this application:

Policy 2 – Shaping Urban Growth and Regeneration – Strategic Placemaking
Policy 8 – Flooding
Policy 9 – Resilient Ecological Networks and Green Infrastructure
Policy 12 – Regional Connectivity

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12, February 2024) outlines the Welsh Government's commitment to the importance of 'places' and 'place-making', the importance of using previously developed land wherever possible in preference to greenfield sites, and the recognition of the health and wellbeing related benefits by creating a sense of place and improving social cohesion. PPW 12 confirms that the environmental components of places are intrinsically linked to the quality of the built and natural environment and contribute to the health and wellbeing of the people who live, work and play there. It emphasises the importance of creating sustainable communities and reducing reliance on the private car as part of a package of measures to reduce the country's carbon footprint and help tackle the climate emergency.

PPW12 is supported by a series of more detailed Technical Advice Notes (TANs), of which the following are of relevance: -

- TAN 11 - Noise
- TAN 12 - Design
- TAN 15 – Development, Flooding and Coastal Erosion
- TAN 18 – Transport

Local Planning Policies

The Local Development Plan for the area comprises the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan which was adopted in January 2016, and within which the following policies are of relevance:

Strategic Policies

- Policy SP3 Sustainable Communities
- Policy SP4 Infrastructure
- Policy SP10 Open Space
- Policy SP15 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Policy SP20 Transport Network
- Policy SP21 Built Environment and Historic Heritage

Topic Based Policy

- Policy SC1 Settlement limits
- Policy OS2 Protection of Existing Open Space
- Policy EN06 Important biodiversity and geodiversity sites.
- Policy EN07 Important Natural Features
- Policy EN08 Pollution and Land Stability.
- Policy TR2 Design and Access of New development
- Policy BE1 Design
- Policy I1 Infrastructure Requirements

Supplementary Planning Guidance:

The following SPG is of relevance to this application: -

- Planning Obligations (October 2016)
- Parking Standards (October 2016)
- Pollution (October 2016)
- Open Space & Greenspace (July 2017)
- Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (July 2017)
- Design (July 2017)
- Landscape & Seascape (May 2018)
- Biodiversity and Geodiversity (May 2018)
- The Historic Environment (April 2019) (incl. Schedule of Buildings of Local Importance and SPG: Schedule of Designated Canal Structures)

ISSUES / ASSESSMENT

Having regard to the above, the main issues to consider in this application relate to the principle of development, together with the impact on the visual amenity of the area, the amenities of neighbouring residents, highway safety, biodiversity and flooding.

Principle of Development

The application site is located within the identified settlement, where the principle of development is considered acceptable subject to the development complying with the requirements of the other development plan policies.

The existing buildings on the site have a lawful use as a D1 – non-residential institution which includes uses such as school, libraries, public halls, places of worship and medical or health services. The proposed use of the building as a education facility would remain within the D1 use class, as such the proposed development would not be a material change of use.

The development is therefore acceptable in principle.

Impact on Visual Amenity

The application proposes the demolition of the existing rear school block and associated outbuilding, and the construction of a new single-storey teaching block providing five additional classrooms and associated facilities. The wider scheme also includes covered outdoor learning and play areas, reconfigured access and parking arrangements, sustainable drainage infrastructure, landscaping enhancements, biodiversity improvements, and ancillary facilities such as cycle and refuse storage.

In visual terms, the proposed development has been carefully designed to respond positively to its site context. The new teaching block would be positioned partly on the footprint of the existing rear building (to be demolished) and partly within the adjacent field area, enabling the replacement accommodation to be delivered while retaining the majority of the site's open space and established vegetation. Importantly, the proposed building is single storey in scale and is set well back from the main highway.

The site benefits from a degree of natural screening, particularly from mature trees and vegetation to the northern boundary, which assist in limiting views of the development from the surrounding area. In addition, attention has been given to the relationship between the proposed building and existing ground levels, ensuring that the overall visual presence of the new block remains modest within the wider school grounds. Although part of the building extends into the adjacent field area, the replacement structure is smaller in scale than the existing rear school block and its siting would not result in an intrusive or prominent form of development.

The submitted detail indicates that the design approach seeks to deliver a contemporary educational building whilst maintaining a visual relationship with the retained historic school building. The proposed materials palette has been selected to provide a modern appearance that complements the character of the existing structures on site – detailed information in respect of the material manufactures and product numbers / codes has been provided at application stage to allow a detailed assessment.

The use of copper-coloured standing seam metal roofing and cladding introduces a contemporary architectural element whilst drawing upon the warmer tones present within the existing school buildings. Buff-toned brickwork is proposed as a durable

and visually attractive material that reflects and complements the established stonework found elsewhere on the site.

Anthracite grey metal window and door frames, together with matching rainwater goods and associated metalwork, would provide a consistent and modern finish whilst helping to unify the overall appearance of the development. The principal lower roof element is proposed as a biodiverse green roof planted with a native wildflower mix, which would not only assist in sustainable drainage and biodiversity enhancement but also soften the visual appearance of the building when viewed from elevated positions.

A further positive aspect of the scheme is the proposed treatment of the existing boiler house. At present, this structure forms a visually dominant feature when approaching the school entrance and is of a significantly different character to the original Victorian school building. The proposal includes the overcladding of the boiler house using the same standing seam metal cladding as the new teaching block, together with the repainting of doors and related external works. This approach would create a more cohesive appearance across the site, helping to visually integrate the existing and proposed buildings through a consistent architectural language and materials palette. The improvements would also enhance the arrival experience for visitors and provide a clearer and more legible frontage to the school entrance.

Given the above, a condition will be imposed requiring that the materials used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development are in accordance with the submitted details which have been assessed as being acceptable.

Overall, it is therefore considered that the proposed school building and associated works represent well-designed and appropriately scaled additions to the school premises. By virtue of their form, sensitive siting, complementary materials, landscaping enhancements and the screening afforded by existing mature vegetation, the proposals would preserve the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area. Accordingly, the development is considered to have an acceptable impact on visual amenity and accords with Policy BE1 of the adopted Development Plan.

Impact on Residential Amenity

The impact of the proposed development on the amenities of neighbouring occupiers has been carefully considered. The application relates to the redevelopment and extension of facilities within an established school site and the proposed development would be located wholly within the confines of the existing premises. As illustrated on the submitted plans, the principal new elements are positioned to the rear of the existing school buildings, extending northwards towards the embankment and cemetery and away from the residential properties located along St John's Terrace.

The siting of the development within the wider school campus ensures that substantial separation distances of a minimum of 44m are maintained between the

proposed main building and the nearest residential dwellings on St Johns Terrace. The existing school buildings would also continue to provide a degree of screening between the proposed development and neighbouring residential properties. This arrangement is clearly demonstrated by the proposed site plan, an extract of which is provided below:



Given this relationship, it is not considered that the proposal would result in any unacceptable overbearing impacts, loss of outlook, visual intrusion or loss of privacy, despite those concerns raised locally.

In terms of overlooking, whilst the proposal incorporates new accommodation and associated external areas, the significant separation distances involved, together with the orientation of the development within the site, ensure that there would be no unacceptable opportunities for direct overlooking of neighbouring residential properties. As such, the proposal would not adversely affect existing levels of privacy enjoyed by nearby residents and as such those concerns raised locally cannot be sustained.

The Council has also considered the potential effects of the development on daylight, sunlight and overbearing – concerns in respect of these matters have also been received from a member of public. Given the location of the proposed development within the school grounds, the substantial distance (44m) from the nearest residential receptors and the intervening built form of the existing school buildings, there is no realistic prospect of material impacts arising in respect of loss of light and overbearing. In these circumstances, a formal daylight and sunlight assessment is not considered necessary.

Concern has been raised locally that the proposal would facilitate an increase in pupil and staff numbers at the school resulting in noise issues. Whilst the proposal could result in a greater level of activity associated with the operation of the educational facility, the site is already in established educational use and such

activity is an inherent characteristic of the existing school environment. Notwithstanding this, the school comprises of two main blocks and the submitted information confirms that the buildings currently have the capacity to accommodate 252 pupils. As part of the proposed development, the rear block will be demolished and replaced by the new teaching block, with the school's capacity reducing to 210 pupils. It is therefore not anticipated in any that event noise from increased pupil numbers, having regard for the previous and proposed capacity, will therefore not transpire to an extent that would be unacceptable.

The application also includes the installation of an air source heat pump and associated plant, and concerns have been raised that the development will result in increased noise nuisance from these items. An Acoustic Assessment has been submitted to assess the impact of the proposed equipment in accordance with BS 4142:2014+A1:2019 – Methods for Rating and Assessing Industrial and Commercial Sound. The assessment demonstrates that, subject to the incorporation of the specified acoustic mitigation measures, the operation of the plant can be accommodated without giving rise to unacceptable noise impacts at nearby noise-sensitive receptors. A condition will also be imposed requiring that the plant noise does not exceed the prevailing background sound level at nearby residential receptors, that the equipment is installed on suitable vibration isolation mounts.

Potential noise and vibration impacts arising from construction activities, including the use of machinery and any piling works, can be appropriately controlled through a planning condition limiting construction operations times.

The EVH Officer is content with the proposals and has not raised any overriding objections.

A condition is also recommended by the EVH Officer requiring full details of any proposed external lighting to be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to installation. This will ensure that the lighting scheme is appropriately designed to minimise light spill and glare, safeguard the amenity of neighbouring residential properties, and responds to related concerns raised locally in respect of nuisance related to light spill.

Having regard to the submitted information, consultation responses and the relationship of the proposed development to surrounding land uses, it is considered that the proposal would not result in unacceptable impacts upon residential amenity in terms of privacy, overlooking, outlook, daylight, sunlight, noise, vibration or general disturbance.

Parking and Access Requirements and Impact on Highway Safety

The application seeks the demolition of the existing building at the rear of the school and its replacement with a new teaching block. As stated, the redevelopment would reduce the school's overall capacity from 252 pupils to 210 pupils. Notwithstanding this, concerns have been raised locally that the development would lead to unacceptable impacts on highway safety.

In response, no changes are proposed to the existing access arrangements. Staff parking would be formalised through the provision of a 20-space car park, including two disabled bays. Based on anticipated staffing levels of approximately 15–20 employees when the school is operating at full capacity, the proposed parking provision would increase the on-site parking ratio compared with the existing arrangement and is expected to reduce demand for on-street staff parking.

Whilst the Council's Parking Standards would indicate a requirement for approximately 42 parking spaces for a school of this size, the proposal would provide 20 spaces, resulting in a shortfall of 22 spaces. However, this represents an improvement over the existing situation, where the shortfall is estimated at 38 spaces. Consequently, despite the concerns raised, the reduction in pupil numbers and increased on-site parking provision are expected to lessen parking demand on surrounding streets compared with the current operation of the school.

In addition, the trip generation assessment contained within the submitted Transport Statement, informed by TRICS data, demonstrates that the proposal is expected to generate fewer peak-hour trips and vehicle movements than the existing educational use operating at its current capacity. It is also important to note the development is considered to be in a sustainable and accessible location.

The Local Highway Authority has, however, raised concerns regarding the proposed construction and demolition access arrangements. In particular, whilst the submitted information states that reversing manoeuvres on St John's Terrace will not be permitted and that vehicle movements will be supervised by a banksman, insufficient detail has been provided to demonstrate how construction and demolition vehicles will safely enter, manoeuvre within, and exit the site without conflict with pedestrians or other highway users. Furthermore, no swept path analysis has been provided to demonstrate that the largest anticipated vehicles can access and egress the site in a forward gear.

Notwithstanding these concerns, it is considered that the matters raised relate to the detailed management of the construction phase and can be satisfactorily addressed through the imposition of appropriately worded planning conditions. A condition can require the submission and approval of a revised CEMP prior to the commencement of development (with exception of demolition and site clearance), incorporating swept path analysis for the largest anticipated vehicles, details of vehicle manoeuvring arrangements within the site, site access arrangements including emergency vehicles and confirmation that vehicles can enter and leave the site in a forward gear. This would ensure that construction and demolition traffic can be safely accommodated without detriment to highway safety. This would safeguard pupils, staff, pedestrians and other road users throughout the construction period.

In addition, concerns have been raised regarding the management of deliveries and servicing during both the construction and operational phases of the development. The CEMP referred to above can require the submission and approval of a Delivery Management Plan for the construction phase. A separate condition can deal with post development delivery management.

Such controls would ensure the safe and efficient operation of the site and minimise disruption to the surrounding highway network in the short and long term.

Subject to the imposition of these conditions, it is considered that the concerns raised by the Local Highway Authority and locally can be satisfactorily addressed and that the development would not give rise to an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

It is therefore considered that the proposed development would have no detrimental impact upon the highway and pedestrian safety of the existing highway network and would accord with the policies of the Local Development Plan.

Biodiversity and Trees

Policies EN6 and EN7 of the Local Development Plan are of relevance insofar as there is a need to ensure any impacts on biodiversity/ natural features are appropriately assessed and, where applicable, mitigated.

Biodiversity

The application was supported by a bat survey, site assessment survey, arboricultural report and a green infrastructure statement.

A Green Infrastructure Statement (GIS) is required with all planning applications. This is considered to be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed and describes how green infrastructure has been incorporated into the proposal. In this case, a GIS has been submitted and includes the planting of four trees, rain gardens and wildflower grassland. The roof of the new building will also be equipped with a biodiverse green roof providing additional habitat and assisting in regulating surface water.

The council's ecologists and NRW have not raised any overriding concern with the submitted ecological information, including the GIS and bat survey. A condition will also be imposed securing the proposed enhancements.

It is therefore considered that the proposed development demonstrates that it would achieve biodiversity net benefit and will more generally accord with the requirements of Chapter 6 of PPW 12.

Trees

The application is supported by a comprehensive Arboricultural Report prepared in accordance with BS5837:2012, incorporating a tree survey, Tree Constraints Plan, Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Tree Protection Plan and Arboricultural Method Statement. The survey identifies a tree stock of generally low to moderate quality, comprising four Category B trees/groups and seven Category C trees.

The proposed development requires the removal of a single small Category C cypress tree, with all remaining surveyed trees to be retained. The Tree Officer raises no objection to the principle of this tree removal, noting that the loss is acceptable in arboricultural terms.

The submitted arboricultural information demonstrates that the majority of retained trees can be satisfactorily accommodated within the proposed layout and provides an appropriate framework for their protection during construction. However, concerns have been raised regarding the relationship between the proposed engineering works and identified arboricultural constraints. In particular, the submitted cut-and-fill drawings indicate excavations of up to approximately 0.5 metres in the vicinity of retained trees in the north-eastern part of the site, while a retaining wall is proposed close to the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of retained trees along the northern boundary. It is therefore important that construction is undertaken in strict accordance with the approved arboricultural protection measures to safeguard retained trees and their rooting environments.

The Tree Officer also notes that, whilst the Tree Constraints Plan illustrates circular RPAs and the Tree Protection Plan identifies construction exclusion zones, the extent of these exclusion zones does not always directly align with the RPAs shown. Although BS5837:2012 allows RPAs to be modified where suitably justified and without reducing their overall area, the submitted documentation does not fully explain the rationale for these differences. Notwithstanding this, the Tree Officer is satisfied that the development can proceed provided all works are implemented in accordance with the approved arboricultural documentation.

The submitted landscape strategy is also considered acceptable and includes a comprehensive scheme of tree, shrub, meadow, SuDS and green roof planting. This will assist in integrating the development into its surroundings while providing biodiversity and visual amenity benefits. The landscaping proposals have been designed with due regard to retained trees and include measures to avoid excavation, cultivation and changes in soil levels within RPAs. Tree planting is specified in accordance with BS8545 principles and includes appropriate irrigation, aeration, staking, mulching and establishment maintenance measures.

Importantly, the proposed replacement planting more than compensates for the loss of the single cypress tree and exceeds the equivalent of a 3:1 replacement ratio.

Overall, subject to the implementation of the approved arboricultural and landscaping measures, the Tree Officer raises no arboricultural objection to the proposed development.

Flood risk / Drainage

The Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Flood Map for Planning indicates that a section of the northern part of the site falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3 associated with surface water and small watercourse flooding.

The application is supported by a Flood Consequence Assessment and Drainage Strategy which has been updated to incorporate the discharge rates agreed with the Lead Local Flood Authority. The revised assessment demonstrates that the proposal would improve the existing situation by reducing discharge to the receiving surface water drainage network and providing a comprehensive package of mitigation measures, including revised site levels, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS),

permeable surfacing, a green roof, attenuation storage and positive drainage arrangements.

The assessment concludes that the identified flood risk is largely associated with the existing site layout, levels and drainage arrangements, and that the proposed redevelopment would significantly reduce flood risk both within the site and downstream of it. It further demonstrates that the development would not increase flood risk elsewhere and is suitable for the proposed use.

In relation to the comments of the Lead Local Flood Authority regarding evacuation route plans and confirmation of existing and proposed permeable areas, it is noted that the proposal represents an improvement over the existing drainage regime, with reduced discharge rates and enhanced attenuation and infiltration measures secured through the submitted drainage strategy. The Flood Consequence Assessment also demonstrates that flood risks can be satisfactorily managed through the design and mitigation measures incorporated into the scheme.

Given the nature of the development and the conclusions of the assessment, officers are satisfied that sufficient information has been provided to demonstrate compliance with relevant flood risk and drainage policies. The absence of detailed evacuation route plans and quantified permeable area figures does not prevent a robust assessment of the proposal, nor does it give rise to concerns that cannot be addressed through the approved drainage strategy, SAB approval and detailed design process. Furthermore, a condition can be imposed requiring the submission of a flood evacuation management plan prior to first occupation of the approved building.

As such, no further information is considered necessary to determine the application and the development, on balance, is considered acceptable in respect of flood risk.

Playing field loss

Part of the existing grassed playing field area would be lost to the proposed development. Sport Wales have raised a query regarding whether the remaining area of outdoor sport and play space would continue to satisfy the statutory minimum requirements set out within the School Playing Fields Regulations. Whilst this is a material consideration, limited weight is attached to this concern in the circumstances of the current application.

In assessing proposals affecting recreation and sports facilities, Planning Policy Wales and Sport Wales guidance recognise that consideration should be given not only to the quantitative loss of land but also to the quality, accessibility and functionality of the provision that remains. In this respect, the application site does not currently comprise a formal sports pitch or playing field used for organised sport, nor is it designated as protected open space within the adopted Local Development Plan. Furthermore, the area affected by the development is currently of limited functional value due to persistent drainage problems that result in extensive waterlogging throughout much of the academic year, significantly restricting its recreational use by pupils.

Notwithstanding the reduction in overall area, approximately 2,050m² of the existing grassed area, equating to around 63% of the current provision, will be retained. More importantly, the proposal incorporates significant drainage improvements to the retained area through the installation of land drains and associated surface water management infrastructure. These measures will substantially improve the quality, usability and accessibility of the remaining outdoor space, enabling it to function as an effective recreational resource for a much greater proportion of the year than is currently the case.

It is also noted that the proposal forms part of wider improvements to the school's facilities and outdoor environment, including biodiversity enhancements, landscaping improvements and the provision of additional outdoor learning opportunities. Taking these factors into account, it is considered that the development would deliver an overall betterment when compared to the existing situation and that the concerns raised by Sport Wales regarding the reduction in area do not warrant refusal of the application in this particular case.

As such, the proposal is not considered to result in a harmful loss of sporting or recreational provision.

Contaminated Land and land stability

Contaminated Land

The application has been supported by a Site Investigation Report as well as a Desk Study report.

NRW have reviewed the information provided, and consider the site to be low sensitivity with respect of controlled waters, therefore do not provide detailed site-specific advice or comments with regards to land contamination issues for this site.

The Council's contaminated land officer has also reviewed the submitted details. Further information, including additional testing, is required. However, in principle there is no overriding objection to the development, subject to imposition of conditions. Conditions will be worded in such a way that additional testing information would have to be provided but still allow some non-intrusive works such as demolition and site clearance to occur. It is also pertinent to note that a separate prior notification application has been granted at the site allowing the demolition of buildings to occur outside of this planning application.

Retaining walls, ground works and means of enclosure

The application site exhibits a significant change in levels, with surveyed ground levels ranging from approximately 18.0m AOD in the lower parts of the site to approximately 23.0m AOD in the upper areas. As such, the proposed development incorporates a series of retaining structures and associated cut-and-fill operations to create usable external spaces and provide safe and accessible circulation routes throughout the site.

The submitted External Works General Arrangement drawing identifies a number of proposed retaining structures. These structures are required to accommodate changes in ground level, create level development platforms and retain land where existing slopes are regraded.

The site presently contains a number of existing retaining features, including stone retaining walls of approximately 1.4m and 2.6m in height. The proposals indicate that certain existing walls will be retained whilst others may be removed or modified as part of the wider external works scheme.

In order to achieve the proposed site layout, areas of higher ground will require excavation (cut) to form level terraces, footways, play spaces and landscaped areas. Conversely, lower-lying areas will require engineered fill to raise levels where necessary and to ensure continuity between external spaces. The extent of these earthworks reflects the site's topography and the need to provide a functional and accessible environment.

The retaining structures will serve both an engineering and placemaking function by allowing the site to be developed without excessive gradients, whilst also limiting the visual and physical impact of more extensive earthworks. A condition will also be imposed requiring detailed design and technical approval of these retaining structures, engineered banks as well as means of enclosure as this information has not been made fully available in support of this application.

In respect of those concerns raised locally in relation to the proximity of the development to the South Wales Main Line railway embankment, Network Rail have been consulted and raised no overriding objection. Informative notes will be included on the decision noting making the development aware of the need to contact Network Rail prior to commencement of development.

As such, it is considered that the proposed retaining walls and associated cut-and-fill works represent an appropriate response to the site's existing topography and are necessary to facilitate the development.

Archaeology

A Level 2 Building Recording was undertaken by Archaeology Wales in advance of the proposed demolition works. The survey confirmed that, whilst the wider school dates from 1868, the classroom block proposed for demolition is a later addition first shown on mapping from the 1940s, with further alterations by 1970.

Glamorgan Gwent Archeological Trust have confirmed that the implementation of a programme of archaeological work shall be carried out in accordance with that out-lined in the submitted Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording that was provided in support of the application. A condition securing this will ensure that a record of features of archaeological interest discovered during the works is secured.

No further archaeological mitigation is considered necessary. Glamorgan Gwent Archeological Trust were consulted and have raised no objection on this basis.

Other matters

An objection was received from a registered blind (severely sight impaired) individual who requested reasonable adjustments to enable their effective participation in the planning process. In response, and in accordance with the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010, the case officer engaged directly with the objector to discuss the most appropriate means of support. Accessible communication arrangements were agreed, including the provision of direct officer contact details.

During these discussions, the objector expressed a wish to better understand the proposal through a site visit. In response to this request, an in-person site visit was arranged and attended by the objector, the planning case officer and the building contractor. This allowed the objector to experience the site first-hand and gain a clearer understanding of the proposed development. By viewing the development area from appropriate locations and distances, and through detailed explanations provided by both the case officer and the contractor, the objector was able to better appreciate the scale, siting and positioning of the proposed buildings and structures, as well as how these would relate to his property and surrounding area.

The visit therefore represented a significant and proportionate adjustment, directly responding to the objector's request and assisting his participation in the planning process. The objector confirmed during the visit that no further information was required.

Furthermore, planning application has been considered in accordance with the Council's statutory procedures, which include public consultation and the opportunity for interested parties to submit representations. The Case Officer has undertaken a site visit and has fully considered all material planning considerations raised through the consultation process. Ward Members have also been made aware of the proposal through the Council's normal procedures.

CONCLUSION

The decision to recommend planning permission has been taken in accordance with Section 38 of The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which requires that, in determining a planning application the determination must be in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Development Plan comprises Future Wales - the National Plan 2040 and the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2011–2026) adopted January 2016.

It is considered that the proposal represents an appropriate form of development that would have no unacceptable impact on visual impacts, impact upon neighbouring properties, Highways and pedestrian safety, biodiversity, contaminated land, flooding and drainage. Accordingly, the proposed development is in accordance with Policies SP3, SP10, OS2, SC1, BE1, TR2, EN6, EN7 and EN8 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan.

It is further considered that the decision complies with Policy 2 (Strategic Placemaking), 9 (Resilient Ecological Networks and Green Infrastructure), 12 (Regional Connectivity) and 13 (Supporting Digital Communications) of Future Wales

- the National Plan 2040, and the Council's well-being objectives and the sustainable development principle in accordance with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.