



PLANNING STATEMENT

WILMOTT DIXON ON BEHALF OF MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

BLESSED CARLO ACUTIS SCHOOL ON SITE OF BISHOP HEDLEY
SCHOOL AND LAND TO THE WEST OF CALON UCHAF ROAD



An isometric line-art illustration of a cityscape with various buildings, streets, and vehicles, rendered in a light teal color. A large teal rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

PLANNING STATEMENT

On behalf of: Wilmott Dixon on Behalf of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

In respect of: Blessed Carlo Acutis School on site of Bishop Hedley School and land to the west of Calon Uchaf Road

Date: February 2023

Reference: R001

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application, submitted on behalf of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, for the:

“Proposed demolition of existing school and construction of a 3-16 school at the site of the existing, including sports facilities, and associated works (including landscaping, access and engineering works, temporary staff car park, construction compound and classrooms during construction) at the site of Bishop Hedley Campus and land to the west of Calon Uchaf Road, Gwaunfarren Road, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 9AN.”

- 1.2 The above description is referred to hereon as (‘the Proposed Development’) and the school land as (‘the Site’).

- 1.3 The Proposed Development is to demolish the existing school buildings on the site, to develop a singular, more compact school building in the northern section of the school estate, to leave the southern section mainly for sports facilities and car parking. The existing sports hall will be retained and refurbished. A separate rugby field is proposed on Plateaux 2 on land to the west of Galon Uchaf Road.

- 1.4 The new school will accommodate a 525-pupil place primary school with a 100 full time equivalent pupil place nursery and a 600 pupil (4 form entry) secondary school with community use.

- 1.5 In addition, the application includes for temporary works during construction including temporary staff parking.

- 1.6 This Planning Statement outlines the context within which the application is made and provides a detailed examination of the main planning considerations raised by the proposals, together with reasoned justification in support of the proposed development.

- 1.7 The statement is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides background to the Site and proposals;
- Section 3 provides a description of the characteristics of the site and surrounding area, and details regarding the planning history associated with the site;
- Section 4 provides details of the development proposals;
- Section 5 outlines the relevant planning policy framework in relation to the site and the development;
- Section 6 assesses the proposals against relevant planning policy;
- Section 7 sets out our conclusions.

- 1.8 This full planning application is supported by a suite of supporting plans and technical reports which should be viewed in conjunction with this report and are listed in the accompanying application Covering Letter.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Councils in Wales are responsible for promoting high educational standards and for delivering efficient primary and secondary education. Having the right schools in the right place and ensuring that they are fit for the 21st Century learner is the challenge facing each Authority.
- 2.2 Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council in conjunction with the Archdiocese has determined to review its Catholic faith provision on the basis of:
- educational standards;
 - the need for places and the accessibility of schools;
 - the quality and suitability of school accommodation; and
 - effective financial management.
- 2.3 In September 2019, the Council decided to approve closure St Aloysius RC Primary, St Illtyd's RC Primary and St Mary's RC Primary Schools and Bishop Hedley RC High School creating a 3-16 all through Catholic education provision. It was then agreed to utilise Welsh Government 21st Century Band B monies to rationalise this provision onto a modern purpose built campus.
- 2.4 Following a feasibility study undertaken by Atkins of the land south of 'Greenie,' west of Galon Uchaf Road and the current BHHS upper and lower sites as potential preferred sites, two site options were taken out to consultation in November 2020, these were:
- Option 1 – Buttercup Fields
 - Option 2 – Greenie
- 2.5 In January 2021, following a review of the consultation responses, the land south of the 'Greenie,' west of Galon Uchaf Road was approved as the preferred site for the new 3-16 VA school and Willmott Dixon were engaged for Phase 1 design development works to further scope the best solutions for the siting of the school building, traffic management, drop-off/parking and sports facilities.
- 2.6 Following discussion and engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders including Cabinet Members, Ward Councillors, the Archdiocese, the new 3-16 Governing Body, and Headteachers/Chairs of Governors of the current Catholic schools, Gurnos FC and concerned residents in respect of the chosen option, the site for the proposed school was reviewed.
- 2.7 The Design Team were engaged to review the potential of utilising the existing Bishop Hedley site and additional land to the west of Galon Uchaf Road for the new school campus. The Local Authority went live with a public and stakeholder consultation in Spring 2021.
- 2.8 The result of this consultation exercise was that 80.5% of respondents preferred selected site Option B (BHHS) as their preferred option in comparison to 19.5% for site Option A (Greenie).

- 2.9 On 16th March 2022 at a special full Council meeting it was confirmed that the location of the new School was to be on the current Bishop Hedley High School site, with school sports pitch provided on Plateau 2 of the Buttercup Fields.

3.0 Site Description

3.1 This section describes the application site and its surrounding context.

Site Location

3.2 The application site covers the site of Bishop Hedley Campus of Blessed Carlo Acutis school and is located to the north of Merthyr Tydfil town centre, within the community of Pen-y-Darren.

3.3 The site is divided into two parts (Phase 1 and 2) with Phase 1 to the south of Gwaunfarren Road and Phase 2 to the north. Access to Phase 1 is achieved via this road. Galon Uchaf Road runs along the western boundary of the site, and access to Phase 2 of the site is achieved via this road.

3.4 The site boundary is outlined in red in the aerial image at Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Site Boundary



Surrounding Context

3.5 The site is surrounded by the residential areas of Pen-y-Darren and Galon Uchaf, which are typically made up of two and three storeys, detached, semi-detached and terraced housing.



- 3.6 Immediately to the north and northwest of the site is the Galon Uchaf Park and 'the Greenie', a large green open space. To the east is the Royal Crescent Allotment which is allocated in the LDP as an Open Space Site.
- 3.7 Gwaunfarren Primary School is located directly to the southwest of the site.
- 3.8 The site has good bus transport links, with Bishop Hedley School bus stop located on Gwaunfarren Road adjoining the site's access.

Site Description

- 3.9 The site is occupied by Blessed Carlo Acutis School (Bishop Hedley Campus) and comprises two parcels of land with the main school buildings to the north and south of Gwaunfarren Road. Originally constructed in the early 1970's, the buildings are now of some age and have deteriorated significantly over the years, with some areas in particularly poor condition.
- 3.10 The buildings vary in height but are generally two or three storeys in height and comprise general teaching facilities for the Bishop Hedley Campus students.
- 3.11 The School's sports hall is a more modern addition which was constructed in the mid-90's under planning permission ref. P/96/0208 and is located to the south of Gwaunfarren Road.
- 3.12 The rest of the site comprises areas of hardstanding and landscaping. The areas of hardstanding are located to the south and west of Phase 1 and north of Phase 2.
- 3.13 Grassed play spaces are located throughout the site, including to the east and west of Phase 2 and to the west and south of Phase 1. Trees are also dotted throughout the site, which include both category A and B trees.

- 3.14 Currently, the site comprises multiple and complex site levels. The level change varies from +274.89 to +240.48, a change approximately 35m across the site.
- 3.15 The site is at low risk of river and sea flooding. However, small parts of the site in Phase 1 are at medium risk of surface water flooding.
- 3.16 Parking is currently provided immediately to the east of the main Phase 1 building as well as to the north of the main Phase 2 building. There is also a relatively large pick up and drop off area to the north of the site.
- 3.17 There is an underground tunnel which links both Phase 1 and Phase 2 together for a safe crossing of the road.
- 3.18 The land to the west of Galon Uchaf Road comprises unallocated open land laid to grass with some vegetation along its east and west extremities. The residential properties along Galon Uchaf Road encloses the eastern side of the land. To the west, the land drops to a watercourse. To the north, a formal football pitch used by Gurnos FC is located within a fenced off area. To the south is a further area of unallocated open land which proposed to be used temporarily for car parking during the construction phase.

Planning History

- 3.19 A search of Merthyr Tydfil's online planning records has highlighted a limited amount of planning history relating to the Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School, with no history relating to Phase 2 of the School.
- 3.20 However, a short summary of the site's planning history can be found in the table below:

Reference	Proposal	Decision and Date
P/12/0208	Installation of solar photovoltaic modules to the flat and pitched roofs	Approved 20 th Sept 2012.
P/96/0208	Demolition of existing sports hall and replacement with new one	Approved 26 th July 1996.

4.0 Proposed Development

4.1 The Proposed Development is for the following:

“Proposed demolition of existing school and construction of a 3-16 school at the site of the existing, including sports facilities, and associated works (including landscaping, access and engineering works, temporary staff car park, construction compound and classrooms during construction) at the site of Bishop Hedley Campus and land to the west of Calon Uchaf Road, Gwaunfarren Road, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 9AN”

4.2 The new all-through 3 to 16 age range school will replace the existing St Aloysius RC Primary Campus, the Federation of St Illtyd’s RC and St Mary’s RC Primary Campuses and Bishop Hedley High Campus. The proposal is to demolish the existing buildings (albeit retaining the existing more modern sports hall) on the Bishop Hedley Campus site and to redevelop the site for a new school building, sports facilities and associated works.

4.3 The form of the building has been developed to reflect the need to achieve an efficient footprint, create good external play areas in proximity to key internal spaces, good levels of natural daylight to all areas, and good visibility and supervision across the building and external areas.

4.4 In accordance with the Sustainable Schools for Learning Programme, BCA Catholic School will be designed and delivered to achieve Net Zero Carbon in Operation.

Proposed New Build Development

Layout and Massing

4.5 Given the complex site levels, the northern parcel of the site will accommodate the main built development and is split into a primary wing to the north, shared wing in the centre and secondary wing to the south (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Proposed New School Building (divided into primary, shared and secondary wings)

- 4.6 The primary wing comprises 2 storeys, the shared wing in the centre of the building comprises 3 storeys, and the secondary wing to the south comprises a part 3 part 4 storey building.
- 4.7 The proposal will form a more compact footprint compared with the existing building arrangement.
- 4.8 The shared space in the centre of the building will include a chapel, shared kitchen, and community room.
- 4.9 The primary wing will comprise both nursery and primary classrooms. The secondary wing will comprise food and design technology and computer/IT classrooms at ground floor. On the first floor, the building will comprise of drama, languages, and music classrooms, as well as a secondary dining hall. The second floor will comprise of maths, RS and computer classrooms, while the third floor will comprise of humanities, art/graphic, and science labs.
- 4.10 In terms of outdoor play, nursery hard outdoor play is proposed at the very north of the site (with terraced seating), primary hard outdoor play is proposed east of the primary wing, and the secondary hard outdoor play will be located to the east of the secondary wing.
- 4.11 To the west of the primary wing, there are proposed drop off parking points, which include 30 standard parking bays and 6 disabled bays. Furthermore, to the west of the shared wing, there are a further 6 disabled parking bays proposed adjacent to the School's main entrance. Additionally by the entrance to the School, there will be a memorial garden and terrace with shrub and tree planting.
- 4.12 In terms of cycling, there are 28 cycle parking spaces proposed by the entrance to the school, and 28 spaces to the south of the new school building, and a further 77 in the southern parcel of land adjoining the new car park.
- 4.13 The arrangement of the building in Phase 2 is efficient and locates most of the development within the northern portion of the site, allowing the use of a large portion of land to the south for sports pitches, sports hall and car parking.
- 4.14 The southern part of the site will be used for car parking and sport provision.
- 4.15 The existing sports hall will be retained and refurbished, and an adjoining new 2 storey block is proposed to accommodate changing rooms, an activity studio and PE classrooms. These will be linked by a single storey circulation spine with a new plant room, sports hall storage and office.
- 4.16 The existing sports hall footprint of 639sqm is large enough to accommodate 4 badminton pitches (6.1m wide x 13.4m long).
- 4.17 Adjoining the sports hall on ground floor, the building will consist of a small office to provide a control point for out of hours use at the point of entry, two pupil changing rooms, pupil WCs and

staff changing rooms. On first floor, there will be two PE classrooms, a PE staff office and a set of WCs.

- 4.18 The majority of the school's outdoor play areas are proposed to the south of the site in Phase 1. This includes a 2 court MUGA immediately to the north of the sports hall, and to the south, a 2 court 3G pitch, 1 court MUGA, and the existing grassed sports pitch will be retained and restored.
- 4.19 The main car parking area is proposed to the south of the school's estate in Phase 1, east of the sports hall. This includes 98 car parking spaces and a proposed drop off area.
- 4.20 Both Phase 1 and 2 areas will be connected via the existing underground tunnel which will be refurbished.

Appearance

- 4.21 The primary and secondary wings are predominantly facing brick contrasting with the shared wing which is predominantly powder coated aluminium. Use is made of contrasting materials to reflect each element and to express the interconnections between the different wings. The contrasting materials are also used to visually break up the scale of each building blocks, for example by continuing the aluminium cladding across the top floor of the secondary wing.

Access and Parking

- 4.22 Pedestrian access to the northern section is provided via Galon Uchaf Road to the west or Gwaunfarren Road to the south. Vehicular access is provided from Galon Uchaf Road.
- 4.23 Access to the southern section will be achieved via Gwaunfarren Road to the north.
- 4.24 The main parking area is proposed in the southern section, where 98 car parking spaces are proposed, as well as a dedicated bus drop-off point.
- 4.25 There will also be a drop off parking area consisting of 30 standard parking spaces and 6 disabled spaces to the north of Phase 2, west of the primary wing.
- 4.26 A further 6 disabled parking bays are proposed adjacent to the main entrance, to the west of the shared wing.
- 4.27 In terms of cycle parking, 28 covered bicycle parking is to be provided by the entrance to the west of the shared wing, and a further 32 cycle spaces will be located to the south of the secondary wing.

Landscaping

- 4.28 The landscape design links habitats and green spaces throughout, retaining a good deal of existing vegetation and replacing any lost with significant new tree and hedgerow planting. New planting will provide screening habitat and improved biodiversity as well as assist in climate resilience and wellbeing.

- 4.29 The design also successfully incorporates the new buildings into a complex topography, via a series of retaining walls and level plateaus serving the schools external needs.
- 4.30 In addition, the SuDS measures are incorporated into the landscape design to make best use of the features and integrate them with the landscaping and biodiversity of the site.

Construction Works

- 4.31 A draft construction management plan is included within the application to provide some information as to how this complex build will be managed over the course of the construction phase.
- 4.32 The initial phase of development will include the demolition of the northern buildings and construction of the new school. The second phase will then focus on the southern parcel which includes the demolition of the existing buildings and works to the sports hall.
- 4.33 Management of construction traffic, drop off and pick up of school pupils will be key in this period. The submission confirms that Plateau 1 on land west of Galon Uchaf Road will be utilised in part as a contractors compound and as a car park for both staff and contractor. This area will need to be surfaced with 'bodpave'. It will accommodate some of the site offices with the remaining contractor storage being on the main school site. Following the completion of the project the area will be returned to its former use and enhanced with wildflower planting.
- 4.34 A temporary drop-off and pick-up area will be provided on Gwaunfarren Road during the course of construction.

5.0 Planning Policy Overview

- 5.1 Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that in determining a planning application the determination must be in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.2 The Development Plan for the area comprises the Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) 2016 - 2031 which was formally adopted by Council on 29th January 2020.

National Planning Policy

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 11) 2021

- 5.3 National Planning Policy is contained within the 11th edition of Planning Policy Wales (PPW), published by the Welsh Government in February 2021. PPW is supported by 20 topic-based Technical Advice Notes (TANs), which are also relevant.
- 5.4 PPW is the Welsh Government's principal planning policy document, with the primary objective of ensuring 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.
- 5.5 PPW and the National Development Framework (NDF) set out how the planning system at a national, regional and local level can assist in delivering these requirements through Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) and Local Development Plan (LDPs).
- 5.6 They identify the importance of education for economic, social and sustainability of Wales (para 3.61) and that they are well placed to support active and social linkages (Chapter 4). Appropriate education infrastructure is also identified as being essential for a 'Productive and Enterprising Wales' (Chapter 5).

Well-being & Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 5.7 The Well-Being and Future Generations (Wales) Act (WBFG) 2015 requires bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.
- 5.8 To ensure we all works towards the same purpose, the Act puts in place seven well-being goals which public bodies are required to work towards achieving. The Act is a material consideration in planning terms and therefore its goals are considered relevant to this proposal. These are as follows:

- A prosperous Wales;
- A resilient Wales;
- A healthier Wales;
- A more equal Wales;
- A Wales of cohesive communities;
- A Wales of vibrant culture and Welsh Language;
- A globally responsible Wales.

5.9 Education is a key component which influences all of the above goals. The importance of providing high quality education within inspiring and well-considered settings should not be under-estimated in terms its significance to the well-being of our future generations should not

Technical Advice Notes

5.10 Planning Policy Wales is supplemented by a series of 21 topic based Technical Advice Notes (TANs) which provide practical guidance relating to various forms of development and the role of the planning system in dealing with the determination of planning applications. The following TANs are considered relevant to this application:

- TAN 11 – Noise (1997);
- TAN 12 – Design (2016);
- TAN 16 – Sport, Recreation & Open Space (2009);
- TAN 18 – Transport (2007).

The Development Plan

Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) 2016 - 2031

5.11 The statutory development plan for the purpose of Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 is the Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan which was adopted in January 2020.

5.12 The Proposals Map identifies the school as being within the Settlement limits, and highlights it as falling within a Heat Priority Area, however does not designate the land for any particular use.

5.13 It is considered that the proposed development will assist in achieving the objectives set out within the LDP Strategy. These include the following:

- LDP Objective 4 Regeneration: To promote the suitable reuse of previously developed land and the continued regeneration of local communities.
- LDP Objective 5 Infrastructure: To ensure that community infrastructure and open space supports the regeneration of local communities.
- LDP Objective 6 Sustainable Design: To promote high quality, sustainable and inclusive design and support measures, which mitigate the predicted effects of climate change.

- LDP Objective 7 Transport: To support an integrated transport system, promote active travel and ensure new developments are accessible by walking, cycling and public transport links.
 - LDP Objective 8 Community Facilities: To support existing community facilities and suitable community led development.
 - LDP Objective 10 Biodiversity: To improve ecosystem resilience and connectivity which support habitats and species of principle importance.
- 5.14 The following Local Development Plan policies contained within the LDP are considered to be of relevance to this application.
- 5.15 From a high level strategic perspective, **Policy SW4** states that development will be encouraged within settlement boundaries (as proposed by this development) to encourage development within urban areas, support the re-use of previously developed land, and to protect and support the functioning of our rural economy and the countryside.
- 5.16 **Policy SW10** highlights that development proposals that improve the quality, quantity or access to open space will generally be supported. The policy also seeks to protect existing open space by setting out criteria that would need to be met to justify any loss. These include, an assessment of the quantum of space in the area, whether other areas can be enhanced to compensate for the loss resulting from redevelopment.
- 5.17 **Policy SW11** states that development must contribute to the creation of attractive and sustainable places through high quality, sustainable and inclusive design. Where appropriate, the development will be required to comply with a set of requirements, such as to be appropriate to its local context in terms of scale, height, massing, elevational treatment, materials and detailing, layout, form, mix and density.
- 5.18 **Policy SW12** articulates that development that encourages a modal shift towards sustainable transport will be supported, including the enhancement of pedestrian, cycle, rail and bus facilities, in addition to any necessary road improvements. Development proposals will be expected to demonstrate how they reduce the need to travel and encourage the use of sustainable transport.
- 5.19 **Policy SW13** confirms that the provision of new and enhanced community facilities will be supported subject to satisfying other relevant LDP policies.
- 5.20 **Policy EnW4** requires that development proposals demonstrate that they will not result in an unacceptable impact on people, residential amenity, property and / or the natural environment from issues such as pollution, contamination and noise.
- 5.21 **Policy EnW5** states that development proposals will be permitted where it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that it would not cause unacceptable harm to the character and quality of the landscape setting of the County Borough.

- 5.22 Given the site's location within a heat priority area, **Policy EcW9** will need to be considered. This policy states major development will be expected to incorporate, where viable and technically feasible, infrastructure for district heating and to connect to existing systems where available.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- 5.23 The following Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) are considered relevant to this development proposal:
- Planning Obligations SPG
 - Sustainable Design SPG
 - Nature and Development SPG

6.0 Planning Assessment

6.1 This section identifies the main issues relevant to the determination of the application and assesses the scheme against the relevant planning policy framework. These matters are considered to be as follows:

- The principle of development – including the acceptability of the use of public open space for sports provision;
- The acceptability of the development in terms of highway capacity and safety;
- The design of the development in relation to its location;
- The acceptability of the development in respect of site drainage;
- The acceptability of the development in terms of biodiversity and protected species;
- The acceptability of the development proposals in relation to trees and arboriculture;
- The proposed Ground condition remediation strategy; and
- The impact of Noise

Principle of Development

The Use of the site for Education Purposes

6.2 As highlighted in earlier chapters, the application site forms part of the existing Bishop Hedley Campus of the Carlos Acutis School located on the northern and southern sides of Gwaunfarren Road. The principle of the proposed use of the site is therefore considered to be accepted given the use of the site will remain as an educational facility falling within Use Class D1 - Non-residential institutions.

6.3 The current school buildings occupying the site are generally not of a standard for 21st century teaching and learning. The buildings are in very poor condition and are not conducive to modern educational requirements. This proposal seeks to address this through significant financial investment by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council in partnership with the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning programme.

6.4 The Well-Being of Future Generations Act and Planning Policy Wales places a significant emphasis on the importance of high quality education both in terms of curriculum, and facilities in sustainable locations with good accessibility to alternative forms of travel.

6.5 More locally, the MTCBC LDP acknowledges the importance of good education to enhance the economic well-being of the area, stating at para 6.7.6:

“One of the Council’s local well-being objectives is to develop the workforce of the future. The Council has committed to the Cardiff Capital Region and a £1.2 billion deal to unlock £4bn of private investment, drive significant economic growth and create 25,000 jobs. The most relevant elements of the Cardiff City Deal Growth and Competitiveness Commission’s Report (2016) are:

..... • *Investing in education (from early years to university), skills and employability as the primary way in which individuals can access opportunities and firms can improve productivity, and;*

- 6.6 The site is located within the settlement limits of Merthyr Tydfil and, therefore, accords with Policy SW4 of the adopted development plan which seeks to direct development to locations within settlement boundaries.
- 6.7 The main proposal also constitutes the redevelopment of previously developed land and will deliver significant social and educational benefits. As such, the site fully accords with the objective of delivering sustainable development contained within PPW Edition 10 and the LDP.
- 6.8 The inclusion of an all-weather pitch and games court as part of the proposed development is supported by Policy SW13 which acknowledges that: *"The provision of new and enhanced community facilities will be supported subject to satisfying other relevant LDP policies. The Council will protect and support the enhancement of the County Borough's existing community facilities."*

The Use of Undesignated Open Space for Educational Sports Provision

- 6.9 As part of the proposals, Plateau 2 of the land west of Galon Uchaef Road will be utilised as a school rugby pitch. The pitch will be enclosed and used solely by the school. There will be no community use of the pitch and it will not be floodlit.
- 6.10 It is understood from various discussions with local residents that the land is currently suffers from anti-social behaviour in the form of motorbike or quad bike riding. It is also, however, used by dog walkers.
- 6.11 This particular element of the application site is not covered by any specific designation in terms of protection of open space (Policy SW10), however, it closely relates to one such site. Technically there is no requirement therefore to justify the loss of designated open space, however, it is understood to be an area which is used by residents.
- 6.12 Policy SW10 of the LDP sets out the criteria under which the loss of open space will be considered. The second bullet point of this policy confirms that the loss of part of the open space will not be permitted unless *'the majority of the open space can be retained and enhanced through the re-development of a small part of the site.'*
- 6.13 As highlighted, none of the designated open space will be lost. Part of the undesignated land will be utilised for a rugby pitch. In terms of the remaining area, following the completion of the construction process, the contractors compound and temporary staff parking will be removed from Plateau 1 and the area re-seeded with a wild flower mix. Dog walking routes will be included and further planting will be provided around the rugby pitch.
- 6.14 Accordingly, it is considered that the area will be enhanced from a visual and biodiversity perspective for the long term enjoyment of local residents.

Summary

- 6.15 In summary, the principle of development is acceptable given the site is currently in use for an educational establishment and is therefore entirely consistent with the local plan policies. Whilst a some of the land to the west of Galon Uchaf Road will be utilised for a rugby pitch, it is undesignated open space and following the completion of works the remaining area will be enhanced for the long term enjoyment of local residents in line with policy SW10.

Highways

- 6.16 The application is accompanied by a Transport Statement & Travel Plan prepared by Cambria.
- 6.17 The proposed development results in a net increase in the number of pupils entering the site. Despite this there are no anticipated negative impacts on the local highway network given the number of proposed improvements to the schools accessibility from a vehicular and pedestrian perspective.
- 6.18 The access arrangements will be complimented by the introduction of highway improvements that include new pedestrian crossing facilities on Galon Uchaf Road and Gwanfarren Road and waiting restrictions to prevent indiscriminate parking.
- 6.19 New signalised pedestrian crossing points will be provided along Galon Uchaf Road. Within the site, appropriate parking provision is made for the anticipated parking demand, ensuring that overspill parking will not be problematic. The layout of the parking area is intuitive and allows for passengers to alight safely onto footways. Buses and service vehicles can circulate without the need for hazardous reversing movements.
- 6.20 It is concluded that the development site is appropriate for the proposed use of the site and it will remain accessible by a range of transport methods. It is served by a safe access, appropriate parking provision is made and it is considered that the traffic generated by the development will have no significant impact on highway conditions. As such it is considered that there are no highway or transportation issues that should prevent the proposal from gaining planning permission.

Design

- 6.21 The accompanying Design and Access Statement sets out how the scheme has developed over the past 18 months to the current position. The DAS prepared by Atkins sets out how the building has responded to the key constraints of the site whilst also seeking to balance the space requirements for such developments, including play and sports pitches.
- 6.22 The changes in level across the site are significant. The scheme has sought to utilise the existing plateau's within the site as much as possible. The northern parcel is reserved for the main school building which will house the primary and secondary elements, and the southern area used for

parking and sports facilities. The existing tunnel connecting the two sites will remain and improved to provide a link.

- 6.23 The main entrance will be located on the western elevation and will include the 'heart' of the operation – including the main visitor reception and other shared facilities. To the north of this will be the main primary school area and the secondary to the south.
- 6.24 The buildings will be mainly two and three storeys in height finished in facing brickwork and aluminium standing seam cladding. Glazed elements will break up the elevations with some full height elements on the southern elevation.
- 6.25 Given there is no predominant character in the area from a design perspective, and given this is in some ways a civic building, the proposed architectural form, character and materials, along with the significant planting and landscaping proposed, will result in a high quality design which the school and local residents would be proud of.
- 6.26 It will create a successful and engaging space for students to learn and will also seek to minimise its impact on the planet by being net zero in operation – both of which are entirely consistent with the aims of the Future Generations Act.
- 6.27 Accordingly it is considered that the proposal is acceptable and in line with local plan policies which seek to promote good design.

Drainage

- 6.28 A Drainage Strategy Report has been prepared by Cambria to identify suitable outfall locations for the Surface Water and Foul Water from the proposed development.
- 6.29 The findings of the report conclude that Welsh Water have confirmed there is sufficient capacity within the sewerage network for the additional peak foul flows generated by the development proposed. The foul drainage will connect into the 150mm diameter public combined sewer on Plantation Close via the existing sewer south-east of the site.
- 6.30 As part of the drainage strategy the SuDS and landscaping scheme designed by Atkins will bring multiple amenity and biodiversity benefits to the area and produce opportunities for nature play spaces and outdoor educational areas.
- 6.31 The surface water strategy will be subject to SAB approval and further detailed design.

Ecology

- 6.32 The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecology Survey produced by EcoLogical relating to the Bishop Hedley Campus and Thompson Ecological Services for the land to the west of Galon Uchaf Road. It is noted, however, that on submission there are bat surveys to be undertaken on the buildings on the land to the south of Gwaunfarren Road. These will be undertaken as soon as

the season/weather allows and will be submitted prior to determination. These surveys will also inform the final mitigation measures for the site.

- 6.33 The Preliminary Ecology Survey, comprising a desk study and extended Phase 1 habitat survey, was carried out for the site. Two statutory designated sites, Cwm Glo a Glyndyrys SSSI and Cwm Taf Fechan Woodlands SSSI, and 13 SINCs lie within 2km of the site, however no significant negative impacts to any designated site, or any priority habitats, are anticipated as a result of the works.
- 6.34 Mitigation measures have been proposed for protected species comprising common reptiles and amphibians, breeding birds, bats, and small mammals, as well as for invasive species. Ecological enhancements to improve the site for wildlife have been recommended. These measures should ensure that the works proposals are compliant with the relevant legislation and planning policy.
- 6.35 Bat surveys have been undertaken for the initial phase of development which has confirmed the presence of bats within the building. Accordingly the application will make the necessary allowance for mitigation including bat boxes on the proposed building once the full picture in terms of bat presence is known (prior to determination of the application).
- 6.36 Further survey for badger and bats are recommended to determine the presence or likely. Further survey for Japanese knotweed has also been recommended in order to ascertain the full extent of the growth of the Japanese knotweed stands on site and inform an ISMP for the site.
- 6.37 It is concluded, therefore, that subject to the additional surveys and appropriate mitigation in place, the site would result in no material impacts on ecology and, in conjunction with the mitigation, SUDs features, and landscaping proposals, there would be an overall enhancement in accordance with local and national policies.

Trees/ Arboriculture

- 6.38 An Arboricultural Report accompanies this application which assesses the quality and constraints of the trees at the application site. The report details the Tree Survey Data & Tree Constraints Plan, Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Tree Protection Plan and Arboricultural Method Statement. The findings of the report set out a Tree Protection Plan to facilitate the construction of the development design to ensure there are minimal impacts as a result of the development.
- 6.39 The report further identifies several trees and hedgerows for removal to facilitate the construction of the proposed development – 36 individual trees, 8 small tree groups/part of tree groups and 358 metres of hedgerow. 27 of these trees and 6 tree groups are either low or poor-quality trees (C / U Category). These trees should not present a constraint on developing the site and shouldn't require replacement mitigation for their loss. The removal of the moderate quality trees (B Category = 9 individual Trees and 2 tree groups (made up of 10 trees) = a total of 19 moderate quality trees). These trees can be readily mitigated for by suitable compensatory tree planting. Further to this, the hedgerows proposed to be removed have the potential to be translocated within the site. AMEND ONCE FULL SURVEY RECEIVED

- 6.40 Notwithstanding the above, and as outlined within the Design & Access Statement, some 500+ new trees of varying maturity will be planted as part of the development. This is a significant and important investment in the character of the site. Whilst a significant proportion of these will be young saplings, there is clear evidence that these trees have a significantly greater survival rates than the more mature specimen. As such, a planting scheme combining a mature and young trees will ensure a successful and long term connected landscaping scheme for the site which benefits the area both visually and from a biodiversity perspective.
- 6.41 The construction of the proposed development, whilst complying with the tree protection scheme as detailed in section 6, will ensure that no significant long-term adverse Arboricultural impact occurs on the health of any retained trees on or adjacent to this site or the long-term amenity of the area.

Ground Conditions

- 6.42 A Site Investigation report has been prepared by Intégral Géotechnique (Wales) Limited which recommends that a series of rotary probe holes are drilled to a depth of 35m across the site to determine the presence of any shallow mine workings.
- 6.43 Due to the limited site access at the time of the site investigation, it is recommended that following site demolition and clearance, exposed formations are checked by a geotechnical engineer for signs of contamination and further soil samples are taken from beneath the former buildings for laboratory contamination testing and further risk assessment.
- 6.44 Additional site investigation works will also be required at the location of the recorded mine shaft in the eastern part of the northern site area. These works will need to be undertaken once access to the current Welsh Water easement is allowed.

Noise

- 6.45 The noise impacts arising from the construction will be managed through a Construction Management Plan during the construction phase. There is no anticipated difference in noise levels during the operational phase given the use of the site will remain as an educational facility for children.
- 6.46 The report outlines the requirement for an acoustic fence along the eastern boundary of the rugby pitch on the land to the west of Galon Uchaf Road. This is to minimise the impacts on the adjoining residents. This, along with the proposed landscaping will assist in minimising both the visual and noise impacts of the rugby pitch in accordance with the policies of the LDP.

7.0 Summary and Conclusions

- 7.1 As demonstrated through this Planning Statement, the application proposals accord with relevant national and local plan policies meaning they should be supported.
- 7.2 The current school building occupying the site is generally not of a standard for 21st century teaching and learning. The proposal supports the Merthyr Tydfil Council's commitment to establishing high quality catholic education in the area, as well as establishing modern, high quality learning environments that meet the school's aspirations. This is enabled through significant financial investment by the Council in partnership with the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Investment programme. The new school building will offer a high-quality learning environment.
- 7.3 Section 6 of this statement and the supporting technical reports demonstrate the following:
- National and local policy support the improvement of existing schools;
 - The design of the scheme takes into consideration site constraints and opportunities and delivers a well-designed proposal;
 - The layout and design of the school does not raise any amenity concerns;
 - There are no severe residual impacts from the development in terms of highways, access or traffic; and
 - The proposed development has been found to be acceptable in terms of all other site-specific considerations namely; ground conditions, flood risk, drainage, noise and ecology.
- 7.4 On this basis, it is considered that the proposed development accords with relevant national and local planning policy, guidance and material planning considerations. As such, there is no planning justification for permission not to be granted.

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