

BikePark Wales Environmental Statement Vol.2: Appendices and Figures

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Chapter 2: Legislative Context

March 2019

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FIGURES:

N/A

APPENDICES:

APPENDICES	TITLE
2.1	SCREENING OPINION REQUEST
2.2	SCREENING OPIINION
2.3	INFORMAL SCREENING ADVICE

Our Ref: BikePark Wales / UG1741

Your Ref:

8th October 2018

Mr D Cross
Planning Officer
Planning and Building Control
Civic Centre,
Castle St, Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8AN

Dear Mr Cross,

RE: Request for an EIA Screening Opinion for development proposed at BikePark Wales, Gethin Woods, Merthyr Tydfil.

Please find enclosed information on development proposed at BikePark Wales. This information is provided for the reference of the Local Planning Authority for the purpose of providing an EIA screening opinion.

Previous correspondence with the Planning Authority established that the proposed development would fall within Category 10(b) of schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2017, and would not in itself be sufficient to be considered EIA development on the grounds that the total site area is 3.02 ha (of which only 1.13 ha is undeveloped) and the threshold for category 10(b) is 5 ha. However, it was concluded by the Planning Authority that the proposed development would mark a significant extension to the existing Park and that cumulatively the proposed development and the existing facility would warrant the need to seek an EIA screening opinion.

The existing developed area of BikePark Wales is 1.5ha. To deliver the proposed development 1.13 ha of previously undeveloped land would be developed. Cumulatively the total developed areas of the Park would then be 2.63ha, which again falls below the category 10 (b) threshold. A screening opinion has been sought, however, to satisfy the conclusion reached by the Planning Authority.

The information provided below is that required by the Planning Authority in order to allow it to make a screening opinion, as set out in the Regulations 2017. Information includes: a plan sufficient to identify the land; a description of the development (including a description of the location of the development and the physical characteristics of the development); a description of the aspects of the environment that are likely to

be affected by the development; (a description of the likely significant effects of the proposed development on the environment resulting from (i) residues, emissions and waste and (ii) the use of natural resources including soil, land, water, biodiversity; and a summary position on whether the development is considered to be EIA development.

1. The Proposed Development

1.1 The Development

The proposed development consists of the following:

- Bike hire building (approx, 15m by 10.5m);
- New catering facility (approx, 6m by 3m);
- Extension to the existing terrace;
- Bike cleaning facility;
- Trail maintenance storage yard;
- Staff office building (approx, 9m by 5m);
- 37 two -bedroom camping pods (approx, 5m by 3.5m);
- Six six-bedroom chalets (approx, 14m by 9m);
- Children's play area;
- 136 daily vehicle parking spaces;
- Overflow parking area providing 84 overflow spaces for events; and
- New access routes (pedestrian and vehicles).

The above development is required in order for BikePark Wales to maintain its position in the market. Since opening, BikePark Wales has seen a continual increase in visitor numbers from approximately 47,500 tickets sold in 2013/14 to approximately 75,000 tickets sold in 2017/18. Continued growth is expected, but the mountain bike market is also becoming increasingly competitive. To ensure continued growth and prominence in the market place, BikePark Wales has planned and secured funding to implement a growth plan over the next 4 years that would result in a capital investment of £1.5 million. This investment is imperative to ensure that BikePark Wales can strengthen its offer to existing and new customers and maintain its position as the premier mountain bike destination in the UK.

BikePark Wales anticipates that the new facilities that would be delivered by the proposals would increase visitor numbers to the Park by a further 30% by 2022. This increase in visitor numbers would allow the BikePark Wales business to grow and increase the positive impact that it has on the local economy in terms of job creation and increased overnight visitors to the local area. In respect of job creation, it is anticipated

that an additional 16 full-time jobs would be created through the investment. This would take the total number of BikePark Wales employees to 70. In respect of overnight stays, previous survey suggests that 48% of visitors stay overnight. Based on current annual ticket sales of 75,000 this equates to 36,000 overnight stays per annum. Should this percentage of overnight stays continue then the investment would result in a further 10,800 overnight stays, which would take the total number of overnight stays to 46,800. While the camping pods and chalets would cater for some of the visitors this would be a fraction, and the local B&B trade that has emerged as a result of BikePark Wales would stand to benefit and continue to flourish.

1.2 The Site

BikePark Wales is located in the Gethin Woods to the west of the A470 and the settlement of Abercarnaid. BikePark Wales is a purpose built mountain bike centre that been delivered within the Gethin Woodland environment. The Park consists of world-class mountain bike trails, an access road from the A470, a series of parking areas and a central complex which includes the main centre building that acts as a headquarters to Bike ParkWales staff and provides visitors with key services (food and beverage; bike hire and maintenance; bike purchase and toilet and shower facilities). The bike trails are located to the west of the parking areas and central complex on elevated ground. The proposed development would be located on and adjacent to the parking areas and central complex. A site location plan and draft illustrative masterplan is enclosed.

The existing access road, parking areas and central complex have been delivered on land that was previously developed to accommodate a recreational facility associated with the Gethin Woodland Park (although some expansion into the adjacent woodland environment was required to accommodate additional parking capacity). Much of the proposed development would be delivered on land that is already developed and which is part of the parking areas or the Park's central complex. This includes: **the bike hire centre; catering facility; extension to the existing visitor terrace; bike cleaning facility; trail maintenance storage yard; staff office building; and part of the additional parking areas and associated access roads).**

The **camping pods, chalets and remaining parking areas and associated access roads** would be located on land to the east of the parking areas and central complex. This land is undeveloped and includes the following habitat types: semi-natural broad-leaved woodland; dense continuous scrub; semi-improved acid grassland; and small areas of ephemeral. A new reed bed with small area of open water is present in the in this part of the site, as are a series of land drains and a stream.

In respect of designations, parts of the site are designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. These are the Abercarnaid Fields and Craig Gethin SINCs. The extent of the designated boundaries are shown below. The Development Advice Map for Wales identifies that the development site is located in Flood Zone A, which TAN 15 considers to be “at little to no risk of flooding”. A stream is located adjacent to the site. The Development Advice Map identifies that this has a low risk of flooding. The exception to this is a small section, which is identified as having a medium risk.

An aerial view of the site, and a series of site photographs are provided below.



2. Aspects of the Environment that Could be Affected by the Development

In delivering the proposed development, the following aspects of the environment could be affected:

- Ecology - The development to be delivered on undeveloped land could result in harm to protected species and result in the loss of valuable existing natural habitat. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site has been undertaken, and this identifies there could be affects on the following: bats; reptiles; nesting birds; amphibians; invertebrates; hedgehog; and, the habitat Abercarnaid Fields SINC and Craig Gethin SINC.
- Landscape and Visual Character - The development would extend the Park to the east. This expansion could amend the landscape and visual character of the site and have a negative impact on views of the area from the surrounding landscape.
- Flooding and Water Resources - The extension to the Park would increase areas of hardstanding (parking areas and access routes etc). This could increase the risk of flooding onsite and offsite. Vehicles accessing these areas could also reduce water quality around and downstream of the site.
- Local Highway Network - The proposed development is required to accommodate and cater for increased visitors to the site. Additional vehicles associated with the development could have a negative affect on the local highway network.
- Ground Conditions - The provision of new areas of hardstanding could result in ground stabilisation issues. Contamination might also be present, and there might be unknown historical buried structures or shafts in the area.
- Pollution, Odour and Light Spill - The additional vehicles visiting the site could increase the risk of fuel spillages and reduction in air quality levels. Odour might result from the proposed uses. Sections of the extended area of the Park would also need the lit. This could result in light spillage from the site to the surrounding area.
- Socio-Economic - The proposed development would increase the number of visitors to the site. More visitors to the Park would provide the opportunity for Bike Park Wales to increase the number of employment opportunities at the Park. More visits would also increase opportunities for local overnight accommodation providers, since a number of the new visitors would require overnight accommodation offsite.

3. Likely Significant Effects of the Development on the Environment

The likely significant effects of the proposed development on the environment are set out below:

- **Ecology and Site Habitat** - As previously outlined, much of the development would be delivered on previously developed land that has little / no ecological value. This part of the proposed development would likely result in no significant ecological effects. However, there is clearly potential for the development being delivered on the undeveloped parcel of land to the east of the existing Park to result in harm to protected species and the loss of valuable existing natural habitat (including SINC habitat). Should this occur ecological effects would likely be negative adverse. To quantify the likely ecological impacts of the development, a Ecological Impact Assessment (including a series of targeted surveys) have been undertaken. The report outlines and recommends a number of mitigation factors in relation to Designated Sites of Scientific Interest and Protected specie, namely bats, common dormice, European otter, reptiles and nesting birds. A summary of key recommendations is provided below:

Species	Recommendation
Bats	• Retain all larger trees highlighted as having suitable features for bats. • Seek ecological guidance for any tree works. • Install bat boxes Schwegler Type 2FN X 5 (exact locations and elevations to be determined by ecologist on site). • Retain dark corridors across the site with no lighting of any tree, vegetated corridor , water feature or bat feature.
Common dormouse	• No further surveys required. • Precautionary vegetation removal advised under ecological supervision. • Removal to be undertaken after the bird breeding season (i.e. after mid September) with above ground vegetation only removed in the winter period, following a check by a licensed dormouse ecologist.

European otter, badger, other mammals	• No further surveys required. • All excavations or trenching that are not covered will include a means of escape for any animals that may fall into them (This may be a plank set at 30° to allow escape).
Great crested newt and amphibians	• No further surveys required. • Herpetofauna-proof fencing installed around the perimeter of the site prior to works being completed; precautionary works advised as per the advice for reptiles.
Reptiles	• A reptile mitigation strategy is required to be agreed by the LPA planning ecologist, and then followed. • The reptile strategy will translocate site reptiles to adjacent land.
Nesting birds	• Any vegetation clearance will take place outside of the bird nesting season, i.e. after 31st August and before 1st March. • Some species of birds are known to nest outside of these dates in suitable conditions and so caution is advised during clearance.
Invertebrates	• No further surveys required. • Compensation management is recommended, with natural regeneration of “reptile area” and overseeding with devil’s bit scabious.

Table 1: Summary of likely ecological effects

The Ecological Impact Assessment identifies that with the mitigation measures outlined above, it is possible for there to be no major impacts on any protected species or habitat as a result of the proposals. A copy of the ecology report is included in the appendix.

- Landscape and Visual Character - Expanding the Park into areas of woodland and grassland would inevitably alter the landscape character of that part of the site. However, this would be minimised through a bespoke landscape design. The objective of the strategy would be to integrate the site into the surrounding woodland and ensure that any landscape character change is minimised. Specifically, the strategy would minimise the loss of existing green infrastructure; provide appropriate replacement habitat;

and screen views of the development from the areas surrounding the site. Views from the surrounding areas are limited due to the elevated nature of the site and the presence of surrounding woodland. High level views of the site would only be possible from the opposite valley slope, but views from this location would be reduced by the considerable distance from the site; and the fact that the new development would be viewed in the context of the surrounding valley floor, which is urban in character and the existing BikePark Wales centre. Subject to the implementation of the landscape strategy, it is considered that landscape and visual effects would likely be limited to moderate adverse effects. A Landscape Appraisal would be included in the planning submitted application to objectively quantify the landscape and visual impact of the proposed development. The scope for this appraisal has been agreed with the Local Authority Landscape Officer.

- Flooding and Water Resources - As part of the development a bespoke drainage strategy (foul and surface) water would be devised. This would ensure that current greenfield run off rates are maintained. To ensure that the new development does not result in additional pollution, appropriate pollution control measures would be integrated into the development drainage design. Subject to the implementation of an appropriate drainage strategy, it is considered that there would likely be no adverse effects on flood risk and water resources. A drainage strategy would be included in the submitted planning application.
- Local Highway Network - A Transport Assessment of the proposed development has been undertaken and would be included in the planning application. The scope of the Transport Assessment (TA) fully considers comments from the Highway Authority and Welsh Government (WG), and considers the traffic impacts across the key strategic routes (including a detailed assessment at the A470 / A4060 / site access roundabout as agreed with Welsh Government). An EIA would consider the significance of the environmental effects of transport which does include driver delay, but the TA already fully considers the impact of development traffic on delay, queueing and capacity through the detailed modelling at the A470 / A4060 / site access roundabout. An overview of the likely highway effects are below:
 - Traffic survey data indicates that on a weekday in September the existing peak hour flows are approximately 40 two-way vehicle movements per hour. The flows are tidal with the majority travelling in one direction, which minimises the level of vehicles passing between the A470 and the site.
 - The proposals are forecast to increase visitor numbers by approximately 30%. This would equate to an increase of approximately 12 vehicle movements in the peak network hour. Allowing for some additional movements associated with the proposed accommodation on the site, the forecast peak hour increase would be less than 20 vehicles per hour, or less than one vehicle every three minutes.
 - The impacts of this level of increase at the A470 / A4060 / site access roundabout are well within daily variations of traffic flows and would not have a material impact on the operation. Traffic modelling

demonstrates a maximum queue length increase of one vehicle and minimal changes in delay and capacity. There would be a negligible and not significant effect on the wider network.§

- We have considered the walking and cycling routes from the site to residential areas, bus stops and rail stations. This therefore considers the impact on pedestrians / cyclists. Considering the type of use and rural location, the site benefits from being connected to public rights of way, including a bridleway which links to the Taff Trail. This therefore provides a cycle route to and from the site to the wider area and public transport interchanges. As the main site use is for cycling, it is considered that this route would provide a reasonable alternative to the car. The additional vehicle traffic generated by the proposals would not have an impact on this key pedestrian and cyclist route.
- We have considered the impact of vehicular traffic on road safety through detailed analysis of accident data and a review of the highway network linking to the site. This includes a speed and traffic survey on the site access road to ensure that the increase in vehicles would not impact on users of the public right of way. There was no evidence of an existing safety issue and the proposals would not have a material impact on safety. The existing arrangements are considered suitable and would remain so with the development.
- In terms of assessment criteria for an EIA, the development would have a negligible environmental effect on severance and pedestrian delay as the site connections and routes would remain as the existing arrangements and the level of traffic flows would not be such to change the context of any of the surrounding routes. We have assessed the parking provision for the site on an operational basis and set out full details within the TA.
- The site would generate a minimal level of large vehicles once operational (they currently comprise less than 1% of all traffic flows and this would remain the same with the proposals. As such, there would be no significant increase in HGVs and a negligible and not significant environmental effect in relation to pedestrian amenity, fear and intimidation, severance, noise and vibration resulting from large vehicles. Measures have been suggested in the TA to mitigate the temporary and short term effects of the construction traffic and a CTMP will be produced to manage and control vehicle movements.
- The effect of cumulative developments has been considered through the application of growth rates, which include strategic allocations, to a future year assessment (2028). The impacts in the future year, from the minimal increase in peak hour flows would be negligible and not significant. Sustainable travel will be encouraged to and from the site, to promote an alternative to car travel and measures have been set out in the TA to demonstrate the operator's commitment to sustainable travel.

As such, it is considered that the TA provides a realistic and robust assessment of the future year conditions encompassing strategic developments on the network. This allows us to appropriately assess the impact of the development on the network. An EIA would not provide any additional assessments in relation to

transport as it is considered that the environmental effects of traffic would not be significant with regard to the EIA regulations.

- Ground Conditions - A desktop survey and report would be prepared to inform the design for the application. This would ensure that ground condition risks are flagged and suitable mitigation can be incorporated into the design and construction of the new infrastructure. ground stabilisation issues, contamination and unforeseen structures are unlikely given the site location. Subject to appropriate mitigation measures, ground condition effects are likely to be negligible.
- Pollution, Odour and Light Spill - The increase in vehicle numbers would not be sufficient to result in negative air quality effects, which would likely be negligible. Appropriate pollution control measures would be incorporated into the drainage design of the site to prevent the spread of any oil or fuel spillages. In respect of odour, the proposed would result in the commission of distinctive odour (note: hot food is already cooked at the site). Furthermore, there are no sensitive receptors in close proximity to the Park. Finally, in respect of light spill, only small sections of the new development would be lit, and where required lighting would be low-level and would be subject to intelligent controls. Overall it is considered that there would be no significant effects on the environment relating to pollution, odour and light spill.
- Socio-Economic - The new jobs and increased business opportunities for local accommodation providers would make a valuable contribution to the local economy. Economic effects would likely be positive.

A summary of the environmental reports and drawings to be included in the planning application are below.

Drawings	Reports
1. Site location plan	1.Transport Statement
2. Masterplan	2. Ground investigation report (desktop)
3. Landscape masterplan	3. Drainage strategy
4. Elevations	4.Utilities strategy
5. Floorplans	5. Preliminary ecological appraisal & targeted surveys
6. Highway and access arrangement	6. Arboriculture survey
7. Drainage strategy	7. Landscape Appraisal
8. Site sections (existing and proposed)	

Table 2: Summary of application contents

4. Summary Position

BikePark Wales is the premier mountain bike destination in the UK. The Park is an asset for Merthyr Tydfil and has a positive impact on the local economy. To remain the premier mountain bike destination, BikePark Wales must continue to strengthen and diversify its customer offer. As such BikePark Wales has secured £1.5m of funding that would be invested in the Park.

The proposed development does not meet the threshold for the category 10(b) development (even when considered cumulatively with the existing BikePark Wales facility). However, it is agreed that the proposed development is a significant extension to the existing Park. In order to ensure that the proposed development is planned appropriately, a careful design process is ongoing and a robust planning application is being prepared. As outlined above, the application content has been selected to ensure that the key environmental factors are duly considered and the likely effects are fully set out for future consideration by the Planning Authority. In light of this, proposed development is not considered to warrant the undertaking of an Environmental Impact Assessment.

The below table summarises the aspects of the environment factors that could be affected by the proposed development, identifies the application component that would appraise the environmental factor and confirms what what mitigation would be delivered to minimise environmental effects.

Environmental Factor	Issues / Mitigation	Planning Application Content
1. Ecology	The Ecological Impact Assessment identifies that with specific mitigation measures, it is possible for there to be no major impacts on any protected species or habitat as a result of the proposals. A copy of the ecology report is included in the appendix.	Ecological Impact Assessment
2. Landscape and Visual Character	Landscape character change likely to be minimised to moderate effects provision of landscape strategy that integrates the development to the surrounding landscape and filters views of the development. Long distance views are limited due to the site topography and distance from other high-level viewpoints.	Landscape Appraisal
3. Flooding and Water Resources	Flood risk to be negated through drainage strategy that maintains green field run off rates. Pollution control measures included in drainage design to ensure no change to water quality levels. Effects would likely be negligible.	Drainage Strategy
4. Local Highway Network	A Transport Assessment of the proposed development has been undertaken and would be included in the planning application. The Transport Assessment fully considers comments from the Highway Authority and Welsh Government (WG) and considers the traffic impacts across the key strategic routes and has undertaken a detailed assessment at the A470 / A4060 / site access roundabout, as agreed with WG.	Transport Assessment

5. Ground Conditions	Ground stabilisation issues and contamination are unlikely given the site location. Desktop Report would appraise the likely conditions and inform the construction method. Effects on ground conditions likely to be negligible.	Desktop Ground Conditions Report
6. Pollution, Odour and Light Spill	Effects from pollution, odour and light spill likely to be negligible. Predicted vehicle flows would not be sufficient to result in reduction to air quality levels. The spread of oil and fuel spillage from vehicles would be prevented through the drainage design. In respect of odour, no uses are proposed that would result in distinctive spread of odour, plus they are no sensitive uses. Finally, lighting would be limited and controlled by intelligent systems.	
7. Socio-Economic	Likely positive socio-economic effects from increased job opportunities and additional overnight visitors.	Planning Statement

Table 3: Summary of likely environmental effects, mitigation and planning application content

On the basis that the proposed scheme does not meet the threshold for category 10 (b) and given that all the likely environmental effects would already be given due consideration in the above report, it is considered that the proposed development should not be held to be EIA development. It is therefore respectfully requested that the EIA opinion adopted by the Local Planning Authority confirm this position.

The following items are included as appendices: Appendix A - Site Location Plan; Appendix B - Draft Illustrative Masterplan; and, Appendix C - Ecological Impact Assessment.

Should you have any enquiries or require further information please contact me via the details below.

Yours sincerely,



Liam Hopkins, Associate

Enc.

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING
(ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT)
(WALES) REGULATIONS 2017**

**PROPOSED EXPANSION OF MOUNTAIN BIKE CENTRE,
GETHIN WOODS, ABERCANAID, MERTHYR TYDFIL**

SCREENING OPINION

A formal Screening Opinion has been sought by The Urbanists on behalf of Bike Park Wales in relation to a proposal for the expansion of a mountain bike centre to provide additional facilities and improve its economic potential.

The proposal in isolation falls within Category 10(b) of the 2017 Regulations, as it would comprise of more than 1 hectare of urban development, which is not dwellinghouse development. When considering the scale of the development, cumulatively with the existing mountain bike centre and associated trails, the overall development would also likely exceed an area of 5 hectares.

The screening opinion has had regard to the guidance contained within W.O. Circular 11/99. Consideration has been given to the characteristics of the development, having particular regard to the criteria set out in paragraphs (a) to (g) of Section 1 of Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations.

Consideration has also been given to the environmental sensitivity of the site and the potential impacts the proposal would have on the site itself, or any area likely to be affected by the development, with regard to the matters set out in Section 2 of Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations.

The potential significant effects of the development have also been considered with particular regard to the matters set out in paragraphs (a) to (h) in Section 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations.

Below sets out the Screening assessment:

Characteristics of the development	
(a) The size and design of the development	The development would be carried out over an area of previously undeveloped land of approximately 1.13 hectares. It would comprise the following elements:- Provision of 37 camping pods, 6 chalets, an area for 7 motorhomes, a bike hire building, bike hire handover structure, external catering unit, an office building, provision of storage containers, bike cleaning facilities, plant room building, toilet/shower

	blocks, sewerage treatment plant, play area, extension of existing terrace, trail maintenance storage yard, new access routes for pedestrians and vehicles, alterations to the existing parking areas/access routes, extension to the car park to accommodate 150 van spaces and an overflow car park for 40 van spaces.
(b) The accumulation with other existing development and/or approved development	The development would be an expansion of the existing mountain bike centre to provide additional facilities, accommodation and car parking areas to better cope with events. The main welcome centre and existing car park currently occupies an area of approximately 1.5 hectares. The existing/permitted trails (over 45km) extend across Gethin Woods and cover a surface area of approximately 4.5 hectares.
(c) The use of natural resources, in particular land, soil, water and biodiversity	The development does not seek to harness natural resources.
(d) The production of waste	The provision of additional toilet/shower blocks and accommodation will necessitate the need for additional on-site sewerage treatment systems. Self-catering accommodation would also generate additional waste.
(e) Pollution and nuisances	The expansion of the car park would increase the potential for fuel/oil leaks into the ground, which may leach into nearby water courses. There would also likely be an increase of silt that impacts on water quality. There would be potential for additional noise and disturbance in the area, which would likely continue into the evening, particularly given the provision of over-night accommodation. This is not of great concern, given the location of the development away from residential properties.
(f) The risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned, including those caused by climate change, in accordance with scientific knowledge	The development does not include the use of hazardous materials or involve any operations that may otherwise indicate the potential for major accidents and/or disasters.
(g) The risk to human health (for example due to water contamination or air pollution)	An increase in vehicular traffic may have a slight impact on air quality in the area. However this is not likely to pose a risk to human health.
Location of development	
(a) The existing and approved land use	The land lies adjacent to an existing mountain bike centre, the majority of which comprises previously undeveloped woodland. An existing

	track that links to the bike centre currently crosses the site.
(b) The relative abundance, availability, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources (including soil, land, water and biodiversity) in the area and its underground	Approximately 0.7 of a hectare of the development lies within the Abercanaid Fields and Craig Gethin SINC's, which are designated for their Broadleaved Woodland habitats. Although some mitigation measures could be implemented, the scale and nature of the development would likely result in the permanent loss, damage or erosion of those SINC environments. The existing trails (to the south-west of the development), are located in an area recently identified (Gethin Forest - in the emerging LDP) to be of SINC quality. This indicates that the trails are located in an area that has some regenerative capacity, possibly due to the nature of the habitats, wide distribution and the narrowness/construction of the trails. There is a variety of protected species and habitats known within the site and in close proximity to the development, including reptiles, bats, Nightjar and fertility butterfly habitats. The development would have some impact on these protected species.
(c) The absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas: i. Wetlands ii. Coastal zones and the marine environment iii. Mountain and forest areas iv. Nature reserves and parks v. European sites and other areas classified or protected under national legislation vi. Area in which there has already been a failure to meet environmental quality standards laid down in Union legislation and relevant to the project, or in which it is considered there is such a failure vii. Densely populated areas viii. Landscapes and sites of historical, cultural or	The development would be located in an area that is recognised as a Landscape of Historic Interest in Wales, which is currently being considered as a 'special landscape area' within the emerging LDP. With reference to LANDMAP, the site lies within an area considered to have an overall 'high' historic landscape value, particularly in relation to its integrity and survival. Additionally, under the visual and sensory layer, it is considered to have a 'high' character value. The existing bike centre is largely screened from distance views and is situated in an area that was formerly used as a public carpark. The proposal would greatly increase the urbanised environment, which would extend into more exposed areas of the landscape. There is scope for the development to be absorbed within the wider landscape, with the visual impacts being addressed through an appropriate tree planting scheme. Nevertheless, there would remain a significant change to the immediate character and landscape qualities from within Gethin Woods. This would be apparent both in terms of the scale of the physical changes to the environment but also in terms of the increase in

archaeological significance	activity in the area.
Types and characteristics of the potential impact	
(a) The magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The development would reasonably likely result in a permanent total loss of approximately 0.7 of a hectare of SINC quality environment (within Graig Gethin and Abercanaid Fields).
(b) The nature of the impact	There would be a significant increase in the number of buildings and structures introduced to the distinctly rural/woodland environment. Given the scale and concentration of the development, which would essentially double the size of the mountain bike centre (not including the trails), there would likely be a significant change in the landscape character. There would be potential harm to the green infrastructure and a loss of tree cover both immediately and in the future as the general health of trees may decline. There are habitats that have the potential to support a variety of protected species, both within the development area and within the vicinity. The development would likely result in the loss or displacement of some of these habitats within the site. The hardstanding areas and use of the land for parking vehicles will likely increase the potential for leaching of oils/fuel into the ground and the amount of silt entering nearby watercourses. An increase in traffic movements to and from the site is likely to occur. This would put additional pressures along the access track leading to the site and at the junction on to the A470 trunk road.
(c) The transboundary nature of the impact	An increase in the number of visitors to the mountain bike centre may likely result in more traffic along the existing trails and access roads, which extend into the Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough. However, the impacts of the development would largely be contained within Merthyr Tydfil County Borough around the existing welcome centre.
(d) The intensity and complexity of the impact	The existing mountain bike facility already has an impact on the woodland environment. There are likely to be further changes to the landscape character which form an important context to the site. The degree of change and the extent the development can be absorbed within the landscape adds to the complexity of any

	assessment. Whilst measures to address direct impacts on habitats and species within the site could be addressed, there are complexities/uncertainties in relation to nearby protected species, such as the Nightjar and fertility butterfly habitats, which may be affected over time due to the increase in activity in the area.
(e) The probability of the impact	Although some of the impacts of the proposal may be minimised, there would evidently be a greater physical change to the landscape character and a reduction in the ecological value of the area.
(f) The expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact	Depending on the construction on the camping pods/chalets within the woodland area, the impact of this aspect of the development could be reversed, insofar as, the removal of these structures may lead to the natural restoration of the woodland environment. However, it is uncertain whether its status as a SINC would be restored over time. The various buildings proposed around the welcome centre and the substantial hardstanding area would likely have a more permanent impact on the landscape character.
(g) The cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development	The development, cumulatively with the existing bike centre, would result in a permanent total loss of approximately 2.84 hectares of SINC quality environment (within Graig Gethin and Abercanaid Fields). The existing mountain bike facility largely comprises the main welcome centre and a hardstanding area, which occupies a former visitor car park. The proposal would considerably expand the mountain bike centre, occupying a far greater area of undeveloped land. When taking into account the trails, this only further emphasises the extent of the impact the mountain bike centre has had on the character and use of the valley side. There are pre-existing issues with the contamination of surface water and silt entering into the existing watercourse. The proposal has the potential to exacerbate this issue, if not properly managed.

	Currently vehicles often park along the access tracks leading to the site during peak times. The increased attraction to the area would likely exacerbate this impact, giving rise to potential congestion concerns.
(h) The possibility of effectively reducing the impact	It has been demonstrated with the submission of an Ecological Impact Assessment that the potential harm to protected species could be mitigated/compensated through the appropriate management of the development. It has been suggested in the screening request that a bespoke landscape design would minimise the impacts on the landscape character. However, there remains uncertainty on the full extent of any impacts and the effectiveness of any mitigation. The hydrological impacts with silt and oil/fuel leaching into the watercourses can be effectively reduced with filtration systems provided in suitable locations and with the appropriate management of the watercourses. The introduction of additional parking within the site may alleviate some of the existing parking issues.

Having regard to the scale and nature of the proposed development, it is considered that there are potential significant impacts on the landscape character and the ecological value of the land. In reaching this view, regard has been given to the details submitted in support of the screening request. Therefore it is concluded that an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for the proposed expansion of the mountain bike centre.


P.P. J Jones

Head of Planning & Countryside

12th November 2016



Liam Hopkins <liam.hopkins@theurbanists.net>

RE: Bike Park Wales

1 message

Cross, David <David.Cross@merthyr.gov.uk>
To: Liam Hopkins <liam.hopkins@theurbanists.net>
Cc: Harri Aston <harri.aston@theurbanists.net>

Tue, Nov 20, 2018 at 5:08 PM

Morning Liam,

Regarding your request for some guidance on the scope of work to be included in the EA, having discussed the issue with our Landscape Architect and Countryside Officer, I can offer the following informal advice:

Ecology.

The attached document sets out some of the matters that would need to be considered in the EA. Essentially, there is a need to assess the impact of the existing development in combination with the proposed development. The matters concerning the potential impact of the proposed development on protected species was largely addressed in the recent survey work, the recommendations of which were accepted. The impact/loss of habitats, particularly the significant loss of SINC quality environments is of greatest concern and should form a key focus in the EA. It may not be necessary to conduct further survey work, as the evidence included in the most recent survey reports, together with the survey work previously carried as part of earlier applications may be sufficient.

Landscape

The assessment of the landscape should following the LVIA 3rd Edition guidelines, which will provide an holistic approach that will inherently identify the key areas to assess further. Regard should be given to the impacts/ changes to the landscape as a result of both the existing and proposed development. As noted in earlier correspondence, the visual impact of the development within the landscape may be limited or easily mitigated. Of greatest concern is the likely impacts on the character of the landscape. LANDMAP should be utilised in the LVIA to provide baseline information of the key characteristics.

There are likely to be areas of overlap between the ecological/habitats and the landscape impacts i.e. the loss of SINC environments may equally contribute to the deterioration of the landscape qualities. As such, consideration should be given to potential mitigation/compensation measures that could potentially address both issues.

I trust the above is of some assistance.

Kind regards

David Cross

Prif Swyddog Cynllunio / Principal Planning Officer

BSc (Cynllunio), Ma (Dylunio Trefol), MRTPI / BSc (Planning), Ma (Urban Design), MRTPI

Ffôn / Tel: 01685 724632

E-bost / Email: david.cross@merthyr.gov.uk

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Merthyr Tudful / Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Uned 5, Parc Fusness Triongl / Unit 5, Triangle Business Park

Pentrebach, Merthyr Tudful / Pentrebach, Merthyr Tydfil

CF48 4TQ

From: Liam Hopkins [mailto:liam.hopkins@theurbanists.net]
Sent: 13 November 2018 14:26
To: Cross, David
Subject: Re: Bike Park Wales

Afternoon David,

Following our conversation this morning, where it was noted that an ES for the planning application would need to consist of an ecology and landscape / visual impact assessment only, I would be grateful if you could provide key requirements for each assessment from the Countryside Officer and Landscape Officer.

Best regards

Liam Hopkins | Associate

[Redacted]

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On Mon, Nov 12, 2018 at 4:57 PM Cross, David <David.Cross@merthyr.gov.uk> wrote:

Afternoon Liam,

Apologies for the delay, I wanted to clarify a couple of points with our landscape architect before finalising the screening opinion, which is now attached.

In regards to the coal mining assessment, I have consulted the Coal Authority and updated our records to include the report you sent across. So for now there is no further action required.

Kind regards

David Cross

Prif Swyddog Cynllunio / Principal Planning Officer

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Countryside Officer comments:

In terms of informal Scoping, the EIA needs to focus on issues which have not been quantified and/or considered, mitigated or compensated across the whole project and the current proposed development either on site or off-site:

1. Consideration should be made to unconsidered historic ecological impacts arising from non-implementation of planning condition and/or agreed Habitat Management Plans and/or Ecological Reports from previous development phases (see attached comments from initial planning application on site for a guide) in addition to current proposed development, in particular as they relate to:
2. SINC/UKBAP Habitat permanently lost/mitigated/compensated.

N.B. The above points may be used to help to ensure that the *“compensation and mitigation plan may be required to negate some of the loss of the onsite SINC habitat “and “reptile mitigation strategy is agreed with the LPA, with a translocation regime, herpetofauna fencing and vegetation management”* Ecological Impact Assessment Report Land at Bike Park Wales, Merthyr Tydfil (04/10/2018) is holistic and efficient in managing ecological impacts accruing from the developments going forward.

Notwithstanding the above EIA issues the following environmental issues will need to be addressed:

- *“A compensation and mitigation plan may be required to negate some of the loss of the onsite SINC habitat “ and reptile mitigation strategy is agreed with the LPA, with a translocation regime, herpetofauna fencing and vegetation management”* Ecological Impact Assessment Report Land at Bike Park Wales, Merthyr Tydfil (04/10/2018)
- Drainage/hydrology/watercourses/erosion and pollution prevention measures (fuel/oil management)
- Increased waste production
- European Protected Species and lighting

Once the significance all ecological impacts for the whole development have been quantified/assessed it is possible to target mitigation and compensation measures at a specific scale and type. The remaining ecological impact can then be taken in to consideration in order to accurately inform the planning process to make a balanced decision on development proposals now and in the future.

