

BIKE PARK WALES, ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT VOL1.
CHAPTER 6

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

CHAPTER 6

Landscape and visual impact

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6. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 This Landscape Statement has been prepared by Peter Quinn Associates Landscape Architects. The Statement has been produced with reference to the “*Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*” 3rd edition by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and with the guidance of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
- 6.1.2 The Statement is structured as follows: context; policy, legislation and guidance; methodology; baseline conditions; assessment of effects; cumulative effects; mitigation; residual effects and summary. Mitigation measures are detailed following the analysis of cumulative effects, since mitigation is proposed for the proposed development and wider BikePark Wales centre.
- 6.1.3 A Landscape and Visual Appraisal is provided in the Appendices and includes the relevant technical appendices and figures to this Statement.

6.2 Context

Study Area

- 6.2.1 The study area constitutes the land proposed to accommodate the development area described in Chapter 3, along with the wider BikePark Wales grounds. This includes the existing visitor centre and the bike trails to the west of the visitor centre. Viewpoints considered in this assessment are mostly focussed on views from within the BikePark Wales grounds, but also include viewpoints to the east of the centre from the valley floor and adjacent valley sides. The focus of viewpoints from within and adjacent to the BikePark Wales grounds is based on the fact that the site is enclosed by tree planting.

6.3 Policy, Legislation and Guidance

- 6.3.1 This study does not seek to list and analyse all *general* landscape policy that may have some bearing on the proposed development as this is unlikely to form the clearest picture of the development’s merits or otherwise. Nor will it discuss policy relating to leisure provision or other social and economic matters. It will however consider those aspects of policy that relate *specifically* to the landscape of this particular site.
- 6.3.2 The following are judged to contain policies that have clear relevance:
- Planning Policy Wales
 - The Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan 2006-2021
 - LANDMAP

LANDMAP contains information and judgements relevant to the site and the proposed development. Relevant details from LANDMAP are described in detail in the baseline section.

- 6.3.3 The excerpts laid out below are judged to be directly relevant to the site, the proposed development and the landscape.

Planning Policy Wales

- 6.3.4 Planning Policy Wales edition 10 (PPW) sets out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government relating to sustainable development and good design. The primary objective of PPW is to ensure that the planning system contributes towards the delivery of sustainable development and improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales, as required by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. PPW places promotes the need for ‘sustainable development’, which is defined as *“improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action in accordance with the sustainable development principle”*. The sustainable development principle is defined as ensuring that *“the needs of the present are met without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”*. In this respect PPW requires development to improve in the delivery of all four wellbeing aspects, which are social, economic, cultural and environmental.

Merthyr Tydfil Local Development

- 6.3.5 The Local Development Plan for the area is the Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan. Of particular note are policies:
- Policy BW4: Settlement boundaries/location constraints
 - Policy BW5: Natural heritage
 - Policy BW7: Sustainable design and place making
 - Policy BW8: Development and the water environment
 - Policy BW11: Transport, cycling and pedestrian proposals
 - Policy AS6: Local nature conservation designations

Landscape Designations

Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)

- 6.3.6 Part of the site is designated as the Abercarnaid SINC. The SINC constitutes a series of fields laying either side of the A470 containing mainly species-rich semi-improved grasslands and marshy grasslands. Also some small areas of semi-natural oak/birch woodland, scattered scrub and trees. Site also includes Webber’s pond, a private nature reserve with well-developed marginal emergent vegetation, a section of the Glamorganshire Canal and an adjacent disused railway embankment which supports unimproved and semi-improved acid grassland, bracken slopes and trees. The SINC features woodland, scrub communities, neutral grasslands, acid grasslands, marshy grasslands, fridd communities, heathlands and grass-heath communities, watercourses, standing open water, mineral spoil tips and other post industrial land & mosaic habitats and common land.
- 6.3.7 Part of the site is also designated as Craig Gethin SINC. The SINC constitutes wooded fridd slopes, supporting extensive ancient semi-natural woodland and bracken slopes with large trees, together with some scree areas supporting lichen heath. The bracken slopes support abundant bluebell. Also includes an area of wet heathland that extends along a ride within a conifer plantation and supports plant species of interest. The site supports a good range of breeding bird species and brown hare has also been recorded. The SINC features woodland, neutral grasslands, acid grasslands, fridd

communities, heathlands and grass-heath communities, watercourses, mosaic habitats and common land, rock exposures, other features.

- 6.3.8 The site is also next to the Rhydyar West SINC. The SINC is an extensive mosaic of fridd enclosures supporting complex of semi-upland and lowland habitats, partly contained within conifer plantation. Main components are ancient semi-natural woodland fragments, other semi-natural woodlands, wet heathland, dry heathland, marshy grassland and semi-improved neutral grasslands. Also there are some bracken slopes, scrub, small ponds, streams and sections of dismantled railway. There are areas of semi-improved acid grasslands to the south especially. The habitats intergrade to form a complex mosaic, and may therefore also include some small areas of improved or low diversity semi-improved grassland, but any such areas are a very minor component. Great crested newt occurs in small pools; noctule and pipistrelle bats have both been recorded. Nationally rare and scarce invertebrates are varied and common throughout the area.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

- 6.3.9 The woodland on and near to the site is TPO'd and is described as being Ancient/Ancient Semi-natural Woodland and is included within the Abercanaid Fields SINC 20 and Craig Gethin SINC 30.

6.4 Policy, Legislation and Guidance

- 6.4.1 The Statement has been prepared in accordance with the *"Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment"* 3rd edition by the Landscape Institute.
- 6.4.2 The effects are divided into two broad categories: landscape effects and visual effects. These may be further subdivided into temporary effects (largely during construction) and permanent effects.
- 6.4.3 Landscape effects may be described as the likely effects on the character or the quality of a landscape caused by the proposed development whether or not such effects are visible or otherwise experienced by users of the site or users of the wider landscape.
- 6.4.4 A number of the landscape effects described have a significant ecological component and the reader should refer to the Ecological Assessment that makes up part of this Environmental Assessment for more detail on ecology.
- 6.4.5 Visual effects may be described as the likely effects on views caused by the proposed development where such effects are visible by users of the site or users of the wider landscape.
- 6.4.6 The elements of the landscape that might be affected are described as landscape receptors. The potential users whose view of the site might be affected by the proposed development are described as visual receptors.
- 6.4.7 In order to assess the likely significance of any particular effect, possible interactions between the proposed development and the receptors are identified.
- 6.4.8 Assessment of visual and landscape effects will, for clarity, be dealt with separately in the sections that follow.

Landscape Effects

Identification of Landscape Effects

6.4.9 The following temporary landscape effects are possible

- Silt, debris and contamination entering watercourses and waterbodies
- Noise
- Dust
- Restrictions to access

6.4.10 The following permanent landscape effects are possible

- Silt and contamination entering watercourses and waterbodies
- Changes to landform, geology and topography
- Changes to the pattern of the landscape
- Introduction of two way access road
- Introduction of new paths within woodland
- Introduction of new areas of parking within the scrub area
- Introduction of new areas of parking within woodland
- Introduction of camping pods and lodges within woodland
- Introduction of other buildings and structures generally
- Introduction of lighting to woodland and other areas
- Introduction of soakaways
- Relocation of the trail maintenance yard
- Introduction of the play area
- Changes to circulation in the vicinity of the visitor centre
- Loss of vegetation cover

Identification of Landscape Receptors

The following landscape receptors may be affected by the development:

- Landform, geology and topography
- Landscape pattern and history
- Woodland
- Scrub and grassland
- Waterways and waterbodies
- Access
- Culture
- Sensory (excluding vision)
- Light

The methodology for assessment is described in the Landscape Appraisal that is included in the Appendices. Definitions of the values are summarised below:

Susceptibility of landscape receptors to change

6.4.11 The following landscape receptors may be affected by the development:

6.4.12 Described as high, medium, low or negligible:

- High susceptibility to change: limited screening, largely undeveloped, cannot host the development without suffering major detrimental effects.

- Medium susceptibility to change: some screening, some development, can host the development but with moderate detrimental effects.
- Low susceptibility to change: moderate screening, moderate development, can host the development but with minor detrimental effects.
- Negligible/no susceptibility to change: prominent screening, dominant development, can host the development with almost no detrimental effects.

Value of landscape receptors

Described as high, medium, low or negligible. Ascertained by considering whether it is valued at a community, local, national or international level. Also considers undesignated landscape of obvious value. Also by consideration of the following:

- Landscape Quality
- Scenic quality
- Rarity
- Representativeness
- Conservation interests
- Recreation value
- Perceptual aspects
- Associations

Landscape sensitivity of the receptor

Described as high, medium, low or negligible/no change. Assessed by combining susceptibility with value:

- High sensitivity of receptor: largely undeveloped landscape, rich in valuable features, possibly with a national or regional designation.
- Medium sensitivity of receptor: some development, some detracting features possibly with a county or district designation.
- Low sensitivity of receptor: prominent development, many detracting features possibly with no designation.
- Negligible/no sensitivity of receptor: development dominant, detracting features dominate, no designation.

Size and scale of the landscape effect

The effect is described as either major, moderate, minor or none. Judgements take account of:

- The extent of the existing landscape elements that will be lost, the proportion of the total that this represents and the contribution that this makes to landscape character
- The degree to which aesthetic or perceptual aspects of landscape are altered
- Whether the effect changes a key characteristic of the landscape

Geographical extent of the landscape effect

The Judgement of size and scale is related to an assessment of the geographical extent of the landscape effect. This should also be described as being, at a site level, affecting the immediate setting, affecting landscape type or character area or having an effect on a larger scale.

Duration of landscape effect

6.4.13 This is described as short term (0-5 years), medium term (5-10 years), or long term (10-25 years).

Reversibility of landscape effect

6.4.14 This assesses whether a development or part of it could be, or is likely to be, reversed within a specific timeframe.

Magnitude of effect on the landscape

6.4.15 Magnitude is calculated by combining size/scale, geographical extent, duration and reversibility and is described as high, medium, low or negligible/no change.

- High magnitude of effect: the introduction of very prominent/uncharacteristic elements into the landscape or a marked deterioration/improvement in the landscape.
- Medium magnitude of effect: the introduction of prominent elements into the landscape or a noticeable deterioration/improvement in the landscape
- Low magnitude of effect: the introduction of minor elements into the landscape or a barely noticeable deterioration/improvement in the landscape
- Negligible magnitude of effect/no change: the introduction of elements into the landscape that are almost/completely invisible or are compatible with the landscape.

Overall significance of landscape effects

Where a receptor has a high or medium sensitivity and the magnitude of the effect is high or where a receptor has a high sensitivity and the magnitude of the effect is high or medium then the overall effect will be judged to be significant.

6.4.16 Where a receptor has a medium sensitivity and the magnitude of the effect is medium then the overall effect may also be judged to be significant.

6.4.17 Each significant landscape effect is assigned a degree of significance reflecting the combinations of sensitivity and magnitude. These are severe, major, moderate and neutral and refer to adverse as well as beneficial effects. These are described below:

Overall significance of landscape effects

6.4.18 Where a receptor has a high or medium sensitivity and the magnitude of the effect is high or where a receptor has a high sensitivity and the magnitude of the effect is high or medium then the overall effect will be judged to be significant.

Significance criteria for landscape effects

6.4.19 Criteria for landscape effects are defined as follows;

- Severe adverse - The proposed scheme would result in effects that are at a complete variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape; would permanently degrade, diminish or destroy the integrity of valued characteristic features, elements and/or their setting; would cause a very high quality landscape, possibly of national importance, to be permanently changed and its quality diminished.
- Major adverse - The proposed scheme would result in effects that cannot be fully mitigated and may cumulatively amount to a severe adverse effect; are at considerable variance to the landscape

degrading the integrity of the landscape; will be substantially damaging to a high quality landscape, possibly of regional importance.

- Moderate adverse - The proposed scheme would be out of scale with the landscape or at odds with the local pattern and landform; will leave an adverse effect on landscape of recognised quality, possibly of county importance.
- Slight adverse - The proposed scheme would not quite fit into the landform and scale of the landscape; affect an area of recognised landscape character, possibly of local importance.
- Neutral - The proposed scheme would complement the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape; maintain existing landscape quality.
- Slight beneficial - The proposed scheme has the potential to improve the landscape quality and character; fit in with the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape; enable the restoration of valued characteristic features partially lost through other land uses.
- Moderate beneficial - The proposed scheme would have the potential to fit very well with the landscape character; improve the quality of the landscape through removal of damage caused by existing land uses.

Visual Effects

The following temporary visual effects will be considered:

- Dust
- Plant
- Compound location and use

The following permanent visual effects will be considered:

- Changes to landform, geology and topography
- Changes to the pattern of the landscape
- Introduction of buildings and other structures
- Introduction of two way access road
- Introduction of new areas of parking within the scrub area
- Introduction of new areas of parking within woodland
- Introduction of camping pods and lodges within woodland
- Introduction of lighting to woodland and other areas
- Relocation of the trail maintenance yard
- Changes to landscape in the vicinity of the visitor centre

Identification of visual receptors

Section 2.0 Visual Landscape indicates that the following users of the landscape are judged to be the visual receptors and may be affected by the proposed development and the application that is currently being decided upon:

- Walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other visitors to BikePark Wales and the immediate area
- Walkers, cyclists, horse riders and motorbikers using Merthyr Common
- Walkers and cyclists using the Trevithick Trail
- Residents of Pentrebach
- Drivers, walkers and riders using roads, footpaths, roadside pavements, bridleways and other public rights of way and public open spaces within Pentrebach and built-up areas near the village able to see the site
- Residents of the farm immediately to the North of BikePark Wales

Overview of visual receptors

Walkers are amongst the most sensitive users as they tend to travel at a relatively slow pace with a greater than normal awareness and focus on the landscape and their surroundings. Such sensitive receptors will probably notice any changes to the landscape more than any other users.

- 6.4.20 Footpaths near to the site appear to be walked primarily by local users. They are likely to be very familiar with the local landscape and thus particularly sensitive to changes in the landscape.
- 6.4.21 Horse riders are also likely to be sensitive to changes to the site and their elevated position means that their views tend to be clearer, being less well screened by intervening features. They are also likely to be local and thus familiar with the local landscape. There are however, far fewer horse riders than walkers and cyclists.
- 6.4.22 Cyclists typically have a high position relative to car drivers and travel at a slower speed than vehicles. Cyclists are in general likely to be more sensitive to changes than car users but less sensitive than pedestrians. The area of BikePark Wales is well used by cyclists, especially at weekends. However, cyclists using the trails at BikePark Wales are likely to be less sensitive to changes in the landscape than other cyclists using roads and paths elsewhere, as they are more focussed on the mountain biking activity.
- 6.4.23 Drivers and passengers are usually the least sensitive receptors due to the speed of travel and lower position relative to walkers, cyclists and horse riders. It should be noted however that walkers using roadside pavements should be considered in the same way as walkers using other public rights of way.
- 6.4.24 LANDMAP evaluates the visual and sensory landscape in and around BikePark Wales as having moderate value. Whilst this is useful for a landscape-wide assessment, it is not considered to be of fine enough resolution for this assessment and will be set aside.
- 6.4.25 The methodology described in the Landscape Appraisal is followed to assess the likely overall effect and its significance. The effects on each of the visual receptors above are assessed and presented in the following sections. Definitions of the values used are summarised below:

Susceptibility of the visual receptor to change

- 6.4.26 *Described as high, medium, or low, susceptibility is a function of the activity of the viewer and the extent of their focus on or interest in the landscape.*
- 6.4.27 The most susceptible are residents, cyclists, walkers and visitors with a particular interest in the landscape. Of intermediate susceptibility are, in general, those travelling in vehicles. The least sensitive receptors include those involved in an activity or work that is the primary focus of their interest.

Value of the view

- 6.4.28 *Described as high, medium, low or negligible. Ascertained by considering whether it is valued at a community, local, national or international level or from facilities associated with the view such as car parks, interpretive panels etc. Also considers other undesignated landscape of obvious value. Also by consideration of the following:*

- *Landscape Quality*
- *Scenic quality*

- *Rarity*
- *Representativeness*
- *Recreation value*
- *Perceptual aspects*
- *Associations*
- *Intangible appeal*

Visual sensitivity of the receptor

Described as high, medium, low or negligible/no change. Assessed by combining susceptibility with value.

- 6.4.29 High sensitivity of receptor: the landscape in the view possibly has a national or regional designation and is the focus of views. Receptors are slow moving and the landscape is the focus of their activity. Includes residents whose view is dominated by the site. Medium sensitivity of receptor: the landscape in the view possibly has a county or district designation. Receptors are slow moving and the landscape is part of their activity. Includes residents for whom the site is a prominent element of their view. Low sensitivity of receptor: the landscape in the view possibly has no designation. Receptors are faster moving and/or the landscape is a minor part of their activity. Negligible/no sensitivity of receptor: the landscape in the view has no designation. Receptors are fast moving and/or the landscape plays no part in their activity.

Size and scale of the visual effect

- 6.4.30 The effect is described as either major, moderate, minor or none. Judgements take account of:

- The extent of the existing landscape elements that will be lost from the view, the proportion of the total that this represents and the contribution that this makes to the view
- The degree to which aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the view are altered
- The size, prominence, degree of contrast or integration of any new features
- Whether views will be full, partial or glimpsed

Geographical extent of the visual effect

Geographical extent reflects the following:

- The angle of the view
- Distance of the viewpoint
- Extent of the changes relative to the existing view

Duration of the visual effect

This should be described as short term (0-5 years), medium term (5-10 years), or long term (10-25 years).

Reversibility of visual effect

- 6.4.31 This assesses whether a development or part of it could be, or is likely to be, reversed within a specific timeframe.

Magnitude of the effect on views

- 6.4.32 This should be described as short term (0-5 years), medium term (5-10 years), or long term (10-25 years).

6.4.33 The magnitude is calculated by combining size/scale, geographical extent, duration and reversibility and is described as high, medium, low or negligible/no change:

- High magnitude of effect: the introduction of very prominent/uncharacteristic elements into views or a marked deterioration/improvement in the view.
- Medium magnitude of effect: the introduction of prominent elements into the view or a noticeable deterioration/improvement in the view
- Low magnitude of effect: the introduction of minor elements into the view or a barely noticeable deterioration/improvement in the view
- Negligible magnitude of effect/no change: the introduction of elements into the view that are almost/completely invisible or are compatible with the existing view.

Overall significance of visual effects

Where a receptor has a high or medium sensitivity and the magnitude of the effect is high or where a receptor has a high sensitivity and the magnitude of the effect is high or medium then the overall effect will be judged to be significant.

6.4.34 Where a receptor has a medium sensitivity and the magnitude of the effect is medium then the overall effect may also be judged to be significant.

6.4.35 Each significant visual effect is assigned a degree of significance reflecting the combinations of sensitivity and magnitude. These are severe, major, moderate and neutral and refer to adverse as well as beneficial effects. These are described below:

- Major adverse effect - Where the scheme would cause a significant deterioration in the existing view.
- Moderate adverse effect - Where the scheme would cause a noticeable deterioration in the existing view.
- Slight adverse effect - Where the scheme would cause a barely perceptible deterioration in the existing view.
- Slight beneficial effect -Where the scheme would cause a barely perceptible improvement in the existing view.
- Moderate beneficial effect -Where the scheme would cause a noticeable improvement in the existing view.
- Major beneficial effect -Where the scheme would cause a significant improvement in the existing view.
- No change - No discernible deterioration or improvement in the existing view.

6.5 Baseline Conditions

- 6.5.1 This stage of the assessment establishes the existing landscape and visual conditions (baseline) and provides:

Site Description

Location and Topography

- 6.5.2 Bike Park Wales is located on the western slope of the Taff Valley around 110m above the river bed. Above the visitor centre, the land rises steeply towards the summit of Mynydd Gethin at 491m OD c.1km to the south-west.
- 6.5.3 The main building is immediately to the south-east of Gethin Woodland Park and is set above the car parks at around 258m OD. The two main car parking areas are situated on terraces separated vertically by around 6m. The lowest point of the car parks is c.237m OD.
- 6.5.4 The boundaries of the existing area of BikePark Wales are not clearly defined on the ground. The land beyond the long south western boundary rises steeply and supports a patchwork of scrub and established deciduous woodland. The short north western boundary is reasonably well-defined by a mature riparian woodland strip (which follows a small stream, Nant Graig). The very short south eastern boundary is within deciduous woodland.
- 6.5.5 Downhill from the site, beyond the north eastern boundary, is an area of mature deciduous woodland, scrub and rough pasture which gives on to the A470 around 400m from the visitor centre. Beyond the A470 is Abercanaid and an area of large, modern, industrial/commercial, low-rise buildings.
- 6.5.6 The general area of BikePark Wales has previously been used for mining and associated tipping though evidence on the ground is largely obscured by woodland and groundcover. The area proposed for development comprises the following:
- A proportion of the area adjacent to, and to the east of, the visitor centre where footpaths, a play area and toilet block is proposed.
 - A rectangular area of scrub east of the existing trail maintenance yard where van and motorhome parking is proposed.
 - A triangular area of woodland north east of the existing car parks where camping pods and lodges are proposed.
 - A rectangular area of woodland to the south east of the existing car parks where overflow parking is proposed.

The bike hire building and office, proposed in planning application number P/18/0335 covers c.0.06ha. The area proposed for development in the latest application covers approximately 3.56ha of which 0.65ha is within the area already developed. The balance of 2.9ha is within land not previously developed.

Pattern and Scale of Landscape

- 6.5.7 BikePark Wales is set on a hillside supporting a large area of deciduous woodland. This woodland includes a broad range of species and ages with trees growing in mixed species blocks of various sizes at various densities. Tree cover is not continuous and is broken by glades, clear-felling, scrub, and

pasture. There is consequently a complex pattern of scales, colours and textures across the hillside which also varies with the seasons.

Settlements

- 6.5.8 BikePark Wales is situated in a relatively isolated hillside position. It is separated from the nearest built-up areas by woodland, scrub and pasture and by the A470 dual carriageway. The nearest other buildings are those of the adjacent farm c.130m to the north north west of the main building.
- 6.5.9 The next nearest buildings, and the nearest large built-up area, is the predominantly residential village of Abercanaid. The nearest point of the village is located around 500m to the north east of the visitor centre c.75m below it. The main part of the village is around 700m away from the visitor centre and is around 100m below it. Beyond Abercanaid, commercial and industrial buildings extend across the relatively level valley floor.

Access and Circulation

- 6.5.10 BikePark Wales is situated in a relatively isolated hillside position. It is separated from the nearest built-up areas by woodland, scrub and pasture and by the A470 dual carriageway. The nearest other buildings are those of the adjacent farm c.130m to the north north west of the main building.
- 6.5.11 The next nearest buildings, and the nearest large built-up area, is the predominantly residential village of Abercanaid. The nearest point of the village is located around 500m to the north east of the visitor centre c.75m below it. The main part of the village is around 700m away from the visitor centre and is around 100m below it. Beyond Abercanaid, commercial and industrial buildings extend across the relatively level valley floor.
- 6.5.12 The visitor centre can be accessed by vehicle and foot via a drive leading from the roundabout on the A470 dual carriageway to the Gethin Woodland Park. The roundabout is just over 1km from the main building.
- 6.5.13 For around five hundred metres beyond the roundabout, the drive is sealed with asphalt. Beyond this point it is surfaced in self-binding crushed stone.
- 6.5.14 BikePark Wales and the area proposed for development is set within Access Land (Rights of Way Act 2000). A number of public rights of way (PROW) also cross or skirt the area of BikePark Wales and the site:
- Bridleway 110/85, which provides access to the summit of Myndd Gethin above the cycle centre, skirts the west and south west edge of the developed area. This connects with BOAT (byway open to all traffic) 110/4 which runs beside the stream (Nant Graig). At its lower end, the BOAT eventually connects with the Taff trail alongside the River Taff.
 - Footpath 110/71 runs from a point north east of the visitor centre and continues past Webber's Pond c.550m to the east. An informal track runs, from the footpath as it reaches the lowest point in the area of scrub, through the woodland in which camping pods and lodges are proposed, and joins the main access track as it heads south east near the easternmost part of the existing car park.
 - Bridleway 110/82 follows the line of the main access drive from the roundabout at the A470, and passes below the visitor centre to join with the western, upper end of BOAT 110/4.

The level of use of PROWs by walkers and others not specifically visiting the cycle centre was difficult to assess where the route is shared with mountain bikers as any footprints left in the surface are mostly obscured by cycle tyre tracks. However, the BOAT and the footpath beyond the stretch it shares with the cycle trail appear to be moderately well-used, though only one pair of walkers was seen during the 3-4 hour period of the site visit.

- 6.5.15 All footpaths, BOATs and bridleways appear to be surfaced in the native substrate except where they share the route of the main access drive or have been resurfaced with crushed stone for the benefit of mountain bikes.
- 6.5.16 Vehicles visiting BikePark Wales approach the centre heading north west along the drive from the roundabout. The drive forks around 300m before the visitor centre. Vehicles follow the upper (south westernmost) fork towards the visitor centre. At the closest point to the main building, below the terrace, the drive rounds a hairpin bend to head south east and follow a route below the incoming route to rejoin it at the fork. Parking is arranged in bays either side of the drive. The system is one way along its entire length and vehicles re-joining the drive towards the roundabout cannot turn back towards the cycle centre without some difficulty.
- 6.5.17 The farm north north west of the main building is accessed via a track which branches from the main access drive at the hairpin.
- 6.5.18 A network of mountain bike trails converges on the area of the main building. These are described in the following section.

Bike Trails

- 6.5.19 The network of mountain bike trails extends across the hillside above the main visitor centre and covers an area of approximately 200ha. The total length of trails is around 45km.
- 6.5.20 The trails are generally downhill, and the start point, at the summit of Mynydd Gethin (491m) is accessed by minibus and trailer from a pick-up point around 500m along the access drive from the main building.
- 6.5.21 Trails are formed from the native substrate and then, along around half of their length, surfaced in crushed stone. Trails are compacted using a relatively light vibrating plate.
- 6.5.22 Bare ground is apparent alongside newly formed or recently maintained trails where ground has been disturbed. Such areas appear to colonise with herbaceous and woody ruderals within a few years to form a well-vegetated edge.
- 6.5.23 With the exception of those very close to the main building and car park, the majority of trails are not visible to users of the area around the main building and are not considered in this Landscape Statement except where they are described in planning conditions or run through the area proposed for development.

Parking

- 6.5.24 Parking is arranged in bays along the access drives to the south east of the main building. Individual spaces are unmarked and vary in size. Parking is generally unsupervised and tends not to be arranged formally. It is thus not possible to accurately count existing parking spaces, but it is in theory possible to park around 15-170 well-arranged cars. Visiting vehicles 'sizes vary greatly however with a large

proportion of visitors arriving in vans. In reality therefore, the maximum number of vehicles that can be parked is much lower.

- 6.5.25 Parking is in general divided into discrete parcels separated by vegetated belts, bunds and strips which provide a range of screening effects. The topography contributes to the screening and the overall effect from any particular viewpoint is of a quantity of parking less extensive than the actual total.

Surface Drainage

- 6.5.26 The area used by BikePark Wales is drained by a series of streams. The main channel, Nant Graig, runs south west to north east close and parallel to the north western boundary and on to the River Taff. A series of smaller channels run across the developed area and the area proposed for development parallel to Nant Graig and on towards the Taff.
- 6.5.27 Webber's Pond is located adjacent to the A470 around 550m to the east of the main building. None of the streams flowing through the area used by BikePark Wales for parking flow into Webber's pond although the access road crosses a number of small streams which probably do.
- 6.5.28 The area of scrub proposed for development, and rough pasture elsewhere around the bike centre, are generally wet or damp throughout the year and waterlogged during much of the winter.
- 6.5.29 Access drives feature no specific drainage structures along much of their length. Where drainage structures are evident they comprise ditches at the side of the drive which appear to feed into the site streams. Parking areas do not appear to be drained towards dedicated drainage structures except where they slope towards the drive and the associated ditches. Bike tracks in the vicinity of the visitor centre do not appear to have dedicated drainage systems.

Natural Landscape

- 6.5.30 The area used by BikePark Wales is drained by a series of streams. The main channel, Nant Graig, runs south west to north east close and parallel to the north western boundary and on to the River Taff. A series of smaller channels run across the developed area and the area proposed for development parallel to Nant Graig and on towards the Taff.
- 6.5.31 The area of BikePark Wales and the area proposed for development feature the following vegetation types:
- Scrub
 - Mature deciduous woodland with areas of new growth
 - Young deciduous woodland with mature specimen trees
 - Mixed deciduous woodland interspersed by parking and other developments

The vegetation types are described briefly and in landscape terms below:

Scrub

- 6.5.32 The woody and herbaceous plants in the scrub area have developed since 2012 when BikePark Wales was established and the pressure from grazing and an area of larch was removed. The area is surrounded on three sides by woodland and there are many young self-sown saplings. There also appears to have been a limited amount of planting of trees. It is likely that, left to its own devices, the area would become woodland within a short period of time.

Mature deciduous woodland with areas of new growth

- 6.5.33 The woodland comprises mature trees with saplings. Part of the bike trail named Badger's Run runs within the woodland and compaction of roots beneath the trail appears to have caused damage to a number of trees.

Young deciduous woodland with mature specimens trees

- 6.5.34 This belt of woodland is contiguous with the area described above but is different in nature: the proportion of young trees is significantly greater. A number of mature trees within this area appear to be suffering as a result of works to parking bays and the drive especially where fill has been piled beneath canopies.

Mixed deciduous woodland interspersed by parking and other developments

- 6.5.35 Banks and strips of ground between parking areas support trees of various species and of various ages. A number of the trees appear to be suffering from damage and/or compaction of roots.

Threats to vegetation independent of site development

- 6.5.36 The site supports a number of ash trees. It is likely that the majority of these trees will die in the next few decades primarily as a result of ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) and possibly as a result of emerald ash borer (*Agilus planipennis*). The death of these trees may have an effect on the proposals and the landscape.

Character and setting

- 6.5.37 The character of the cycle centre is predominantly rural and dominated by trees. Views are in the main restricted by trees and it is not possible to see clearly from one side of the developed area to the other. It is possible however to see several areas of parking from most points within the developed area, especially in winter.
- 6.5.38 Views are more open in the scrub-covered part of the proposed development area. Views within the wooded areas are more restricted.
- 6.5.39 The built-up areas of the valley below are generally not apparent in views except from views at the upper, western end of the scrub area and the northern part of the terrace and adjacent areas. Elsewhere, long views are almost entirely restricted to the middle and upper parts of the west-facing slopes of the Taff valley opposite, which reinforces the impression of a rural setting.
- 6.5.40 The buildings, being finished in grey slate, timber and muted colours, are in keeping with their setting. However, the associated terrace, parked vehicles and trail maintenance yard all detract from the site's character.
- 6.5.41 The terrace is surfaced in part in grey concrete flags and in part in coarse crushed stone. Though muted in tone, both surfaces are more urban in character than their setting. In certain areas of the car park, the banks and verges are worn and damaged by vehicles and short cutting by bicycles and pedestrians. The trail maintenance yard is only partially screened by landform and presents a generally untidy scene.
- 6.5.42 The character of the site is described in greater detail in the LANDMAP and other subsequent sections.

Landscape Character
LANDMAP

- 6.5.43 The LANDMAP database stores information for all of Wales on landscape features and qualities that contribute to character. The information is arranged in five broad areas: geology, habitat, history culture, and visual & sensory. The following information from LANDMAP is relevant to the site and the proposed development:

Geological Landscape

- 6.5.44 The site straddles two Geological Aspect Areas. The larger, north eastern part of the site is covered by the Gellideg aspect area (MRTHRGL007) and is classified as *Mountain and upland valley/Glaciated mountain terrain/Glacial mountain valley (Level 3)*.
- 6.5.45 It is described as having a geographical and topographical character as follows: *Shallow western slope above Afon Taf with two minor tributary valleys, dissected into gently S-dipping mudstone-dominated succession of Namurian Middle Shale – Productive Coal formations...Bounded to E by NNW-SSE Merthyr/Church Fault... Widespread cover of boulder clay on slopes...Extensive made ground after coal and iron mining – closed coal mines, waste tips, old iron workings...*
- 6.5.46 It is evaluated as having high value and contains a number of RIGS (Regionally Important Geological Site). It is recommended that the RIGS are conserved as existing. Tolerance to change is *there are significant threats to the integrity and condition of Earth Heritage features in the area*.
- 6.5.47 The smaller, south western part of the site is within the Aberfan aspect area (MRTHRGL005) and is classified as *Mountain and upland valley/Glaciated mountain terrain/Glacial mountain valley (Level 3)*.
- 6.5.48 It is described as having a geographical and topographical character as follows: *Steep western slopes of U-shaped fault controlled Afon Taf valley, dissecting high-level sandstone plateau of gently S-dipping South Wales Pennant Formation. Eroded cirque above Upper Abercanad. Patchy cover of boulder clay and head on slopes. Major deep rotational landslide with rock face above Tarren y Gigfan. Disused quarries, coal mines and made ground.*
- 6.5.49 It is evaluated as having high value and recommended to be conserved as existing. Tolerance to change is *not known*

Landscape Habitat

- 6.5.50 The site is within the MRTHRLH011 aspect area code and is classified as *Dry (Relatively) Terrestrial Habitats/Grassland & Marsh/Acid Grassland (Level 3)*.
- 6.5.51 The area is described as having *podzolic, brown* and *surface-water gley* soils with the following Phase 1 habitats:
- Semi-natural Broadleaved Woodland
 - Semi-improved Acid Grassland
 - Improved Grassland
 - Bracken
 - Dry Acid Heath

It does not contain habitats of international importance but has the following Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats:

- Ancient and/or Species Rich Hedgerows
- Lowland Heathland
- Purple Moor Grass & Rush Pastures

It also contains SSSIs and Local Wildlife sites. The nearest of these is Webber's Pond Nature Reserve located beyond the BikePark Wales /proposed development site.

6.5.52 LANDMAP evaluates the area as having moderate value and recommends conserving the *diversity of vegetation and heritage features* and suggests a principal management recommendation to *Retain diversity of mosaic through limited reclamation and vegetation management, conserving and enhancing semi-natural habitats and extending heathland areas.*

6.5.53 The aspect area is evaluated as having moderate significance, low connectivity/cohesion and moderate sensitivity (*threat from development*).

Historic Landscape

6.5.54 The site is within the Mid Taff Enclosed Valley Side aspect area (MRTHRHL024) and is classified as *Built Environment/Industrial/Extractive (Level 3).*

6.5.55 It is described thus: *This area is characterised as a valleyside mineral field associated with coal extraction, for both industrial (iron works), steam coal, and domestic production during the 19th century, in particular the Cefn-glas, Graig, Gethin and Castle Collieries, the former opened before 1860, the latter in 1869. The area is co-terminous with the former extent of post-medieval agricultural enclosure, though during the 20th century has seen extensive afforestation. Features characteristic of the adjacent unenclosed area HL011 are characteristic of the area, indicating the former extent of the unenclosed landscape. The area retains characteristic prehistoric funerary and ritual sites, Bronze Age cairns, while post-medieval agricultural features associated with livestock farming (eg sheep folds) are found throughout. In the medieval and early post-medieval period, the area was enclosed (probably for use as winter pasture); there are also sheepfolds relating to the use of the adjacent upland common (HL011) as summer pasture. As well as the main colliery sites, minor industrial features are also characteristic of the area, and include a number of quarries, airshafts, coal shafts, levels and coal tips. Major landscape changes have resulted from the planting of areas of forestry, and most recently from the construction of the A470(T) road which has effectively separated the enclosed slopes from the valley bottom and transport corridor (HL012) to the east.*

6.5.56 The following features are also described as being important to the historical pattern of the area:

- Irregular Fieldsapes
- Regular Fieldsapes
- Woodland
- Non-nucleated Settlement

- Extractive
- Communications

Significant archaeological interest in the area is provided by:

- Relict-Earthworks
- Relict-Stone Monuments
- Buildings & Structures
- Industrial Archaeology
- Associations

The area is described thus: *Substantial remains survive of levels, shafts and various communication features and structures associated with mid 19th century 'steam coal' mining activity and the sites of the Cefn-glas, Graig, Gethin and Castle Collieries; however these remains are heavily obscured by extensive modern forestry plantations.*

6.5.57 LANDMAP shows a disused shaft immediately to the north of Nant Graig, a disused tip adjacent to the access drive and a disused level up-slope from the visitor centre.

6.5.58 The following traditional boundary types are described as prevailing in the area:

- Hedgerow
- Hedgerow With Trees
- Dry Stone Walls
- Stone Rubble Bank
- Cloddiau Variants/Stone & Earth Banks

LANDMAP evaluates the area as having high value and expands upon this as follows: *The high value assigned to this area reflects the reasonably intact condition of the upland pastoral fieldscape and the presence of substantial extant remains of mid 19th century extractive activity specifically associated with the 'steam coal' industry, now obscured by extensive late 20th century forestry plantations which have detracted from the coherence of this landscape.*

6.5.59 Management recommendations have not been assessed.

Cultural landscape

6.5.60 The site is within the Mynydd Merthyr aspect area (MRTHRCL019) code and is classified as *Influences/Material expressions/Rural (Level 3)*.

6.5.61 The area is described as having the following significant influences on the cultural landscape:

- Agricultural
- Forestry

- Rural Settlement
- Communications & Transport

It is described as follows: *Prominent landscape features in largely agricultural area adj... Communications routes, industrial development.*

6.5.62 LANDMAP evaluates the area as being commonplace but having moderate value and recommends continuing *as now with no major physical development* and limiting *forestry expansion*.

6.5.63 Tolerance to change: *not known*. Significant threats: *not known*

Visual and sensory landscape

6.5.64 The site is within the Merthyr West Flank aspect area (MRTHRV917) and is classified as *Upland/Upland Valleys/Open/Wooded Mosaic Upland Valleys (Level 3)*.

6.5.65 The area is described as having *attractive* and both *sheltered and exposed* sensory qualities. Sense of place and local distinctiveness is described as *moderate (long views over patchwork of relic industrial/agriculture above town)*.

6.5.66 The area is large and varied and the descriptions in the database are not all relevant to the site. However the most pertinent descriptions include:

- The area has a distinctive sense of place
- It is somewhat akin to a massive area of urban fringe in that the influence of the town is evident throughout yet it is still distinctly rural in overall character
- There are areas of woodland and substantial natural regeneration, which look like natural habitats from a distance
- Further south the balance is in favour of the remnant field pattern and small blocks of woodland
- The naturally regenerated habitat mosaics are a particular feature of the Merthyr landscape and compare favourably visually with some of the sterile reclamation projects designed purely for industrial development or grazing

LANDMAP evaluates the area as having moderate value, scenic quality and rarity and low integrity and high character. It recommends retaining *diversity of mosaic through limited reclamation and vegetation management* and *extending woodland framework while retaining mosaic character* whilst limiting *expansion of development*.

6.5.67 Tolerance to change: *not recorded*.

Visual Landscape

General

6.5.68 The area within which BikePark Wales is set and the area proposed for development is fairly well described by the excerpts presented above. In order to assess the potential effect of the proposed development, a more detailed description of the existing visual environment is presented in the following sections with photographs.

- 6.5.69 Views of BikePark Wales were assessed by observing which areas were visible *from* BikePark Wales. These areas were then visited and representative photographs taken. All views were considered with the naked eye and described at the time of the study. Deciduous trees and shrubs had around one third of their leaves at the time of the survey.
- 6.5.70 Representative viewpoints were used to represent the experience of different types of visual receptor likely to experience similar effects. Viewpoints were chosen where the view of BikePark Wales and the site was clearest in any particular area. Photographs taken in the direction of the site generally place it in the approximate centre of the frame unless otherwise stated. Distances are approximate only.
- 6.5.71 All photographs in this section were taken from a standing position on the ground between the hours of 10.30 and 3.00pm on 2nd November 2018 using a hand-held Nikon F55 set at 50mm (producing a horizontal field of view of c.45°). All photographs are presented at the same size without cropping. In order to illustrate the actual view of the site and its context, photographs have not been annotated but are described in detail.
- 6.5.72 The approximate positions from which photographs were taken are shown on the Site Context Plan and Existing Site Plan in the Appendices. Heights above OD are given for each viewpoint.
- 6.5.73 Conditions on the day were dry with minimal cloud cover and excellent visibility.
- 6.5.74 Unless otherwise stated, names, labels and other descriptions referred to in the text, and not shown on the *Photograph Locations* plans, can be found on the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 166, “Rhondda & Merthyr Tydfil”

Summary of Views

- 6.5.75 The area within which BikePark Wales is set and the area proposed for development is fairly well described by the excerpts presented above. In order to assess the potential effect of the proposed development, a more detailed description of the existing visual environment is presented in the following sections with photographs.
- 6.5.76 Views within the site tend to be framed and/or screened by landform and vegetation. They tend to be restricted in extent being increasingly screened with distance.
- 6.5.77 Views from the site to the south east, south, south west, west and north west are almost completely screened by woodland and landform. Views to the north, north-east and east are restricted to the following areas:
- Middle-distance (c.750m) partial views of the commercial and industrial areas beyond Abercanaid
 - Longer distance views of Merthyr Tydfil (c.1.5km) almost completely screened by vegetation
 - Long distance (c.1.5km+) clear but restricted views to Pentrebach and slopes above on the north-eastern flank of the Taff valley

Views into the site are summarised as follows:

- The commercial and industrial areas beyond Abercanaid are just possible but the site is barely perceptible
- Views from Merthyr Tydfil are not possible
- Views from Pentrebach are clear but distant and restricted by buildings and vegetation

- Views from the slopes above Pentrebach are clear but distant

Representative photographs that show views within, from and towards BikePark Wales are presented and described below. The photographs are presented in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal that is included in the Appendices.

Photograph 1

- 6.5.78 Photograph 1 was taken from the main access drive around 115m from the main entrance to the visitor centre looking north west. Height c.253 OD.
- 6.5.79 The foreground shows the access drive with bridge walls either side. The drive is one-way (heading into the picture) and is used by every visitor arriving by car and presents the first view of the visitor centre. A large proportion of visitors also approach the visitor centre by foot and by bike from this direction after parking elsewhere or in returning from rides.
- 6.5.80 The main visitor centre building is visible slightly left of and above the centre of the frame just beyond the black van. The view of the building becomes increasingly clear as it is approached and the effect of framing by roadside vegetation decreases.
- 6.5.81 Parked vehicles detract from views of the main visitor centre and beyond.
- 6.5.82 Views above this point (left and centre of frame) are restricted by vegetation and landform. Views to the car park areas below (east of) this point are partly screened by vegetation.
- 6.5.83 Views east beyond the site are generally restricted by vegetation from this point.

Photograph 2

- 6.5.84 Photograph 2 was taken from the bridleway adjacent to the main visitor centre looking east. Height c.254 OD.
- 6.5.85 In the foreground, at the right of the frame, is the tree at the northern end of the pump trail.
- 6.5.86 The wooden fence at the left of the frame surrounds a settling pond (reed bed).
- 6.5.87 The blue shipping container is the same as that featured in photographs 5 and 6. Beyond and below the blue container is the trail maintenance yard. The structures visible just to the left of the blue container are storage units associated with trail maintenance. The parked vehicles, containers and the fence around the pond, and the high voltage wires in the distance, detract from what is otherwise a very agreeable view.
- 6.5.88 In the distance, just above and to the left of the blue container, the upper parts of Pentrebach are clearly visible. The dark ground above Pentrebach is a slag heap which forms part of Merthyr Common (see photograph 17). The common extends to the ridge and beyond the horizon. The highest point on the ridge visible in the view is Mynydd Cilfach-yr-encil.
- 6.5.89 This section of the bridleway is heavily used by visitors to BikePark Wales on bikes and on foot.

Photograph 3

- 6.5.90 Photograph 3 was taken from the eastern corner of the settling pond (reed bed) looking east. Height c.248 OD.
- 6.5.91 In the foreground is the area of scrub and grass proposed for development as van and motorhome parking through which footpath 110/71 winds. Part of the bike track which connects with the footpath can just be seen in the right of the frame just below the centre line.
- 6.5.92 A number of trees covered by the tree survey (T1540, 1541, 1542 and T1546) are visible on the right of the frame. These form the northern edge of the area of woodland proposed for development. The trees on the left of the frame are part of the riparian woodland along Nant Craig.
- 6.5.93 In the distance, just above the centre of the frame, the upper parts of Pentrebach are clearly visible. The dark ground above Pentrebach is a slag heap which forms part of Merthyr Common. The common extends to the ridge and beyond the horizon. The highest point on the ridge visible in the view is Mynydd Cilfach-yr-encil.
- 6.5.94 The high voltage wires in the distance detract from what is otherwise a very agreeable view
- 6.5.95 The area from which the photograph was taken is little visited except by trail maintenance crew. Mountain bikers and the occasional walker use the bike track/footpath through the scrub area.

Photograph 4

- 6.5.96 Photograph 4 was taken from BOAT 110/4 looking south west towards the visitor centre. Height c.243 OD.
- 6.5.97 The visitor centre is visible in the centre of the frame but is partly screened by riparian trees and shrubs. In the summer the building is almost completely screened. In winter it is fairly clear.
- 6.5.98 Further downstream, views of the scrub area are limited by the high bank above the stream. The eye level of a user of the BOAT is below the top of the bank for almost the entire length of the BOAT adjacent to the scrub area.
- 6.5.99 Litter and other tipping down the banks and into the stream detract from what is otherwise a characterful and charming right of way.
- 6.5.100 Judging by wear of the surface, this section of the BOAT appears to be lightly used.

Photograph 5

- 6.5.101 Photograph 5 was taken at the junction between BOAT 110/4 and the farm access track looking south. Height c.248 OD.
- 6.5.102 The timber office building, under construction at the time of the visit, is clearly visible and dominates views towards the visitor centre and beyond.
- 6.5.103 The gate at the left of the frame marks the approximate boundary between BikePark Wales and the adjacent private farm.

6.5.104 The blue shipping container is the same as that featured in photographs 2 and 6. The track leading to the container is the farm access track.

6.5.105 Judging by wear of the surface, this section of the BOAT appears to be lightly used. The access track to the farm is used approximately daily.

Photograph 6

6.5.106 Photograph 6 was taken at the junction between bridleway 110/85 and the farm access track looking south east. Height c.252 OD. The blue shipping container is the same as that featured in photographs 2 and 5. The tree at the far right of the frame is that described in photograph 2 at the northern end of the pump track.

6.5.107 The main access drive approaches from the roundabout on the A470 from the right of the frame, turns at the hairpin (immediately to the right of the black van) and heads back south east towards the roundabout along the drive visible just above the centre of the image.

6.5.108 The line of cars and vans at the left of the frame sit above the trail maintenance yard and are parked on the area proposed for redevelopment as a picnic area. The tall group of trees beyond the black van include trees T1530-1534.

6.5.109 The prominent vehicles and container detract from near views of what is otherwise an agreeable scene. They detract markedly from very agreeable longer views onto the opposite side of the Taff valley.

6.5.110 This section of the bridleway is heavily used by visitors to BIKEPARK WALES on bikes and on foot.

Photograph 7

6.5.111 Photograph 7 was taken from bridleway 110/85 above and west of the visitor centre looking east. Height c.263 OD.

6.5.112 Views of the visitor centre from south of this point (right of frame) are increasingly well-screened by vegetation until the area of photograph 8 where shrubs and trees give way to more open scrub and herbaceous vegetation.

6.5.113 Very agreeable views above the visitor centre across the Taff valley are restricted by vegetation but clear (though light conditions prevent this from being apparent in the photograph). The roof of the visitor centre detracts from these views but is less disruptive than the ancillary structures and activities to the rear of the visitor centre (between the building and the viewpoint). Partial screening of this area is provided by herbaceous and woody vegetation in the foreground.

6.5.114 The area to the right of the green container just above the frame's centre is proposed for the construction of the bike hire centre.

6.5.115 Observation on the day of study suggests that the bridleway is very well used by mountain bikers. Other users, ie walkers and horse riders, were not observed but are reported as using the bridleway on occasion.

Photograph 8

6.5.116 Photograph 8 was taken from the bridleway above & southeast of the visitor centre looking north. Height c.273 OD.

6.5.117 The office, visitor centre and its terrace and flags is visible in the upper left quadrant of the view. No vehicles are visible around the main building and terrace which gives it the appearance of being well integrated into its woodland setting. Parked vehicles are just visible to the right of the terrace.

6.5.118 Despite a large part of the car park potentially being visible, very few vehicles can be seen to detract from what is a very agreeable view. It is likely that on busier days the adverse effect of vehicles on the view would be greater though not by a significant amount. The view across the Taff valley is restricted by topography but clear (though light conditions prevent this from being apparent in the photograph).

6.5.119 A short section of one of the bike trails is visible to the right of the centre of the frame.

6.5.120 It is not possible to see the area proposed for the construction of the bike hire centre. The area proposed for the outdoor catering facility appears to be partially visible.

6.5.121 Observation on the day of study suggests that the bridleway is very well used by mountain bikers. Other users, ie walkers and horse riders, were not observed but are reported as using the bridleway on occasion.

Photograph 9

6.5.122 Photograph 9 was taken from the lower limb of the main access drive around 75m east of the visitor centre looking north east. Height c.249 OD.

6.5.123 The trailer in the foreground is that just visible beyond the black van in photograph 6.

6.5.124 The trees in the foreground, left of frame, are T1535, 1536 and 1536A. They are proposed for removal to create an access road to the scrub area proposed for parking, and visible beyond. The trees behind the above group are the riparian trees along Nant Graig.

6.5.125 The trees on the right of the frame are part of the woodland in which camping pods are proposed.

6.5.126 Very agreeable distant views are possible across the Taff valley but are restricted and partially screened by vegetation.

6.5.127 This section of the drive is very heavily used by vehicles and users on bikes and on foot.

Photograph 10

6.5.128 Photograph 10 was taken from the bike trail/footpath 110/71 looking west towards the visitor centre. Height c.232 OD.

6.5.129 The main building and office are just visible behind and either side of the van and tractor just above the centre of the frame. The foreground comprises the scrub area proposed for development as a car park. The trees on the right off the frame are part of the riparian woodland along Nant Graig.

6.5.130 The footpath is visible on the right and is clearly well used by bikes. The level of use by walkers could not be discerned as confidently but footprints were visible and a pair of walkers did use it on the day of the study.

6.5.131 The general appearance of the area is very rural and in part, wild. The vehicles described above detract slightly from what is otherwise an agreeable scene.

Photograph 11

6.5.132 Photograph 11 was taken from the existing track through the woodland in which pods and lodges are proposed looking north east. Height c.233 OD.

6.5.133 The large tree at the right of frame is T1546.

6.5.134 The general appearance of the area is very rural with no detracting elements in the foreground or middle ground. It is possible to make out part of Merthyr Tydfil through the trees above the middle of the frame though this does not detract much from the scene. This view is likely to be screened fully by trees in summer and quite clear in winter.

6.5.135 The track appears to be well used by bikes. The level of use by walkers could not be discerned as confidently though footprints were visible and a pair of walkers did use it on the day of the study.

Photograph 12

6.5.136 Photograph 12 was taken from the existing track through the woodland in which pods and lodges are proposed, looking south west. Height c.233 OD.

6.5.137 The branches of the large tree at the top left corner of the frame belong to T1549.

6.5.138 The general appearance of the area is very rural with no detracting elements in the foreground. In the middle distance, it is possible to make out parked vehicles on a bank through the trees just left of the middle of the frame, though this does not detract much from the scene. This view is likely to be screened fully by trees in summer and fairly clear in winter.

6.5.139 The track appears to be well used by bikes. The level of use by walkers could not be discerned as confidently though footprints were visible and a pair of walkers did use it on the day of the study.

Photograph 13

6.5.140 Photograph 13 was taken from the field below the area of woodland proposed for overflow parking looking north. Height c.232 OD.

6.5.141 The field in the foreground is beyond the developed area of BikePark Wales and beyond the area proposed for development. The trees on the left edge of the frame however grow along the north eastern edge of the woodland proposed for development as overflow parking. The trees across the centre of the frame form the south eastern edge of the woodland in which it is proposed to construct lodges.

6.5.142 The scene is very rural with only high voltage electrical wires visible on the right side of the frame forming any detractive element. The field is used for rough pasture.

6.5.143 The fence forming the boundary between field and woodland is just visible and marks the edge of an area of russet coloured ground cover within the woodland.

Photograph 14

6.5.144 Photograph 14 was taken looking east from the main access drive looking into the woodland where overflow parking is proposed. Height c.236 OD.

6.5.145 The trees visible across the foreground form the band of woodland between the drive and the adjacent field prominent in photograph 13. The trees are likely to form a dense screen in summer but are likely to offer a much-reduced screen in winter.

6.5.146 The ridge of Mynydd Cilfach-yr-encil is visible forming the horizon beyond the trees.

6.5.147 The drive at this point is not frequently used by customers of BikePark Wales on foot but is very well used by vehicles and to a lesser extent by mountain bikers returning to cars.

Photograph 15

6.5.148 Photograph 15 was taken from Dyffryn Road, the main road through Pentrebach, outside Greenfield school looking west south west. Height c.147 OD.

6.5.149 Vehicles parked at BikePark Wales are just about visible in the centre of the frame just above the gap between the two pitched roofs. The view is glimpsed between trees, buildings and other elements in Pentrebach. The view is in many respects typical of views from dwellings and other properties in the village. No residential properties were visited as part of this study and views from them were inferred from views from publicly accessible areas such as this.

6.5.150 There are many detractive elements in this and similar views, and the hillside and woodland within which BikePark Wales is set form a backdrop to these elements rather than the focus of views.

6.5.151 The road is well used by residents walking along the pavement, and local and through traffic.

Photograph 16

6.5.152 Photograph 16 was taken from the footpath north east of and above Pentrebach looking west. Height c.169 OD.

6.5.153 The houses in the foreground mark the north eastern and highest boundary of the village. The A4060, the road which links the Heads of the Valley Road (A465) with the A470 along the eastern side of Merthyr Tydfil crosses the River Taff on the bridge visible at the left of the frame.

6.5.154 The village of Abercanaid is visible as a line of houses separated by trees above the roofs of the houses of Pentrebach.

6.5.155 Vehicles parked at BikePark Wales, at a distance of c.1750m, are just visible in woodland to the right of the centre of the frame. The scrub area proposed for car parking can also just be made out though it is partly screened along its southern edge by the adjacent woodland.

6.5.156 The houses detract from what would otherwise be a very agreeable and panoramic view. The vehicles at BikePark Wales are an unwelcome element in an otherwise wooded hillside but they are far from prominent and are unlikely to be noticed by many users of the footpath.

6.5.157 The footpath is part of the Trevithick Trail, a 15km footpath commemorating the first journey in 1804 by a steam locomotive to pull a load on rails. It is well used by local and other walkers.

Photograph 17

6.5.158 Photograph 17 was taken from the top of the slag heap described in photograph 2 looking west. Height c.286 OD.

6.5.159 The houses in the middle ground mark the north eastern and highest boundary of the village of Pentrebach. The A4060, the road which links the A465 with the A470 along the eastern side of Merthyr Tydfil crosses the River Taff on the bridge visible at the left of the frame.

6.5.160 The village of Abercanaid is visible as a group of houses between Pentrebach and the hillside opposite. Vehicles parked at BikePark Wales, at a distance of c.2175m, are just visible in woodland just above the apparent centre of Abercanaid. The entire area of scrub proposed for car parking can also just be made out.

6.5.161 The residential, commercial and industrial areas in the valley detract from what would otherwise be a very agreeable panorama. The vehicles at BikePark Wales can be seen in what is an otherwise wooded hillside but they are far from prominent and are unlikely to be noticed by the majority of users of Merthyr Common. It should be noted however, that though the summit of the slag heap is a difficult climb, it is obviously well used by walkers and motorbikers. Most walkers, having made the effort to climb up, are likely to pause and admire the view from this location in more detail than users of the footpaths in the locality.

6.5.162 Views from further up the slope between here and the ridge are similar except that the built up areas make up a greater proportion of the view and are more prominent within those views.

6.6 Assessment of Effects

Landscape Effects

Landscape Receptor: landform and geology

Table 6.1: Landscape effects on landform and geology

Value: High (LANDMAP)
Susceptibility: Medium (Not assessed in LANDMAP)
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate in size, long-term, permanent
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant

6.6.1 The main adverse effects on landform and geology are the excavation of the bank to allow construction of the bike hire building and the groundworks (excavations and bund construction) associated with the overflow, van, and motorhome parking areas.

6.6.2 The depth of excavation required to provide acceptable gradients in the overflow parking and other areas will affect the geology at a site level and will affect its immediate setting. It will not however affect

the landscape type as the general landscape has previously been subject to mining and other activities that affect the landform.

- 6.6.3 The combination of a medium sensitivity and a medium magnitude of effect leads to the conclusion that this is a significant effect when considered with the recommendation of the LANDMAP assessment that the landform should be conserved as existing.
- 6.6.4 The overall effect on landform and geology has been assessed as significant and is likely to be subject to a moderate adverse effect. It will be assessed in section 8.0 for how the effects can be mitigated.

Landscape Receptor: landscape pattern and history

Table 6.2: Landscape effects on landform pattern and history

Value: High (LANDMAP)
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant

The pattern of the landscape on site and the history of the site are closely linked and have been considered together. The site has good screening and already features some development and would be described as being of low susceptibility if it were not for the changes that would be likely to follow the removal of woodland associated with the overflow parking area which are likely to have an adverse effect on the existing pattern of the landscape.

- 6.6.5 The overall effect on landscape pattern and history has been assessed as significant and is likely to be subject to a moderate adverse effect. It will be assessed in section 8.0 for how the effects can be mitigated.

Landscape Receptor: woodland

Table 6.3: Landscape effects on woodland

Value: High
Susceptibility: High
Sensitivity: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: moderate in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Moderate
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant

The woodland is not assessed separately in LANDMAP but the landscape habitat is assessed as being of moderate value and of moderate sensitivity. It recommends retention of “*diversity of mosaic through limited reclamation and vegetation management*”. The woodland on and near to the site is TPO’d and is described as being Ancient/Ancient Semi-natural Woodland and is included within the Abercanaid Fields SINC 20 and Craig Gethin SINC 30. It has thus been assigned a high value.

6.6.6 The woodland may be affected by the development as follows:

- Damage to roots of significant and other trees by concrete foundations
- Damage to canopies of significant trees by construction process during construction of buildings and two-way access road
- Damage to roots of significant and other trees by construction of two-way access road
- Damage to roots of significant and other trees by construction of new paths within woodland
- Removal of/damage to significant and other trees by construction of parking within woodland
- Removal of/damage to roots of significant and other trees by construction of topsoil bunds
- Introduction of camping pods and lodges into woodland
- Introduction of lighting to woodland
- Introduction of soakaways to woodland
- Installation of access path through woodland
- Installation of services beneath path through woodland
- Reduction in area of woodland available to plants and animals

The area of woodland directly affected by the construction of paths, drives, bunds, pods and lodges within it is c.0.57ha. The area of woodland removed to facilitate the construction of the overflow parking is c.0.33ha.

6.6.7 The woodland is not judged to be capable of accommodating the development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline or conformity with planning policy. It is thus assigned a high susceptibility and high sensitivity.

6.6.8 The overall effect on woodland has been assessed as significant and is likely to be subject to a moderate adverse effect. Mitigation is provided later.

Landscape Receptor: scrub /grassland

Table 6.4: Landscape effects on scrub / grassland

Value: Low
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Low
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Moderate
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Not significant

The scrub and grassland is not assessed separately in LANDMAP but the landscape habitat is assessed as being of moderate value and of moderate sensitivity. It recommends retention of *“diversity of mosaic through limited reclamation and vegetation management”*.

- 6.6.9 The area of scrub/grassland removed to facilitate the construction of the parking and motorhome area is c.0.7ha.
- 6.6.10 Part of the scrub area was until recently closely grazed and the evidence from earlier aerial photographs suggests that this has been the case for many years. The remaining part of the scrub area was planted with a commercial crop of larch. This stand of non-native conifers made up part of Abercanaid Fields SINC 20. The conifers have since been felled.
- 6.6.11 The complex scrub community now growing across the area has developed in less than 6 years and is protected by the area’s designation as a SINC. Its replacement with a car park will have an adverse effect on the environmental complexity of the site. This loss is assessed in detail in the Ecological Assessment that forms a separate part of this EA.
- 6.6.12 The overall effect on landscape scrub/grassland has been assessed as not being significant. It will not therefore be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.

Landscape Receptor: waterways and waterbodies

Table 6.5: Landscape effects on landform and geology

Value: Low
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: moderate in size, long-term and reversible in the long-term
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant

The waterways and waterbodies are not assessed separately in LANDMAP but the landscape habitat is assessed as being of moderate value and of moderate sensitivity. It recommends retention of *“diversity of mosaic through limited reclamation and vegetation management”*.

- 6.6.13 The development is unlikely to affect Webber’s Pond. The main possible effects on streams are pollution events, silting and changes to pH. Any effects would be likely to have repercussions downstream.
- 6.6.14 Runoff conducting silt and pollution into watercourses during construction could lead to severe adverse effects on waterflow and wildlife including trees and other vegetation.
- 6.6.15 The soil and general vegetation are related to the existing acidic ground water. The stone proposed for use on roads and parking areas has not been specified. If limestone or other basic (alkaline) stone were specified then the pH of the groundwater and runoff would be increased. This may have an adverse effect on the existing vegetation and other aspects of the landscape.

6.6.16 The above effects may have a greater effect on wildlife. This is considered in the Ecological Assessment that forms a separate part of this EA.

6.6.17 The overall effect on waterways and waterbodies has been assessed as significant and could have a moderate adverse effect. Mitigation is proposed later.

Landscape Receptor: access

Table 6.6: Landscape effects on access

Value: High
Susceptibility: Moderate
Sensitivity: Moderate
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate in size, short-term duration and reversible
Magnitude of effect: Minor
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Not significant

LANDMAP only refers to access obliquely as part of the cultural landscape. The cultural landscape is assessed as having moderate value but this is not judged to be specific enough to the access landscape receptor or the site.

6.6.18 The site, before development as BikePark Wales was a destination popular enough to have a dedicated car park and was clearly well used. The woodland park, Webber's pond and other landscape features appear to be popular and the area is well served with rights of way and is designated Access Land. It is thus assigned a high value.

6.6.19 In the long-term, susceptibility is judged as low as access will not be unduly adversely affected by the proposals: there are some changes to the route and context of some of the rights of way on the site but these are judged to be minor. In the short-term however, access may suffer greater adverse effects in that the route of footpath 110/71 will be blocked. Susceptibility and sensitivity are thus judged to be moderate.

6.6.20 The informal track through the woodland will be affected in a similar way to footpath 110/71 but this is not a dedicated right of way. The remodelling of the main access path will affect bridleway 110/82 but is not likely to close the route for anything but very short periods and access will probably be retained throughout the development period though no specific construction methodology statement relating to access was available at the time of this study.

6.6.21 The development proposals are such that all excavated material will be re-used on site thus limiting lorry traffic. Also, given the existing high level of traffic on the A470, the dual carriageway nature of the road and the relatively limited size of the development, the extra traffic generated during the construction of the proposals is unlikely to cause noticeable disruption even in the short term.

6.6.22 The increase in visitor traffic using the site in the long-term will have an adverse effect on access and contributes to the assessment of the effect as moderate. On balance however the magnitude of effect of the proposed development on access is judged as being minor.

- 6.6.23 The overall effect on access has been assessed as not being significant. It will however be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.

Landscape Receptor: culture

Table 6.7: Landscape effects on culture

Value: Moderate
Susceptibility: Low
Sensitivity: Low
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: minor in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Not significant

Cultural features of the site and the immediate area are closely tied to the pattern of the landscape and history. LANDMAP describes the cultural landscape in the area as having moderate value based on its agriculture, forestry, rural settlement, communications & transport. It recommends that no major physical development occurs and the expansion of forestry (assumed to mean commercial plantation type) is limited.

- 6.6.24 The development could not be described as major and no commercial forestry is planned. The effect of the development on the site's cultural landscape is unlikely to be significant. It will not therefore be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.

Landscape Receptor: sensory aspects

Table 6.8: Landscape effects on sensory aspects

Value: Moderate
Susceptibility: Low
Sensitivity: Low
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Not significant

The description of the Merthyr West Flank aspect area as having *attractive* and both *sheltered and exposed* sensory qualities reflects the experience of visiting the site and the immediate area. It has a very strong sense of place and local distinctiveness that is formed by its mixture of relatively peaceful woodland and glades, open areas (including scrub), farm animals, other users and the exposure to a much larger landscape beyond. Tranquility is greatest in woodland areas away from the active BikePark Wales area.

- 6.6.25 LANDMAP evaluates the area as having moderate value and recommends the following:

- Retaining diversity of mosaic through limited reclamation and vegetation management
- Extending woodland framework while retaining mosaic character
- Limiting expansion of development

The area is judged to have a low susceptibility to the changes proposed except in the short term. With the exception of the motorhome parking and play areas, the proposals do not introduce elements that are not already present. Similarly, the motorhomes and play area will not introduce *effects* that are not already present around BikePark Wales. There would be an increase in the intensity of use of the site but this is not considered to be of a magnitude that warrants a larger assessment than low.

- 6.6.26 The overall effect on sensory aspects has been assessed as not being significant and will not be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.
- 6.6.27 Cultural features of the site and the immediate area are closely tied to the pattern of the landscape and history. LANDMAP describes the cultural landscape in the area as having moderate value based on its agriculture, forestry, rural settlement, communications & transport. It recommends that no major physical development occurs and the expansion of forestry (assumed to mean commercial plantation type) is limited.
- 6.6.28 The development could not be described as major and no commercial forestry is planned. The effect of the development on the site's cultural landscape is unlikely to be significant. It will not therefore be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.

Landscape Receptor: light

Table 6.8: Landscape effects on light

Value: Medium
Susceptibility: Low
Sensitivity: Low/moderate
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Not significant

No study was carried out at night so effects have been estimated.

- 6.6.29 The hillside in which BikePark Wales is set is has few street lights, buildings or other elements that are lit at night. In terms of conservation, wildness and sensory appeal this could be assigned a high value. However the already established visitor centre and parking reduces the intactness of the dark scene and leads to an assessment of value as medium and susceptibility as low. Sensitivity is thus judged to be low/moderate.
- 6.6.30 The magnitude of the effect on light is judged to be low as the increased effect of headlights and the lights of buildings on the darkness of the hillside are limited by the existing vehicles and buildings of BikePark Wales. In addition, lux levels of proposed "wayfinder" bollards are specified as low and the light is directed downward.

- 6.6.31 The effect of the development on the site's darkness is unlikely to be significant. It will not therefore be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.

Landscape effects: general character

- 6.6.32 It is not considered likely that the overall landscape character would be altered by the proposed development as the proposed elements are not fundamentally different in character from those already existing on the site. Also, the size of the proposed development, though large in relation to the existing BikePark Wales visitor centre and car park, is not of a scale that is likely to significantly change the character of the aspect area sufficient to create a new landscape type or sub-type.
- 6.6.33 In terms of its visual and sensory character, LANDMAP describes the aspect area in which BikePark Wales is set as a, "*massive area of urban fringe in that the influence of the town is evident throughout yet it is still distinctly rural in overall character*". All aspect areas covering BikePark Wales are sufficiently heterogeneous to receive the development without noticeable changes to their character.

Visual Effects

Visual receptors: users of PROWs and Access Land in and around BikePark Wales

Table 6.9: Landscape effects on sensory aspects

Value of view: Medium
Susceptibility of receptor: High
Sensitivity of receptor: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: High
Likely overall effect: Significant

Gethin Woodland Park is clearly attractive. The presence of a car park pre-dating BikePark Wales suggests a popular facility visited by locals in order to enjoy the landscape. It is probably not of regional value or higher and thus views within the BikePark Wales area are assigned a medium value.

- 6.6.34 Users of the BikePark Wales area may be divided into two groups: i) walkers, horse riders and cyclists not using the mountain biking trails and ii) mountain bikers. Mountain bikers are physically interacting with the landscape but have some appreciation of views. Walkers and others are likely to be focused on the landscape, and elements within the landscape, and being mostly local, are very likely to notice any changes. They are thus the most susceptible to changes in the view and have been assigned a high susceptibility. Consequently, sensitivity is described as high.
- 6.6.35 The proposed changes will affect a large part of the BikePark Wales site and will thus be perceived as affecting a major part of views. Temporary effects will also adversely affect many of the views. The magnitude of effect, despite the size and longevity of the effects, is described as medium, as the proposals introduce few new elements into the landscape and large areas of planting are proposed.
- 6.6.36 Views from the bridleway 110/85 near to the visitor centre are likely to be affected as follows:

- From points south of the visitor centre (see photograph 8) users will see little change to the view other than the proposed catering unit and the office (under construction in the photo).
- A view of the bike hire building roof, associated containers and other buildings will be prominent from the viewpoint of photograph 7. This will affect the view adversely though it will improve in time as proposed screening vegetation grows.
- The trail maintenance yard proposed to the rear of the visitor centre will be visible in part from viewpoints immediately to the west of the visitor centre though the gabion wall will provide some screening. This will probably have no adverse affect on views as the area to the rear of the visitor centre is not an attractive space at present. Views will improve in time as proposed screening vegetation grows.
- Views from the stretch north of the visitor centre will improve as the presently unkempt area is rationalised and planted with trees and shrubs. Views of the existing maintenance yard will be much improved by its relocation and replacement with a landscaped play area specified in keeping with its rural setting. Views across to Merthyr Common will be framed by proposed and existing trees and will thus improve.

Views from footpath 110/71 within the scrub area (see photographs 3 and 10) are likely to be affected as follows:

- Within the areas proposed for van and motorhome parking, near views will be adversely affected by changing from scrub to vehicle parking, access roads and screening planting. The re-routing of the path will change views but will be unlikely to directly lead to adverse effects. Longer views of Merthyr Common will largely be lost by screen planting. Views from the lower part of the scrub area will be adversely affected by the construction of lodges within the woodland. The adverse effect on near views will be reduced but not eliminated by planting as it matures.
- Views of the existing maintenance yard will be much improved by its relocation, replacement with a landscaped play area specified in keeping with its rural setting and by intervening planting.

Views from BOAT 110/4 are likely to be affected as follows:

- From the point where the BOAT runs alongside the stream (see photograph 4) proposed buildings will not be prominent. Vehicles parked along the northern edge of the proposed van and motorhome parks may be in places visible. Any slight adverse effects will reduce in time with the proposed planting between the proposed car parks and edge of the existing woodland.
- Around the point where the BOAT meets the farm access track (see photograph 5) the office building will be prominent but increasingly screened by planting. Vehicles and containers parked will be almost completely screened. Any slight adverse effects will reduce in time with the proposed planting.

Views from bridleway 110/82 above the proposed overflow parking area will see a deterioration in the view caused by removal of a significant section of screening woodland (see photograph 14) and replacement with a dry macadam surface and parked cars and vans.

6.6.37 Views from footpath 110/71 on approaching Webber's Pond and Access Land immediately to the north east of the proposed overflow parking area (see photograph 13) are likely to be adversely affected by the removal of a significant section of screening woodland (see photograph 14) and replacement with a dry macadam surface and parked cars and vans and the introduction of lodges into the woodland. The adverse effects on views will be slightly reduced by the proposed feathered and standard tree planting as it matures but not eliminated.

6.6.38 Views from the informal track between the proposed parking area and the proposed overflow parking area (see photographs 11 and 12) are likely to be adversely affected by the removal of certain trees

and shrubs, the widening and resurfacing of the track and the introduction of camping pods, lodges, access footpaths and lit bollards into the woodland. The adverse effects on views will be slightly reduced by the proposed feathered and standard tree planting as it matures but not eliminated.

6.6.39 Views of the terrace and front of the visitor centre are likely to improve with the following changes:

- Removal of parking from the vicinity of the visitor centre
- Improvements to boundaries and surfaces across the extended terrace area
- Formalisation of desire lines

General views are likely to improve with the following changes:

- Relocation of track maintenance yard and containers etc to the rear of the visitor centre
- Creation of picnic area and bespoke play area to replace parking and track maintenance yard.
- General planting of tree and shrub whips and of feathered and standard trees.

The likely overall effect on users of footpaths, bridleways, BOATS and Access Land in and around BikePark Wales has been assessed as significant and is likely to have a major adverse effect reducing to moderate in time as screening planting matures. It will be assessed in section 8.0 for how the effects can be mitigated.

Visual Receptor: users of Merthyr Common

Table 6.10: Visual effects on Merthyr Common

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: High
Sensitivity of receptor: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor, long term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect: Not significant

Views from Merthyr Common towards BikePark Wales, despite encompassing built-up areas within the valley floor, are very appealing (see photograph 17). The common is, in part, very well used by walkers, horse riders, cyclists, scrambler bikers and paragliders.

6.6.40 These may be divided into two groups: i) walkers, horse riders and cyclists and ii) scrambler bike riders and paragliders. Scrambler bike riders and paragliders are physically interacting with the landscape but have some appreciation of views. Walkers and others are likely to be focused on the landscape and elements within the landscape and being mostly local, are very likely to notice any changes. They are thus the most susceptible to changes in the view and have been assigned a high susceptibility. Consequently, sensitivity is described as high.

6.6.41 However, the proposed buildings and associated structures are unlikely to be noticeable to the vast majority of sensitive receptors, as viewpoints are more than 2km away from BikePark Wales. Furthermore, the proposed buildings and structures will be viewed against the backdrop of a well-wooded hillside of complex texture and pattern. Existing buildings at BikePark Wales are barely visible

- 6.6.42 The toilet block, lodges and pods are proposed within an area of woodland and are finished in muted natural tones. Despite the removal of a certain number of trees and shrubs and the raising of certain lodges above ground level, it is unlikely that the installation of these buildings will have a noticeable effect on views except at night in winter.
- 6.6.43 Of significantly greater prominence in existing views are the vehicles and shipping container. The proposed increase in extent of parking and the expansion into the more exposed scrub area is likely to be noticeable from Merthyr Common especially to those very familiar with the view. Similarly, certain areas of the existing parking and the proposed overflow parking are likely to be noticeable with the removal of a significant area of screening woodland and relatively little proposed screening along its north eastern edge. The distance will reduce the magnitude of the effect substantially but views will be adversely affected. This will reduce in time as proposed screening planting grows.
- 6.6.44 The overall effect on this view has been assessed as not being significant. It will however be assessed in section 8.0 for how the effects can be mitigated as the view of BikePark Wales is clear and the integrity of the woodland around BikePark Wales is an important character of that view and its preservation is considered important.

Visual Receptor: users of the Trevithick Trail and other PROWs on the eastern valley flanks

Table 6.11: Visual effects on Trevithick Trail and other PROWs on the eastern valley flanks

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: High
Sensitivity of receptor: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor, long term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect: Not significant

Views from the Trevithick Trail and other PROWs, east and east north east of BikePark Wales encompass close views of built-up areas within Pentrebach and commercial/industrial areas nearby but are nevertheless appealing (see photograph 16) and enjoyed by a great many walkers and some cyclists. Walkers, and to a lesser extent cyclists, are likely to be focused on the landscape and elements within the landscape and being mostly local, are very likely to notice any changes. They are thus the most susceptible to changes in the view and have been assigned a high susceptibility. Consequently, sensitivity is described as high.

- 6.6.45 However, the proposed buildings and structures are unlikely to be noticeable to the vast majority of sensitive receptors, as viewpoints are more than 1.5km away from BikePark Wales. Furthermore, the proposed buildings and structures will be viewed against the backdrop of a well-wooded hillside of complex texture and pattern. Existing buildings at BikePark Wales are barely visible.
- 6.6.46 The toilet block, lodges and pods are proposed within an area of woodland and are finished in muted natural tones. Despite the removal of a certain number of trees and shrubs and the raising of certain lodges above ground level, it is unlikely that the installation of these buildings will have a noticeable effect on views except at night in winter.

- 6.6.47 Of significantly greater prominence in existing views are the vehicles and shipping container. The proposed increase in extent of parking and the expansion into the more exposed scrub area is likely to be noticeable from Merthyr Common especially to those very familiar with the view. Similarly, the overflow parking is likely to be noticeable with relatively little proposed screening along its north eastern edge. The distance will reduce the magnitude of effects substantially but views will be adversely affected. This will reduce in time as proposed screening planting grows.
- 6.6.48 The overall effect on this view has been assessed as not being significant. It will however be assessed in section 8.0 for how the effects can be mitigated as the view of BikePark Wales is clear and the integrity of the woodland around BikePark Wales is an important character of that view and its preservation considered important

Visual Receptor: residents of Pentrebach (views from dwellings)

Table 6.12: Visual effects on residents of Pentrebach

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: Intermediate
Sensitivity of receptor: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor, long term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect: Not significant

Views from dwellings within Pentrebach were not assessed from any buildings or private gardens but were inferred from views from publicly accessible areas.

- 6.6.49 Views from residential properties and associated private gardens are likely to include the hillside around BikePark Wales but are unlikely to focus on it. However, residents with a view of the area of BikePark Wales being very familiar with the view and able to study it at their leisure, are very likely to notice changes to the landscape. The effects of such changes are however likely to be tempered by the context of the viewpoint: the foreground of such views is dominated by the surrounding townscape (see photograph 15). They are thus assessed as being of intermediate susceptibility to changes in the view. Consequently, sensitivity is described as medium.
- 6.6.50 However, the proposed buildings and associated structures are unlikely to be noticeable to the vast majority of sensitive receptors, as viewpoints are more than 1.5km away from BikePark Wales. Furthermore, the proposed buildings and structures will be viewed against the backdrop of a well-wooded hillside of complex texture and pattern. Existing buildings at BikePark Wales can hardly be made out.
- 6.6.51 The toilet block, lodges and pods are proposed within an area of woodland and are finished in muted natural tones. Despite the removal of a certain number of trees and shrubs and the raising of certain lodges above ground level, it is unlikely that the installation of these buildings will have a noticeable effect on views except at night in winter.

6.6.52 Of significantly greater prominence in existing views are the vehicles and shipping container. The proposed increase in extent of parking and the expansion into the more exposed scrub area is likely to be noticeable from Merthyr Common especially to those very familiar with the view. Similarly, certain areas of the existing parking and the proposed overflow parking are likely to be noticeable with the removal of a significant area of screening woodland and relatively little proposed screening along its north eastern edge. The distance will reduce the magnitude of effects substantially but views will be adversely affected. This will reduce in time as proposed screening planting grows.

6.6.53 The overall effect on this view has been assessed as not being significant. It will however be assessed in section 8.0 for how the effects can be mitigated as the view of BikePark Wales is clear and the integrity of the woodland around BikePark Wales is an important character of that view and its preservation considered important.

Visual Receptor: Users of public areas within Pentrebach and adjacent built-up areas

Table 6.13: Visual effects on public areas within Pentrebach and adjacent built-up areas

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: Low
Sensitivity of receptor: Low
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: minor, long term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect: Not significant

The effect on users of public areas of Pentrebach and surrounding areas is likely to be similar to residents (see above) except in the following respects:

- Users are less likely to be very familiar with the view
- Users are unlikely to be stationary and unlikely to be focused on the landscape
- Users within public open spaces may have a clearer view of the hillside around BikePark Wales than residents within dwellings and private gardens.

The overall effect on this view has been assessed as not being significant. It will not be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.

Visual Receptor: residents of the farm north of BikePark Wales

Table 6.14: Visual effects residents of the farm north of BikePark Wales

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: Low
Sensitivity of receptor: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: minor or none, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low or negligible
Likely overall effect: Not significant

The farm adjacent to BikePark Wales is private property and was not visited as part of this study.

- 6.6.54 The judgements contained in the above table assumes that the view of BikePark Wales and the area proposed for development from the farm is either non-existent or very restricted.
- 6.6.55 The overall effect on this view has been assessed as not being significant. It will however be assessed in section 8.0 for how any possible effects can be mitigated as the property is very close to BikePark Wales and any adverse effects on views will need to be addressed.

Summary

- 6.6.56 Significant effects on views are limited to those within and near to BikePark Wales and the proposed area for development. Other views will however be considered in the assessment of mitigation as the setting of BikePark Wales is considered to be of such high value and its preservation of some importance.

6.7 Cumulative Effects

- 6.7.1 Gethin Woodland Park has been developed as a cycle centre in a relatively short period of time. Residents and users of the area are likely to view the development in its totality and not as series of discrete increments. A judgement based on the total development, existing and proposed, will reflect their likely experience and impressions more accurately.
- 6.7.2 This totality of effects is described as the cumulative effects on the landscape. This section will review the proposed developments assessed in this document *alongside* all previous developments since the facility established in 2012.
- 6.7.3 Cumulative effects relevant to BikePark Wales can be described in two ways:
1. Landscape effects: qualitative or quantitative combinations with other similar developments
 2. Combined visual effects: the ability to see the development in conjunction with other similar developments in the same view.

Prior to the establishment of the mountain bike facility in 2012, the site comprised an informal car park set in woodland and rough pasture with an access road connecting it to the A470. Aerial photography is included in the Landscape Appraisal included in the Appendices.

- 6.7.4 The existing development (implemented since 2012) is outlined on the Existing Site Plan as “previously developed area”. The relevant applications are as follows:
- Planning Application P/12/0235 - The first successful application, granted permission in October 2012 comprised: a main visitor centre; 17 forest bike trails; campsite (including 5 timber camping pods); shower block; additional car parking; and, landscaping works.
 - Planning Application P/13/0214 - Permission for development was granted on the 5th August 2013 for the erection of a single storey extension (plant room) to the main visitor centre.

- Planning Application P/16/0055 -Permission for development was granted on the 7th April 2016 for the retention of revised car parking layout, including the provision of additional parking spaces and the erection of two wood clad huts.

The key consideration in assessing the cumulative effect of the combined developments is a judgement of whether the effects of the proposed development (assessed in previous sections of this report) are increased or extended when the the entire development, existing and proposed, are assessed together.

Landscape Baseline

- 6.7.5 The Visual Impact Statement (VIS) of 15th May 2012, by the same author as this report, gives an outline of the landscape baseline before the development of BikePark Wales. It can be viewed on Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council's website as part of Planning Application P/12/0235. The description of the site was however less comprehensive, in line with the nature of the report.
- 6.7.6 The section on mitigation in the VIS anticipated that, *"In general, cars, because of their colours and shiny angled surfaces, are more likely than proposed buildings to adversely affect views into the site"*. This proved to be the case and is likely to be the case with the proposals outlined in this assessment. However the VIS gave limited consideration to the visual effects on users of the site itself. It concentrated instead on users of the wider landscape. Consequently, mitigation dealt only with reduction of effects on these visual receptors. Differences between the findings and mitigation described in the VIS and this assessment should thus not be used as a measure of the effects of each set of proposals as the two studies not only differed in the proposals but in scope.

Significance

- 6.7.7 The following sections will reconsider the effects of the proposed developments alongside the existing development since 2012 in order to assess whether the effects are extended or intensified compared with the findings in 5.0 Analysis of Effects.
- 6.7.8 The cumulative effects will be considered for each likely significant effect in turn. Those effects not considered significant in section 5.0 above, will be reconsidered for significance. Those effects considered significant in section 5.0, will be reconsidered for their *degree* of significance.

Cumulative effects on landscape receptors

Landscape Receptor: landform and geology: NO CHANGE

- 6.7.9 The main adverse effects of the proposed development on landform are the excavation of the bank to allow construction of the bike hire building and the groundworks associated with the overflow, van, and motorhome parking areas. The effects on landform of the existing development were similar in character but, considered together, greater in extent. The judgement on the size of the effects would not however be increased beyond moderate and the significance criteria not increased beyond moderate adverse.

Table 6.15: Landscape cumulative effects on landform and geology

Value: High (LANDMAP)
Susceptibility: Medium (Not assessed in LANDMAP)
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate in size, long-term, permanent
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant

Landscape Receptor: landform pattern and history: NO CHANGE

It is not considered that the effects on pattern and history would be changed in considering existing and proposed together. The overall effect would still be significant and the significance criteria moderate.

Table 6.16: Landscape cumulative effects on pattern and history

Value: High (LANDMAP)
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant

Landscape Receptor: woodland: NO CHANGE

It is not considered that the effects on woodland would be changed in considering existing and proposed together. The overall effect would still be significant and the significance criteria moderate.

Table 6.17: Landscape cumulative effects on woodland

Value: High
Susceptibility: high
Sensitivity: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Moderate
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant

Landscape Receptor: scrub/grassland: NO CHANGE

It is not considered that the effects on scrub/grassland would be changed in considering existing and proposed together as the existing development does not directly affect the area. The overall effect would still not be significant.

Table 6.18: Landscape cumulative effects on scrub/grassland

Value: Low
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Low
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Moderate
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Not significant

Landscape Receptor: Waterways and waterbodies: NO CHANGE

It is not considered that the effects on waterways and waterbodies would be changed in considering existing and proposed together as the existing development does not directly affect them. The overall effect would still not be significant.

Table 6.19: Landscape cumulative effects on waterways and waterbodies

Value: Low
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate in size, long-term and reversible in the long-term
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant

Landscape Receptor: access: NO CHANGE

It is not considered that the effects on access would be changed in considering existing and proposed together as the existing development and proposed developments are likely to have very similar effects. The overall effect would still not be significant.

Table 6.20: Landscape cumulative effects on access

Value: High
Susceptibility: Moderate
Sensitivity: Moderate
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate in size, short-term duration and reversible
Magnitude of effect: Minor
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Not significant

Landscape Receptor: culture: CHANGE

The combined effect of existing and proposed developments on the cultural aspect of the site is likely to be different from the proposed development considered in isolation. The introduction of buildings and a significant change in the degree and nature of activity in the Gethin Woodland Park is considered to have a noticeable effect on the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the cultural landscape.

6.7.10 It is likely that there would be a change in susceptibility from low to moderate and a consequent increase in sensitivity to medium. The size of effect would increase to moderate and consequently magnitude would increase to medium.

6.7.11 The effect would be judged significant and it will now be assessed in section 8.0 for how the effects can be mitigated.

Table 6.21: Landscape cumulative effects on culture

Value: Moderate
Susceptibility: Moderate (previously low)
Sensitivity: Medium (previously low)
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate (previously minor), long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Medium (previously low)
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant (previously not significant)

Landscape Receptor: sensory aspects: CHANGE

The combined effect of existing and proposed developments on the sensory aspects of the site is likely to be different from the proposed development considered in isolation. With the exception of the existing car park, the combined existing and proposed developments introduce a number of new elements into the landscape compared with the pre-2012 baseline. The introduction of buildings and a significant change in the degree and nature of activity in the Gethin Woodland Park is considered likely to have a noticeable effect on the sensory landscape.

6.7.12 It is likely that there would be a change in susceptibility from low to moderate and a consequent increase in sensitivity to medium. The size of effect would increase to moderate and consequently magnitude would increase to medium.

6.7.13 The effect of the cumulative development would be judged significant and it will now be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.

Table 6.22: Landscape cumulative effects on sensory aspect

Value: Moderate
Susceptibility: Medium (previously low)
Sensitivity: Medium (previously low)
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate (previously minor), long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Medium (previously low)
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant (previously not significant)

Landscape Receptor: light: CHANGE

No study was carried out at night so effects have been estimated.

6.7.14 The hillside in which BikePark Wales is set, prior to 2012 had almost no street lights, buildings or other elements that were lit at night. Use of the car park at night was limited. In terms of conservation, wildness and sensory appeal it had a high value. Susceptibility to changes in the night scene caused by cumulative development of the site is high. Sensitivity is thus judged to be high.

6.7.15 The magnitude of the effect on light is judged to be major as the marked increase in the adverse effect of headlights, the lights from buildings and pathside and other outside lights on the darkness of the hillside is substantial.

6.7.16 The effect of the cumulative development on the site's darkness is likely to be significant. It will thus be assessed for how the effects can be mitigated.

Table 6.23: Landscape cumulative effects on light

Value: High (previously medium)
Susceptibility: Low (previously low)
Sensitivity: High (previously low/moderate)
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Major (previously minor), long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: High (previously low)
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant (previously not significant)

Cumulative Landscape effects: overall character

It is considered likely that the overall landscape character would be changed by the proposed and existing developments taken together. The character is judged to be substantially different in character from the pre-2012 baseline.

- 6.7.17 The size of the cumulative development, though large in relation to the pre-2012 car park, is however not of a scale that is likely to significantly change the character of the aspect area sufficient to create a new landscape type or sub-type.

Cumulative effects on visual receptors

Visual Receptor: users of PROWs and Access Land in and around BikePark Wales NO CHANGE

- 6.7.18 The combined effect of the existing and proposed developments are likely to have very similar effects on users of the site in that the sensitivity of the receptor and overall magnitude of effect would both remain high, the likely overall effect would be significant and likely to have a major adverse effect reducing to moderate in time as screening planting matures.

Table 6.24: Visual cumulative effects on light

Value of view: Medium
Susceptibility of receptor: High
Sensitivity of receptor: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: High
Likely overall effect: Significant

Visual Receptor: users of Merthyr Common: NO CHANGE

The combined effect of existing and proposed developments on views from Merthyr Common is unlikely to be changed from that of the proposed development alone.

Table 6.25: Visual cumulative effects on Merthyr Common

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: High
Sensitivity of receptor: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor, long term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect: Not significant

Visual Receptor: users of the Trevithick Trail and other PROWs on the eastern valley flanks: NO CHANGE

The combined effect of existing and proposed developments on views from the Trevithick Trail and other PROWs on the eastern valley side is unlikely to be changed from that of the proposed development alone.

Table 6.26: Visual cumulative effects on Trevithick Trail and other PROWs on the eastern valley PROWs

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: High
Sensitivity of receptor: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor, long term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect: Not significant

Visual Receptor: residents of Pentrebach (views from dwellings): NO CHANGE

The combined effect of existing and proposed developments on views from dwellings in Pentrebach is unlikely to be changed from that of the proposed development alone.

Table 6.27: Visual cumulative effects on residents of Pentrebach

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: Intermediate
Sensitivity of receptor: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: minor, long term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect: Not significant

Visual Receptor: Users of public areas within Pentrebach and adjacent built-up areas: NO CHANGE

The combined effect of existing and proposed developments on views from users of open space and publicly accessible areas in Pentrebach and adjacent built-up areas is unlikely to be changed from that of the proposed development alone.

Table 6.28: Visual cumulative effects on public areas within Pentrebach

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: Low
Sensitivity of receptor: Low
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor, long term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low
Likely overall effect: Not significant

Visual Receptor: residents of the farmhouse north of BikePark Wales: NO CHANGE

The combined effect of existing and proposed developments on views from the adjacent farmhouse is unlikely to be changed from that of the proposed development alone.

Table 6.29: Visual cumulative effects on residents of the farmhouse north of BIKEPARK WALES

Value of view: High
Susceptibility of receptor: Low
Sensitivity of receptor: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Minor or none, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Low or negligible
Likely overall effect: Not significant

Conclusion: cumulative effects on visual receptors

The visual effects of the combined proposals are considered to be similar to those assessed for the proposed development alone: visual effects on users of BikePark Wales and immediate area are considered to be significant and severe adverse reducing to moderate in time. Effects on receptors beyond the site are not considered significant.

Mitigation of cumulative effects

- 6.7.19 The mitigation identified as being necessary following assessment of cumulative effects is very similar to that identified as being necessary for the proposed development alone. Mitigation of cumulative and proposed development is provided below.

6.8 Mitigation

- 6.8.1 Earlier drafts of this assessment identified potential adverse landscape and visual effects. The design has been refined by a series of amendments to avoid or minimise these effects: the design as presented is thus significantly different from the original concept.

6.8.2 Certain adverse effects, as outlined in previous sections, still remain. The following section attempts to mitigate these effects. It encompasses conditions and proposals not completed from earlier planning decisions. Mitigatory proposals are illustrated on the Landscape Mitigation Plan (appendix 6.0).

6.8.3 Adverse effects that cannot be fully mitigated are summarised at the end of the section.

6.8.4 Proposals for mitigation are offered as follows:

Woodland

6.8.5 Mitigation of a number of the effects is discussed in other sections that follow. Those that are not are discussed below.

Damage to canopies of significant trees by construction process during construction of buildings, bunds and two-way access road

6.8.6 A full method statement for avoidance of damage should be prepared in writing and agreed before implementation commences. It should include specific details of machinery sizes and types (machinery should be tracked and small). It should describe procedures for working in close proximity to mature trees and should also include measures for surgery to trees that are accidentally damaged or need to be trimmed to allow construction. Plastic or steel heavy-duty temporary ground guards should be employed in areas beneath tree canopies likely to be heavily trafficked.

6.8.7 The areas of hard surfacing between pods and lodges within woodland should be reduced to the minimum required for access to reduce damage to tree roots and maintain as much space for wildlife as possible. The spaces between clusters of buildings could be retained for social use with picnic tables etc. but without hard surfacing.

6.8.8 The woodland should also be re-assessed for opportunities to increase the planting of trees and shrubs within it once pods, lodges and paths have been constructed. The aim should be to increase screening, especially at edges, and to increase opportunities for wildlife.

6.8.9 The loss of tranquility and wildness associated with the woodland can only be partly mitigated by the proposed planting. Loss of space for biodiversity can also not be fully mitigated.

Access Roads

6.8.10 The route of the access drive avoids the majority of mature trees but proposes the removal of a group of C category trees near to the western end of the east-west section near to the shower block.

6.8.11 The (verbally) proposed specification for roads describes a 600mm deep construction profile. In general however, the excavation depth to formation will be c.150mm with 450mm of the construction above the existing ground level. This is likely to affect the roots of nearby trees but damage in most cases is unlikely to be severe.

6.8.12 It is very likely that the root systems of trees growing along the informal track through the woodland in which pods and lodges are proposed, extend beneath the track. As described above, the 150mm construction depth of the proposed north-south section of the drive along the route of the track is unlikely to cause significant damage to these trees. The overburden on roots is however very likely to have an adverse effect.

- 6.8.13 The depth and level of the ditch soakaway along the west side of the north-south section of the proposed drive are not described. In order to avoid damage to significant tree roots, the level of the base of the ditch should be at existing levels or no more than 150mm below existing levels.
- 6.8.14 Where access drives are constructed (or existing tracks increased in width) beneath or close to the canopy of significant trees or where they coincide with the root protection zone of surveyed trees, the road should be constructed using a no-dig construction method using a plastic cell base layer (such as cell web). Where the existing substrate is not reasonably firm in such areas and needs to be excavated below the existing ground level, the surface should be carefully reduced by small increments under close observation by a second person standing immediately adjacent to the work area. Where significant tree roots are encountered, the landscape architect or arboriculturalist should be consulted to advise on the appropriate action. This may be to cut the root, to provide a consolidated substrate around the root or to amend the alignment or width of the road.
- 6.8.15 The source material for road construction should be an acidic or neutral stone. Limestone or similarly basic stone should not be used. The specification should not however compromise the free-draining nature of the stone described by Bingham Hall.

Footpaths and other pedestrian surfaces

- 6.8.16 The (verbally) proposed specification for footpaths proposes a 150mm deep construction profile. Where footpaths are constructed beneath or close to the canopy of significant trees or where they coincide with the root protection zone of surveyed trees, the path should be constructed using a no-dig construction method using a plastic cell base layer (such as cell web). Where the existing substrate is not reasonably firm in such areas, the process described for roads should be followed except that excavation should be carried out by hand and not machine.
- 6.8.17 Access for recreation across the site will not be affected in terms of routes except in the short term but the setting of footpaths will change especially compared to the pre-2012 baseline. Some mitigation of adverse effects is likely with planting shown on the Masterplan.
- 6.8.18 The source material for path construction should be specified as a non-acidic stone as per the recommendations for roads above.

Buildings

- 6.8.19 The proposed lodges are likely to be visible along the south east edge of the woodland in which they are proposed. The standard and feathered trees proposed will help soften the outline of the lodges but will not screen them. A greater area and density of planting including shrubs is required to improve screening. This should be planted along the south east boundary within the woodland. The possibility of planting within the adjacent field was investigated and rejected because of the high ecological value of the adjacent field.
- 6.8.20 The maximum depth below existing ground level of the formation layer for the base pads of lodges 4 and 5 has been estimated as 600mm. This will cut through all feeder roots that coincide with the footprints of the lodges.

- 6.8.21 The author is not qualified to comment on suitable alternative foundations except to suggest that a foundation design based on a series of piles, carefully located to avoid damage to significant roots would be likely to be less damaging than pads. A proper investigation of this or similar foundations should be made and applied to the pods and lodges if deemed suitable and affordable.
- 6.8.22 The timber supports proposed for lodges 1, 2 and 3 are not specified but would probably be less damaging than concrete pad foundations.
- 6.8.23 Barge boards on the lodges are proposed in white. These should be specified in a darker more muted colour to reduce the impact on views and character.

Parking areas

- 6.8.24 The planting shown on the masterplan around and within the parking area is only effective in mitigating some of the adverse effects on the area of scrub in which it is proposed.
- 6.8.25 Headlights in winter will continue to have an adverse effect on the night-time landscape. The users of footpath 110/71 will continue to suffer permanent adverse effects though reducing as shrubs and trees grow.
- 6.8.26 Actions to mitigate the loss of scrub are discussed in the Ecological Assessment.
- 6.8.27 Anticipated screening from proposed planting may be compromised by proposals to construct surface water soakaways beneath the planted bunds that divide parking bays. In all cases, the soakaways should be relocated to the upslope (western) side of the planted bunds within the parking bays.

Landform and geology

- 6.8.28 The main adverse effects on landform and geology are the excavation of the bank to allow construction of the bike hire building and the groundworks (excavations and construction of bunds) associated with the overflow, van, and motorhome parking areas.
- 6.8.29 Mitigation of the adverse effects on landform and geology are only partially possible (screening planting already proposed) as both will be significantly altered as an integral part of the development proposals.

Proposed overflow parking area

- 6.8.30 The following actions are proposed in the area of the overflow car park:
- removal of a significant area of woodland
 - ground modelling (cut and fill) extending beyond the footprint of the proposed car park shown on the masterplan
 - construction of a dry macadam surface
 - introduction of parked vehicles

These will cause a deterioration in the views from the bridleway/access drive above (south west of) the proposed overflow parking area. Views from footpath 110/71 (on approaching Webber's Pond) and

Access Land immediately below (and to the north east of) the overflow area will also be adversely affected. They will also have an adverse effect on landscape pattern and history.

- 6.8.31 The adverse effects on views will be slightly reduced but not eliminated by the proposed feathered and standard tree planting as it matures. The possibility of using gabions to reduce the area of cut & fill (and thus the area of trees proposed for removal) was investigated and rejected because of cost.
- 6.8.32 Adverse effects on near and long views from the footpath and Access Land below could be further mitigated by the planting of a greater number of trees and shrubs along the north eastern edge of the parking area, though space is limited. The possibility of additional screening planting within the adjacent field was investigated and rejected because of the high ecological value of the adjacent field.
- 6.8.33 Views from the bridleway/access drive above could be improved by reinforcing planting within the strip of retained woodland between the drive and parking area. Establishment would be problematic however below the canopy of existing trees. Yew and holly (both native evergreens) would provide year-round screening and would be easier to establish being relatively tolerant of shade. Indeed, unless evergreens are used, screening would be unlikely to be fully effective in this area, even in the long term.

Services and drainage

- 6.8.34 Services are in general unlikely to have an adverse effect on the site except for those proposed within the woodland area surrounding the proposed pods and lodges. The following section deals with mitigation to services within this area of woodland.
- 6.8.35 All services are proposed for burial in trenches. Within the woodland, water, electricity and communications trenches are proposed beneath or close to the proposed main footpaths the proposed main east-west footpath. Foul drainage is proposed directly between lodges and the proposed cesspit and between the shepherd's huts along the proposed east-west drive to the cesspit. Surface drainage from lodge roofs is proposed to run beneath paths to the proposed soakaway in the parking area or directly to an adjacent soakaway within the woodland.
- 6.8.36 The proposed depth of services below "ground level" ranges from telecoms at 350mm to water at 900mm. Installation of services at this depth below existing ground level will cut through almost all tree roots coinciding with the routes. This is likely to have a significant adverse effect on mature trees especially where trenches skirt the edge of canopies.
- 6.8.37 The route of electrical trenches along the east-west path cannot be altered from that illustrated as a number of lit bollards requiring an electrical supply are arranged along the path.
- 6.8.38 The following changes are to be incorporated into the masterplan:
- The exact route of fresh water, communications, foul drainage and surface drainage trenches should be determined on site by the landscape architect or arboriculturalist to reduce damage to tree roots. Excavation beneath the canopies of significant trees and those surveyed individually in the tree survey should be carried out with care, in small increments, under close observation by a second person standing immediately adjacent to the work area. Where significant tree roots are encountered, the landscape architect or arboriculturalist should be consulted to advise on the

appropriate action. In general, any significant roots encountered should remain and be allowed to bridge the trench where possible. Ducting, pipes and cables should be installed with care below retained roots. Backfilling should be completed as soon as possible after excavation, preferably on the same day.

- Trench depths should be below finished levels. Reduce the proposed depths of excavation for electricity ducting to 250mm, and fresh water pipes to 600mm below finished levels.
- All services should be run under proposed drives and footpaths to reduce the overall trench depth (unless advised otherwise by landscape architect or arboriculturalist on site as above). In the case of the electricity cable, a depth of footpath construction of 150mm largely above existing levels and a depth of excavation of 250mm below finished levels for the ducting trench, the total depth of excavation below existing levels would be 100mm which reduces the potential damage to tree roots significantly from the 450mm below “ground level” previously proposed. In the unlikely event that trenches would need to be re-excavated in the future, the routing of services below paths and drives would make them easier to locate and would reduce damage to roots and vegetation in general.
- Services proposed to run beneath east-west access drive should be run along the centreline of the carriageway to establish maximum distance from trees.

Damage to roots by services within woodland will only be partially mitigated by the above actions however.

Pollution prevention, waterways and waterbodies

- 6.8.39 Changes to the water table by trenching, excavations and installation of soakaways cannot be mitigated by landscape. No written details were provided to describe measures to be taken to avoid the spillages of fuel and other deleterious materials during construction and during the operation of the site to prevent incidents of watercourse pollution from chemical and petrochemical substances, oils, grease and wash downs of apparatus.
- 6.8.40 No written details were provided to describe how materials are to be delivered and stored within the site prior to and during construction to prevent contamination of watercourses etc and methods to be operated to remove traces of contamination after construction.
- 6.8.41 A written method statement should be produced before construction commences and closely followed thereafter.

Landscape management

- 6.8.42 Details of landscape management were submitted with the application currently under consideration but were restricted to the area of planting around the Bike Hire Building.
- 6.8.43 A more comprehensive management programme should be provided and implemented to ensure establishment of planting into the long term and to lay out the management of woodland and other areas essential to preserve and enhance biodiversity, views and landscape character.

Light

- 6.8.44 The cumulative effect of the existing and proposed development is likely to have a significant adverse effect on landscape character. No study was carried out at night so the effect has been estimated.

6.8.45 Considering existing and proposed development (cumulative effects), adverse night-time effects are likely to include:

- The installation of outside lighting within the site generally
- Light from lodges and pods for use by campers and thus beyond the normal opening hours
- Light from all other buildings
- An increase in vehicular activity in the evening and at night

Lights within woodland (all sources) will be screened from long views in summer. In winter, screening will be much less. Extra planting should be proposed to help screen light from all sources in order to reduce adverse effects on all near and long views and on landscape character and sensory aspects of the woodland.

6.8.46 Outdoor lighting should be very low intensity. The proposed bollard spacing of c.9m should be increased. The bollards are solely intended to function as waymarkers and users of paths will be expected to have a torch to illuminate their way. Spacings can therefore be increased without compromising safety. Spacing of bollards should be increased to c.20m or restricted to path junctions, road crossings etc.

6.8.47 Lights within lodges and pods should be of very low intensity and windows should be provided with curtains/blinds. No outdoor lighting should be used on lodges and pods. Movement sensitive lighting is likely to be activated by leaves and wildlife so should not be installed.

6.8.48 Light effects can only be partially mitigated.

Residents of the farm north of BikePark Wales

6.8.49 Planting along the northern boundary of the site is considered sufficient to mitigate any effect on views from the farm.

6.8.50 Any effects of increased disturbance caused by the intensification of use, and the extension of activities into the evening, that is likely to result from the use of motorhomes, camping pods and lodges, cannot however be fully mitigated by landscape.

Residents of Pentrebach (views from dwellings), users of Merthyr Common, the Trevithick Trail and other PROWs on the eastern valley flanks

6.8.51 The planting proposed in the latest masterplan will significantly mitigate and adverse effects on daytime summer views from Pentrebach and the PROWs and open areas above.

6.8.52 Wintertime daytime views may still be adversely affected in that vehicles being shiny and brightly coloured and possessing reflective, angled windscreens are likely to be visible in winter.

6.8.53 Similarly, effects on night-time views will be adversely affected by vehicle headlights and other light sources especially as evening and night-time use of the car parks and access drives will increase with the installation of motorhome parking and pods and lodges.

6.8.54 Shipping containers, tanks, plant and similar structures which might be visible in long views should be removed, relocated, screened by dense planting, painted in muted, matt colours or clad in natural timber.

- 6.8.55 The daytime, summer adverse effects on the above visual receptors will be fully mitigated in time as proposed planting matures. Nighttime effects can only be partially mitigated.

General character, cultural and sensory aspects of the landscape and views within the BikePark Wales area

- 6.8.56 Increased activity on the site, and the intensification of activities into the evening that is very likely to come with the use of motorhomes, camping pods and lodges, is likely to cause adverse effects on the above. These will be most felt in terms of increased disturbance and a loss of tranquility and wildness.
- 6.8.57 The planting proposed on the masterplan will be effective to a certain degree in reducing the overall effects compared to the pre-1012 baseline.
- 6.8.58 More extensive mitigatory planting of trees and shrubs would further help by improving the screening of views within the site and in a limited way, return a sense of wildness and tranquility to it. Reinforcement of planting between, and adjacent to, existing parking areas will be particularly effective in this respect.
- 6.8.59 Other areas not already shown on the masterplan as being planted should also be assessed for suitability for additional planting. Those areas which have seen some reduction in mature tree condition and numbers since 2012 or have not been planted in accordance with previous proposals or planning conditions, should also receive additional planting.
- 6.8.60 Installation of bunds within certain areas to accompany planting would enhance its screening effect. Such bunds should not be located beneath existing tree canopies.
- 6.8.61 The effects on general character and the above landscape receptors cannot however practically be fully mitigated by landscape.

6.9 Residual Effects

- 6.9.1 The majority of adverse effects listed in previous sections will be reduced or eliminated should the recommendations contained within the Mitigation section above be followed. However, certain adverse effects cannot be fully mitigated should the development be implemented in its current form. These are listed below.

Landscape Receptor: landform and geology

- 6.9.2 Mitigation of the adverse effects on landform and geology are only partially possible with increased screen planting as both will be significantly altered as an integral part of the development proposals. Significance criteria will remain unchanged.

Table 6.30: Residual landscape effects on landform and geology

Value: High (LANDMAP)
Susceptibility: Medium (Not assessed in LANDMAP)
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate in size, long-term, permanent
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant – moderate adverse

Landscape Receptor: landscape pattern and history

Screening of the overflow parking area would be unlikely to be fully effective, even in the long term for users of footpath 110/71 and access land to the north east. Mitigation would however be likely to reduce the significance criteria to slight adverse as vegetation develops and screening in summer becomes moderately effective.

Table 6.31: Residual landscape effects on landscape pattern and history

Value: high (LANDMAP)
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant – slight adverse

Landscape Receptor: woodland

Changes to the water table by excavations and installation of soakaways cannot be mitigated by landscape and may have adverse effects on certain mature trees within the woodland.

- 6.9.3 Loss of space available for flora and fauna by construction of buildings, drives, parking and other infrastructure cannot be fully mitigated on site.
- 6.9.4 The overburden on roots from parking and drive construction will have a long-term adverse effect on the oxygen levels and drainage around the roots of larger trees. This will lead to some loss of vigour in all trees affected and may lead to the death of a smaller number.
- 6.9.5 Damage to roots by excavation of service trenches within woodland cannot be fully mitigated by the proposed re-routing and careful excavation.
- 6.9.6 It is considered that the significance criteria will remain moderate adverse.

Table 6.32: Residual landscape effects on woodland

Value: High
Susceptibility: High
Sensitivity: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Moderate
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant – moderate adverse

Landscape Receptor: scrub/grassland

Loss of space available for flora and fauna by construction of drive and parking cannot be mitigated on site.

Table 6.33: Residual landscape effects on scrub/grassland

Value: Low
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Low
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Moderate
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Not significant

Landscape Receptor: culture

The effects on cultural aspects of the landscape of increased disturbance caused by the intensification of use, and the extension of activities into the evening, cannot be fully mitigated. It is likely that the significance criteria would remain moderate.

Table 6.34: Residual landscape effects on culture

Value: Moderate
Susceptibility: Moderate
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant – moderate adverse

Landscape Receptor: sensory aspects

The effects on the sensory aspects of the landscape of increased disturbance caused by the intensification of use, and the extension of activities into the evening, cannot be fully mitigated.

6.9.7 It is likely that mitigation would however reduce the significance criteria from moderate to slight adverse.

Table 6.35: Residual landscape effects on sensory aspects

Value: Moderate
Susceptibility: Medium
Sensitivity: Medium
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Moderate, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: Medium
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant – slight adverse

Landscape Receptor: light

Nighttime light effects can only be partially mitigated. It is not possible to completely prevent light pollution from the increase in number and activity of vehicles across the BikePark Wales area. Light pollution, especially in winter, will continue to have an adverse effect on night-time views.

6.9.8 The moderate adverse significance criteria would however be likely to reduce to slight after mitigation as vegetation establishes and adverse summertime light effects reduce.

Table 6.36: Residual landscape effects on light

Value: High
Susceptibility: Low
Sensitivity: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: Major, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: High
Likely overall effect on landscape character: Significant - slight

Visual Receptor: users of PROWs and Access Land in and around BikePark Wales

The users of footpath 110/71 in the proposed parking area will continue to suffer permanent adverse effects though this will reduce as shrubs and trees grow.

6.9.9 Screening of the overflow parking area would be unlikely to be fully effective, even in the long term, for users of bridleway 110/82 and access land to the north east.

6.9.10 The setting of footpaths compared to the pre-12012 baseline will continue to suffer adverse effects. Overall the significance criteria is likely to reduce from moderate adverse to slight in time as screening planting matures though the effect will vary across the site.

Table 6.37: Residual visual effects on users of PROWs and Access Land in and around BikePark Wales

Value of view: Medium
Susceptibility of receptor: High
Sensitivity of receptor: High
Size, duration and reversibility of effect: major in size, long-term and unlikely to be reversed
Magnitude of effect: High
Likely overall effect: Significant - slight

6.10 Summary

- 6.10.1 This Landscape Statement has been prepared by Peter Quinn Associates Landscape Architects. The Statement has been produced with reference to the “Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment” 3rd edition by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and with the guidance of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
- 6.10.2 In respect of landscape character this Statement identifies that a number of landscape receptors would be significantly affected by the developments proposed, and that the cumulative effects of proposed and previous developments would increase the number of significant effects on landscape receptors. However, it is not considered likely that the overall landscape character would be altered by the proposed development and aspect areas covering BikePark Wales would be able to receive the development without noticeable changes to its *overall* character.
- 6.10.3 In respect of visual effects, the Statement finds that while there are likely to be significant effects on views within and near to BikePark Wales, longer views are unlikely to be significantly affected and that the cumulative effects of proposed and previous developments would not increase the number of significant effects on visual receptors.