

DELEGATED REPORT

Application No:	P/25/0068
Site Address:	Taff Bargoed Wellness Centre The Old Drift Mine Trelewis
Development:	Cold water wellness unit
Case Officer:	Mr Gareth Davies
Site Visit:	18th March 2025
Application Expiry Date:	14th May 2025
Consultation reply date expired:	4th April 2025

APPLICATION SITE

The application site relates to a gravelled area of hardstanding situated to the south of the Taff Bargoed Summit Centre and to the rear of existing industrial buildings currently being used for car repairs. To the west and south the site is bound by dense vegetation and areas of woodland with a watercourse further to the west and reed beds further south, immediately east of the site is the access road which also serves as a public footpath/cycleway to the south of the site.

The site is located on the flat area of the valley floor at a lower level than the adjacent highway (B4255) which lies further east of the site and provides the access to Bedlinog. The entrance into the site from the B4255 is from the north via a service road that also serves the climbing centre and the various small businesses that make use of the industrial units. The site has a gated entrance on its eastern boundary

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development would occupy an irregularly shaped site with maximum dimensions of 50m x 38.7m. The wellness facility would be located centrally adjacent to the southern boundary with the remainder of the site given over to car parking provision.

The wellness facility will be placed on a deck elevated 0.5m above natural ground level. The deck would have overall dimensions of 22.3m x 10m and the container units would be located on the eastern side of the deck along with the main site entrance. The western side of the deck would provide cold water baths and shower units.

The shipping containers would be in two separate blocks with block 1 measuring 12.1m x 3m providing changing facilities along with a sauna. The smaller block 2 with dimensions of 2.5m x 3m would provide an office for the proposed development. The containers would be screened with hit and miss timber cladding (painted black) on the elevations which would be staggered between 3.23m to 4.5m high. Across the roof of the containers would

be a sedum roof and solar panels on top. Around the perimeter of the decked area would be a 1m high fence. Across the decked areas the wellness facility would accommodate a total of 6 outdoor baths along with a series of showers surrounded by a fence approximately 1m high. The plans illustrate that the cladding will also be applied to the various doors and entrance gates to the facility

PLANNING HISTORY

P/21/0198 - Use of land for outdoor storage of skips for a temporary period of 12 months. Refused 21st July 2021. Currently subject of an undetermined planning appeal

P/23/0207 - Change of use of land for the storage of outdoor skips.
Refused 27th March 2024

CONSULTATION

Head Highways & Engineering	-	No objection subject to a condition requiring the provision of cycle parking in any consent that might be granted.
Planning Ecology Officer	-	No objection but concerns have been raised at the lack of detail in the GIS
Estates Division	-	No response received
Council's Arboriculturist	-	No objection
Environmental Health	-	No response received
Rights of Way Officer	-	No response received
Regeneration	-	No response received
Bedlinog Community Council	-	No objection
Natural Resources Wales	-	No objection
Dwr Cymru Welsh Water	-	No objection subject to the inclusion of a condition controlling the disposal of surface water from the site.
Mining Remediation Authority	-	No objection
South Wales Fire & rescue Service	-	No objection
South Wales Police	-	No objection

PUBLICITY

In accordance with the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012, letters were sent to nearby properties and site notices displayed in the vicinity of the site.

No representations have been received.

POLICY CONTEXT

Future Wales 2040 The National Plan

Policy 1 Where Wales will grow

Policy 2 shaping urban growth and regeneration - Strategic Placemaking

Policy 5 supporting the rural economy

Policy 33 identifies Cardiff Newport and the valleys as National Growth Areas

Planning Policy Wales 12 (February 2024)

Planning Policy Wales provide guidance on matters relevant to this application, namely:

- Placemaking in Action: Good Design Making Better Places
- Placemaking in Action: Sustainable Management of Natural Resources
- Placemaking in Action: Placemaking in Rural Areas Strategic Placemaking: Previously Developed Land
- Strategic Placemaking: Development in the Countryside
- Activities in Places: Living in a Place
- Distinctive and Natural Places: Recognising the Special Characteristics of Place.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) 2016 – 2031

LDP objectives

LDP objective 4 – to promote the continued regeneration of local communities

LDP objective 5 – to ensure that community infrastructure and open space supports the regeneration of local communities.

LDP objective 8 – to support existing community facilities and suitable community led development.

LDP objective 10 – to improve ecosystem resilience and connectivity which supports habitats and species of principal importance

LDP objective 11 – to protect and enhance the character and appearance of the landscape and the countryside.

LDP objective 13 – to strengthen and diversify the rural economy.

LDP objective 15 – to support sustainable tourism leisure and recreation developments and encourage an all year round tourism industry.

Policies

Policy SW4 – Settlement boundaries

Policy SW11 – Sustainable Design and Placemaking

Policy EnW1 – nature conservation and ecosystem resilience

Policy EnW2 - Internationally and Nationally Protected Sites and Species

Policy EnW4 - Environmental protection

Policy EnW3 – RIG's, SINC's, LNR's and Priority habitats and species

Policy EnW4 – Environmental protection

Policy EnW5 – Landscape protection

Policy EcW7 – Tourism, leisure and recreation development.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The proposal seeks permission for the construction of a unique facility that would complement the adjacent climbing centre facility and broaden the recreational offer at this location. Key in the determination of this application is the compliance with planning policy, the impact of the proposed development on the countryside, ecological impacts, highway impacts and the impact of the proposals on local amenity.

The principle of development

A key policy determinant in respect of this proposal is compliance with Policy SW4 of the LDP, which generally supports development within the settlement boundary. Outside of such areas proposals would be regarded as countryside development and shall not be permitted unless it relates, amongst other criteria, to the following:

- Supports the expansion of an existing business in the countryside
- Is for tourism, recreation or leisure facilities or complimentary development where the need for a countryside location is fully justified.

In this instance it is envisaged that the facility will be used in conjunction with the adjacent climbing centre and will be complimentary to it, broadening the overall offer at the site. Additionally, it is a recreational development with a focus on health where the open air nature of the proposal is better suited to a countryside location rather than an urban environment.

LDP Policy EcW7 accepts tourism development outside of defined settlement limits in circumstances where the need for the development is fully justified and the proposal minimises environmental and amenity impacts, maximises positive effects on the local community, economy and environment and is of an appropriate scale. The proposed development is low impact in terms of its size and appearance and in terms of it being a lightweight structure. The development would be supported off the ground by a series of posts further reducing the impact on the site and avoiding the need for extensive foundations. As such the proposal could also be easily removed and the site allowed to regenerate, further demonstrating the low impact of the development. Accordingly, the proposal complies with Policy EcW7 of the LDP.

Impact on the character of the countryside

The application site, though located in the countryside otherwise gives the appearance of being previously developed land that has been reclaimed by nature, though much of the surface of the site remains gravel/rolled hardcore with minimal growth. The design of the Wellness Centre is lightweight with all development sitting on a raised deck to aid its integration into a countryside setting area with all development on that deck. Whilst the use of shipping containers would not normally be encouraged at this location, the use of natural cladding material and the sedum roofs on the containers aids the visual integration of the facility into its countryside setting and reduces the visual impact of the shipping containers. The use of solar panels atop the containers within the context of the development proposed and the wider area is in this case acceptable as it would sit within and be largely hidden by the proposed cladding minimising its impact on the countryside location. The solar panels would also have the benefit of the development meeting some,

if not all, of its electricity needs. Further, the site sits in the valley floor and in a broader context the development would be read in conjunction with the adjacent climbing centre which has a greater bulk and massing than the open lightweight structure now proposed. The proposal would also be seen adjacent to a small group of units of a typical industrial construction. As such the proposed development is compliant with the requirements of LDP Policy SW11.

Ecological impact

The site lies near three Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, viz, Lower Cwm Bargoed (33m), Afon Bargoed Taf (54m) and Gelligaer Common (134m). Additionally, there is also woodland in close proximity to the site including trees to the east which are protected by a Tree Preservation Order.

The application is supported with a Green Infrastructure Statement (GIS) which was reviewed by the Council's Ecologist who initially outlined further information was required in respect of the lighting of the site, the provision of a management plan and biodiversity enhancements in order to properly consider the impact of the development on the ecology of the area. A revised GIS has subsequently been submitted together with updated plan. The council's ecologist expressed some initial concerns with the potential adverse impact from external lighting and that the use of a sedum roof would require appropriate management. The applicant has noted that whilst they have shown potential lighting on the revised plans, it may not be required as the facility would normally be open in daylight hours only. The applicant has also agreed to prepare a management plan which can be secured by a condition on any planning permission granted. Additionally, the applicant points out that the proposed development takes a light touch approach, with the building being constructed on stilts in an area that currently comprises of gravel/rolled hardcore, which further minimises the impact on the ecology of the area. This they regard as compliant with the stepwise approach, as even though the proposals represent development in the countryside, the design approach has been to provide a lightweight appearance with minimal impact and offering mitigation in the development to compensate for any adverse impacts on ecology from the development. The revised plans also illustrate the provision of bird and bat boxes to deliver net biodiversity benefit as part of the development.

It is noted that the site has previously been the subject of two planning applications for a proposed skip bin storage area, which were subsequently refused permission. One of the reasons for refusal related to the potential impact of such a use on protected species and habitats within the surrounding countryside. The principal concerns, as advised by the Council's Ecologist at the time, related to the disturbance of ecological environments, emissions and the potential for pollutants to leach into the ground. At the time additional information was sought and not provided resulting in insufficient information becoming an issue with that planning application.

In this instance, the current proposal is deemed to have a lesser ecological impact given its central location within the site boundaries, occupying an area of rolled hardcore, and the light touch construction approach which has built development elevated on stilts. Indeed, the built element of the proposal would be limited to a small part of the wider hardstanding area. Further, the current proposal presents less potential to create pollution in terms of emissions and noise and issues such as lighting which might impact nocturnal species can be adequately controlled through the use of planning conditions. It should be noted that in the absence of specific ecological surveys in respect of this application

Council's Ecologist has not raised any objection to the proposal subject to appropriate measures being addressed, particularly in relation to lighting. Accordingly, the application complies with policy EnW1 of the LDP.

Highway impact

The proposed development would utilise the existing means of access which serves the wider Taff Bargoed Wellness Centre and links to the adopted highway to the north of the site. It is considered that this access is of a suitable standard to accommodate any additional traffic generated by the development, that there would generally be sufficient parking available within the main carpark, which is shared by the adjacent facilities and businesses. Additionally, it is noted that the hardstanding area around the site would also be utilised to provide additional parking for visitors to the cold bath facility. In this regard it is acknowledged that the head of Engineering and Highways, has not raised any highway concerns with the proposal. It has been requested that the development makes provision for cycle parking facilities, which can be adequately secured as a condition of any permission granted. In this regard it is noted that the site is well connected to a network of pedestrian and cycle routes to the south of the site. Accordingly, the proposal complies with the requirements of LDP Policy SW11.

Impact on local amenity

The application site is situated in a countryside location outside of defined settlement limits however, it is not a typical countryside location given that other recreational uses are located adjacent and there are also a number of industrial uses working out of smaller units in the vicinity of the site.

The nearest residential property is Pant Y Ffynon House which sits 60m to the east of the site on a plot elevated above the valley floor. Given the nature of the proposed development, existing other businesses and practices around the site and the separation distance and difference in levels involved, it is not considered that the development would give rise to significant noise levels over and above those currently existing at that property.

In terms of visual amenity, the development would be read in the context of its wider setting which contains a number of other far more substantial buildings in the form of the climbing centre and various industrial units. Additionally, the proposed development would lie immediately south of the outdoor climbing cage element of the climbing centre and would appear visually as a natural extension to that facility.

The proposal is therefore considered compliant regarding the requirements of LDP Policies SW11 and EnW5.

Other matters

Part of the site lies within flood zone B as defined by Natural Resources Wales Flood Advice Maps. However, the facility proposed would be built outside of that zone and would in any event be considered less vulnerable development and as such no objection would be raised to the development on that basis.

The site though previously developed land has largely been reclaimed by nature this combined with the elevated and lightweight nature of the proposed development means

that the proposal does not raise any issues around environmental protection and satisfies the requirements of LDP Policy EnW4.

CONCLUSIONS

The duty to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, under section 3 of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ("the WBFG Act") has been taken into consideration when determining this application. In reaching the following recommendation, the ways of working set out at section 5 of the WBFG Act have been considered and thus the proposal is in accordance with the sustainable development principle through its contribution towards one or more of the Welsh Ministers well-being objectives set out as required by section 8 of the WBFG Act.

The principle of development of deemed to be acceptable and the proposal would not give rise to any significant impacts on the surrounding environment in terms of its design, highway safety, ecological impact or effects on the amenities of nearby residents. Accordingly, the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION: **BE APPROVED** subject to the following **CONDITIONS:**

1. The development shall begin not later than five years from the date of this decision.

Reason - To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

- Drawing No. 1111.011 Proposed Site Plan
- Drawing No. 1111.012 Proposed Elevations
- Drawing No. 1111.013 Proposed Elevations
- Drawing No. 1111.014, Proposed Plans
- Green Infrastructure Statement, Rev A, received 16/04/2025

Reason -To ensure compliance with the approved plans and clearly define the scope of the permission.

3. No development shall take place until full details of cycle parking provision have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The agreed details shall be in place and available for use prior to the beneficial first use of the development hereby approved.

Reason - To promote sustainable modes of transportation in accordance with Policies SW11 and SW12 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

4. No surface water or land drainage shall be allowed to connect directly or indirectly with the public sewerage network.

Reason - To prevent hydraulic overloading of the public sewerage system, to protect the health and safety of existing residents and to ensure no pollution of or detriment to the environment in accordance with policy EnW4 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

5. No external lighting shall be installed until, a detailed lighting scheme has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority to protect bat foraging/commuting areas. The details shall include:

- horizontal and vertical illuminance plans demonstrating dark corridors/routes to be maintained, together with dark routes for access to any bat boxes;
- details of the siting and type of external lighting to be used together with the proposed colour temperatures;
- Isolux drawings setting out the light spillage in key sensitive areas;

The lighting scheme shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To protect the natural environment and important habitats in accordance with Policies EnW1 and EnW2 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

6. Prior to the commencement of development a Landscaping, Habitat and Ecology Management Plan (LHEMP), shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The LHEMP shall include: -

- Details of any retained landscaping/habitat/green infrastructure;
- A planting plan;
- Long term maintenance and management measures for all on site landscaping/habitat/green infrastructure (including the sedum roofs);
- Details of other ecological measures e.g. bat boxes, bird boxes, hibernacula etc;
- Details of funding mechanisms to meet provision and ongoing maintenance; and
- Details of the responsible person/company/body responsible for overseeing and delivering the LHEMP.

Reason - To safeguard and promote net biological benefit to the environment in accordance with Policy EnW1 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

RECOMMENDATION ENDORSED



Director of Neighbourhood Services

DATE: 13.06.2025