

DELEGATED REPORT

Application No:	P/22/0095
Site Address:	Taff Bargoed Centre Trelewis CF46 6RD
Development:	Change of use to coach parking facility with associated hardstanding area
Case Officer:	David Cross
Site Visit:	27th April 2022
Application Expiry Date:	4th August 2022
Consultation reply date expired:	15th November 2022

APPLICATION SITE

This application relates to an existing industrial unit that forms part of the Taff Bargoed Centre, located in a relatively isolated area that is surrounded by the open countryside, approximately 1.2km south-east of the main settlement of Bedlinog. The building is situated at the bottom of a valley, which rises to the east and west. Within the immediate vicinity, the site is well populated with trees and woodland areas and a watercourse to the west. The adopted highway (B4255) is elevated above the site to the east, with the main entrance into the Taff Bargoed Centre located to the north, which runs alongside two visitor car parks that serve the wider recreational facilities.

The unit forms part of a small cluster of buildings, which historically would have been used as part of a mining facility. Alternative uses have since been introduced, which include the climbing centre (Rock UK) to the west and two industrial units to the south, alongside other outdoor activity facilities. The nearest residential property to the site is Pant-Y-Ffynnon House, approximately 145m to the south-east.

The industrial unit is currently being used as a coach parking facility, which includes a recently constructed hardstanding to the side (east) of the building. An area to the front (south) of the building is used for staff parking, as well as a turning area for the coaches within the site.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Retrospective planning permission is sought for the continued use of the industrial unit as a coach parking facility and for the retention of a hardstanding to the side of the building, which is also being used for the parking of coaches. There are no proposed alterations to the existing building or to the existing access arrangements into the site.

The submitted site plan illustrates that a total of 4 coaches can be parked within the industrial unit and a total of 9 coaches can be parked on the hardstanding. An area to the front of the building is currently being used as a turning facility for the coaches.

It has been highlighted by the applicant, that the business currently has a contract to take children to the local schools and the coaches regularly depart from the site during the weekdays in the mornings and afternoons. The business also provides holiday coach tours, which also depart from the site, but do not often return for a number of days.

In the supporting statement, the applicant has indicated that the business has 12 coaches in total, of which 4 are regularly parked within the building and 2 are parked on the hardstanding. The remain 6 coaches are used for the holiday tours and whilst they are also parked on the hardstanding, they may not all be present at the same time.

During the morning school runs, the coaches depart from the site at 7am and return at 8:45am. In the afternoon, the coaches depart at 1:30pm and return at 4:30pm. The holiday tour coaches typically depart 7am to 9am Mondays and return 3:30pm to 6pm Fridays. Some of the coaches also do weekend tours departing at 7am Fridays and returning 6:30pm Mondays.

Alongside the use of the industrial unit for the parking of coaches, it is noted that the coach business also operates from an existing bus depot in Bedlinog and has a total of 12 employees. Only the coach drivers pick up/drop off the coaches at the application site and there are no visiting members of public to the coach parking facility.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no relevant planning history relating to the application site.

CONSULTATION

Head of Engineering & Traffic	-	No objection.
Planning Division's Policy Officer	-	No objection.
Planning Division's Ecologist	-	No objection subject to conditions relating to ecological mitigation measures.
Environmental Health Manager	-	No objection subject to conditions relating to construction hours, land contamination and imported soils.
Natural Resources Wales	-	No objection.
Bedlinog & Treharris Community Group	-	No response.
Welsh Water	-	No objection subject to conditions relating to surface

water and land drainage.

PUBLICITY

In accordance with the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012, letters were sent to the neighbouring property and a site notice was displayed within the vicinity of the site.

No representations were received as a result of this publicity exercise.

POLICY CONTEXT

National planning policy

The Future Wales – the National Plan 2040 sets out a strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy, achieving decarbonisation and climate-resilience, developing strong ecosystems and improving the health and well-being of our communities.

Planning Policy Wales (PPW), Edition 11, February 2021:

Para 3.5 – 3.15 set out the importance of high quality design to ensure inclusive design, to promote environmental sustainability and ensure high environmental quality. Regard should also be given to the special characteristics of an area, community safety and to encourage sustainable forms of transport.

Para 3.55 notes that previously developed land wherever possible should be used in preference to greenfield sites where it is suitable for development.

Para 4.0.3 seeks to ensure new development is designed in a way that minimises the need to travel, reduced dependency on the private car and enable sustainable access to employment, local services and community facilities. This is achieved through integrating development with sustainable transport and maximise the provision and use of sustainable forms of travel.

Para 4.1.43 – 4.1.56 set out the need to reduce the level and speed of traffic in new development, the provision of car parking and how this may be integrated into new development to minimise the reliance on cars. Transport assessments are also an important mechanism to determine anticipated impacts a development proposal may have.

Para 6.4.21 – 6.4.23 note that local authorities should seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and build resilient ecological networks to ensure that any adverse environmental effects can first be avoided, mitigated or compensated. Regard should also be given to any potential impacts on protected species which may result in disturbance or harm to the species or its habitat.

Para 6.7.22 – 6.7.25 set out the need to have regard to the air quality and noise levels, as well as any local and regional air quality action plans and strategies. Regard should also be given to the contribution of green infrastructure in terms of maintaining good air quality.

Technical Advice Notes (TAN):

- TAN 5 Nature Conservation and Planning, September 2009
- TAN 11 Noise, October 1997
- TAN 12 Design, March 2016
- TAN 18 Transport, March 2007

Local planning policy

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

- Policy SW4 - Settlement Boundaries
- Policy SW11 - Sustainable Design and Placemaking
- Policy CW1 - Historic Environment
- Policy EnW1 - Nature Conservation and Ecosystem Resilience
- Policy EnW2 - Internationally and Nationally Protected Sites and Species
- Policy EnW3 - Regionally Important Geological Sites, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, Local Nature Reserves and Priority Habitats and Species.
- Policy EnW4 - Environmental Protection
- Policy EcW10 – Sustainably supplying minerals
- Policy EcW13 – Minerals Safeguarding

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG):

- SPG 4 Sustainable Design, July 2013
- SPG 5 Nature and Development, May 2015

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Land use

The application site lies outside the settlement boundary where new development is generally restricted by policy SW4 of the LDP. As such, the proposal constitutes countryside development and shall only be permitted if, amongst other criteria, it supports the expansion of an existing business in the countryside.

The industrial unit would have previously been used in association with the historic mining activities that took place at the site many years ago. Whilst some of the units at the Taff Bargoed Centre are now used for recreational purposes, some of the smaller units have been retained to support small business uses. It is asserted by the applicant that Gibbon Coaches have been operating from the industrial unit for the last 9 years and prior to this, a different coach business also used the building for 6 years to park their vehicles. Whilst there have been no previous planning applications relating to the current or past use of the site, it is accepted that a coach business has been operating from the property in some capacity for some time, which has been further evidenced by records of the lease agreements between the Taff Bargoed Centre and coach businesses. Notwithstanding this, there has been an unauthorised expansion of the current business with the construction of a hardstanding (in September 2017 according to the applicant) to the side of the building to accommodate additional coach parking capacity.

Policy SW4 encourages the re-use of previously developed land and supports the expansion of an existing business in the countryside. It is reasonable to accept that a coach business has been operating from the building for some time, albeit, the nature or extent of the previous coach business is not entirely clear. This proposal seeks to use the building only for the parking of coaches. The applicant has noted that some general maintenance would take place, (e.g. replacing light bulbs) and that at times, the coaches are washed and the interiors are cleaned after a holiday tour. The primary use would be for the parking of coaches inside the building and on the hardstanding.

In regards to the need for the development, it is understood that the applicant has an existing coach facility within the residential area of Bedlinog, which has been operating since 1993, but it is restricted in its size and cannot accommodate a large number of coaches. Although the applicant could look to relocate the entire business to an alternative site within the settlement boundary, this may have an impact on the local rural economy with the loss of jobs in the area. An alternative site may also not be ideally located to provide a bus service to the local schools. Taking into account the length of time that Gibbons Coaches has already been operating from the site, the use of the industrial unit to park coaches is deemed to be well established.

In regards to the expanded hardstanding area, it can be seen in aerial photographs of the site between 2001 and 2006, the land was previously disturbed and it appears that items were stored down the side of the building. In 2013, it appears that the land was cleared and a hardstanding was created, albeit, no surface seems to have been laid. The land became overgrown again in 2016 and was once again cleared with a tarmac surface being evident in 2018. The applicant has indicated that the hardstanding was laid in September 2017 and has been in place for over 5 years. It is considered that the hardstanding is also established, albeit without consent. Therefore, the main consideration is whether the continued use of the hardstanding for the parking of coaches is acceptable.

In this instance, given that the application seeks to expand an existing established business in the countryside, on previously developed land, being the existing hardstanding, the principle of the development is supported by policy SW4 of the LDP. In this regard the Planning Division's Policy Officer has not raised any objection to the development. However, it is also acknowledged that consideration should be given to the environmental impacts as a result of the intensification of the coach business.

Noise impact

Prior to the submission of this application, complaints were received from the occupants of Pant-Y-Ffynnon, in respect of the noise and disturbance associated with the coach business. In particular, concerns were highlighted in relation of the coaches being parked outside with idle engines in the early hours of the morning. The residential property is approximately 145m away from the hardstanding and is considerably elevated above the site. There is also a boundary fence around the property and an intervening ancient woodland. To the east of the residential property (40m away) is the main road leading to Bedlinog and a railway line within 30m. To the west of Pant-Y-Ffynnon (within 65m) are two other industrial units and approximately 120m to the north-west is the main car park serving the rock climbing centre.

During a site visit in the afternoon, a coach was noted on the hardstanding with an idle engine, while it was being prepped for its next trip. In close proximity to the site, the engine was clearly audible, although not excessive as you could hold a conversation without

having to raise your voice. Further south from the site along the lane the idle engine could still be heard, but was at a much lower volume.

A Noise Assessment was carried out in support of the application to determine the potential impact of the development on Pant-Y-Ffynnon, being the nearest sensitive property. Noise monitoring equipment was setup within the application site and close to the residential property for a period of 5 days.

It is highlighted in the report that the site was not considered to be particularly noisy or busy and that the noise climate was more consistently dominated by road traffic noise along the B4255, birdsong, rustling of vegetation and less frequently from the railway. The survey did not indicate clear periods of high noise levels. The report considers the average ambient noise levels during the day (7am to 7pm) to be 49dB, in the evening (7pm to 11pm) it is shown to be 46dB and during the night time (11pm to 7am) it is 47dB.

In regards to the monitoring station adjacent to Pant-Y-Ffynnon, the report considers the noise climate to be similar to that by the application site. The report considers the average ambient noise levels during the day (7am to 7pm) to be 52dB, in the evening (7pm to 11pm) it is shown to be 49dB and during the night time (11pm to 7am) it is 50dB.

Whilst the report acknowledges that the coaches could be heard faintly manoeuvring or idling on the hardstanding, this did not have a significant effect on the ambient noise levels when observing the sound level meter between the 'on' and 'off' periods of coach activity. This suggests the noise contribution from the facility are below the baseline noise levels generated by the wider environment. The report notes that the ambient noise levels appear to be slightly higher (3dB) in the location of the residential property, but this is thought to be as a result of greater levels of birdsong given the positioning of the monitoring equipment in the wooded area. The report considers the results of the monitoring to represent the worst-case scenario and that the noise levels at the location of the dwelling itself would likely be lower and that the noise levels, are largely influenced by the wider ambient noises rather than the development itself, which is deemed to be relatively low.

It is highlighted in the report that the site has been used for the parking of coaches for over 10 years and it is not until more recently that a complaint has been received in respect of the noise concerns. It is concluded in the Noise Assessment that the site appears to be well masked and whilst it cannot be said that the development is completely inaudible at the nearest receptor property, the noise contributions are deemed to be minimal and below the background noise levels. Furthermore, it should be noted that no objections to this application have been received from the occupants of Pant-Y-Ffynon.

Given the findings of the Noise Assessment, it is reasonable to conclude that the development does not give rise to a significant impact on residential amenity that warrants the refusal of this application on such grounds. Therefore, the development complies with policy SW11 and EnW4 of the LDP.

Ecological impact

To determine the potential impact the development has on the surrounding environment, particularly following the recent construction of the hardstanding area to the side of the industrial unit, a Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) has been submitted in support of the application.

It was concluded in the report that the application site is deemed to be of low ecological value at a local level due to its overall small size, the history of vegetation clearance, its current use and the extent of the tarmacadam surface across the majority of the site. The only features of ecological interest are the adjacent woodland, trees and scrub areas. The report also acknowledges that whilst the site has been subject to clearance on repeated occasions, the land has largely regenerated into fridd habitat. These areas would continue to regenerate naturally with the current habitats succeeding to broadleaved woodland. This ensures the continuation and maintenance of a locally valuable ecological resource. The report also notes there is no external lighting that may otherwise have some potential to impact on nocturnal species. It is acknowledged in the report that there is a need to appropriately manage surface water, which may include accidental oil or fuel spillages or leaks from vehicles, which could have an impact on the surrounding environment. This is a matter that can be appropriately addressed as part of a separate SAB (Sustainable drainage Approval Body) application, which would be required for the development.

Accordingly, the development would not have an adverse impact on any protected species or habitats. In this regard, the Planning Division's Ecologist has not raised any objection to the development. Therefore, the development complies with policies EnW1, EnW2 and EnW3 of the LDP.

Highway implications

Access to the coach parking facility is via a private road that also serves the wider Taff Bargoed Centre and links to the adopted highway to the north. The development does not involve any alterations to the existing access arrangements. The submitted plans demonstrate that there is sufficient room within the site to enable the coaches to turn, albeit a little constrained. Additionally, due to the acute turning radii at the entrance into the site, it is likely that the coaches have to reverse either in or out of the site in order to continue along the private road and on to the main highway in a forward gear. Adjacent to the site there is also a car park, which can accommodate coaches as part of the wider Taff Bargoed Centre. It is noted that coaches do not come and go from the site throughout the day but instead typically set off in the early hours of the morning and in the evening as part of the school runs. As such, the frequency of the coach movements is generally limited and does not appear to cause significant conflict with other traffic movements associated with the Taff Bargoed Centre. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the coach business has already been operating from the site for approximately 9 years with no apparent highway incidents that may give rise to highway safety concerns. In this regard, it is acknowledged that the Head of Engineering and Highways has not raised any objection to the proposal. Therefore, the continued use of the site for the parking of coaches is acceptable and complies with policy SW11 of the LDP.

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.

For the above reasons, the proposed development is acceptable and complies with the relevant LDP policies. Accordingly, the following recommendation is made:

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

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

Drawing No. Taff Bargoed Centre 02, Proposed Parking Arrangements, received 11.04.2022

Preliminary Ecological Assessment, received 16.08.2022

Ecological Management Plan, received 16.08.2022

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

2. The industrial unit and hardstanding area hereby approved shall only be used for the purpose of parking coaches in accordance with the parking arrangement as illustrated on Drawing No. Taff Bargoed Centre 02 and no more than 13 coaches shall be present on site at any one time.

Reason - In the interests of road safety, local amenity and the character and appearance of the open countryside, in accordance with Policy SW11 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

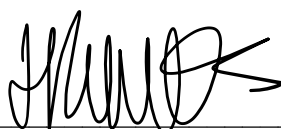
3. No surface water and/or land drainage shall be allowed to connect directly or indirectly with the public sewerage network.

Reason - To prevent hydraulic overloading of the public sewerage system, to protect the health and safety of existing residents and ensure no pollution of or detriment to the environment, in accordance with Policy SW11 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

INFORMATIVES

1. The application/developer is advised to liaise with the Council's SuDS Approval Body (SAB) in respect of any necessary permissions relating to surface water drainage requirements, under Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. If you require any advice, you should contact the SAB officer on 07759 137063/SAB@merthyr.gov.uk.

RECOMMENDATION ENDORSED



Director of Neighbourhood Services

DATE:

1/12/22