



Land at Crabtree Walk, Trefechan, Merthyr Tydfil

Planning Application for Residential Development

On behalf of WDL (Homes) Limited

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Prepared by
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 John Campion Associates Limited (JCA) have been commissioned by WDL (Homes) Ltd to prepare a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA), in support of a full planning application for residential development of 45 units, with associated infrastructure, on land at Crabtree Walk, Trefechan, within the administrative area of Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council.
- 1.2 This Appraisal has been prepared by John Campion, Chartered Landscape Architect, Director of John Campion Associates Limited (JCA). He has been involved in a wide range of commissions, including major infrastructure and building projects within designated landscapes. He has provided strategic landscape advice for major rural design projects, including within designated landscapes, and worked extensively throughout Wales on preparing and reviewing environmental impact assessments for major planning projects, especially for Natural Resources Wales and its predecessor authority, the Countryside Council for Wales. He has also appeared as a landscape expert witness for both of those government advisory bodies. He has lectured on Landscape Design, Management and Professional Practice at the University of Manchester, Edinburgh College of Art (Heriot-Watt University), Sheffield University and Bristol University. For over twenty years, he was an examiner for the final professional practice examinations of the Landscape Institute.
- 1.3 Anthony Jellard, an Associate Consultant to JCA, has contributed to the appraisal. He is a Chartered Landscape Architect with a detailed knowledge of the local landscape and extensive experience of undertaking landscape character assessments within Wales. He has worked on a wide range of development projects, including working within designated landscapes, embracing environmental assessments, housing schemes, leisure and commercial projects.
- 1.4 Rob Malcomson, an Associate Consultant to JCA, has also contributed to the appraisal. He is a Chartered Landscape Architect with extensive experience of landscape and visual impact assessment and landscape character studies within Wales. He has direct experience of LANDMAP assessment as an Aspect Specialist in compiling Visual & Sensory Aspect data for LANDMAP surveys in Wales, commissioned jointly by local planning authorities and the former Countryside Council for Wales.

2. SCOPE OF THE REPORT

- 2.1 This LVA has been prepared with reference to guidance, as far as it is appropriate to an appraisal of this nature, contained in:
- *“Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact assessment” (3rd Edition, 2013)*, published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Management and Environmental Assessment (GLVIA3).
GLVIA3 notes that, in an appraisal such as this for the proposed development, *‘the process is informal and there is more flexibility in the approach that is taken [compared to a full LVIA] but the essence of the approach still applies’*;
 - *LANDMAP Methodology: Guidance for Wales* (2013) published by Natural Resources Wales;
 - *“Making Sense of Place – Landscape Character Assessment Guidance,”* (2002) published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish National Heritage; and

- *"Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity"* (Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency, 2004).

Consultations

- 2.2 Pre-Application Consultations have been held with the Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council (the Council), and specific matters relating to landscape have been cited. In addition to the formal Pre-Application response received from the Council in a letter dated 19th June 2019, the Council's Landscape Architect, Tom Bramley, has also provided direct inputs into the process of identification of appropriate representative visual assessment viewpoint locations. The main content of the Council's response regarding landscape and visual matters is included below:

*'The proposal is considered to be a prominent development adjoining a sensitive landscape of international importance. Given the likely visible imposition of the proposal on the landscape and the change in character that is likely to ensue, our Landscape Architect has indicated that a proportional landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) is required in order to ascertain the potential impacts on both landscape character and vantage viewpoints. Such a study should demonstrate, through detailed mitigation, how the impacts of the development can be appropriately addressed through sensitive design.'*¹

Other specific landscape and visual matters raised by the Council are dealt with in appropriate subsequent sections of this LVA.

- 2.3 A formal LVIA has not been required by the Council through the mechanism of an Environmental Impact Assessment. This LVA is considered to be both proportionate and appropriate to be submitted in support of the subsequent planning application for the full site development. It is intended to address the Council's concerns over the landscape and visual aspects of the proposed development, and to assess The Site's capacity to accept residential development of the nature and extent envisaged without detriment to the local landscape character or adverse effects on significant views.

3. METHODOLOGY

Study Area

- 3.1 The Study Area for the assessment has been defined in accordance with the guidance provided in GLVIA3, which advises that the Study Area for a landscape assessment needs to cover *'The Site itself and its wider landscape context, within which the proposed development may influence landscape character'*.
- 3.2 Given the nature and the particular characteristics of the proposed development, adjacent to an existing residential area at the edge of an established settlement – together with the quality of the local topography and the nature and extent of vegetation cover, topography and intervening buildings - no substantial effects are anticipated beyond 0.25 kilometres from the edge of The Site.

¹ Letter to Asbri Planning & Transport (Emma Harding) from Merthyr Tydfil Planning Officer (David Cross), dated 19th June 2019 (ref PA/19/0029)

- 3.3 Wherever possible, the analysis has been objective, the residual effects quantified, and any subjective judgements have been described in clearly defined terms. Both objective analysis and subjective professional judgements are required for effective, high quality landscape and visual analysis.

Surveys

- 3.4 Detailed desktop reviews were carried out of published material relevant to the landscape of The Site and its wider context. Material included maps, photographic evidence, published historic landscape and cultural data, and adopted local planning policies and supplementary planning guidance. Fieldwork enabled the recording the nature and extent of various landscape elements such as topography, land use and vegetation. From the analysis of this combination of material, it was possible to carry out an evaluation of landscape character and assess the predicted effects of the proposed development.

Assumptions

- 3.5 Reference to ‘The Site’ should be interpreted as the area contained within the red line drawn to identify the proposed planning application boundary for the whole of the development of The Site.
- 3.6 Predominantly, the visual assessment field survey work has been undertaken from within publicly accessible areas only: where included, views from private properties and commercial buildings are approximate and have been estimated, with reference to the nearest publicly-accessible location from which assessment could reasonably take place. However, we have included a visual assessment viewpoint located at Morlais Castle (a Scheduled Monument), at the suggestion of the Council’s Landscape Architect, Tom Bramley, although this location does not appear to have any recognised form of public access.²

Assessment Viewpoints

- 3.7 A series of potential viewpoints, based on desktop analysis of mapped information, was selected to be representative of the various groups of receptors whose views may be affected by the proposed development. The focus, when selecting viewpoints, was on those from which ‘*likely significant effects*’ might be experienced and taking ‘*an approach that is proportional to the scale of the project that is being assessed*’, in line with GLVIA3 as current best practice guidance; although it should be noted that the term ‘significant’ is not defined within this guidance, nor indeed within the current Environmental Assessment Regulations where a formal landscape and visual impact assessment is required. This approach involves using professional judgement and, for this appraisal, we have identified potential locations from where likely *substantial* effects could occur. These candidate viewpoints were then reviewed in the field and refined as necessary, before being submitted to the Council’s Landscape Architect for review and comment. The final list of assessment viewpoints was drawn up following the written response received from the Council’s Landscape Architect³.
- 3.8 A computer-generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) has not been produced as part of this appraisal. Given that the proposed development is partially contained by combination of

² There is no designated Access Land at this location, nor any Public Right of Way providing access to it

³ Email message from Tom Bramley to John Campion, dated 12th August 2019

landform and existing mature vegetation and is partially screened by nearby buildings - and that much of the local area from which the site would be viewed is highly urban in character⁴ - it was our view that a computer-generated ZTV would not reliably inform the process of determining potential visibility. A Preliminary Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) was identified in the analysis stage of the preparation of this LVA and used to inform the process of identifying candidate representative viewpoints for the visual assessment work, supplementing our detailed local knowledge of the Merthyr Tydfil landscape. The Preliminary ZVI was also used to assist in our liaison with the heritage consultant in relation to effects of the assessment of effects on the visual setting of heritage assets. These viewpoint locations were refined and evaluated by fieldwork and through direct consultation with the Council's Landscape Architect. The key to establishing an accurate baseline of visibility was the fieldwork survey, which was carried out by two experienced professional landscape architects, each with a detailed prior local knowledge of the Merthyr Tydfil landscape, and making suitable allowances for the presence of leaf cover on deciduous trees and shrubs and its effects on potential visibility.

Landscape Receptor Sensitivity

- 3.9 The term 'landscape receptor' means an element or a group of elements which will be directly or indirectly affected by the proposals. Landscape receptors are physical elements or attributes of the landscape that could be affected by the development, such as landscape character, landform, water courses, woodland, groups of trees or hedgerows, land uses and field boundaries.
- 3.10 Prior to the advent of the landscape character assessment procedure now used by local authorities, the sensitivity of a given landscape receptor was often defined in terms of landscape value, which took the form of national planning designations - such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - or local designations, such as Areas of Great Landscape Value or Special Landscape Areas. Recent assessment guidance has placed greater emphasis on those landscapes which do not benefit from national or local designations, but which may be valued locally for particular reasons.
- 3.11 The sensitivity of landscape receptors is assessed by combining judgements on the susceptibility to the type of change proposed and the value attached to the landscape, in accordance with GLVIA3, and defined in *Table 1, below*:

Table 1: Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors

Sensitivity	Landscape Type or Feature
High	An area possessing a particularly distinctive sense of place, in good condition, or highly valued for its scenic quality and/or landscape character, for example National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts, Grade 1 Listed Buildings and historic parks; or an intact feature of high intrinsic value; [such as prominent trees or tree groups, forming a critical part of the landscape

⁴ Urban areas create difficulties with mapping and modelling accurately the buildings and structures that would influence potential visibility. *GLVIA3, op. cit.* para 6.8, pp.102-3

Sensitivity	Landscape Type or Feature
	pattern or historic landscape pattern]; landscapes or features with a low tolerance to change of the type identified.
Medium	An area with a well-defined sense of place and/or character in moderate condition; or an area valued by designation at a local or regional level; or a partly damaged feature of high intrinsic value; or an intact feature of moderate intrinsic value [such as prominent trees or tree groups which contribute to the character of The Site, screening of views, landscape or historic landscape pattern]; a landscape or feature which is partially tolerant of change of the type identified.
Low	An area with a poorly defined sense of place, and/or landscape character in poor condition, often not valued for its scenic quality; or a feature of low intrinsic value [such as trees and species-poor hedgerows of no special quality or function]; or a landscape or feature that is tolerant of change of the type identified.

Magnitude of Landscape Effect

- 3.12 The criteria used to assess the magnitude of landscape effects (including those on landscape character and historical landscape character and setting) are based upon the geographic extent of the area influenced, the predicted amount of physical change - and its duration and reversibility - that will occur as a result of the proposals, as described in *Table 2, below*. These are based on best practice examples and experience:

Table 2: Magnitude of Landscape Effect

Landscape Effect Magnitude	Description
Major adverse landscape effect	The proposals will be at <i>complete variance</i> with the scale, landform, pattern or character of the landscape, and/or would <i>diminish or destroy</i> the integrity of characteristic features and their settings.
Moderate adverse landscape effect	The proposals will be <i>at odds</i> with the scale, landform, pattern or character of the landscape and/or would cause a <i>noticeable diminution</i> of the integrity of characteristic features and their settings.
Minor adverse landscape effect	The proposals will <i>not quite fit into</i> the scale, landform, pattern or character of the landscape and/or would cause a <i>perceptible diminution</i> of the integrity of characteristic features and their settings.
Negligible adverse landscape effect	The proposals will create a <i>barely perceptible diminution of the integrity of characteristic features and their settings</i> .

Landscape Effect Magnitude	Description
No change	The proposals will <i>not cause any change</i> to the scale, landform, pattern or character of the landscape.
Negligible landscape beneficial effect	The proposals will provide a <i>barely perceptible enhancement of the integrity of characteristic features and their settings</i> .
Minor landscape beneficial effect	The proposals will achieve <i>a degree of fit</i> with the scale, landform, pattern or character of the landscape and <i>make a minor contribution to enhancing</i> the character, sense of place or integrity of the landscape.
Moderate landscape beneficial effect	The proposals <i>will fit well with</i> the scale, landform, pattern or character of the landscape and would <i>noticeably enhance</i> the character, sense of place or integrity of the landscape.
Major landscape beneficial effect	The proposals <i>will fit very well with</i> the scale, landform, pattern or character of the landscape and would <i>restore or greatly enhance</i> the character, sense of place or scale of the landscape.

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

- 3.13 The term 'visual receptor' means *people* - individuals and/or defined groups of people - who have the potential to be affected, directly or indirectly, by the proposals. Visual receptors are at accessible viewpoints, the sensitivity of which would be dependent on the location, the activity and expectations of the viewer, and the importance of the view. These would include viewpoints available to the users of outdoor facilities, sporting activities and users of public rights of way; viewpoints from landscape features and recognised beauty spots; viewpoints outside local properties (which would represent the view for residents); and viewpoints available to people travelling through the landscape. Views may be glimpsed and fleeting, or open and sustained.
- 3.14 The determination of the sensitivity of the visual receptors is a matter of professional judgement. The guidance in GLVIA3 recommends that the assessment of sensitivity will be dependent on:
- the location and context of a viewpoint;
 - the expectations and occupation or activity of the viewer;
 - the importance of the view (which may be determined with respect to its popularity or the numbers of people affected, its appearance in guidebooks, on tourist maps, and in the facilities provided for its enjoyment and references to it in literature or art); and
 - the scale of the view and the extent of visibility.

Table 3: Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

Sensitivity	Visual Receptor
High	Viewers with a particular <i>interest</i> in their visual environment and/or prolonged viewing opportunities; for example, residents within their homes or in the curtilage of their property; or visitors to National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or Heritage Coasts; or walkers and riders on National Trails or on promoted regional trails.
Medium	Viewers with a <i>general interest</i> in their visual environment; for example, visitors to regionally or locally valued countryside - including Access Land and National Trust Land not within a designated landscape - and users of local open space facilities, and walkers or horse riders on local public rights of way which are not specifically promoted for their visual interest.
Low	Viewers with a <i>passing or momentary interest</i> in their everyday surroundings, for example motorists or people at their place of work, whose attention is focussed on other activities and who are therefore less susceptible to change.

- 3.15 The magnitude of visual effects depends on factors such as separation distance, the time of day, the season, the prevailing weather conditions, elevation and aspect, as well as the context of the view. The predicted level of effect has been assessed during good visibility and light conditions, therefore with the best possible view of the proposals. All assessment viewpoints were visited during August and September 2019. Proper allowance has therefore been made for the likely visibility of the proposed development during the winter aspect, as noted at *paragraph 3.8, above*.
- 3.16 The following scale has been adopted for assessing the magnitude of visual effects, based on the degree of change to the view, or to the composition - *see Table 4, below*. This is based on best practice examples and previous experience.

Table 4: Magnitude of Visual Effect

Visual Effect Magnitude	Description
Major adverse or beneficial visual effect	The proposals will cause a <i>dominant or complete change</i> to the composition of the view, the appreciation of the landscape character, or the ability to take or enjoy the view.
Moderate adverse or beneficial visual effect	The proposals will cause a <i>clearly noticeable change</i> to the view, which would affect the composition, the appreciation of landscape character or the ability to take in or enjoy the view.
Minor adverse or beneficial visual effect	The proposals will cause a <i>perceptible change</i> to the view, but which would not materially affect the composition, the appreciation of landscape character, or the ability to take in or enjoy the view.

Visual Effect Magnitude	Description
Negligible adverse or beneficial visual effect	The proposals will cause a <i>barely perceptible change</i> to the view, which would not affect the composition, the appreciation of landscape character, or the ability to take in or enjoy the view.
No change	The proposals will cause no change to the view.

Assessment of Overall Level of Effect

- 3.17 The scale shown in *Table 5, below*, has been adopted to assess the overall level of both landscape and visual effects and whether they are considered to be adverse, beneficial or neutral. (*Note that neutral effects would be those where there may be a landscape or visual change, but the overall weighting of positive and negative effects is very finely balanced*). The basis of this scale is derived from professional experience. In accordance with good practice, the main aim in the reporting of the identified effects is to describe the key landscape and visual issues which are relevant to determining this planning application; for the purposes of this assessment, such effects are referred to as being *substantial*, and include overall landscape and visual effects that are assessed as being moderate or greater. It should be noted that the term 'residual effects' used in this assessment refers to those effects which are predicted, having taken into account all the proposed mitigation measures.

Table 5: Assessment of Overall Landscape or Visual Level of Effect

(*It should be noted that some of assessment values below, e.g. moderate-minor, are expressed as a continuum. In these instances, our professional judgement is that the assessment of the level of effect is not sufficiently weighted as to be defined by a single value of, say, moderate or minor. Our approach follows GLVIA 3 guidance on the importance of professional judgement in landscape and visual assessment*)

Magnitude of Change	Receptor Sensitivity		
	High	Medium	Low
Major	Major Adverse/Beneficial	Moderate Adverse/Beneficial	Minor Adverse/Beneficial
Moderate	Major-Moderate Adverse/Beneficial	Moderate-Minor Adverse/Beneficial	Minor Adverse/Beneficial
Minor	Moderate-Minor Adverse/Beneficial	Minor Adverse/Beneficial	Minor-Negligible Adverse/Beneficial
Negligible	Minor-Negligible Adverse/Beneficial	Negligible Adverse/Beneficial	Negligible Adverse/Beneficial

Note: *Those cells shaded in blue are considered to be substantial effects.*

4. BASELINE CONDITIONS

- 4.1 The baseline condition information is assembled by a process which combines the results of desktop research with those of detailed field observation and analysis.

Landscape Baseline

Location and Land Use

- 4.2 The Site lies adjacent to an established residential area at the northern edge of Trefechan, a small, largely post-World War Two designed housing estate situated in the extreme north of the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil. The Site lies just to the south of the Brecon Beacons National Park, and its closest part is around 80 metres from the national park boundary, at the point where it meets the north-western extremity of the Sweetwater Park housing estate. From here, the national park boundary follows the margin of the former enclosed farmland above and beyond The Site, before crossing the open high ground on the southern flanks of the ridge known as Cefn Cil-Sanws, on a roughly east-north-east to west-south-west alignment - and following no obvious physical feature for much of its length. This open grazing is common land known as Vaynor/Cil-Sanws Common (*see Appendices, Figure JCA/01: Viewpoint Location & Context*).
- 4.3 The Site for the proposed development consists of a single parcel of land formerly comprised of a number of small, irregularly-shaped agricultural fields enclosed by dilapidated drystone boundary walls and post-and-wire fences. The Site is approximately 3.15 hectares in extent. This land has previously been in use primarily as pasture. Adjoining land use to the north-west is agricultural, being comprised of similar small enclosed but unmanaged fields at the edge of the open mountain rough grazing land, and golf course land lies beyond. Close by to the south-west is the Merthyr Tydfil Golf Club site, while the south-eastern site boundary is contiguous with the rear curtilages of residential properties along Crabtree Walk and Hawthorn Hill, at the north-western edge of Trefechan. Adjacent to the north-east, beyond the public bridleway, is the residential estate known as Sweetwater Park located at the north-eastern edge of Trefechan.

Topography

- 4.4 The Site is located on part of the lower south-eastern slopes of the Cefn Cil-Sanws ridge, which forms the high ground on the western side of the Cwm Taf, the valley of the Taf Fawr river to the north-west of Merthyr Tydfil. This ridge rises to 426m AOD at its summit. The centre of Trefechan village lies to the south at around 266m AOD (on Beechwood Avenue), beyond the housing areas to the south of which the land falls away into the narrow, steep-sided and deeply entrenched valley of the Taf Fechan river. The modern housing area of Sweetwater Park, adjacent to the north-east, reaches an elevation of around 329m AOD at its highest point. To the north-east of Trefechan is the large, deep recess formed by long term and extensive limestone extraction at the Vaynor Quarry, which appears to be no longer operational for stone extraction. The topography of The Site itself is sloping, with varying degrees of steepness. From the highest point on the northern boundary fence, at just over 318m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), The Site falls to around 286m AOD at the southern boundary close to the entrance to the existing access track

leading off Crabtree Walk. The houses on the nearby north-western arm of Crabtree Walk are built on benches cut into the hill slope, which has the effect of the ground floor rooms here being set well down below the level of the access road immediately beyond their rear curtilages. A similar effect occurs at the rear of the houses along the western end of Hawthorn Hill which back onto The Site which have rear gardens contiguous with The Site boundary.

Existing Site Vegetation and Site Boundaries

- 4.5 The Site is partly demarcated by dilapidated drystone walls, partly by timber post-and-wire fences and is partly unfenced. Woody vegetation is mostly confined to the edges of The Site, but there are also some scattered mature trees and shrubs growing within the northern and central areas of The Site. The existing trees were subject to a specialist tree survey and assessment which is submitted in support of the planning application.
- 4.6 The north-western and south-western site boundaries are demarcated by post-and-wire fences.
- 4.7 The north-eastern boundary of The Site follows the line of a dilapidated drystone wall, with a parallel post-and-wire fence, forming the boundary with an adjacent public bridleway. There is intermittent growth of deciduous trees and shrubs along much of this boundary.
- 4.8 The south-eastern site boundary to the gardens at the rear of the adjacent houses along Hawthorn Hill is defined by a concrete post-and-chain link fence. To the west of the existing site access, along the rear of the houses at the western end of Crabtree Walk, the site boundary is undefined, lying just to the north of – and roughly parallel with – a line of tall concrete posts set along the northern side of the metalled access road.

Existing Structures

- 4.9 There are two detached residential properties on The Site: ‘Caerllwyn’ (east of the track) and ‘Mira Monte’ (west of the track). These are bungalows and both are accessed from the narrow stone-surfaced track which leads northwards off Crabtree Walk just beyond its junction with Hawthorn Hill. A further narrow stone-surfaced track leads off this track to the south-west, eventually terminating at the turning head at the western end of the metalled access road at the rear of Crabtree Walk, where it provides access to the adjacent land to the south-west via a field gate in the boundary fence.
- 4.10 A single overhead telephone line carried on wood poles crosses the western area of the site, leading up from the access road to the rear of Crabtree walk.

Heritage Assets

[Refer to paragraphs 6.17 to 6.19, below, for the assessment of effects on the visual setting of relevant heritage assets]

- 4.11 This LVA deals only with the visual aspects and setting of heritage assets. It does not deal with the predicted effects on the value of any individual heritage asset. There are no Listed Buildings in the vicinity of The Site. The nearest Listed Building is the St John the Baptist

Church at Cefn Coed-y-cymmer, situated at around 0.87kms distant to the south from the closest part of the boundary to The Site⁵. It is Listed as Grade II and its visual setting does not extend as far as The Site. To the south-east of The Site, beyond Trefechan, the A465(T) and the residential areas of Cefn Coed-y-cymmer and Gurnos, lies the Registered Historic Parkland at Cyfarthfa Castle. It is listed as being Grade II* and the castle itself is a Grade I Listed Building.⁶ The visual setting of both of these heritage assets does not extend to include The Site or its locality. The Site lies wholly within the Merthyr Tydfil Registered Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales, identified by Cadw as an internationally-renowned iron and coal industrial landscape of the 18th and 19th centuries.⁷ A Historic Landscape Characterisation has been carried out for the Registered Historic Landscape by GGAT on behalf of Cadw, reported in 2003⁸. The *Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment* to be submitted in support of the planning application deals in detail with the predicted effects of the proposed development on the heritage assets themselves.

Public Rights of Way

- 4.12 No public right of way crosses The Site. A public bridleway runs along the land immediately adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of The Site, separating it from the adjacent residential area of Sweetwater Park. This route connects the public road within the southern section of Sweetwater Park at a point some 45 metres from its junction with the main road, Beechwood Avenue, to the open land at the edge of Cil-Sanws common at the north-western edge of Sweetwater Park.
- 4.13 Only one other public right of way – a public bridleway – is in the wider vicinity of The Site, on the edge of Cil-Sanws common and around 110 metres to the north-west at its closest point. This runs northwards from the car park at the Merthyr Tydfil Golf Club then turns north-eastwards to run across the open golf course land until it meets the western edge of Vaynor Quarry, where it abruptly terminates.

Public Roads

- 4.14 The main public road in the wider vicinity of The Site is the A465(T) Heads of the Valleys Road, a busy trunk road running along a roughly east-north-east to west-south-west alignment, which lies to the south of the Taf Fechan river valley beyond the southern edge of Trefechan. This trunk road is a two-lane dual carriageway highway which crosses the Taf Fechan on a viaduct. There are no views of The Site perpendicular to the direction of travel from the open carriageway where the road traverses the Taf Fechan viaduct, because of intervening topography, buildings, and the dense woodlands clothing the Taf Fechan river valley sides. As the road climbs the eastern side of the valley beyond the Taf Fechan, any views obtained from these higher elevations would be only partial and glimpsed through dense intervening deciduous tree and shrub cover, growing along the road corridor and on the adjoining land to the north. Such views would only be obtainable during the winter aspect.

⁵ Cadw website entry as at 23rd September 2019

⁶ Archwilio Historic Environment Record website 25th September 2019

⁷ *Register of Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales; Part 2.1: Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest*; Cadw, 1998; p.49

⁸ NRW LANDMAP website, 25th September 2019

- 4.15 Within Trefechan, the minor public road running between Cefn Coed-y-cymmer and Pontsticill runs along Beechwood Avenue. There are partial views into The Site perpendicular to the direction of travel, through the adjacent housing areas, both from the road and from the paved footways along both sides. There are a number of minor residential access roads within the nearby areas of Trefechan which lie to the north of Beechwood Avenue, but there are only direct and sustained views towards The Site from the small number of houses located along the nearest sections of Crabtree Walk and Hawthorn Hill.

Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.16 '*Landscape character*' is defined as a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently in a particular type of landscape and how people perceive it. It reflects particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation and land-use, and human settlement. It creates the particular 'sense of place' of different areas of the landscape.

National Landscape Character Areas

- 4.17 National Landscape Character Areas (NLCAs) form the broadest scale of landscape character assessment in Wales. The information published by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) records 48 discrete NLCAs. Amongst the uses which NRW provides are the following:
- '*a summary description and list of key characteristics linked to regional identity*
 - '*short narratives capturing visual, geological, habitat, historic and cultural influences.*'⁹
- 4.18 Although The Site lies close to the administrative area of the Brecon Beacons National Park, the National Landscape Character study places the village of Trefechan and the proposed development site within the identified NLCA 37, *South Wales Valleys*. The northern boundary of this NLCA appears to correspond with the line of the national park boundary locally. The adjoining NLCA to the north is NLCA30, *Brecon Beacons & Black Mountains*.
- 4.19 The Site's context appears to largely conform to the majority of the stated key characteristics of NLCA37. *Table 6, below*, provides a useful illustration of the stated 'Key Characteristics'¹⁰ attributed to NLCA37 noting those characteristics which are evident in the wider landscape context of the proposed development site.

Table 6: NLCAs - Key Characteristics in relation to The Site

NLCA37 South Wales Valleys	Commentary on the Site Context
Extensive upland plateaux – typically wild and windswept, often with unenclosed tracts, running roughly north-south as 'fingers' parallel between intervening deep valleys	Large area of unenclosed rising ground on the lower slopes of the Cil-Sanws ridge forms the prominent land backdrop to The Site
Numerous steep-sided valleys - typically aligned in parallel, flowing in southerly directions, shaped by southward flowing glaciers, leaving behind distinctive corrie ('cwm') and crag	Taf Fechan river valley is deeply entrenched just to the south of Trefechan

⁹ NRW website entry at 24th September 2019; date of information is given as March 2014

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

features. Major rivers include the Tawe, Taff and Rhymney	
Heather, rough grassland and steep bracken slopes – dominate many plateaux and are grazed mainly by sheep. Much is common land	Extensive bracken and rough grassland within and adjoining The Site to the north and north-west (Common Land). Grazing not evident within The Site
Extensive remains of heavy industry – with a mix of derelict, preserved and largely redeveloped areas, notably for coal mining. Preserved as heritage (World Heritage Site) at Blaenavon; this typically includes old railway alignments, buildings and former tips	Large limestone quarry to the east of Trefechan (Vaynor Quarry). Dismantled railway line running along the western and northern side of the Taf Fechan valley from Cefn Coed-y-cymmer up to Ponsticill
Field boundaries - dry stone walls mark the boundary of common land while fields on lower slopes are bounded by dense hawthorn hedges, interspersed with swathes of broadleaved woodland Improved pastures on some lower valley sides - grazed by sheep and some dairy cattle.	Dilapidated drystone field boundary walls within parts of and adjoining The Site
Large blocks of coniferous plantation and deciduous woodland fringes – covering many steep hillsides and hilltops, most notably in the middle to western portion of the area, providing a softer contemporary landscape where there was once industry	No significant coniferous woodland in the vicinity, but extensive linear deciduous woodland within the Taf Fechan valley
Ribbon urban and industrial areas in valleys – in places extending up valley sides and to valley heads. The area is sometimes regarded as being part of a ‘city region’. Middle and eastern valleys tend to be the most heavily and continuously developed, e.g. Rhondda Valley. The uplands by comparison have little or no settlement	No ribbon development apparent. Trefechan is a discrete planned housing estate with a nucleated pattern, designed in 1947
Transport routes restricted to valleys – the intervening topography makes valley to valley travel difficult, except at heads and bottoms of valleys. Occasionally there are roads that climb steeply over passes with dramatic views and ‘hair pin’ bends	Former railway line within the Taf Fechan valley conforms to this observation, but the modern A465(T) Heads of the Valleys Road dual carriageway is not thus constrained, crossing the upper valley terrain by way of bridges and cuttings
Iconic cultural identity – many popular images of a tough, rugby-playing, religious, radically-minded society still remain associated with the South Wales Valleys, however today’s post-industrial, internet-connected reality is somewhat different	Trefechan has its own identity and specific origins as a new settlement intended to replace slum housing cleared from within Merthyr Tydfil following the end of World War Two
Contrast of urban valley activity next to quiet uplands – e.g. busy roads, new developments, traffic noise, night lighting, versus the adjacent wilder, remoter, quieter uplands	The existing north-western and north-eastern edges of Trefechan have an abrupt transition from high-density residential areas onto open, uninhabited upland

LANDMAP

- 4.20 The LANDMAP system has been developed specifically for the assessment of character in the landscape of Wales. The system was developed by the Countryside Council for Wales (now Natural Resources Wales) and has been implemented in partnership with Local Planning Authorities throughout Wales. Much of the methodology is underpinned by earlier work carried out by the Countryside Agency – the government body formerly with statutory responsibility for England’s countryside (now Natural England) – in the preparation of their document, the ‘Character Map of England’. This has classified the whole of England by describing Landscape Character Areas (LCA’s), defined as being:

“...single unique areas which are discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type.”

- 4.21 LANDMAP, introduced in 1997, was revolutionised in 2003 with the introduction of a benchmark methodology and incorporation of a quality assurance process to ensure consistency, accuracy and accessibility of landscape information in Wales.

- 4.22 It should also be noted that the CCW (NRW) has arrived at a working definition of landscape as follows:

“The physical reality of the environment around us, the tangible elements that give shape and diversity to our surroundings. But landscape is also the environment perceived, predominantly visually but additionally through our senses of smell, touch and hearing. Our appreciation of landscape is affected, too, by our cultural backgrounds, and by personal and professional interests. For the Countryside Council for Wales’s purposes, landscape is defined as the sum of all these components.” (CCW, 2001).”

- 4.23 We have therefore reviewed the Landscape Character of The Site and its landscape context using the most recent published LANDMAP Aspect Area data, in accordance with the ‘Summary advice on good practice’ in Chapter 5 of GLVIA3. This advice states, on pages 93-94, that:

*‘Existing assessments must be reviewed critically as their quality may vary, some may be dated and some may not be suited to the task in hand...
..... and may need to be reviewed and interpreted to adapt them for use in LVIA, and fieldwork should check the applicability of the assessment throughout the study area and refine it where necessary.’*

Although there are five constituent Aspects within the LANDMAP data, the LANDMAP methodology for landscape characterisation notes that landscape character areas are to be defined using the Visual & Sensory Aspect Area as a starting point, then refined by examining the data from other Aspects. The following landscape character descriptions are taken direct from the current published LANDMAP Collector data for the Visual & Sensory (VS) Aspect Areas, together with the other four Aspects produced as part of the LANDMAP study for this area. This information generally includes their summary description, evaluation and classification; LANDMAP Aspects are ‘organised according to a hierarchical classification system’ consisting of four levels of increasing detail from Level 1 to Level 4, and the guidance states that ‘LANDMAP Aspect Areas must be identified to Level 3’, based upon *landform and*

landcover.¹¹ We have therefore provided the classification for all Aspect Areas at Level 3, in line with the above guidance.

- 4.24 LANDMAP places the great majority of The Site just within the northernmost boundary of the extensive Visual and Sensory Aspect Area identified as **Merthyr Tydfil** MRTHRVS122. We note that the original assessment was carried out in November 2003 and that monitoring work was carried out by Bronwen Thomas in January 2013. This monitoring triggered a boundary revision which included a specific reference to expansion of the area at Trefechan.¹²

- 4.25 This Aspect Area is classified at Level 3 as being *Development/Built Land/Urban*. It encompasses the urban area of Merthyr Tydfil, from Dowlais Top in the east to Clwydyfagwyr in the west; and from Trefechan in the north to Troedyrhiw in the south. The Summary Description of the land within the **Merthyr Tydfil** VS Aspect Area noted the following matters relevant to the Trefechan vicinity:

*'This urban area includes Merthyr Tydfil itself and a series of linked village communities and housing estates, which surround the town centre... All sit within a broad basin around the confluence of the Taf Fawr and the Taf Fechan and also the Nant Morlais The main road pattern defines the funnel shape of this basin - the A465 across the northern edge, the A470 and A4102 along the western edge and the A4060 along the eastern edge... This is an extremely complex area... The pattern of development has historically been controlled by the exploitation of local minerals and related industrial development... With this in mind the area can be divided into older settlement cores and the matrix of areas in between which comprise newer housing developments, industrial and commercial sites, open spaces and apparently unused and reclaimed land... Recent peripheral housing developments have expanded the boundaries. ... The outlying housing estates such as Gurnos and Gellideg are often in elevated positions on the edge of the town with few facilities.'*¹³

From our fieldwork, we consider that the stated description of this extensive VS Aspect Area fairly represents the landscape context of the proposed development site and its vicinity, based upon the following evidence:

- The Site itself is contained by residential areas on its north-eastern and south-eastern sides, and there are two separate detached residential properties within the boundaries of The Site;
- The Site contains apparently unused land formerly in pastoral agricultural use;
- However, the village of Trefechan is not conjoined with nearby areas of Merthyr Tydfil or Cefn Coed-y-cymmer, being a separate entity, originally designed as a self-contained housing settlement.

- 4.26 LANDMAP classifies this Aspect Area as being of 'Low' value – that is, of little or no importance. For this Aspect Area, the *Overall Evaluation* notes that:

*'The town has a very complex form with no discernible pattern and coherence... Some areas are in poor condition and there are numerous detractors... New development and reclamation have obscured the important heritage of the area in parts... Though there is a significant story to tell about Merthyr this is not apparent...'*¹⁴

¹¹ LANDMAP Methodology, p.3; Natural Resources Wales; 2013

¹² NRW LANDMAP website, 20th August 2019

¹³ NRW LANDMAP website, 24th September 2019

¹⁴ NRW LANDMAP website, 20th August 2019

From our fieldwork, we have concluded that the proposed development site's context generally conforms to this low overall evaluation, for the following reasons:

- The rear aspects of the adjacent housing areas at Crabtree Walk, Hawthorn Hill and Sweetwater Park present unattractive and utilitarian frontages onto much of The Site from close range. There are dilapidated boundary and other fences present and The Site has a rather unkempt appearance. Parking of cars along the land to the rear of Crabtree Walk within the edge of the site is unregulated and intrusive;
- There are no attractive views into The Site itself, but there are some attractive long-range views out from The Site and its periphery over Merthyr Tydfil and some short range views to some local parts of the higher ground to the north at the edge of the national park;
- There is a list of perceptual and other sensory qualities recorded which includes noise. We noted from our fieldwork that the ambient road traffic noise, largely emanating from the nearby section of the busy A465(T) trunk road, is a noticeable background intrusion in the wider vicinity of The Site.

4.27 LANDMAP has classified the extreme north-western part of The Site and adjacent areas to the west and north-west as being just within the easternmost extremity of the VS Aspect Area identified as **Taff Fawr** MRTHRVS393, classified at Level 4 as being *Open/Wooded Mosaic Upland Valleys*. First surveyed in November 2003, it was monitored in February 2013 by Bronwen Thomas. The Summary Description of this VS Aspect Area - which is strongly based upon the valley of the Taf Fawr river to the north of the A465(T) and lies substantially within the Brecon Beacons National Park - notes that:

*'The Taf Fawr has a distinct and impressive character defined by the juxtaposition of the open scree slopes below Cefn Cil-Sanws and the rural field pattern on the valley floor... The open scree slopes contrast with the predominantly deciduous woodland on the western valley side (outside the County Borough)... The area is particularly scenic and the A470 benefits from sweeping views along the valley... The road does not particularly disturb the sheltered tranquillity of the valley... To the south east the Taf Fawr enters an enclosed wooded gorge section between Cefn Coed-y-Cymmer and Cefn Coed Cemetery... To the south west, upland farmland lies on the shoulder between Cwm Ffrwd and Taf Fawr... Enclosure is limited to hedgerows which are discontinuous and riparian vegetation on the Nant Ffrwd and extensive views are possible from the A465 across this landscape which acts as the edge and setting to the Brecon Beacons... This area bounds the north west fringes of Merthyr and acts as a buffer and as its rural setting... Settlement is scattered farmsteads and Llwyn-On village, built to service the reservoir to the north... Minor boundary alteration at change detection to exclude Trefechan housing expansion. The area abuts a series of the village communities which constitute the edge of Merthyr Tydfil... In places this boundary is abrupt e...g... adjacent to Gellideg, while elsewhere the edge is more gradual due to the nature of the built development e...g Cefn Coed... Elsewhere new development is very visible due to its elevated nature e...g... the northern edge of Trefechan...'*¹⁵

¹⁵ NRW LANDMAP website, 24th September 2019

From our fieldwork, it is evident that this Summary Description is primarily concerned with describing the determining features of the core of the VS Aspect Area as identified. We conclude that the majority of the identified characteristics of this Aspect Area are not applicable to The Site, for the following reasons:

- The noted characteristics of the main Taf Fawr valley running north of the A465(T) are not comparable to those of the Site and its vicinity;
- The easternmost extremity of this VS Aspect Area exhibits very few of the stated attributes;
- It is difficult to understand why the LANDMAP Assessor has included the land to the east of Cefn Coed-y-cymmer as part of this VS Aspect Area, on the basis of the assumption that high scenic quality and a strong sense of place are similar throughout. This is definitely not the case;
- The detailed digitisation of the Aspect Area boundaries is unreliable here, since there is no precision in the drafting so as to comply with the physical site features which form the actual boundaries. This has the effect of erroneously introducing a high value into an area which is identified as substantially a low value area, thus having the potential to distort the value to be ascribed to the proposed development site.

4.28 LANDMAP evaluates this VS Aspect Area as 'High', being of county or regional importance, with the *Justification of the Overall Evaluation* given as follows:

*'The area is an attractive upland valley with good views and distinctive features such as scree slopes and rocky outcrops... It is generally unspoilt and acts as a setting to the uplands of the Beacons to the north....'*¹⁶

This observation is not readily applicable to The Site itself, or its immediate vicinity, with the exception of some small rocky outcrops being present. The Site is enclosed on two sides by adjacent high-density residential development.

4.29 LANDMAP places The Site just within the southernmost part of the extensive Cultural Landscape Aspect Area identified as **Garn Ddu Uplands** MRTHRCL005, which stretches northwards from the edge of Cefn Coed-y-cymmer and lies predominantly within the Brecon Beacons National Park. It is classified at Level 3 as being predominantly *Rural*. It is evaluated as 'High'. The Summary Description, cited verbatim, is as follows:

*'Upland moorland rising above Taf Fawr and Taf Fechan valleys, lying within the Brecon Beacons National Park; relict landscape use and social culture dating from prehistory - a variety of enclosures, hut circles, cairns, tumuli and burnt mounds in a bleak but once productive landscape.'*¹⁷

The Aspect was surveyed in August 2003 and no evidence of subsequent review is provided. The boundary of this Aspect Area includes the housing area of Sweetwater Park, yet there are no such inclusions at the edge of Cefn Coed-y-cymmer. The Site's physical relationship to this extensive upland Aspect Area and its imprecise local boundary demarcation means that this cultural information is of little value in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ NRW LANDMAP website, 24th September 2019

contributing to the understanding of the local landscape character of the proposed development site and its vicinity.

- 4.30 LANDMAP places The Site within the Historic Landscape Aspect Area identified as **Garn Ddu** MRTHRHL002. This is an extensive upland Aspect Area, very similar in extent and configuration to the Garn Ddu Uplands Cultural Aspect Area, and again predominantly lying within the national park. It is classified at Level 3 as being *Rural Environment/Non Agricultural/Marginal Land* and has been evaluated as ‘*Outstanding*’, being of national or international importance. The data notes that there is a Registered Historic Landscape Present and explains that a Historic Landscape Characterisation has been carried out by GGAT on behalf of Cadw, reporting in 2003¹⁸. Accordingly, this information is used in this assessment, since it provides more detailed historical information, equivalent to a Level 4 LANDMAP study.
- 4.31 The Site lies within the extensive Merthyr Tydfil Registered Historic Landscape. The Cadw documents note that
- ‘The northern boundary of the Merthyr Tydfil historic landscape generally follows the valley of the Afon Taff Fechan with its large tracts of Ancient Woodland; now a Site of Special Scientific Interest (area 027). The boundary of the area follows that of the northern limits of the County Borough, diverting slightly north of the Taff Fechan to include the Vaynor Quarry and Cefn-Coed-y-Cymmer at the confluence of the Taff Fawr and the Taff Fechan and extending along Nant Ffrwd.’*¹⁹
- 4.32 The Historic Landscape Characterisation of this non-statutory designated landscape has placed The Site within a small, specific Historic Landscape Character Area (HLCA), identified as **HLCA 58 Ty-newydd**. It is summarised as being a
- ‘Post-medieval agricultural enclosed landscape remnant, small, irregular enclosures, drystone field boundaries; religious, funerary and ritual feature.’*²⁰
- Scrutiny of the LANDMAP mapped data shows that the name Ty-newydd was that of a farmstead now built over by the adjoining Sweetwater Park housing development. The predicted effects upon the visual characteristics and setting of this HLCA are dealt with as part of the Visual Assessment, under the heading of Heritage Assets - refer to paragraphs 6.17 to 6.19, below.
- 4.33 LANDMAP places The Site within the Geological Landscape Aspect Area identified as **Cwm Taf Fechan** MRTHRGL011. This Aspect Area is classified at Level 3 as *Karst/Karst/Doline or sink field, pavements, dry valleys, etc.* The entry for Boundary Justification is as follows:

*‘Outcrop area of Carboniferous Limestone E of Taf Fawr.’*²¹

¹⁸ NRW LANDMAP website, 25th September 2019

¹⁹ GGAT website, 25th September 2019

²⁰ GGAT website, 25th September 2019

²¹ NRW LANDMAP website, 25th September 2019

- 4.34 LANDMAP evaluates this Aspect Area as being of '*Outstanding*' value, that is, of national or international importance. The *Justification of the Overall Evaluation* is given as follows:

'SSSI Nant Glais Caves (303960 210675); Karstic dip slope, incised valleys with caves, tufa, working and disused limestone quarries; Potential RIGS.' ²²

- 4.35 LANDMAP places The Site within the extensive Landscape Habitats Aspect Area identified as MRTHRLH001, but apparently untitled, which covers the great majority of the upland between the Taf Fawr and the Cwm Taf Fechan to the west of Ponsticill. This Aspect Area is classified at Level 3 as *Dry (Relatively) Terrestrial Habitats/Grassland & Marsh/Marsh/Marshy Grassland*. Its key features are described as being:

"Large area of upland habitats based around Vaynor & Cilsanwys Common; partly on limestone, but mostly acid or neutral soils....." ²³

- 4.36 LANDMAP evaluates this Aspect Area as being of '*High*' value, that is, of county or regional importance, but no justification for this evaluation is provided. The *Ecological Assessment* to be submitted in support of the planning application for the whole site development will deal with the effects on this element of the landscape resource.

Merthyr Tydfil Special Landscape Areas

- 4.37 Five proposed Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) have been identified and mapped by the Council, the details of which are contained in a Background Paper to the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Local Development Plan (2016-2031), prepared in June 2017. The Executive Summary of this document explains that:

"The Special Landscape Areas define areas of high landscape importance within the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Area outside the Brecon Beacons National Park...." ²⁴

The Background Paper notes that:

'Guidance recommends that SLAs should be designated where there is a good reason to believe that normal planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection and where there is justification to apply an extra level of landscape protection through special landscape policies.' ²⁵

- 4.38 The western boundary of The Site lies immediately adjacent to the westernmost part of the proposed 'Nant Morlais and Cwm Taf Fechan SLA', an extensive tract of land wrapping around the whole of the northern fringes of Merthyr Tydfil. The 'Summary description – character' opens by stating that this proposed SLA is:

'A large complex area situated on the fringes of the BBNP with a variety of land uses ranging from an exposed upland character to bleak and open areas remote from development in the north east with long views to BBNP to incised valleys and upland

²² NRW LANDMAP website, 25th September 2019

²³ NRW LANDMAP website, 24th September 2019

²⁴ *Special Landscape Areas Background Paper* to the Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council Local Development Plan (2016-2031); June 2017; p.1

²⁵ *Special Landscape Areas Background Paper, op.cit*; p.7

*farmland in the south west. The area is influenced by its proximity to the town on its southern edge.'*²⁶

We note with interest that the boundary of this proposed SLA which is contiguous with the proposed development site precisely follows the field boundaries on the western edge of The Site, which should be noted in conjunction with our conclusions regarding the Taf Fawr VS Aspect Area boundary included at paragraph 4.27, above.

Overall Landscape Sensitivity

4.39 Landscape sensitivity is defined by several factors, and it does not necessarily follow that a highly valued landscape or landscape feature will always be defined by a high sensitivity. Landscape designation is thus only one of several criteria that are considered in identifying the relative 'sensitivity' of the landscape to a proposed development. It should not be used in isolation. We have assessed the overall sensitivity of the existing landscape resource, based on the following representative criteria:

- Existing land use;
- Landscape scale and pattern;
- Landscape value²⁷ and quality (condition)²⁸;
- Nature of views and degree of visual enclosure and openness;
- Landscape designations present; and
- Scope for mitigation.

4.40 The overall sensitivity of a landscape is categorised as high, medium or low for the purposes of this assessment. This assessment is derived from analysis in relation to the stated representative criteria. *Table 7, below*, provides information relating to the various criteria affecting landscape sensitivity, which is used to arrive at a final overall level of sensitivity for the local landscape.

Table 7: Overall Sensitivity of the Development Site and the Local Landscape to the Proposed Development

LANDSCAPE ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION
Land Use	The Site consists of a single parcel of land comprised of several small pasture fields with little evidence of recent agricultural management. Within The Site are two detached residential properties with gardens and curtilage buildings. Adjoining land use adjacent and nearby to the north-west is rough grazing and an eighteen-hole golf course. To the south-west, beyond relict grassland fields, are extensive areas of rough grazing land and the golf course. Adjacent to the north-east and south-east are established residential areas.

²⁶ *Special Landscape Areas Background Paper, op.cit; p.32*

²⁷ *Landscape Value* - defined by GLVIA3 as being: 'The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons.'

²⁸ *Landscape quality (condition)* – defined by GLVIA3 as being: 'A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.'

Scale and Pattern	The Site is located on rising ground facing south-east, immediately adjacent to the north-eastern edge of the village of Trefechan, which lies above the northern valley side of the Taf Fechan river. Trefechan is a discrete nucleated settlement, having been designed as a separate, self-contained entity to provide replacement housing following slum clearance in Merthyr Tydfil. The scale of the landscape of the upper valley sides north of Trefechan and Cefn Coed-y-cymmer is medium, influenced by the blurred outline of small- to medium-sized pasture fields where the boundary walls have become dilapidated or have collapsed, or been replaced by post-and-wire fences, and by the golf course on Cefn Cil-Sanws. The landscape pattern north of the A465(T) major road is that of concentrated areas of settlement separated by tracts of open rough grazing land, bracken-covered slopes and patches or blocks of deciduous scrub or woodland
Value and Quality	The great majority of The Site has been assessed overall by the Visual & Sensory LANDMAP assessor as being of <i>low</i> value – that is, of little or no importance - having placed it within the large urban Aspect Area which encompasses the Merthyr Tydfil landscape. The extreme north-western fringes of The Site have been included within the extensive VS Aspect Area adjacent to the north, which is substantially within the Brecon Beacons National Park. Despite the latter somewhat anomalous inclusion – which we believe to arise from draughting or digitisation errors - the proposed development site's character and that of its vicinity is predominantly influenced by the adjacent high-density residential built form adjacent to the north-east and south-east. In particular, the upper parts of the Sweetwater Park housing estate to the north-east form a dominant local landscape element. The Site lies within the very extensive Merthyr Tydfil Registered Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest. It also lies adjacent to the westernmost part of the extensive proposed Nant Morlais and Cwm Taf Fechan Special Landscape Area
Nature of Views	The key views afforded from the more elevated locations (Access Land) on the open upland to the north are in an arc from east to west, over the whole of the valley basin in which Merthyr Tydfil is located, terminating in the high ground of the ridges which separate the Taf valley from the adjacent river valleys to the east and west. Views towards The Site across the valley from the east are restricted to those from areas of higher ground east of Cwm Taf Fechan, especially from Morlais Hill. From the west, medium range views are restricted by intervening high ground on the southern flank of the Cefn Cil-Sanws ridge. More open, medium range views of The Site are obtainable from the middle valley slopes around Clwydyfagwyr and parts of Heolgerrig to the south-west. At closer range, views of The Site from the south-east around to the south-west are restricted by intervening landform, built form or dense tree and shrub cover – or by combinations of these elements. Long range views that encompass The Site and its locality are only afforded from very elevated viewpoints, and these are generally located at a much greater distance.
Landscape Designations	The Site lies just to the south of the Brecon Beacons National Park, at around 110 metres from the park boundary at its closest point, which is at the northern edge of the adjacent Sweetwater Park housing estate. The Site lies wholly within the Merthyr Tydfil Registered Historic Landscape of

	Outstanding Interest in Wales, designated in recognition of its importance in the production of iron and coal during the 18 th and 19 th centuries. Part of the extensive proposed Nant Morlais and Cwm Taf Fechan Special Landscape Area is contiguous with the south-western boundary of The Site.
Scope for Mitigation	Design of the housing so as to set the development well below the ridge heights of the Sweetwater Park housing area adjacent to the north-east, reflecting the landscape and visual sensitivity of the location. Retention and enhancement of as much of the existing mature boundary vegetation as possible, and with areas of new naturalistic scrub woodland belt planted along the north-western boundary. Retention and re-use of stone from redundant and collapsed boundary walls to form some of the boundary features and a new entrance to The Site. Tree and hedgerow planting within the residential development, to help break up the mass of the new housing and to assimilate the new built form into the settlement edge by softening the transition into the open land above.
Overall Landscape Sensitivity of Site: in relation to ability to accommodate development of the scale, nature and extent proposed	Medium: <i>Reasoning:</i> The Site lies at the edge of the greater urban area that is Merthyr Tydfil, supported by the LANDMAP VS Assessor. Although the southern edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park is close by on the high ground above the Site to the north-west, the difference in elevation between The Site and the areas of land within the national park means that there is no potential for adverse effects on the national park. There would be no effects on views either into or out from this section of the national park. The scale of the landscape on the valley slopes at the southern end of the Cil-Sanws ridge is medium, with topography, blocks of woodland and scrub, groups and built form restricting views. The LANDMAP Visual & Sensory Aspect overall value for the majority of The Site is assessed as 'Low' (being of little or no importance). <i>High value</i> VS Aspect Areas lie immediately adjacent to the north-west, but their value is strongly influenced by their size and their physical disposition, and the fact that most of their land lies within the national park. The proposed development site is enclosed by established high-density residential areas on its north-eastern and south-eastern sides, and by a steeply rising land backdrop to the north-west. Development of the scale and type proposed would not be out of character in this local settlement-edge context. The proposed housing could be readily assimilated within the local landscape setting, with the retention of many of the existing trees, together with new planting of areas of naturalistic scrub woodland belt along much of the north-western flank, together with tree and hedgerow planting within The Site to break up its mass

Visual Baseline

Visual Receptors

- 4.42 Residential receptors are amongst the most sensitive to visual impacts.
- 4.43 *Residential Properties:* the two detached residential properties (bungalows) located close to the centre of The Site - 'Caerllwyn' and 'Mira Monte' - will have direct close range views of

new houses on all sides, only partially screened by curtilage vegetation, boundary features and existing trees. Caerllwyn is proposed to be demolished as part of the development proposals. A small number of properties in the north-western part of Trefechan will have some direct open or partial close range views of the development. However, from several of these locations, the proposed housing will be partly, or predominantly, screened by combination of existing built form, topography and mature trees. Views from adjacent residential receptors are restricted to those properties along the western end of Crabtree Walk, the western end of Hawthorn Hill and some properties on the upper western edge of Sweetwater Park. Elsewhere within the north-western and central parts of Trefechan, views of The Site are restricted by intervening built form and the presence of nearby, boundary and curtilage vegetation.

- 4.44 *Public Rights of Way:* There will be direct close-range views from the public bridleway right of way which runs adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of The Site. The other public right of way in the vicinity is the public bridleway which runs across the open land on the southern flank of the Cil-Sanws ridge, between the golf course car park and the western edge of Vaynor Quarry. The extensive panoramic views from the closest section of this bridleway are south-eastwards towards Merthyr Tydfil above and over The Site, within which the new houses would be set around 20 metres below the route. Some mature trees would be retained and substantial sections of those edges of The Site facing onto the open land and the bridleway route would be planted with stands of naturalistic scrub woodland, thus reducing the visibility of the closest parts of the new development.
- 4.45 *Designated Access Land:* There will be views from some of the nearby areas of the very extensive tract of elevated Access Land across the southern flanks of Cefn Cil-Sanws, to the north-west of Trefechan. From these areas, the proposed development site would be only partially visible, being substantially screened by intervening landform.
- 4.46 *Surrounding Public Roads:* At close range, there will be only partial close-range views of The Site from the road and footways on the minor road between Cefn Coed-y-cymmer and Ponsticill, which runs along Beechwood Avenue through the centre of Trefechan. These views would be perpendicular to the direction of travel and substantially screened by intervening built form and vegetation. There may be some partial glimpsed views in winter from the A465(T) Heads of the valleys dual carriageway, along that section where it rises up the slopes above the eastern side of the Cwm Taf Fechan. These partial views will be seen through a continuous tracery of dense deciduous woodland and scrub growing on the flanks of the road corridor, and within the intervening ground between the road boundary and the Taf Fechan.

5. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 The elements of the proposed development are described in more detail elsewhere in documents submitted in support of the planning application for the whole site development, in particular the *Design & Access Statement*. The essential parts of the proposed development which have implications for the assessment of landscape and visual effects are the demolition of the Caerllwyn property and the construction of 45 dwellings to be built on The Site, to be

comprised primarily of two-storey of houses. There will be landscape and visual effects both during and after construction.

Mitigation

5.2 There are essentially two categories of mitigation measures:

- Primary measures that intrinsically comprise part of the development design through an iterative process;
- Secondary measures designed to specifically address the remaining (residual) negative (adverse) impacts of the final development proposals.

This landscape and visual appraisal relates to the predicted residual effects which remain with both primary and secondary mitigation measures in place.

5.3 Primary measures for the proposed development include:

- The siting of the proposed development in a location which fits within the existing structure of the landscape, the local site topography and which respects the layout and character of the nearby residential areas. The Site is compatible with the form of the village of Trefechan, as it would constitute a small local area of rounding-off development at the settlement edge, which would not adversely influence the character of the surrounding land;
- Retaining and enhancing existing field boundary shrubs and mature trees, wherever practicable.

Secondary measures include:

- Hard and soft landscape materials selected to be sympathetic to the local landscape character, including selective conservation and re-use of walling stone to create new - or rehabilitate existing – boundary features;
- Appropriate naturalistic new scrub woodland planting in stands along the north-western boundary and further tree planting within The Site, so as to enhance the general appearance of The Site and to assist in assimilating the new housing area into the local landscape of the upper valley side. This would provide a softer transitional edge to the north-western side of Trefechan village, unlike the abrupt transition which occurs at the existing hard edge of the settlement along Crabtree walk, Hawthorn Hill and at Sweetwater Park.

The planting mitigation measures are shown on the '*Overall Landscape Layout*' plan (Drawing Nr 1909TMT.02; June 2020) and the *Softworks Specification and Schedule* (Drawing Nr 1909TMT.03; June 2020) which are submitted in support of the planning application.

6. MAGNITUDE AND OVERALL LEVEL OF EFFECTS

Elements of the Proposed Development which have the Potential to cause Landscape and/or Visual Effects

6.1 The following is a schedule of the main elements of the proposed development that have the potential to cause landscape and/or visual effects:

- Site clearance works, including the demolition of the Caerllwyn property; erection of site compound; erection of safety fencing; creation of temporary hardstanding storage areas

and materials storage facilities; and the construction of the access road, associated drainage infrastructure, temporary access routes and structures; associated movement of vehicles, plant and machinery;

- Construction works on that part of Crabtree Walk where the access road into The Site will be formed; associated movement of vehicles, plant and machinery;
- Potential effects on the present landscape character of The Site and the surrounding area;
- Potential effects on public visual receptors in the landscape and private views from nearby properties.

Assessment of Effects on the Landscape Resource

6.2 Landscape effects are defined as changes in the elements, characteristics, and qualities of the landscape because of development. These effects can be positive, negative or neutral. When identifying, and assessing landscape change, it is important to consider the existing trends for change within the landscape, which may be due to natural processes or human activities.

6.3 There will be effects on the landscape fabric of The Site during the construction phase because of demolition, site clearance and associated ground disturbance, excavations, temporary site works, access tracks and the activities of machinery such as earthmovers, etc. Disturbance will be short term, and all temporarily affected surfaces will be restored on completion of construction.

Effects on Landscape Character

6.4 The great majority of The Site lies within the LANDMAP Visual and Sensory Aspect Area identified as **Merthyr Tydfil** MRTHRVS122. This has been identified as an urban Aspect Area and evaluated as being *low* – that is, of little or no importance. In our opinion, the character of The Site is strongly characterised by the adjoining high-density residential areas on two sides, as well as the two detached residential properties which lie close to the centre of it. We have therefore ascribed a level of landscape sensitivity which is *low*, given the small to medium scale nature of The Site when seen in the context of the very substantial geographical extent of this urban VS Aspect Area, the established village edge location, and the limited amount of vegetation removal involved. There will be a *major* magnitude of change on this *low* sensitivity landscape, resulting in a *minor adverse level of effect* during construction. At the end of construction, and when mitigation planting is established, there will remain a minor magnitude of change, resulting in an *overall minor adverse level of residual effect* which is *not substantial*.

6.5 With regard to the adjacent VS Aspect Area **Taf Fawr** MRTHRVS393 to the west, wrapping around the northern edge of Cefn Coed-y-cymmer village, and which is evaluated as *high*, we have discussed at *paragraphs 4.27-28, above*, that The Site and its immediate vicinity are not representative of the attributes of this Aspect Area. The proposed development provides a means of enhancing the local landscape character at the north-western settlement edge of Trefechan, by achieving a softer and less abrupt transition from the urban landscape into the edge of the nearby upland rural landscape leading up to the national park boundary. This would also be assisted by

the recreation and rehabilitation of some sections of drystone boundary walls. These proposals are in keeping with the suggested management recommendations for this Aspect Area. There would be indirect landscape effects on this adjoining Aspect Area, the contiguous parts of which we would regard as being of *medium* sensitivity, since they lie outside the national park boundary and have a very similar character to The Site itself. The magnitude of change here would be *major*. As a consequence, the indirect landscape effects on the limited nearby parts of this adjacent Aspect Area are assessed as being *moderate adverse* and so *substantial*. These factors will result in a residual landscape effect which is *moderate adverse* and therefore *substantial*.

- 6.6 The Site lies within the extensive upland rural LANDMAP Cultural Landscape Aspect Area identified as **Garn Ddu Uplands** MRTHRCL005 and evaluated as *high*. In cultural landscape terms this development, which respects the local issues of landscape setting at close to the lowest elevation of this high upland Aspect Area, will add a small number of residential properties to part of its southernmost fringe at the edge of Trefechan, amounting to a *negligible and neutral* magnitude of change. This development as envisaged will have a *negligible and neutral* effect on this very extensive Cultural Landscape Aspect Area.
- 6.7 The Site lies within the LANDMAP Historic Landscape Aspect Area identified as **Garn Ddu** MRTHRHL002. This is an extensive upland Aspect Area, very similar in extent and configuration to the Garn Ddu Uplands Cultural Aspect Area, and again predominantly lying within the national park. The magnitude of change on this very small part of a very extensive but *high sensitivity* Aspect Area would be *negligible adverse*. Consequently, the level of residual landscape effect on this HLCA is assessed as being *minor-negligible adverse* and *not substantial*. The *Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment* to be submitted in support of the planning application deals in detail with the effects of the proposed development on this area of the designated landscape of the Merthyr Tydfil Registered Historic Landscape.
- 6.8 The Site lies within LANDMAP Geological Landscape Aspect Area identified as **Cwm Taf Fechan** MRTHRGL011, evaluated as being 'Outstanding'. While there will be moderate losses from the earthworks necessary for the development, these must be seen in the context of the very considerable geographical extent of this Aspect Area, which encompasses much of the Vaynor uplands, the eastern side of the Taf Fawr valley and the whole of the Cwm Taf Fechan stretching up to the Morlais Hill quarries. The magnitude of change on this *high* sensitivity Aspect Area would be *negligible adverse*. The residual landscape effect on this Geological Landscape Aspect Area is therefore assessed as being *minor-negligible adverse* and therefore *not substantial*.
- 6.9 The Site lies within the LANDMAP Landscape Habitats Aspect Area identified as MRTHRLH001, but apparently untitled, which covers the great majority of the upland between the Taf Fawr and the Cwm Taf Fechan to the west of Ponsticill and is within the Brecon Beacons National Park. It is evaluated as 'High'. Whilst there will be a loss of an area of unmanaged enclosed pasture and sections of drystone boundary wall within and bordering The Site, there will be selective re-construction or new construction of some sections of drystone boundary wall using reclaimed stone from

The Site. In addition, new planting of native trees and shrubs in stands along the north-western edge of The Site is proposed as part of the development of The Site. The magnitude of change on only a small part of the lowest slopes at the southern extremity of this very extensive upland Aspect Area would be *minor adverse*. The residual landscape effects on this Landscape Habitats Aspect Area are assessed as being *moderate-minor adverse* and *not substantial*. The *Ecological Assessment* to be submitted in support of the planning application for the whole site development will deal with the site-specific effects on this element of the landscape resource.

- 6.10 The western boundary of The Site lies adjacent to the westernmost part of the proposed 'Nant Morlais and Cwm Taf Fechan SLA', an extensive tract of land wrapping around the whole of the northern edges of Merthyr Tydfil. The Site itself is excluded from this proposed designation, although it was included in the 'broad area of search' which formed part of the SLA study.²⁹
- 6.11 This proposed SLA wraps around the whole of the perimeter of Trefechan village. At present, there is a very abrupt transition from the edge of settlement into the adjacent open land to the north and north-west of the village. The proposed development of The Site would include the re-establishment of a stone wall along part of its western boundary, that which is contiguous with the proposed SLA. In addition, substantial stands of naturalistic scrub woodland planting are proposed along much of the north-western flank, thus providing a softer transition into the open upland beyond The Site boundaries and providing a more sympathetic delineation of the rounded-off settlement edge. There would be indirect landscape effects on a very small part of this proposed *high* sensitivity landscape resource. The magnitude of change would be *negligible adverse*. Once the above proposed mitigation measures have been taken into account, the residual indirect landscape effects on the proposed Nant Morlais and Cwm Taf Fechan SLA are assessed as being *minor-negligible adverse* and *not substantial*.

Massing and Scale in the Surrounding Landscape

- 6.12 The proposal is for a small scale development which is contiguous with the existing north-western urban edge of Trefechan, a location which we consider has a *medium* sensitivity to the type of development being proposed. The magnitude of change would be *minor adverse*. It would not have a detrimental effect upon the existing settlement pattern of the village or on the land along the lower slopes of the nearby high ground to the north and north-west. It would be in scale with the nearby parts of the existing settlement. Overall, it is considered that the massing and scale of the development would have a *minor adverse* residual landscape effect which is *not substantial*.

Physical Landscape Effects on Topography

²⁹ *Special Landscape Areas Background Paper, op.cit*; Boundary Definition – Plan 11, p.15

- 6.13 The construction of the proposed development will involve significant local alterations to ground levels to achieve the required highway engineering access standards. The sloping site is assessed as being of *medium* sensitivity. The detailed design and layout will work to optimise cut-and-fill, so as to allow the development to relate to The Site's contours – and those of the adjoining land – in a visually sympathetic manner, wherever practicable. Overall, the magnitude of physical change to topography arising from the proposed development is therefore assessed as *moderate adverse*, resulting in a *moderate-minor adverse* landscape effect which is *not substantial*.

Vegetation

- 6.14 The greater part of the existing unmanaged herbaceous vegetation within The Site will be removed. Some of the intermittent existing boundary woody vegetation will be retained and rehabilitated. A number of stands of naturalistic scrub woodland planting are proposed for sections of the north-western site boundary (*refer to the Overall Landscape Layout plan*).
- 6.15 This retained vegetation, combined with new planting along the north-western boundary and at appropriate locations within The Site, will assimilate the development into its local surroundings, with a resulting *minor* beneficial magnitude of change on a resource which is of *low* sensitivity. The overall effects on The Site vegetation are therefore assessed as a *minor - negligible beneficial* effect which is *not substantial*.

Public Rights of Way

- 6.16 The existing bridleway public right of way adjacent to the north-eastern site boundary will be unaffected by the proposed development. The use of the right of way would remain intact, although the landscape character of that section adjoining the site will change substantially, being a *major adverse* magnitude of change on this *medium* sensitivity resource. This would result in a local *moderate adverse* residual landscape effect, following establishment of all mitigation measures, which would be *substantial*.

Effects on the Landscape and Visual Setting of Heritage Assets

- 6.17 This assessment only addresses the visual aspects of the quality and setting of heritage assets. Effects upon the quality and significance of the assets themselves are dealt with in the *Archaeological Desk Based Assessment* which accompanies the planning application.
- 6.18 The Site lies wholly within the extensive Merthyr Tydfil Registered Historic Landscape. It is close to the northern edge of the designated area. The subsequent Historic Landscape Characterisation study undertaken for Cadw has identified The Site as coinciding exactly with the very small **HLCA 58 Ty-newydd**, its main attributes being related to a post-mediaeval agricultural landscape, notably small irregular enclosures and drystone wall field boundaries. The proposed development would substantially remove the relict field pattern, but the landscape mitigation proposals do include the conservation and selected re-use for new and rehabilitated stone boundary walls along parts of the eastern and western site boundaries. The magnitude of change on this very small but *high sensitivity* Aspect Area would be *major adverse*. Consequently, the level of residual landscape effect on this HLCA is

assessed as being *major adverse* and *substantial*. The *Archeological Desk-Based Assessment* to be submitted in support of the planning application deals in detail with the effects of the proposed development on this heritage asset itself.

- 6.19 The closest Listed Building is St John the Baptist Church in Cefn Coed-y-cymmer, Grade II, located around 0.87kms distant to the south at the closest. The visual setting of this heritage asset does not extend as far as The Site and its environs. The degree of horizontal and vertical separation and the nature of the intervening landscape can be seen in the Assessment Viewpoint Photograph for **Viewpoint 5** (see *Appendices: Figure JCA/06 Viewpoint 5*).

Overall Landscape Effects

Overall Landscape Sensitivity

- 6.20 We have ascribed a level of overall landscape sensitivity of *medium* to the Site and its vicinity. In spite of its close proximity to a section of the southern boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park, its landscape sensitivity is strongly influenced by its position at a very much lower elevation than the nearby areas of the national park on the Garn Ddu upland area, and by the presence of high-density urban development on the north-western edge of Trefechan which adjoin two sides of The Site. The LANDMAP VS Assessor included The Site within the extensive urban area which encompasses the great majority of the valley basin within which Merthyr Tydfil is located and ascribed a *low* evaluation to this Aspect Area.

Overall Magnitude of Change

- 6.22 While some of the existing landscape features will be retained on the boundaries, construction of the houses, access road and associated works will involve a *major* magnitude of change on The Site itself, but not to the site's vicinity.

Overall Magnitude and Level of Landscape Effects

- 6.23 Given the justifiably ascribed *medium* sensitivity of the landscape receptor, and the *major* landscape magnitude of change, the predicted overall level of effect on the landscape of The Site itself is *moderate adverse*, and so *substantial*. The proposals will lead to a loss of openness within The Site itself, but it will have a sustainable use which is compatible with the surrounding land uses and the character of the settlement edge in this part of Merthyr Tydfil. Once the mitigation planting has become fully established, the residual landscape effects on the wider locality however will be *minor adverse* and therefore *not substantial*.

Assessment of Visual Effects of Proposed Development

General

- 6.24 Visual effects are defined as changes in the appearance of the landscape because of development. These can be positive (beneficial or an improvement), or negative (i.e. adverse or a detraction). The assessment of visual effects describes:
- The changes in the character of the available views resulting from the development;
 - The changes in the visual amenity of the visual receptors.

A series of representative viewpoints have been established to inform the visual assessment (see *Appendices: Illustrations, Figures JCA/03 to 10*). The summary of the predicted visual effects from these viewpoints is set out in *Table 8, below*.

Table 8: Viewpoint Assessment Summary

VP Nr	Location and Distance from site boundary (and Ordnance Survey Grid Reference)	Designation	Receptor(s)	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Effect [During Construction/ At Completion/ With Mitigation]	Overall Level of Visual Effect [During Construction/ At Completion/ With Mitigation]
1	Public bridleway adjacent to the housing area at north-western edge of Sweetwater Park, Trefechan (SO 0340 0180) Adjacent to The Site boundary	Public Bridleway Registered Historic Landscape	Residential Bridleway Users	High Medium	Major adverse Major adverse Moderate adverse	Major adverse Major adverse Major-moderate adverse Substantial
2	Head of access road cul-de-sac at rear of west end of Crabtree Walk, Trefechan (SO 0334 0890) Adjacent to The Site boundary	Public local residential access road Registered Historic Landscape	Residential Road Users	High Low	Moderate adverse Moderate adverse Moderate adverse	Major-moderate adverse Major-moderate adverse Major-moderate adverse Substantial
3	Public road and footway at Beechwood Avenue, Trefechan (SO 0367 0880) c. 270 metres south-east of The Site boundary	Public Road through residential area Registered Historic Landscape	Residential Road Users	High Medium	Minor adverse Minor adverse Minor adverse	Moderate -minor adverse Moderate -minor adverse Moderate-minor adverse Not substantial
4	Pontsarn Close, Pontsarn: entrance to residential access road (SO 0465 0942) c. 1.2 kms east-north-east of The Site boundary	Public Road adjacent residential area Registered Historic Landscape	Residential Road Users	High Medium	Negligible adverse Negligible adverse Negligible adverse	Minor-negligible adverse Minor-negligible adverse Minor-Negligible adverse Not substantial

5	Morlais Castle, at the summit of Morlais Hill (SO 0502 0960) c. 1.5 kms east-north-east of The Site boundary	Scheduled Monument Registered Historic Landscape	Heritage Asset Recreational? (No apparent public access right or permissive right)	Medium Medium	Minor adverse Minor adverse Negligible adverse	Minor adverse Minor adverse Negligible adverse Not substantial
6	Edge of Gurnos Ring Road, entrance to access road to Gyrnos Farm (SO 0414 0846) c. 0.876 kms south-east of The Site boundary	Entrance off public local distributor road at edge of residential area Registered Historic Landscape	Residential Road Users	High Low	Minor adverse Minor adverse Negligible adverse	Moderate-minor adverse Moderate-minor adverse Minor-negligible adverse Not Substantial
7	Service Road adjacent to east side of Trago centre, Gellideg, above Swansea Road (SO 0358 0654) c. 2.29 kms south-south-east of The Site boundary	Service road to rear of shopping and leisure centre Registered Historic Landscape	Road Users	Low	Negligible adverse Negligible adverse No change	Negligible adverse Negligible adverse No change Not Substantial
8	Winch Fawr Road, Clwydyfagwyr (SO 0215 0621) 2.77kms south-west of The Site boundary	Public local access road adjacent to Access Land Merthyr Tydfil Registered Historic Landscape	Recreational Road Users	Medium Low	Negligible adverse Negligible adverse Negligible adverse	Minor-Negligible adverse Minor-Negligible adverse Minor-Negligible adverse Not Substantial
9	Lay-by on northbound carriageway of A4060(T) road, Merthyr by-pass, Dowlais (SO 0644 0700) 3.6kms south-east of The Site boundary	Major Public Road Merthyr Tydfil Registered Historic Landscape	Road Users	Low	Negligible adverse Negligible adverse Negligible adverse	Negligible adverse Negligible adverse Negligible adverse Not Substantial

Note: Where two levels of receptor sensitivity apply at a given viewpoint, we have only assessed the higher level of sensitivity, as representing the worst-case scenario.

Residential Receptors

- 6.25 Residential receptors are amongst the most sensitive to visual effects. In accordance with GLVIA 3rd Edition, the assessment of visual effects is based on the likely view(s) from ground floor rooms that are normally occupied during daylight hours, or from within the curtilage of these properties.
- 6.26 The great majority of the houses within the Trefechan will be substantially unaffected by visual impacts arising from the development, largely because of its position and the effects of intervening buildings and vegetation.
- 6.27 12 properties located along the far north-western section of the cul-de-sac at Crabtree Walk, around 20 metres to the south-east of The Site, would experience visual effects from the proposed development. The Assessment Photographs at Viewpoints 1 and 2 illustrate the local landscape context (*see Appendices: Figure JCA/02 and 03, Viewpoints 1 & 2*). These would be direct and sustained views. However, the relative elevation of the houses compared to that of the south-eastern edge of the development site means that views from the rear ground floor rooms of these houses and rear curtilage is substantially restricted by landform, boundary fences and the rear access road cul-de-sac. During the construction stage, the change in the view from here is predicted to be *moderate adverse*, largely emanating from the construction activities and the related movement of vehicles, plant and machinery. Upon completion, the change in view would remain *moderate adverse*, and would remain at this level even following the proposed mitigation measures. The overall level of visual effect on this *high* sensitivity receptor would be *major-moderate adverse* during construction and on completion, remaining so even after the proposed mitigation measures have been implemented. These effects would therefore be *substantial*.
- 6.28 The single detached residential property which would remain within the proposed development site, Mira Monte, would have direct and sustained views into the nearby parts of the new housing at close range, partially screened by curtilage vegetation in some instances or by buildings and boundary fences. During the construction stage, the change in the view from here is predicted to be *major adverse*, largely emanating from the demolition and construction activities and the related movement of vehicles, plant and machinery. Upon completion, the change in view would remain at *major adverse* and would remain so even after the proposed planting scheme has become established. The overall level of visual effect on these two *high* sensitivity receptors would be *major adverse* during construction, and on completion, and these effects would persist even after the full implementation of mitigation measures. These effects would therefore be *substantial*.
- 6.29 16 properties located along the western section of the Hawthorn Hill have rear gardens which back onto the south-eastern site boundary, and these houses are typically between 14 and 20 metres from the site boundary, with some variations in their individual orientation. They would experience close range visual effects from the proposed development. The photographs at Viewpoints 1 & 2 illustrate the local landscape context (*see Appendices: Figure JCA/02 & JCA/03, Viewpoints 1 & 2*). These would be direct and sustained views, partially screened by intervening vegetation and some curtilage buildings and structures.

During the construction stage, the change in the view from here is predicted to be *major adverse*, largely emanating from the construction activities and the related movement of vehicles, plant and machinery. Upon completion, the change in view would remain *major adverse*, and would reduce to *moderate adverse* following the implementation of proposed mitigation measures, which include tree and hedgerow planting within and around a small area of public open space adjacent to their rear gardens, straddling a proposed footpath link through to the public bridleway. The overall level of visual effect on this *high* sensitivity receptor would be *major adverse* during construction and on completion, reducing to *major-moderate* once the proposed mitigation planting has become fully established. These effects would therefore be *substantial*.

- 6.30 Some houses on the outer upper edges of the residential area of Sweetwater Park at the north-eastern edge of Trefechan would have views of some of the new development from their rear elevations and curtilages. These houses are generally sited at significantly higher elevations than those at the eastern edge of the proposed development, with considerable variation in their orientation. An indication of this spatial relationship is shown in the Assessment Viewpoint Photograph at *Appendices: Figure JCA/06 Viewpoint 5*. It is also clear when viewed at a distance from the south, as shown on the Assessment Viewpoint Photograph at *Appendices: Figure JCA/10 Viewpoint 9*. Most of these views would be partially screened by curtilage fences, buildings and vegetation. Most of the higher elevated houses will experience oblique views, whilst a smaller number of houses at lower elevations would have direct views. During the construction stage, the change in the view is predicted to be *moderate adverse*, largely emanating from the construction activities and the related movement of vehicles, plant and machinery. Upon completion, the change in view would remain at *moderate adverse*, falling to *minor adverse* once the proposed site planting has become established. The overall level of visual effect on these *high* sensitivity receptors would be *major-moderate adverse* during construction and on completion. Once the proposed perimeter and nearby on-site planting has become established, the effect would reduce to *moderate-minor adverse*, and so it would *not be substantial*.

Public Rights of Way

- 6.31 There will be some adverse effects on views from the single public bridleway which runs parallel to and just outside the eastern boundary of The Site, connecting part of the Sweetwater Park estate to the open land to the north-west. These views would be at very close range. The bridleway will be retained along its existing alignment, with a new linking footpath joining it from the south-eastern part of the new development from the proposed open space to the rear of the houses located at the western end of Hawthorn Hill (see *Appendices: Figure JCA/02 Viewpoint 1*). This is a local public bridleway, it is not promoted and not within the national park, but it does connect to the Access Land within national park close by to the north. Its visual receptor sensitivity is assessed as being *medium*. The change in views from the footpath during construction along that section adjoining The Site would be *major adverse*. On completion, the change in view would remain as *major adverse*; and once the proposed planting scheme has become established, this change would reduce to *moderate adverse*. For these reasons, the overall level of visual effects here are assessed as being *moderate adverse* during construction, remaining at this level immediately after,

reducing to *moderate-minor adverse* when the planting has become established. The residual visual effects on this *medium* sensitivity receptor are therefore *not substantial*.

Access Land on the Southern Slopes of Cefn Cil-Sanws

- 6.32 There are wide and open panoramic views from here over Merthyr Tydfil towards the high ground of the upper valley sides on the eastern and western sides of the town. Areas of this designated Access Land to the west of Trefechan are also occupied by the course and infrastructure at Merthyr Tydfil Golf Club. The Brecon Beacons National Park boundary crosses this land on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment, following no particular geographical feature or artificial boundary. The relative positions of The Site and the national park boundary are clearly shown on the Assessment Viewpoint Photographs at *Appendices: Figure JCA/08 Viewpoint 7 and Figure JCA/09 Viewpoint 8*. The much lower elevation of the proposed development site and its position adjoining the existing built edge of Trefechan mean that views to the south would be virtually unaffected by the additional development in the view, especially when the proposed naturalistic scrub woodland stands proposed along much of the north-western site edge are fully established. The magnitude of effect on views out from this *high* sensitivity receptor would be at most *minor adverse* during construction and immediately following completion. These effects would reduce to *negligible adverse* once the edge planting has become fully established. The resultant overall visual effects would therefore be *moderate-minor adverse* during construction and following completion, reducing to *minor-negligible adverse* once the mitigation planting has become fully established. These effects would *not be substantial*.

Public Roads

- 6.33 The main public road which will have some partial views of the proposed development at medium range is the A465 Heads of the Valleys trunk road where it climbs the slope to the east of Cwm Taf Fechan *en route* to Dowlais Top. This busy trunk road is a *low* sensitivity receptor, as a consequence of its location outside the national park and the substantially urban views from the road between Dowlais Top and Gellideg. There may be some partial views in winter of the upper area of the proposed development at an angle to the direction of westbound travel, heavily screened by intervening topography, buildings and the flanking roadside tree and woodland vegetation. The type and degree of vegetation cover flanking the A465 trunk road is clearly evident in the Assessment Viewpoint Photograph at *Appendices: Figure JCA/07 Viewpoint 6*. The road's position in relation to The Site is also shown clearly in the Assessment Viewpoint Photograph at *Appendices: Figure JCA/06 Viewpoint 5*. The change in such views from the A465 trunk road during construction would be *negligible adverse*. On completion, the change in view would remain *negligible adverse*; and once the planting scheme has become established, this change would at most remain as *negligible adverse* or reduce to *no change*. For these reasons, the overall level of visual effects here are assessed as being *negligible adverse at all stages*. The residual visual effects on this *low* sensitivity receptor are therefore *not substantial*.
- 6.34 Users of the minor public road and footways at Beechwood Avenue in Trefechan to the south-east of The Site would experience some partial close-range views of the proposed development. A typical view is illustrated by the Assessment Viewpoint Photograph at *Appendices: Figure JCA/04 Viewpoint 3*. This is a *medium* sensitivity receptor, being a local

road within a residential area. The change in view from this road during construction would be *minor adverse*. On completion, the change in view would remain *minor adverse*; and once the proposed planting scheme has become established, this change would reduce to *negligible adverse*. For these reasons, the overall level of visual effects here are assessed as being *minor adverse* during construction, remaining *minor adverse* immediately after completion, and reducing to *negligible adverse* when the planting has become established. The residual visual effects on this *medium* sensitivity receptor are therefore not substantial.

Night-Time Effects

- 6.35 It is assumed that the new houses will be occupied constantly over the whole of the year. There will be light emanating from windows and reflected light from street lighting, as well as from vehicles travelling at night in and out of the new housing area.
- 6.36 There are two fixed sources of light generation on the land at present; the residential properties of Caerllwyn and Mira Monte. The Site adjoins the existing edge of Trefechan and is set well below the nearest section of the boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park. The relative positions of The Site and the national park boundary are clearly shown on the Assessment Viewpoint Photographs at *Appendices: Figure JCA/08 Viewpoint 7 and Figure JCA/09 Viewpoint 8*. Mitigation planting along substantial areas of the north-western edge of the development will assist in containing light spread from the new houses to the north and north-west. Whilst there will be some views into parts of The Site from the nearby surrounding countryside, the development will be seen as only a small extension to the already illuminated northern areas of Trefechan, rather than as a separate entity.

7. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

- 7.1 Whilst the 2013 edition of the GLVIA provides more guidance on cumulative landscape and visual effects, the definition contained in the 2002 is still relevant. Those guidelines defined cumulative landscape and visual effects as those that:
“Result from additional changes to the landscape or visual amenity caused by the proposed development in conjunction with other development (associated with or separate to it), or actions that occurred in the past, present or are likely to occur in the foreseeable future”.
- 7.2 Best practice Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment guidance contained in the 3rd Edition GLVIA, Page 133, states that the baseline for assessing cumulative and visual effects should include those schemes and additional potential schemes that are not yet present in the landscape but are at various stages in the development and consenting process, including schemes with planning consent and schemes that are the subject of a valid planning application that has yet to be determined. Schemes that are at a pre-planning or scoping stage are not generally considered in the assessment of cumulative effects.
- 7.3 Using these guidelines, we are not aware of any other planning applications relating to this area of Trefechan.

- 7.4 The cumulative effects of the proposed development are therefore only those in addition to the existing established urban area to which the proposed development would be a minor local extension, rounding-off the settlement edge along an appropriate line. The magnitude of change would be *moderate*. The cumulative effects would be a very local effect, assessed as being *moderate-minor adverse* and not substantial.

8. LEGISLATION AND PLANNING POLICY

- 8.1 This section highlights those aspects of current planning policy which are relevant to the landscape and visual appraisal of the proposed development. There are also short commentaries on how the development relates to the specific policies.

National Landscape Planning Related Policy

- 8.2 *Planning Policy Wales, Edition 10, December 2018* (PPW10) provides the current relevant national planning policy context. The development approach takes full account of this guidance. The design has been informed by a proper understanding of the context and character of the landscape and their contribution to placemaking. The objective has been to minimise adverse effects and optimise the potential benefits to the local landscape character. A sustainable development can be achieved in landscape terms.

- 8.3 At Paragraph 6.3.5, PPW 10 states that:

“The statutory landscape designations that apply in Wales are National Parks, and AONBs. Planning authorities have a statutory duty to have regard to National Parks and AONB purposes. This duty applies in relation to all activities affecting National Parks and AONBs, whether those activities lie within, or in the setting of, the designated areas.”

JCA Commentary:

- 8.4 The scale and siting of the proposed development would not have substantial adverse effects upon local landscape character beyond The Site and its immediate environs. Building materials and finishes will be appropriate to this location, contiguous with the existing edge of Trefechan, which has limited diversity and generally undistinguished residential built form. The landscape character of The Site is not the same as that on the land high above The Site and further to the north-west and outside the current settlement boundary. There would therefore be no adverse effects upon the stated Special Qualities of the national park. The proposed development would not conflict with the statutory purposes of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

TAN12: Design

- 8.5 Technical Advice Notes (TANs) are to be read in conjunction with PPW, which sets out the Welsh Government’s land use planning policy in respect of promoting sustainability through good design and planning for sustainable buildings, which

includes the role of local planning authorities in delivering good sustainable design.

TAN12: *Design*³⁰ is intended to facilitate that process. Paragraph 5.6.2 advises that:

“In areas recognised for their landscape, townscape, architectural, archaeological and/or historic value, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, World Heritage Sites and conservation areas, the objective of sustaining character is particularly important and context appraisals should reflect this. The general aspects of the “character” objective of good design should be pursued but more detailed information may be needed in relation to key issues such as:

- the setting and views of key buildings, landscape, parks and gardens, archaeology and skylines within, to and from the area;*
- the degree of architectural unity or informality in building groups and settlements and in landscape;*
- locally distinctive building elements and construction techniques, such as roof pitches, window proportions, parapets, or paving details;*
- locally distinctive facing materials such as natural slate, brick quoins or natural stone in both buildings and the public realm;*
- boundary details including means of enclosure of landscape features, open spaces and gardens;*
- street furniture including signage, street nameplates, street lighting; and*
- in retail areas distinctive design and proportions of shopfronts, signs, and lettering.”*

JCA Commentary:

8.6 The scale and siting of the proposed development would not have substantial adverse effects upon local landscape character beyond The Site and its immediate environs, or substantial adverse visual effects upon most residential or most recreational receptors. The landscape character of The Site is not the same as that on the land high above The Site and further to the north-west and outside the current settlement boundary. Building materials and finishes will be appropriate to this location, contiguous with the existing edge of Trefechan, which has limited diversity and generally undistinguished residential built form. Selective re-use of stone from the existing drystone walls which border and lie within some parts of The Site will be respectful of the traditional local field boundary treatment and elements which are noted in the HLCA in respect of the assessment of heritage assets. The proposed development would have no effects upon the visual setting of any Listed Building, nor would it have any substantial adverse effects on the visual setting or the visual quality of the Merthyr Tydfil Registered Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest.

8.7 Paragraph 5.5.2 of TAN12³¹ advises that:

“In general terms, good design will almost always be dependent on working within the natural constraints and the historic character of the landscape and this should be the starting point from which the design of development evolves. The aim should be to achieve good design solutions which maximise

³⁰ TAN12; March 2016

³¹ TAN12; March 2016

the natural landscape assets and minimise environmental impact on the landscape. It is particularly important that proposals to amend or create new landscape are not considered as an afterthought and that the long-term impact of development on the landscape is fully understood. The quality of implementation and the long-term management of changes implicit in planting schemes are fundamental to a scheme's success."

JCA Commentary:

- 8.8 The scale and siting of the proposed development would not have substantial adverse effects upon local landscape character beyond The Site and its immediate environs. The landscape elements of the proposed development include the selective re-use of stone from the existing relict drystone walls which border and lie within some parts of The Site. This proposal will be respectful of the traditional local field boundary treatment and elements which are noted in the HLCA in respect of the assessment of heritage assets. Significant stands of naturalistic scrub woodland are to be planted along the north-western flank of The Site, thus providing a softer edge with a far less abrupt transition from the hard urban edge of Trefechan into the open land of the rising ground leading up to the national park boundary. This planting will also provide a similar definition to the boundary of the proposed Nant Morlais and Cwm Taf Fechan Special Landscape Area part of which, if adopted in the current LDP process, will extend to the land which abuts The Site to the south-west and west.

Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan Adopted May 2011

- 8.9 Planning Policy is interpreted at a more local level by the current Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan, Adopted May 2011. Policies relevant to landscape issues in the LDP include the following:

'Policy BW7: Sustainable Design and Place Making

The Council will support good quality sustainable design and require new development to:-

- be appropriate to its local context in terms of scale, height, massing, elevational treatment, materials and detailing, layout, form, mix and density;*
- integrate effectively with adjacent spaces and the public realm to enhance the general street scene and create good quality townscape;*
- not result in unacceptable impact on local amenity in terms of visual impact, loss of light or privacy, disturbance and traffic movements;*
- incorporate a good standard of landscape design;*
- sensitively relate to existing settlement patterns and take account of natural heritage and the historic environment on site and in terms of potential impact on neighbouring areas of importance;*
- foster 'inclusive design' by ensuring the development allows access for the widest range of people possible;*
- contribute to the provision of usable open and outdoor play space, ensuring its accessibility and connectivity to other green infrastructure, footpaths and cycleways;*
- incorporate resource efficient / adaptable buildings and layouts using sustainable design and construction techniques, including the re-use and*

recycling of construction and demolition waste on site, and energy and water conservation /efficiency measures;

- minimise the demand for energy and, where appropriate, utilise the renewable energy resource through appropriate layout, orientation, mix of uses, density of development, landscaping, optimal use of local topography and incorporation of renewable energy technologies;*
- incorporate facilities for the segregation, recovery and recycling of waste; and*
- provide a safe environment by addressing issues of security, crime prevention, and the fear of crime in the design of buildings and the space and routes around them.'*

JCA Commentary:

- 8.10 The Site lies within the identified settlement boundary. The scale and siting of the proposed development would not have substantial adverse effects upon local landscape character. The landscape elements of the proposed development include proposals, wherever practicable, to retain and enhance the mature native species hedgerows with trees present within and along the boundaries of The Site, and the planting of stands of naturalistic scrub woodland and native species hedgerows with trees. Although there are some residential properties – chiefly the two within The Site – which would experience substantial adverse visual effects, these would be local in extent and not unacceptably adversely affect the sense of place. There would be no wider unacceptable loss of amenity. It would not impact unacceptably on either the visual setting and quality of the Merthyr Tydfil Registered Historic Landscape, or on the adjacent land to the west and south-west proposed as part of the Nant Morlais and Cwm Taf Fechan Special Landscape Area.

'Policy AS4: Historic landscape

There will be a presumption in favour of the protection, conservation and enhancement of:-

- Gelligaer Common, and*
- the main settlement of Merthyr Tydfil*

in accord with their status as Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales.

The extent of these areas is shown on the LDP Proposals Map and proposals for development will only be permitted where they would maintain or enhance the character and integrity of the landscape.'

JCA Commentary:

- 8.11 The scale and siting of the proposed development would not have an unacceptable impact on, nor detract from the visual setting or the visual quality of the Merthyr Tydfil registered Historic Landscape. This is a small scale residential development located close to an existing settlement edge in a settled valley side location. The *Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment* to be submitted in support of the planning application deals in detail with the predicted effects of the proposed development on the heritage assets themselves.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 A detailed Landscape and Visual Appraisal has been carried out of the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposed development on land at Crabtree Walk, Trefechan. This study has been carried out in accordance with nationally agreed “best practice” standards of landscape and visual assessment. It has involved an examination of various published data relevant to The Site, including maps, aerial photographs and planning background information. A detailed inspection has been made of The Site, looking at its present characteristics and condition and at the potential development effects. A detailed study of nearby landscape and heritage features in respect of their visual settings has also been carried out, with additional specific reference to the submitted specialist archaeological assessment.
- 9.2 Landscape and visual effects likely to arise from the development as envisaged have been assessed, taking into account the predicted effects during construction stage, immediately after completion of construction and when mitigation planting becomes established. The evaluation does take account of the full range of mitigation measures which are proposed.
- 9.3 The Site lies within the settlement boundary. The proposed development would not encroach onto open land to the north-west but would be set within the existing former agricultural field landscape with no net loss of woody vegetation. New naturalistic scrub woodland stands will be planted along the north-western boundary, providing a softer transition from the urban edge into the adjoining open land to the north-west and west. Specimen trees and tree groups, as well as some sections of native-species hedgerow, will also be planted within The Site, providing local visual containment, helping to assimilate the new houses, and contributing positively to local landscape character. Selective re-use of stone reclaimed from relict drystone boundary walls will allow for the creation of new boundary features along some sections of the north-eastern, south-eastern and south-western boundaries.
- 9.4 There will be substantial permanent alterations to the local topography of The Site to accommodate the new housing and its associated infrastructure, including the access road.
- 9.5 The existing residential property to be retained within The Site, ‘Mira Monte’, would experience substantial adverse residual visual effects arising from the development. Along parts of the adjacent housing areas on Crabtree Walk and Hawthorn Hill in Trefechan, some properties would also experience substantial adverse residual visual effects from their rear aspects and curtilages.
- 9.6 No substantial adverse residual effects on the visual setting of any designated or non-designated heritage asset has been identified, including the Merthyr Tydfil Registered Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest.
- 9.7 No substantial residual visual effects on users of either the national or local road network have been identified.

- 9.8 The only public right of way which will experience substantial residual visual effects when mitigation planting is fully established is the local public bridleway which crosses the land abutting the eastern boundary of the proposed development site, that section of the route between The Site and the adjoining Sweetwater Park housing estate. The layout of the development with some public open spaces adjoining this feature and mitigation planting, will seek to minimise the adverse visual effects on the users of this public bridleway.
- 9.9 There would be no substantial adverse residual landscape effects on the nearby areas of the Brecon Beacons National Park. No substantial adverse residual effects would occur on the visual setting of nearby areas of the Brecon Beacons National Park or on views out from the national park.
- 9.10 There would be no substantial adverse landscape on the nearby areas of the proposed Nant Morlais and Cwm Taf Fechan Special Landscape Area. There would be no substantial residual adverse visual effects on the views out from this adjoining land.
- 9.11 There would be no substantial adverse effects on the nearby areas of Access Land on the southern slopes of Cefn Cil-Sanws. There would be no substantial residual adverse visual effects on the views out from this adjoining land.
- 9.12 The overall conclusion of this landscape and visual assessment is that the proposed development will appear as only a minor extension of the existing village edge, appropriately assimilated into the wider landscape by a combination of topography, site layout, existing built form, retained existing vegetation, and proposed planting. The Site has the capacity, in landscape and visual terms, to accept this development as envisaged without detriment to its landscape character or that of the open land to the north-west and to the west.