

FFOS Y FRAN FINAL RESTORATION STRATEGY

Biodiversity Statement

For

MERTHYR (SOUTH WALES) LIMITED

February 2026

3274/11

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Foreword

The Welsh Government is required under the **Environment Act (Wales) 2016** to publish a **State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR)** to evidence and record changing environmental factors such as climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, and what this means for Wales. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are the environmental advisor and regulator for Wales which became operational in 2013. Their purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, enhanced and used now and in the future:-

“...to pursue sustainable management of natural resources. This means looking after air, land, water, wildlife, plants and soil to improve Wales’s well-being, and provide a better future for everyone.”

The State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) is an assessment by NRW of the extent to which Wales is achieving the **sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR)**. The report provides a unified baseline of evidence that is common to all users and helps to track progress against Wales’ seven well-being goals as set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The **SMNR objective** has been broken down into four aims. SoNaRR uses the four aims to assess Wales’ management of natural resources and to identify opportunities for achieving SMNR. The four aims of SMNR are to ensure that:

1. Natural resources are safeguarded and enhanced.
2. Ecosystems are resilient to expected and unforeseen change.
3. Wales has healthy places for people, protected from environmental risks.
4. Contributing to a regenerative economy, achieving sustainable levels of production and consumption.

In December 2024, NRW published the third and interim SoNaRR report that contains **Area Statements**. Merthyr Tydfil sits within the area addressed by the **South-Central Area statement** and includes neighbouring authorities such as Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Cardiff. It also includes the moorland fringes of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, and uplands high above the South Wales valleys in which Ffos-y-Fran is located. **Building resilient ecosystems** and **Connecting people with nature** are the two cornerstones of the South-Central Area Statement. The theme **Building resilient ecosystems** identifies two challenges when it comes to SMNR. The first is climate change and the second is the **loss of biodiversity**.

The Biodiversity Statement is one of a suite of documents submitted as part of a planning application to vary conditions of a restoration strategy at Ffos-y-Fran that was approved as far back as 2005 (A-PP 152-07-014) and approved in 2016 (P/16/0012) referred to as the 2015 restoration strategy approximately 10 years ago. The alternative restoration scheme submitted to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) for approval in February 2025 (P/25/0037), aligns closely with current Welsh Government’s statutory environmental duties and extant planning policies on climate change and biodiversity.



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This Biodiversity Statement demonstrates that the 2025 scheme submitted, protects and safeguards biodiversity and priority species that has naturally recovered on the former opencast site, and has a higher potential to deliver significant environmental benefits when compared to the currently approved scheme that is likely to result in a loss of biodiversity on the site, as well as significantly more Carbon emissions and potential environmental nuisance caused by significant bulk earthmoving operations required to achieve the previously approved scheme.



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of commission

- 1.1.1 Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd (RML) have been commissioned by Merthyr (South Wales) Ltd (MSW) to produce a Biodiversity Statement in support of the final restoration of the Ffos y Fran surface mine in Merthyr Tydfil.

1.2 Background

- 1.2.1 This is a Biodiversity Statement prepared in support of a Section 73 Application for the proposed final restoration strategy of the former surface mine at Ffos-y-Fran, Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales. The final restoration strategy is an alternative approach to a scheme that was originally approved in 2005 and has been partially completed prior to the closure of the mine at the end of November 2023. The alternative proposals are subject to a Section 73 planning application being considered by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
- 1.2.2 The Welsh Government (WG) has committed to an ambitious goal of protecting 30% of land, freshwater and seas by 2030 and this is set out as a series of objectives in the publication Biodiversity Deep Dive (October 2022). This target is part of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and represents a crucial step towards addressing urgent environmental challenges, including biodiversity loss and climate change.¹ By safeguarding and restoring natural habitats, the aim is to create resilient and thriving ecosystems in Wales that benefits both nature and people. By fostering collaboration among local communities, conservation organisations, and policymakers, the aim is to ensure that Wales's rich biodiversity is protected and enhanced for the well-being of current and future generations.
- 1.2.3 Planning Policy Wales (PPW) states that reclamation can provide opportunities for creating or enhancing sites for nature conservation and contribute to the targets in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, or equivalent, and those adopted in local Biodiversity Action Plans throughout Wales. This can also be extended to include and target priority species and habitats under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2015.

¹ Wales Biodiversity Partnership <https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/en/our-work/30-by-30-in-wales/>

- 1.2.4 This Biodiversity Statement provides a record of previous biodiversity baseline conditions recorded at Ffos-y-Fran prior to the surface mining activities commencing in 2007 and following cessation of mining activities at the end of November 2023. No interim baseline conditions were recorded during this period. During the operational period of the surface mine, some areas of the site were reclaimed in accordance with the original proposed scheme and were recorded as such during 2023 and 2024. Other areas, such as the overburden mounds that had been left largely untouched since their formation (in 2015), had also become naturally colonised with various plant species. These areas combined with the main void and areas of most recent mining activity were recorded and formed the baseline conditions surveyed in 2022/2023 that were reported in the Environmental Statement that was submitted with the S73 Planning Application.



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2 BASELINE CONDITIONS

2.1 2003 Baseline Conditions

2.1.1 The baseline conditions recorded in the Environmental Statement (ES) prepared for the original reclamation scheme for open cast mining operations at Ffos-y-Fran recorded a landscape “crossed by power lines, existing and disused railways, and a network of small roads and tracks. Other evidence of previous mineral working and industrial activity exists in the form of a number of adits, surface spoil and man-made ponds for water storage with a few houses along the western end of the Bogey Road.”²

2.1.2 Surveys undertaken in the summer and autumn of 2001 recorded:-

“Much of the site comprises land affected by past mining and other anthropogenic activities, large areas of which are of little nature conservation interest, but locally, secondary habitats of interest have developed on this land. The site area also includes a range of semi-natural habitat types. Much of the land is common land subject to rights of grazing. The common land is grazed by sheep, cattle and horses. As is typical of such land in upland areas, overgrazing has resulted in degrading of the vegetation with the development of extensive acid grasslands at the expense of dwarf shrub heath communities.”

2.1.3 The baseline conditions recorded in 2001 indicates that much of the site was covered by improved grassland and dry acid grassland some of which had become established on old tips. In the more low-lying parts of the site there were areas of damp acid and marshy grassland with some patches of wet dwarf shrub heath. There were also several ponds and patches of swamp vegetation.

2.1.4 The ES concluded that while there may be impacts as a result of the scheme, the proposed mitigation works and benefits resulting from the scheme, would far outweigh the disbenefits. The ES claimed that the reclamation of a huge area of acutely derelict land would help generate wealth and well-being to the region creating many jobs in the process.

² Ffos-y-Fran Land Reclamation Scheme - ES 2003 para 3.1.4 – Leek and Weston Ltd



2.2 2023 Baseline Conditions

2.2.1 The baseline conditions of the EIA for the alternative scheme subject to the S73 Application were established as being the environmental conditions of the site taken as those present following cessation of mining at the end of November 2023. The Scoping Report established that the baseline conditions were taken as those that existed on site in May 2024 following closure of the mine. The Scoping Report was issued to MTCBC on 22nd July 2024. MTCBC responded to the request for scoping on 4th October 2024, there was no mention of baseline conditions in their response. NRW also responded as a statutory consultee (09/09/2024) stating that they noted the baseline conditions were taken as being from November 2023, but further consideration should be given to historical data dating back 10 years and if possible, back to the period prior to mining operations commencing. In response to both responses from MTCBC and NRW, RML (acting on behalf of MSW) responded to the subject of baseline conditions as follows:-

“The Scoping Report sets out our approach to the establishment of baseline conditions in sections 3.1.2 and 6.4.1. It is standard practice to establish baseline conditions at the closest time as possible to the commencement of the assessment process. It is therefore considered appropriate for the purposes of the EIA, to establish the baseline conditions when the operations of coal extraction ceased at the end of November 2023.” (14/10/2024).

2.2.2 The EIA was therefore undertaken on the basis that the baseline conditions agreed, were those environmental conditions prevalent on the site within the red line boundary at that point in time. This could then form the basis of assessing the likely effects of implementing the alternative restoration scheme on the current environmental conditions within the site boundary and surrounding area.

2.3 EIA Regulations

2.3.1 Regulation 3(f) of the EIA Regulations that requires an Environmental Statement to include “any additional information specified in Schedule 4 relevant to the specific characteristics of the particular development or type of development and to the environmental features likely to be significantly affected”. The ES prepared for the S73 Application and alternative restoration reports the likely effects that the scheme would have on the baseline conditions that were recorded in 2023/24 and following closure of the mine. This includes ponds and adjacent habitat used by great crested newt that would not be adversely affected by the alternative restoration scheme and are listed as priority species under Section 7 of the Act.



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2.4 Future Baseline

2.4.1 Future baseline is referred to in the EIA Regulations as a scenario that could happen **if the proposed development does not go ahead**. Part 3 of schedule 4 states that:-

“A description of the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment (baseline scenario) and an outline of the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the development as far as natural changes from the baseline scenario can be assessed with reasonable effort on the basis of the availability of environmental information and scientific knowledge.”

2.4.2 The likely evolution of the Ffos-y-Fran site without implementation of the alternative restoration, would likely to see the gradual process of nature recovery progressing as seen on areas within the site boundary as areas of the site are progressively restored or left undisturbed. It is likely that this natural process of nature recovery would see a range of habitats develop, and the increase in populations of species such as great crested newt, reptiles and amphibians.

2.4.3 The restoration proposals approved under the earlier planning permission could constitute being the future baseline where it can be adjudged as representing the likely evolution of the existing baseline. However, in reality, this would be highly unlikely or not feasible as:-

1. The approved restoration scheme could not be achieved through natural changes to the baseline as it requires extensive earthworks.
2. Implementation of the consented scheme would be in contradiction to the Section 6 duties that require Welsh Government and local authorities to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems.
3. Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 in so far as the implementation of the consented scheme would be of significant detriment to the presence and conservation status of great crested newts that are of principle importance; and that would conflict with the duty of Welsh Government to maintain and enhance the listed species and habitats.
4. Implementation of the approved scheme would be in contradiction to Planning Policy Wales and the stepwise approach to safeguard and enhance species and habitats of principal importance and to avoid adverse effects and damage to features of biodiversity.
5. It would lead to direct impact on a species of principal importance and be in contradiction to the Welsh Governments (Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee) aims of halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030.

2.4.4 It is well documented in the S73 Application, that there are distinct advantages in adopting the alternative restoration scheme compared to implementing the



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remaining works under the approved scheme. In summary the, the advantages of the alternative scheme are:

1. The alternative scheme requires significantly less bulk earthworks of 2.5 million m³ compared to circa 25 million m³.
2. The alternative scheme offers significant environmental benefits as the earthworks require around 7,072 tCO₂e to complete, compared to 64,692 tCO₂e for the approved scheme, a reduction of around 57,620 tCO₂e, which represents a saving of around 90%.
3. Adopting the alternative scheme would result in a significantly more diverse landscape than that of the consented scheme and provide a diverse landscape framework for visual amenity and recreational opportunities.
4. The alternative scheme provides greater resilience to climate change and through the formation of a groundwater and surface water fed lake creates a permanent body of water for livestock and mammals during drought.
5. The alternative scheme follows the Stepwise approach and principles of DECCA that avoids and minimises adverse effects on protected species and biodiversity, which would be significantly enhanced.
6. To implement the consented scheme would require extensive earthmoving operations that would cause lengthy periods of disruption and environmental risks to land and ponds within and adjacent to the site boundary known to support populations of great crested newt. An EPS licence would need to be approved by NRW to implement both the alternative and the approved scheme. It is considered that by retaining the ponds and creating buffer zones, the alternative scheme delivers significantly more environmental merits than the approved scheme that would require the complete removal and replacement of the many waterbodies used by great crested newt.



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3 COSTS AND FUNDING

3.1 Costs of Restoration and Funding

3.1.1 It is well documented that there is often a shortfall of funding for the restoration of former opencast sites. The Welsh Government's Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee make several recommendations in the "Restoration of opencast mining sites" (August 2024). The likely costs of funds needed for restoration of the Ffos-y-Fran site are referred to in the report under section 68 (page 43):-

"David Cross explained the difficulties in providing an accurate estimate for the restoration costs, given the need for additional information about the site's condition. Previous estimates had ranged from £50 million to £120 million, and this was due to incomplete data. He highlighted the difficulties the council has faced in obtaining accurate and comprehensive data about the site, often relying on information provided by the developer. This had, however, improved recently."

3.1.2 The costs associated with the restoration of the site lie principally with those associated with bulk earthworks as explained in the report by MTCBC:-

"Major reconfiguration of the form of restoration for the site. A dominant cost component for the restoration works relates to the bulk earthmoving needed to replace the excavated overburden back into the void. Such costs could be reduced by partially in-filling the void, reshaping the overburdens and could include part of the void being retained as a water feature. This is currently being explored at the Ffos Y Fran site, where the site operator is currently preparing the submission of a future planning application to vary the restoration strategy, which would likely involve the retention of some of the overburdens and a water body in the void."

3.1.3 The issue of bulk earthworks and associated costs in relation to the restoration of opencast sites is not new. The Welsh Government publication "Research into the failure to restore opencast coal sites in south Wales" (April 2014) acknowledges that the costs of bulk earthworks at Ffos-y-Fran:-

"Based merely on the likely cost of bulk earthmoving of those overburden mounds, and the final restoration and treatment of the surface of the 400 ha site, it is likely that the fixed bond of £15m held by the LPA, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, falls well short of a worst case restoration cost which could be in excess of £50m based on the collected information."



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- 3.1.4 The report also acknowledges that an operator might:-
“fail to restore a site or if there is no or an inadequate bond and enforcement fails.”
- 3.1.5 The report suggests some possible mitigation measures such as revising a planning application and to reduce costs by:-
“partially refilling the void and reducing and softening the shape of the overburden mounds”” The costs of void filling and surface finishes will of course be further reduced if parts of the void are retained as water features”.
- 3.1.6 The proposed alternative restoration strategy effectively adopts this approach as set out in the 2014 report. In addition, and as reported in the Environmental Statement, there are also significant savings on carbon (by reducing the quantity of bulk earthworks) and a closer alignment with Welsh Governments’ policies on greenhouse gases and climate change and strengthening resilience. The Welsh Government state there is an urgent need for joined up climate adaptation and mitigation to support a climate resilient Wales that enhances biodiversity, reduces flood risk and improves public health. The alternative restoration strategy goes some way to supporting these needs and contributing to achieving the Carbon Budget 3 (2026-2030). Therefore, MSW strongly believe that the S73 submission should be supported and approved by MTCBC.



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4 PROPOSED RESTORATION

4.1 Restoration Strategy 2015

- 4.1.1 The 2015 Restoration & Aftercare Scheme for Phase 1 included a restoration strategy which indicated that the final void scheme indicates that the final void would be filled to form a basin, with extensive earthworks required to create a varied topography with steep sides rising up from the basin to a rounded flat-topped hill to a height of approximately 400 metres, and leaving an exposed section of opencast high wall on the eastern flank. There is a linear plateau that skirts the western flank of the hill that could provide a route for a future rail corridor and a series of flat plateaux for light industrial use created adjacent to the A4060 dual carriageway.
- 4.1.2 The proposed land use is predominantly upland grassland for stock grazing and urban common with public access footpaths. It includes areas of natural regeneration and woodland and lagoons and small ponds to attenuate surface water run-off, with two main watercourses that discharge into a watercourse adjacent to the A4060 (T). These watercourses would discharge off-site and flow down to Goat Mill Road and Bradley Gardens respectively. Without the construction of significant attenuation ponds, at great expense and with ongoing maintenance requirements to the local authority, the volume of water forecast during storm events, adjusted for climate change, would have the potential to cause major flooding downstream.
- 4.1.3 The component land cover area for the 2015 restoration strategy, based on the Restoration Plan (03/12/2015), has been measured with GIS software.

Table 1 Restoration Plan 2015 land cover areas within planning application boundary

Category	Land cover	Area (ha)
Watercourses and Waterbodies	Stream	6.5
	Ponds	1.2
Vegetation	Upland grassland	259.9
	Improved grassland	42.3
	Natural regeneration	16.3
	Acid grassland	41.4
	Wet heath	7.7
	Woodland and hedgerow	14.2
Other features	Exposed mine high wall	0.6
	'Finger tips' re-exposed	1.6
	Bare ground	3.6
	Road or track	1.2
Total area (ha)		396.5



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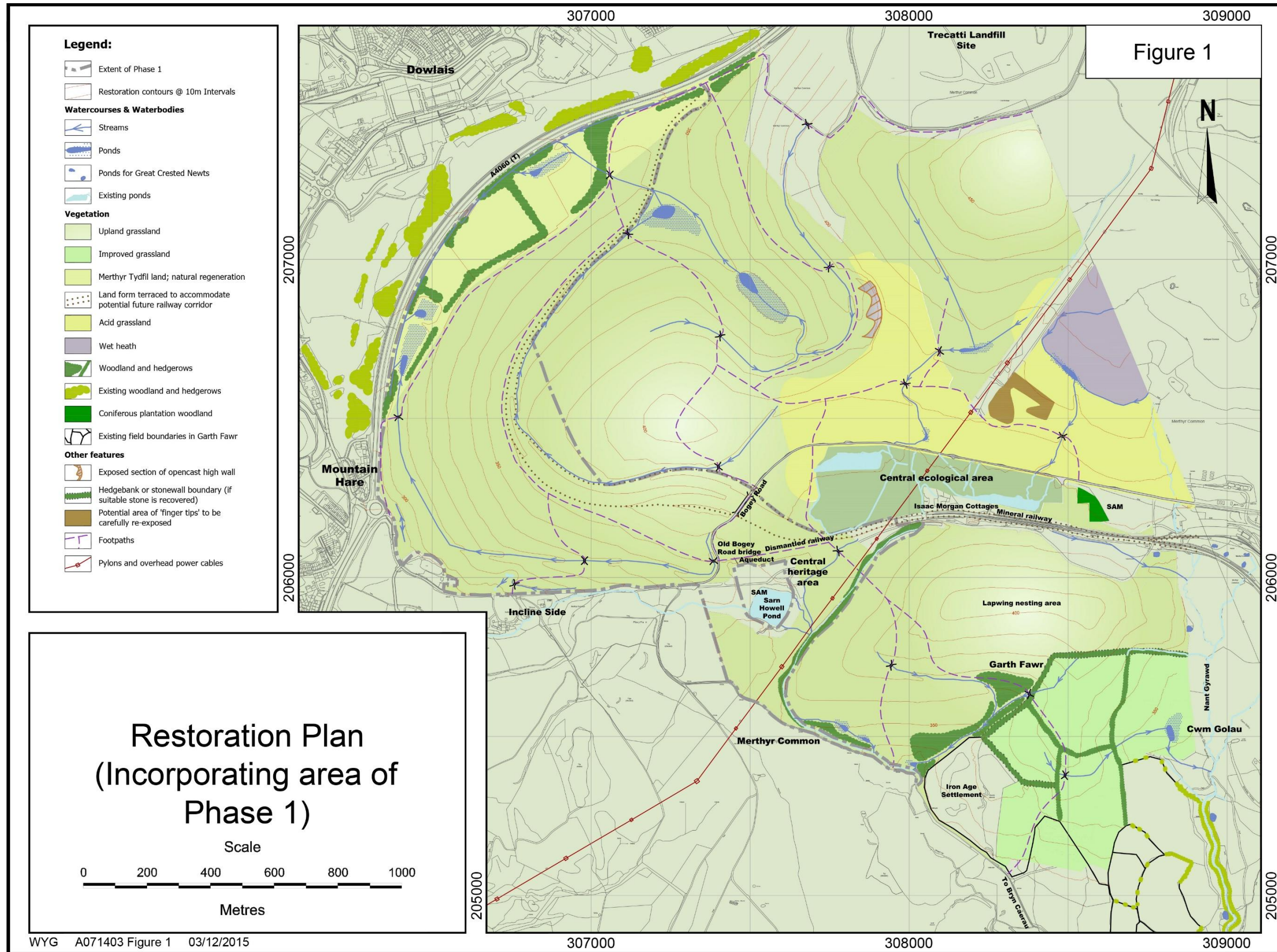
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Figure 1 Restoration Plan (2015)



4.2 Restoration Strategy 2025

- 4.2.1 The alternative Scheme involves the final restoration of land that has previously been part of the surface mine operations at Ffos-y-Fran. The 2025 proposal is the latest variation to the restoration strategy that has been previously considered, revised, updated and approved in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2015. During that time, the approach to the remediation of coal mines has adopted a more sustainable approach. The traditional approach to dutifully pursuing bulk earthworks in the restoration process is now considered outdated and unsustainable and more pragmatic alternatives involving less earthworks are also more affordable. Less bulk earthworks also vastly reduce potential environmental risks associated with such activities on air quality and noise sensitive receptors and the use of carbon in the process. Less bulk earthworks can also present significant opportunities to restore and deliver a more interesting and naturally biodiverse landscape.
- 4.2.2 Many areas of the Ffos-y-Fran site have already been progressively restored or have remained dormant and undisturbed for some time. These areas are starting to show signs of nature recovery. Wetland habitats have developed around the margins of settlement ponds and drains. Evidence of great crested newts has been recorded (in 2024) in over half the ponds on site (many of which would be removed as part of the approved scheme), southern marsh orchids have colonised in some of the wetland and peregrine falcons have been seen flying over the site.
- 4.2.3 To implement the original and approved scheme would require significant bulk earthworks, the removal of existing ponds and wetlands and inevitable potential disruption to the local environment. An alternative approach has therefore been proposed that embraces more recent Welsh Government policies and approach to climate change and biodiversity such as Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12) and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
- 4.2.4 The key elements of the restoration and aftercare proposals are proposed as follows:-
1. The overburden mound OB1 in the northern part of the site and that is visible from parts of Merthyr and sections of the Heads of Valley Road, A4060 and surrounding area, would be reduced in height and reprofiled on the western slopes and grass seeded.
 2. Sections of exposed rock on the eastern side of the surface mine void would be retained as open scree and as a geological feature for visual amenity and open cliff



habitat providing potential habitat for lichens and mosses, and possibly a suitable location for breeding birds such as Raven and Peregrine.

3. The two overburden mounds OB2 and OB3 would remain largely as they appear today, and the lower slopes grass seeded and planted with native tree species.
4. Old reservoirs, dams and leats that remain from previous phases of mining activity including the Dowlais Free Drainage System would be retained and enhanced for biodiversity. Other water bodies such as settlement lagoons used in the earlier phases of Ffos -y-Fran would also be retained and protected.
5. The groundwater fed lake that has formed naturally in the mine void would be retained with shallow banks and margins around the backfilled shores. The surrounding slopes of the lake would be re-profiled and planted with native trees to form a mixed woodland.
6. Demolition and removal of existing buildings associated with the operational mine such as workshops used for vehicle maintenance and storage of materials such as fuel and machinery would be demolished and removed from the site.
7. A proportion of the site would be returned to urban common as rough grazing land. This would require areas to be fenced off to aid establishment of vegetation and to controlled grazing by livestock.
8. Areas outside the urban common would be prepared to enable habitat creation and the establishment of species rich grassland, broad-leaved and mixed woodland, open cliff, acid wetland and flushes and heath.
9. Land adjacent to A4060 would be re-profiled to provide potential for future light industrial use and grass seeded for general amenity until opportunities for development come forward.
10. Creation of a network of permissive footpaths and Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and a Byway Open to all Traffic (BOAT).



- 4.2.5 The land cover area for the 2025 restoration strategy, based on the Restoration and Aftercare Plan and including the Phase 1 restoration works completed in 2025, has been measured with GIS software.

Table 2 Restoration and Aftercare Plan 2025 land cover areas within planning application boundary

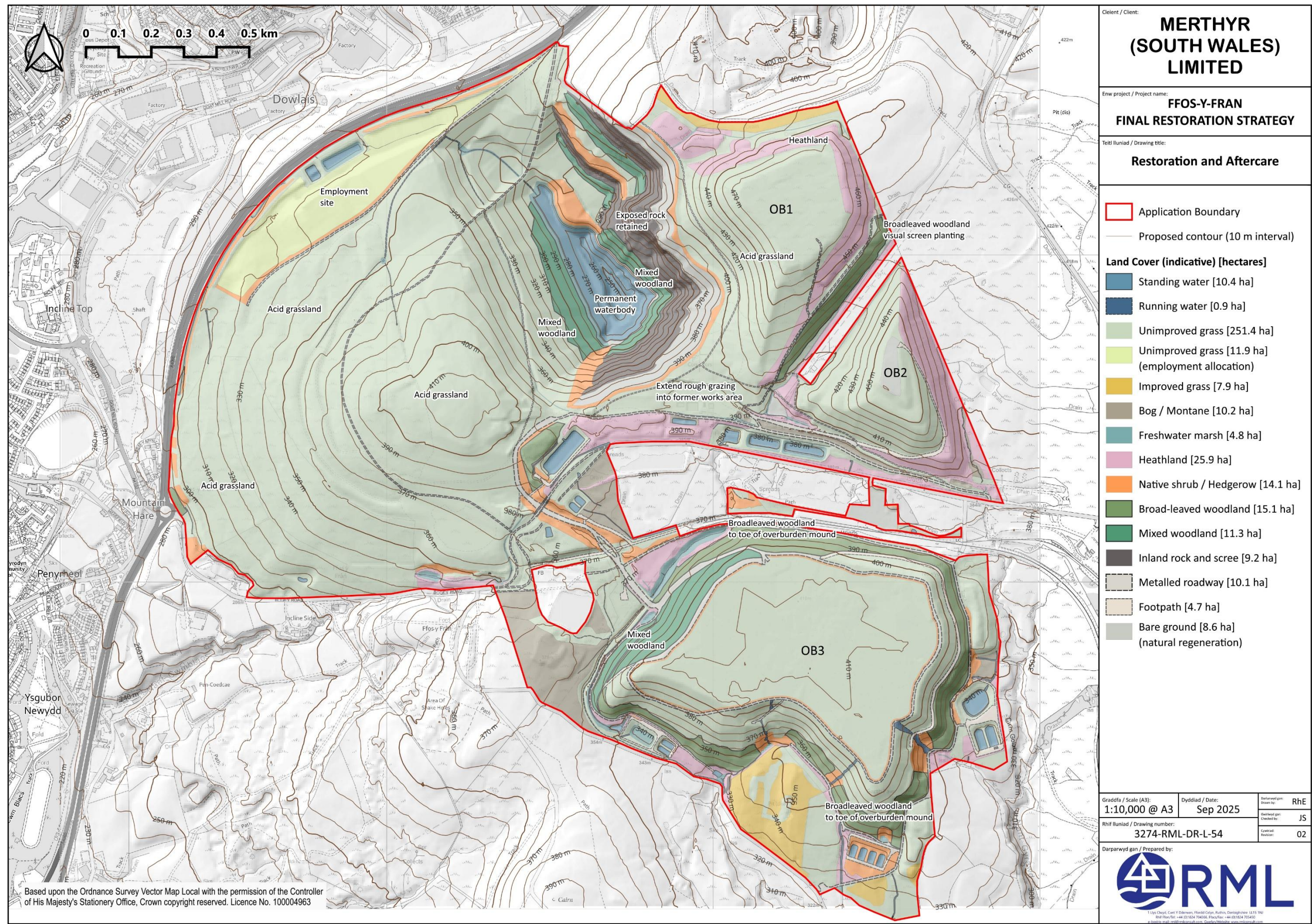
Category	Land cover	Area (ha)
Watercourses and waterbodies	Standing water	10.4
	Running water	0.9
Vegetation	Unimproved grass	251.4
	Unimproved grass (employment allocation)	11.9
	Improved grass	7.9
	Bog/Montane	10.2
	Freshwater marsh	4.8
	Heathland	25.9
	Shrub / Hedgerow	14.1
	Broad-leaved woodland	15.1
	Mixed woodland	11.3
	Inland rock and scree	9.2
Other features	Metalled roadway	10.1
	Footpath	4.7
	Bare ground	8.6
Total area (ha)		396.5



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Figure 2 Restoration and Aftercare Plan (2025)



4.3 Environment (Wales) Act Section 7 Terrestrial Habitats of Principal Importance

- 4.3.1 According to Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act (2016), it is mandatory to create biodiversity lists. These lists identify habitat types that are considered of "Principal Importance" for the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Wales. This requirement replaces the obligation outlined in Section 42 of the NERC Act 2006. The dataset provides information on the distribution and location of terrestrial habitats designated as "Principal Importance" in Wales.
- 4.3.2 The restoration strategies proposed do not specify terrestrial habitat but prescribe land cover which is a generalisation used to describe topographic features such as buildings, land parcels and infrastructure. The land cover areas will ultimately develop into new terrestrial habitat.
- 4.3.3 In order to illustrate what net benefits the 2015 and 2025 restoration strategies would have on terrestrial habitat, the land cover descriptions are converted to an applicable priority terrestrial habitat. This is to provide a broad indication of the changes different restoration strategies would have on habitat. The majority of Ffos-y-Fran is at an elevation of over 300 m above Ordnance datum and is accordingly classed as upland habitat.
- 4.3.4 The 2015 restoration strategy has the potential for 11% of the site area to evolve into five priority habitats of hedgerow, inland rock and scree, ponds and upland heath. (Refer to Table 4 and Figure 3). There could also be benefits from a larger surface area of open mosaic habitat to colonise on previously developed land allocated for employment use adjacent to the A4060. However, if this land was to be developed, then the potential area of the site to develop priority species would drop to 6%.
- 4.3.5 The 2025 restoration strategy benefits from a larger proportion of the site potentially supporting 28% of the site comprising of eight priority habitats (Refer to Table 5 and Figure 4). These include surface areas of inland rock and scree due to the retention of parts of the southern and eastern walls of the void. Also, it would benefit from the retention of surface water management features such as ponds, and the groundwater fed waterbody of the pit lake exposed within the void. Side slopes of the overburden mounds have gradually become established with heath species and provide a diversity of slope gradients and aspects.



Table 3 Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Section 7 – list of the terrestrial and freshwater habitats of principal importance for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in relation to Wales.

Terrestrial, Coastal and Freshwater Habitat	Priority Terrestrial Habitat
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland	Traditional orchards
	Wood pasture & parkland
	Upland oak woodland
	Lowland beech and yew woodland
	Upland mixed ash woodland
	Wet woodland
	Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
Boundary and linear features	Hedgerows
Arable and horticultural	Arable field margins
Improved grassland	Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
Neutral grassland	Lowland meadows
Calcareous grassland	Lowland calcareous grassland
	Upland calcareous grassland
Acid grassland	Lowland dry acid grassland
Dwarf shrub heath	Lowland heathland
	Upland heathland
Fen, marsh and swamp	Upland flushes, fens and swamps
	Lowland fens
	Purple moorgrass and rush pastures
	Reedbeds
Bogs	Lowland raised bog
	Blanket bog
Montane Habitats	Mountain heaths and willow scrub
Rivers and Streams	Rivers
Standing open waters and canals	Oligotrophic and dystrophic lakes
	Ponds
	Mesotrophic lakes
	Eutrophic standing waters
	Aquifer-fed naturally fluctuating water bodies
Inland rock	Inland rock outcrop and scree habitats
	Calaminarian grasslands
	Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land
	Limestone pavement
Supralittoral rock	Maritime cliff and slopes
Supralittoral sediment	Coastal sand dunes
	Coastal vegetated shingle



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- 4.3.6 The areas not considered as potential priority habitats are likely to be upland and improved grassland managed as urban common and for the grazing of sheep by the Gelligaer and Merthyr Commoners Association (GMCA). This blanket assumption does not mean that GMCA would not pursue management of some parcels of land for biodiversity. The association is committed to improve the environmental, social and community enhancement and management of the Common, and may also wish to pursue habitat restoration and creation should funding be forthcoming.
- 4.3.7 A list of Section 7 Habitats of Principal Importance has been provided in Table 3 and these priority habitats, including both terrestrial and marine types, require active management to foster ecosystem resilience in Wales. The likelihood is that should appropriate management regimes be adopted and implemented, then the priority habitats will support Section 7 Species of Principal Importance.
- 4.3.8 The existing site at Ffos-y-Fran is known to support Great Crested Newt, a species of Principal Importance with surveys undertaken in 2024 returning evidence of GCN found in 17 of 31 ponds surveyed within the red line boundary of the S73 application. This sign of nature recovery is encouraging, especially given that the site has only ceased operational activity in 2023. A great crested newt Conservation Plan has been prepared to protect the existing ponds and prescribe habitat improvements to enhance the ponds and adjacent terrestrial habitat.
- 4.3.9 Should the 2015 restoration strategy be implemented, then many of these ponds known to support great crested newts would be lost and adjacent habitat disturbed by bulk earth moving operations, likely to take several years to complete before land restoration can commence.



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Table 4 Restoration Plan 2015 land cover and applicable priority habitat equivalent (Refer to Figure 3)

Land cover	Priority habitat equivalent	Area (ha)
Stream	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Ponds	Ponds	1.2
Upland grassland	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Improved grassland	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Natural regeneration	Open mosaic habitat on previously developed land	16.3
Acid grassland	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Wet heath	Upland heathland	7.7
Woodland and hedgerow	Hedgerows	14.2
Exposed mine high wall	Inland rock outcrop and scree habitat	0.6
'Finger tips' re-exposed	Inland rock outcrop and scree habitat	1.6
Bare ground	Open mosaic habitat on previously developed land	3.6
Road or track	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Total area (ha)		45.2

Table 5 Restoration and Aftercare Plan 2025 land cover and applicable priority habitat equivalent (refer to Figure 4)

Land cover	Priority habitat equivalent	Area (ha)
Standing water	Ponds/Mesotrophic lakes	10.4
Running water	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Unimproved grass	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Unimproved grass (employment allocation)	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Improved grass	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Bog/Montane	Purple moorgrass and rush pastures	10.2
Freshwater marsh	Upland flushes, fens and swamps	4.8
Heathland	Upland heathland	25.9
Shrub / Hedgerow	Hedgerows/Mountain heaths and willow scrub	14.1
Broad-leaved woodland	Upland oak woodland	15.1
Mixed woodland	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Inland rock and scree	Inland rock outcrop and scree habitat	9.2
Metalled roadway	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Footpath	Not applicable (no corresponding habitat)	0
Bare ground	Open mosaic habitat on previously developed land	8.6
Total area (ha)		98.3



Figure 3 Restoration Plan 2015 priority habitat relationship to whole site

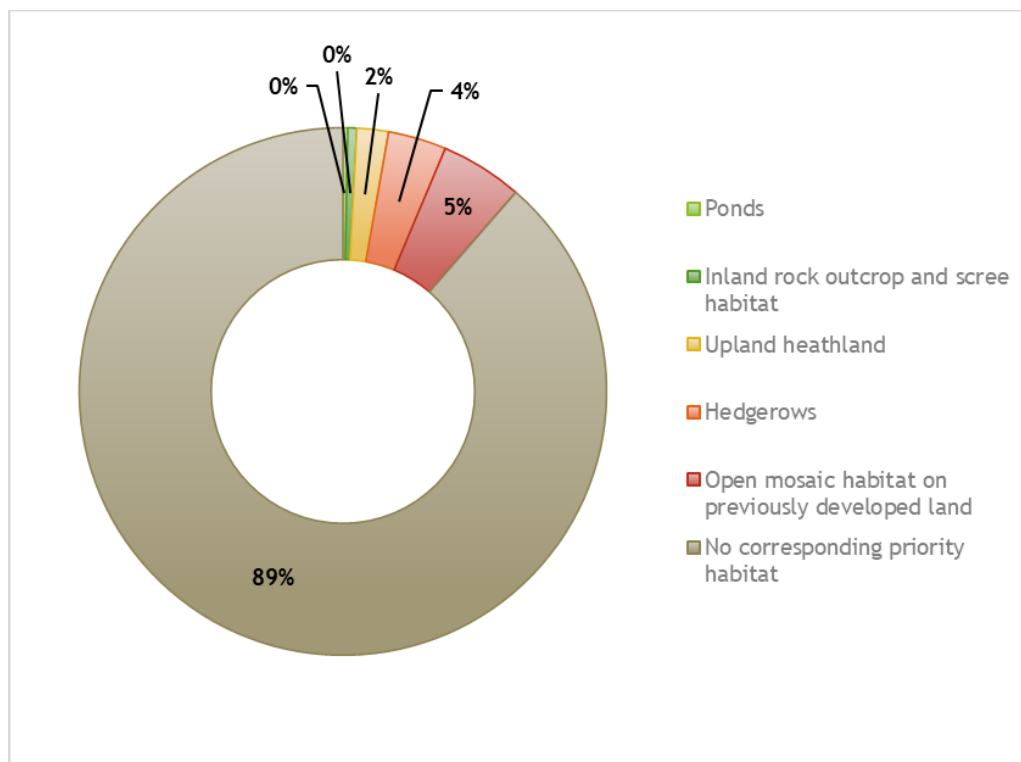
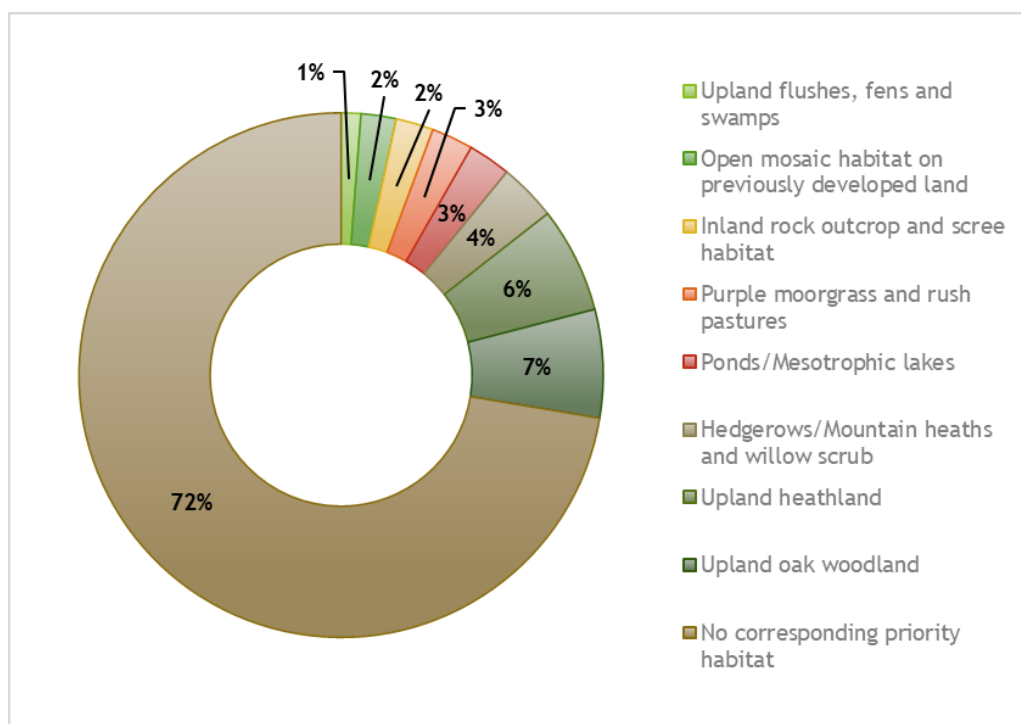


Figure 4 Restoration Plan 2025 priority habitat relationship to whole site



5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Biodiversity

- 5.1.1 This Biodiversity Statement has demonstrated the benefits to biodiversity that the alternative restoration strategy would deliver, compared to the approved restoration scheme. The alternative restoration is currently subject to approval of a Section 73 planning application (P/25/0037), validated by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council on 19th February 2025.
- 5.1.2 The merits of the alternative restoration strategy compared to the existing and approved scheme are clear and are evidenced in several documents submitted as part of the planning application.
- 5.1.3 The alternative restoration strategy seeks to safeguard and avoid adverse impacts on protected species and nurturing nature recovery, through targeting the delivery of priority habitats of principal importance. The approach follows the stepwise approach as advocated by Planning Policy Wales. Existing great crested newt habitat would be retained and protected and be subject to a Conservation Plan.
- 5.1.4 The alternative scheme avoids unnecessary and highly disruptive earthmoving operations that would require the excavation and moving of around 26 million cubic metres of material that could take a minimum period of 2-2.5 years and have a significant impact on existing habitats.
- 5.1.5 The alternative final restoration strategy aligns well with the stepwise approach advocated in PPW by avoiding and minimising potential loss and damage to elements of biodiversity while promoting opportunities for mitigation and enhancement. It is therefore considered that the alternative restoration scheme has many environmental merits and advantages over the approved scheme including significant biodiversity benefits.



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