

Site Name:

Bike Park Wales, Gethin Woodland Centre, Abercanaid, Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 1YZ

Report Reference:

WWE25107 Bike Park Wales, Main Lodge Area, Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Date: 14/04/2026

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Introduction

Bike Park Wales, Gethin Woodland Centre, Abercanaid, Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 1YZ (Grid reference: SO 05132 03460) is subject to planned works (Under approved planning permission, application P/22/0192) to construct new camping facilities, including camping pods, shepherd's huts, lodges, and associated infrastructure.

Non-material amendments have since been made to these approved works. These include:

- Changes to the elevations of shepherd's huts (no change to footprint of units);
- Change number of shepherd's huts vs pod (no total increase in number of units or footprint of units);
- Removed 3 x pods and replaced with hardstanding for camper vans;
- Minor changes to pathways around shepherd's huts to allow access from the broadside; and
- Changes to the internal layout of the shower block and drainage routes.

The Landscape Masterplan outlining these amendments can be found within the appendices of this report (Appendix I).

Potential ecological impacts and necessary mitigation requirements arising from these amendments are considered within this report. Assessments are based on previous ecological survey works conducted on the site by Wildwood Ecology.

A preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was undertaken at the site by Wildwood Ecology in 2018. Detailed species surveys were carried out by Wildwood Ecology in 2018, including: bat transect surveys, static monitoring, reptile surveys and breeding bird surveys. A high-level site walkover, Ground-Level Tree Assessment (GLTA) as well as bat activity surveys (static monitoring and walked transect), and breeding bird surveys were conducted on the site in 2022. The results of these surveys can be found in the previously submitted Ecological Impact Assessment (Report Reference: *WWE22067 EcIA Rev A, 16/10/2018*).

This EcIA report was updated in 2023 (*WWE22067 EcIA Rev C, 16/01/2023*). A site walkover was undertaken in 2023 when an updated application to permission P/19/0073 was made, and subsequently granted via P/22/0192. The findings of the 2023 walkover can be found in the previously submitted Ecological Impact Assessment prepared by Wildwood Ecology in 2023 (*WWE22067 EcIA Rev C 16/01/2023*).

WWE22067 EcIA Rev D 27/03/2023 was submitted in accordance with condition 6 of permission P/22/0192. This is therefore the most relevant EcIA document that assesses the area considered within this report.

A walkover of the site for an update PEA and GLTA was conducted in 2025, to inform the changes proposed within the Non-Material Amendments application. These surveys were undertaken by Dr Amy Williams Schwartz MCIEEM, Senior Ecologist at Wildwood Ecology on 16/10/2025, following the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2017) guidelines and using UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0 codes (UK Hab, 2023).

The aerial image of the site below (Figure 1) shows the site to consist of an area of woodland with some open and hard standing areas, and access tracks running through it.

The wider area includes a mix of woodland types on the valley sides above the River Taff. The A470 runs north-west-south-east past the site to the east, and the small towns of Abercanaid and Pentrebach are situated to the east, with industrial, retail, residential and public spaces present.

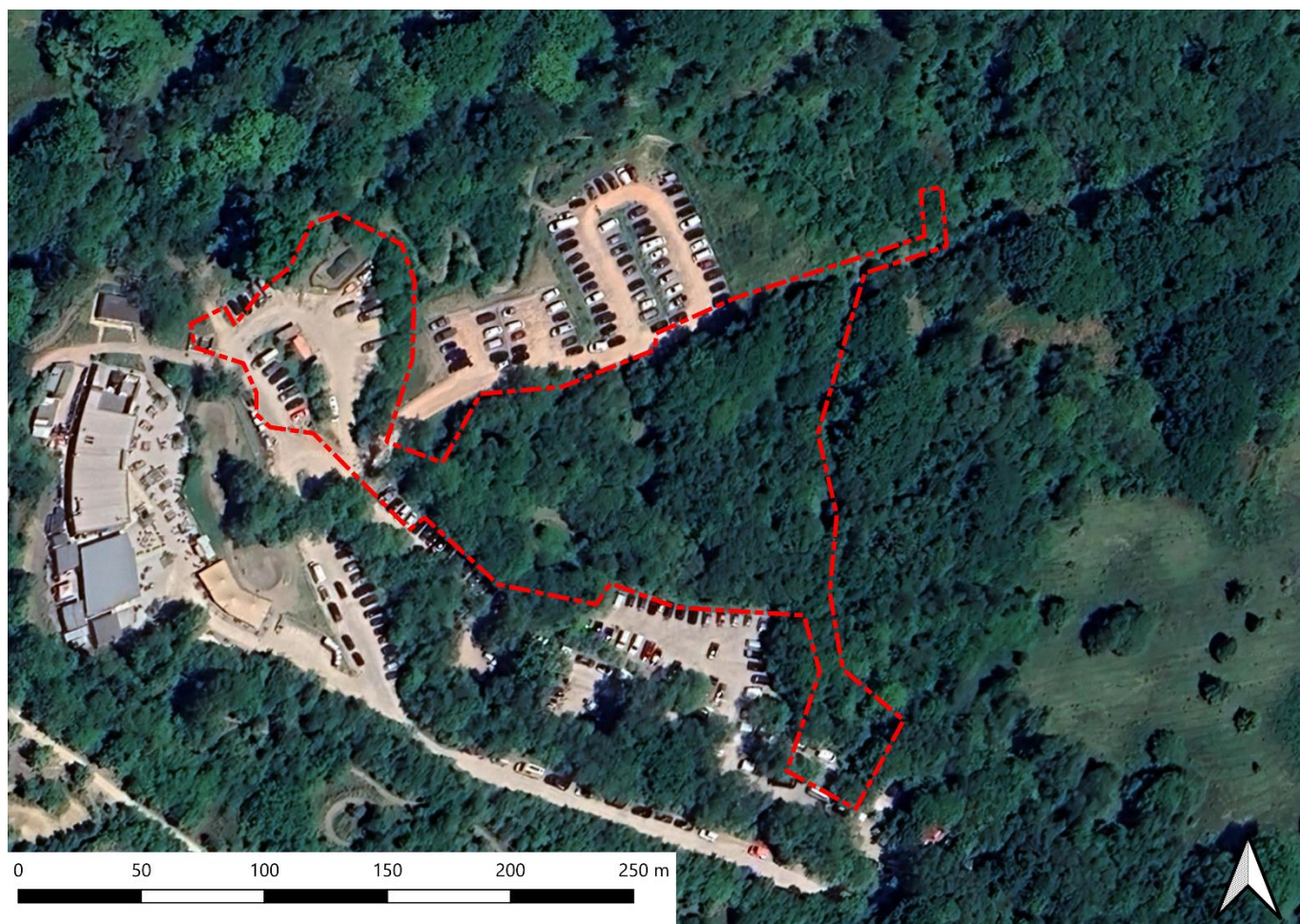


Figure 1: Aerial photograph showing site boundary

Survey methods

UKHab Habitat Survey

A field survey was undertaken on 16/10/2025.

All habitats present within the site with the suitability to support rare, protected, or otherwise notable species of flora or fauna were noted, as well as incidental observations of species.

A UKHab Habitat Plan was produced in QGIS, incorporating Target Notes used to highlight features of ecological interest (Appendix II).

Desk study

No updated biological records were requested from SEWBRc as part of this survey, as records were obtained in 2022 and then further updated by findings of the Wildwood Ecology surveys throughout that year. Desk study data was collected from the following sources:

- South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBRc) (May 2022);
- Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) (May 2022 & updated/checked in November 2025); and
- previous surveys on the site by Wildwood Ecology (outlined in *WWE22067 EcIA Rev D, 27/0323*).

Designated sites

Results from desk study data showed that there were no designated sites (Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), RAMSAR) within 10km, one national designated site (Site of Special Scientific Conservation (SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR) within 2km of the site, and six non-statutory, locally designated sites (Local Wildlife Site (LWS), Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)) within 1km of the site:

- Cwm Glo a Glyndyrys SSSI (950m N of the site)
- Abercanaid Fields SINC (onsite)
- Graig Gethin SINC (<50m W)
- Rhydycar West SINC (75m N)
- Cwm Woods SINC (450m NW)
- Buarth-Waunydd SINC (563m SE)
- Afon Taf SINC (630m E)

Priority and notable habitats

The following priority/notable habitats were noted within and adjacent to the site:

- lowland mixed deciduous woodland; and
 - a pond (approximately 475m to the east).
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A small area of the site is classed as 'restored ancient woodland site', see the figure below.

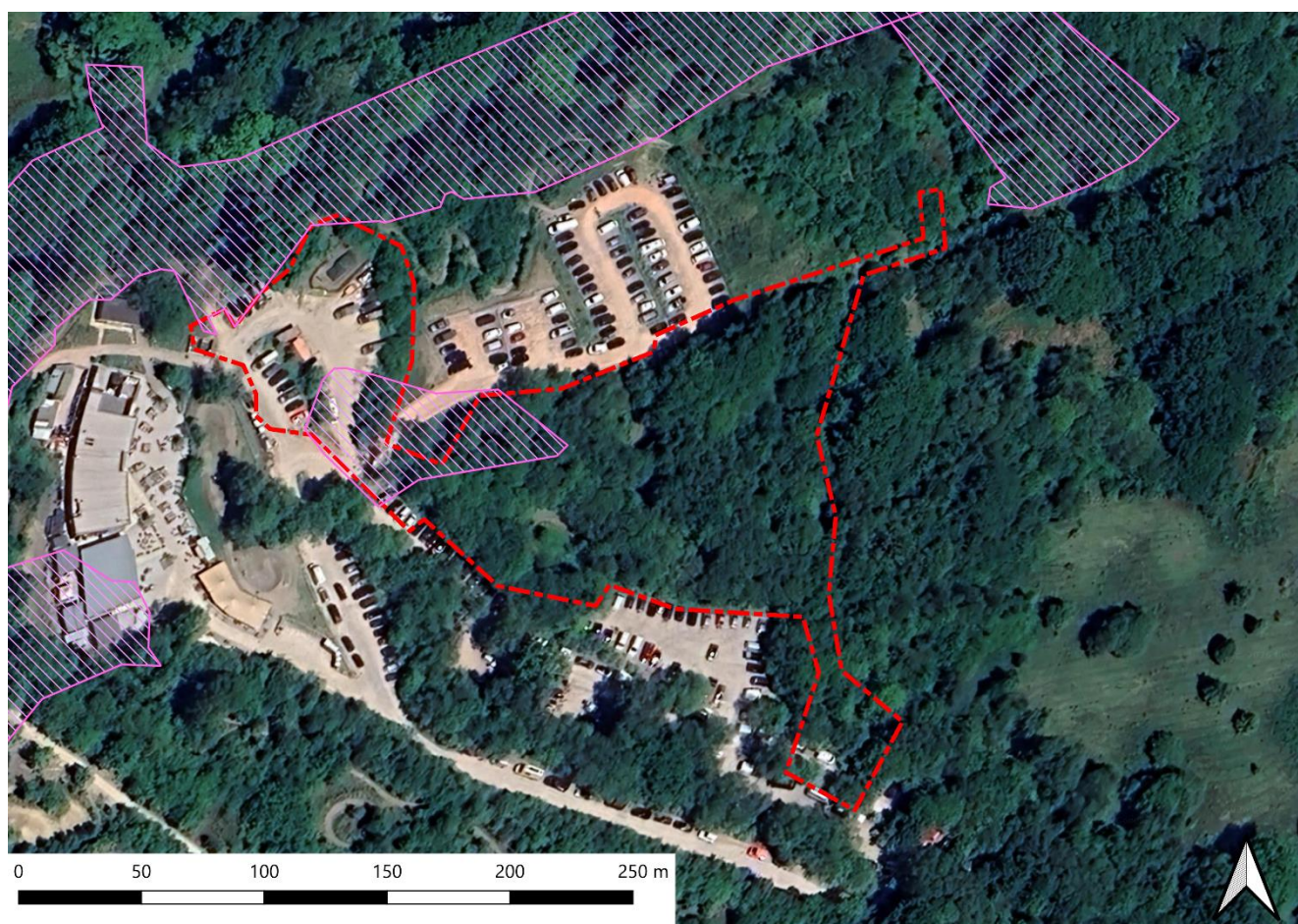


Figure 2: Area of restored ancient woodland (Purple polygon) within the site's boundary.

Data taken from taken from DataMap Wales "WOM21 Ancient Woodland Inventory" showing the extent of ancient woodland and restored ancient woodland site in the vicinity.

Priority and protected species

Priority and protected species records were returned from the Southeast Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBRc) for species located within 2km of the site, and/or were located during previous Wildwood Ecology surveys and include the following:

Amphibians: common frog, common toad, and palmate newt on site during surveys. Great crested newt unspecified sighting 1.1km from site.

Bats: records of at least six species of bat within 2km of the site, five of which were recorded during surveys on site in 2018 (common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared, noctule, and Myotis species), and three in 2022 (common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, lesser horseshoe).

Badger: record, dead on road 0.3km from site.

Birds: a variety of records both existing and during surveys, notable of which was crossbill (a Schedule 1 breeding bird) recorded on site

Hazel dormouse: there were no records of hazel dormouse returned from SEWBRC. However, online records from the Natural Resources Wales public register of protected species licences, returned a total of 13 hazel dormouse records in counties neighbouring Merthyr Tydfil. This included – Rhondda Cynon Taf, Caerphilly, and Brecon Beacons. As detailed locations of the licence records were not provided, an assessment of the distance of these records from the site could not be made. However, it is assumed likely that hazel dormouse are also present in the Merthyr Tydfil county (potentially under recorded).

Hedgehog: record, dead on road 0.4km from site.

Otter: record, unspecified sighting 0.8km from site.

Reptiles: common lizard recorded on site during surveys, slow worm and grass snake recorded 0.8km from site.

Water vole: record, unspecified sighting 1.4km from site.

Field survey

Table 1 - Field survey timings and conditions

Date	Weather conditions			
	Temp [°C]	Cloud cover [Oktas]	Wind speed [Beaufort scale]	Rain
16/10/2025	11	8	2 (3)	Nil

Field survey limitations

The following limitations relevant to this assessment were noted:

Although the extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey fell outside the recommended seasonal period for botanical surveys, the evaluation and habitat descriptions (and hence the impacts and their significance), are considered to be accurate for the following reasons:

- given the type of vegetation and habitats present, the valuation of the intrinsic interest is considered unlikely to change.
- access was possible to all areas of the site and the vegetation was clearly visible; and
- previous surveys carried out by Wildwood Ecology in 2018 and 2022 collected extensive information on plant species present on the site.

New biological records were not requested from the Local Records Centre as part of the desk study, as records were previously obtained in 2022 to inform the EcIA report (*WWE22067 EcIA Rev D 27/03/2023*) and further updated by the findings of the ecological survey work conducted throughout the year by wildwood Ecology.

Habitats

Table 2 sets out descriptions of the habitats present within the site using UK habitat Classification Version 2.0 codes, along with a list of species present.

Habitat	Habitat description	Species present
g1c - Bracken Secondary code: 207 - woodland open space	Area to the east of site with some larger trees but understory comprised of majority bracken.	Bracken, bramble.
g1d - Other lowland acid grassland Secondary codes: 14 - scattered rushes 16 - tall forbs 202 - young trees - self-set	Area of acid grassland with encroaching scrub and bracken. Previously areas were plantation forestry (cleared before 2013) with successional growth of individual self-seeded trees. Some areas around the car park were recently seeded.	Grasses: cock's-foot, crested dog's tail, perennial rye grass, smaller cat's-tail, sweet vernal grass, Yorkshire fog. Sedges and rushes: compact rush, field woodrush, flowering rush, jointed rush, soft rush. Forbs: bird's-foot trefoil, black medick, cleavers, common nettle, creeping buttercup, creeping cinquefoil, creeping thistle, dandelion, devil's bit scabious, figwort, great willowherb, hedge woundwort, hemp agrimony, herb bennet, herb robert, lesser trefoil, mare's tail, meadow thistle, meadow vetchling, meadowsweet, sorrel, spear thistle, square-stalked willowherb, tormentil, white clover. Ferns: bracken. Scrub: bramble, buddleia. Individual trees: alder, cherry, hazel, pedunculate oak, willow.
h3h - Mixed scrub Secondary code/s: 202 - young trees - self-set	Areas of scrub were present along the woodland margins, as understorey and encroaching within the acid grassland area. Scrub was particularly dominant at the north-east of the site.	Alder, ash, bracken, bramble, common centaury, creeping buttercup, foxglove, gorse, hawkbit sp., hazel, heath bedstraw, hoary plantain, hogweed, knapweed, lady's mantle, rowan, sowthistle, yellow pimpernel.
r1g - Other standing water Secondary codes: 41 - pond (non-priority) 49 - freshwater - artificial 848 - sustainable drainage system	Reedbed filtration system installed at the west of the site with small area of open water present.	Common reed.
u1b - Developed land; sealed surface	Small hard standing area around the car park.	N/A
u1c - Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface Secondary code: 804 - car park	Some gravel tracks/car parking.	N/A

u1e – Built linear features Secondary code/s: 800 (road), 839 (track)	Access road and tracks.	N/A
W1f – lowland mixed deciduous woodland Secondary codes: 28 - ancient woodland site 30 - semi-natural woodland 204 - veteran tree	The majority of the site consisted of mixed deciduous woodland. There are veteran trees present, but many of the trees are of similar age.	Canopy: alder, ash, beech, birch sp., cherry, hawthorn, hazel, ivy, pedunculate oak, sessile oak, sweet chestnut, sycamore, willow sp. Understory: bracken, bramble, holly. Ground flora: bluebell, comb fern, common nettle, herb robert, hogweed, ivy, rough meadow-grass, wood sorrel.

The suitability of the site habitats for protected species relevant to the site habitats, the connectivity of the site and observed incidental evidence can be found in Table 3.

Table 2 - Protected species potentially present onsite

Species or group	Habitat suitability	Site connectivity	Notable onsite features	Presence confirmed?
Amphibians, including great crested newt	Good	Excellent/direct	Filter pond present at north-west of the site, toads found during reptile surveys.	Common amphibians (excluding great crested newt) confirmed onsite via incidental evidence
Badger	Excellent	Excellent/direct	No signs of badger directly observed but likely to use the habitat.	Onsite habitat was suitable and the site had good connectivity to the surrounding landscape
Bats: foraging and commuting	Excellent	Excellent/direct	Variety of habitats present for foraging bat species.	Confirmed onsite during previous surveys
Fish	Poor	Poor	Some small ditches present but likely to dry frequently.	Onsite habitat was unsuitable and there was no connectivity to the surrounding landscape
Fungi	Excellent	N/A	Lots of standing and lying deadwood supporting saprotrophic fungi.	Confirmed onsite via incidental evidence
Hazel dormouse	Good	Excellent/direct	Dormouse not recorded in Merthyr, however they are known to be present in neighbouring counties and	Onsite habitat was suitable and the site had some connectivity to the

			considered likely to be in the local area.	surrounding landscape
Hedgehog	Excellent	Excellent/direct	Suitable habitat for nesting/foraging/hibernation	Onsite habitat was suitable and the site had good connectivity to the surrounding landscape
Invertebrates	Good	Excellent/direct	Many different plant species recorded to support a variety of invertebrates.	Onsite habitat was suitable and the site had good connectivity to the surrounding landscape
Nesting birds	Excellent	Excellent/direct	Many bird species identified on site, multiple of which were found to be nesting during previous surveys.	Confirmed onsite during surveys
Otter	Good	Good	Some habitat suitability for otters, and they are likely to at least occasionally utilise the large pond approx. 475m to the east of the site.	Onsite habitat was suitable and the site had some connectivity to the surrounding landscape
Reptiles	Good	Excellent/direct	Reptiles known to be using scrub/woodland edge and areas of grassland.	Confirmed onsite during surveys
Water vole	Poor	Good	Site does not contain suitable habitats for water vole.	Onsite habitat was unsuitable and there was no connectivity to the surrounding landscape

Invasive species

No species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 were observed to be present onsite.

Ground Level Tree Assessment

Tree reference numbers (where available) taken from the tree plans produced by Treescene – numbers not in brackets from tree survey report dated March 2025, bracketed numbers from report dated November 2019.

Tree reference	Tree species	PRF type	PRF description
(T23)	Oak	PRF-I	Small cracks, fissures
Unknown – between (T23) & (T41)	Unknown	PRF-M	Dead tree, highly suitable, 2x woodpecker holes and large rot hole
(T41)	Oak	PRF-M	Broken limb (storm damage) providing large cavity
(T42)	Oak	PRF-I	Large tree with likelihood of PRFs not visible from ground
T1862 (T43)	Oak	PRF-I	Large tree with likelihood of PRFs not visible from ground
T1863 (T44)	Oak	PRF-I	Large hole currently with hornets' nest present, meaning downgrade from PRF-M to PRF-I

T1864 (T45)	Oak	PRF-M	Large cavity on north and west side of main stem. Extensive deadwood throughout crown. Some storm damage.
(T46)	Oak	PRF-I	Small cracks, fissures
Unknown – south of (T46)	Unknown	PRF-M	Hole in main trunk
Unknown, adjacent to above	Alder	PRF-I	Small cracks, fissures
T1867 (T53)	Oak	PRF-I	Various gaps around snapped branches, wounds on large branches
T1868 (T55)	Oak	PRF-I	Small holes where branches have been pruned
T1870 (T57)	Oak	PRF-I	Small cracks, fissures
T1871 (T61)	Alder	PRF-M	Large hole formed from snapped branch
T1873 (T63)	Alder	PRF-I	Small cracks, fissures

Impacts

Due to the proposed works, it is likely that in the absence of mitigation there will be adverse effects on the following designated sites, habitats and species.

- Designated sites – There are no statutory designated sites within the vicinity of the site that are likely to be impacted by the works – however, there are three local non-statutory designations on and adjacent to the site:
 - The designation for Abercanaid Hills SINC extends into the wooded area at the ease of the site. Other SINC are in close vicinity to the site - Graig Gethin SINC (<50m W), and Rhydycar West SINC (75m N).
- Description of the SINC includes the following: “Series of fields laying either side of the A470 containing mainly species-rich semi-improved grasslands and marshy grasslands. Also some small areas of semi-natural oak/birch woodland, scattered scrub and trees.”

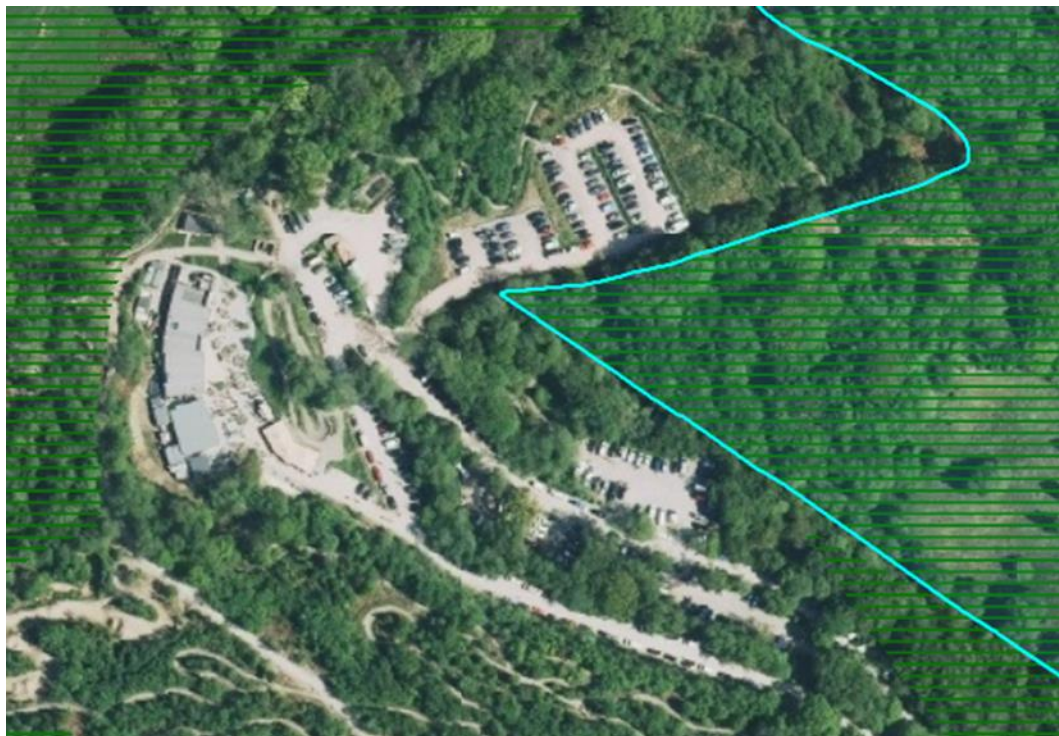


Figure 3: Location of extent of Abercanaid Fields SINC (boundary highlighted in blue).

Other SINC extents visible in the map are Rhydycar West SINC (visible at the north-west of the image) and Graig Gethin SINC (visible at the west and to the south of Abercanaid Fields).

Priority Habitats

- **Pond** – due to the distance between the site and Webber’s Pond as well as the nature of works, it is not considered that these works will have a negative impact on the pond.
 - **Woodland** - There will be no removal of any mature trees, though there will be a loss of some understorey to allow the new camping provisions. Additional new planting is proposed to provide screening as per the landscape proposals masterplan and to replace any trees which may be removed, with the species planted to be of local provenance (grown in the UK) and native species only. The management plan as outlined in the landscape proposals masterplan will be implemented to ensure the survival of plants, and if any fail, these will be replaced like-for-like in the next winter season. Therefore, no woodland area will be lost as part of the current proposals. While the woodland habitat will be altered, the overall woodland character will be retained, with only clearance on the footprint of the small buildings (i.e. camping pods, and shepherds huts) and associated pedestrian paths. The footprint areas of each small building are not to be changed by the Non-Material Amendments being made.
 - Indirect impacts to the woodland could include the following:
 - Breaking connection between veteran trees
 - Reducing semi-natural habitats
 - Increasing light, air and soil pollution
 - Increased disturbance to wildlife from increased human activity, particularly at night, as the site is currently only used during the daytime, but not at night.
 - Increased trampling of plants and soil erosion
 - Increased fly tipping and litter
 - **Amphibians** – due to the loss of/damage to suitable terrestrial habitats nearby. There is also a risk of killing/injury to amphibians during the clearance and construction phases of development, as well as increased risk of trampling during the operational phase of the development.
 - **European badger** – due to the loss of suitable foraging habitat onsite, higher levels of nocturnal disturbance due to overnight stays on the site and the potential for direct killing/injury of badger during the construction phase of the proposed development.
 - **Foraging and commuting bats** – As evidenced by the 2018 and 2022 bat surveys, the site is used as a flight-path and foraging habitat for at least six bat species, including light-sensitive species (brown long-eared, Myotis species, and lesser horseshoe). Due to the loss of understorey habitat in the absence of suitable mitigation, there is a risk of impacts on the local foraging and roosting bat populations at the site.
 - **Hazel dormouse** – due to the impacting of suitable woodland habitat onsite, despite the lack of records for hazel dormouse in the local area, in the absence of suitable mitigation there is a risk of killing or injuring dormouse if they are present at the site (as they are known to be present in neighbouring counties). Indirect impacts could also occur if dormouse were present, as a result of new artificial lighting, noise, and disturbance including trampling of habitat.
 - **Hedgehogs** - loss of suitable foraging habitat onsite, higher levels of nocturnal disturbance due to overnight stays on the site and the potential for direct killing/injury of hedgehogs during the clearance construction phase of the proposed development.
 - **Nesting birds** – due to nesting birds being confirmed onsite during previous surveys and onsite habitats being highly suitable for use by nesting birds. Proposals will result in a reduction in available nesting habitat due to removal of scrub as well as increased disturbance.
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- **Reptiles** – onsite presence of reptiles was confirmed by the 2018 reptile survey, as well as presence of suitable habitats and features. Owing to good connectivity to suitable habitats within the surrounding landscape. It is likely that small numbers of common lizard will use the woodland edges, and edges of areas of scrub which are within the proposal area.

Therefore, in the absence of mitigation there is a risk of killing/injury of reptiles during the clearance and construction phases of the proposed development.

- **European otter** – due to the potential for otter commuting over the site, increased noise and light pollution at night have the potential to negatively impact otter that may be using the site due to disturbance.

Recommendations

Habitats and biodiversity enhancements

Local authorities have a duty to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. Where possible, the existing onsite habitat of ecological importance should be retained to ensure that habitats and species that rely on them are not adversely affected by the development/works.

As the proposed works will impact on onsite habitats, the development must aim to provide a Net Benefit for Biodiversity (NBB).

To achieve the above, the recommendations laid out in the previously approved Habitat Management Plan (*WWE22067 HMP, 22/06/2022*), Wildlife Protection Plan (*WWE20037 WPP Rev G, 23/06/2022*), and Woodland Management Plan (*WWE20037 WMP Rev A 30/06/2022*) remain valid, and will be followed. These include recommendations for root protection zones, planting, and other management. The Ecological Impact Assessment Report (*WWE22067 EcIA Rev D*) also has information detailing the proposed locations of species-specific enhancement such as nest/roosting boxes.

If any trees as laid out in Table 4 are to be altered or removed as part of the proposals, further investigations for bats will be required.

Priority and protected species

In-depth recommendations for specific species provided within the Ecological Impact Assessment Report (Report Reference: *WWE22067 EcIA Rev D 27/03/2023*) and are deemed to continue to be valid due to the site being in very similar condition to when it was previously assessed.

With consideration to the Non-material Amendments being made to the previously approved proposals: it is considered that the species-specific mitigation measures outlined in *WWE22067 EcIA Rev D 27/03/2023* remain relevant despite the minor changes to proposals.

The EcIA report contains a Reptile Mitigation Strategy in Appendix V, as well as information about sensitive lighting for the site in Appendix VII. It is considered that this information remains relevant, and should be followed during construction and operational stages.

The reptile mitigation strategy appended to *WWE22067 EcIA Rev D 27/03/2023* includes information about enhancement of habitat outside of the site boundary. A directional 2-stage cut, such as the method described within Appendix V of the EcIA, should be utilised, directed towards enhanced/ retained areas of suitable habitat (i.e. woodland edge, mixed scrub and grassland).

The following points are made for general protection of wildlife:

- To protect all wildlife, no trenches or excavations should be left open without a means of escape (ramps should be left at a 30-degree angle to allow escape);
 - All materials, fuel, and chemicals should be kept safely away from animal access;
-

- retained habitats of importance should be protected during the construction phase by installation of Heras fencing where required, as per best practice. This would help to avoid habitat damage by accidental incursions by plant or inappropriate material storage; and
- If any protected species are encountered during the works, works must stop, and a suitably qualified ecologist contacted for advice.

If any trees as laid out in Table 4 are to be altered or removed as part of the proposals, further investigations for bats will be required.

The following recommendations are made for general protection of wildlife, and in relation to specific species or habitats:

- To protect all wildlife, no trenches or excavations should be left open without a means of escape (ramps should be left at a 30-degree angle to allow escape);
- All materials, fuel, and chemicals should be kept safely away from animal access;
- If any protected species are encountered during the works, works must stop, and a suitably qualified ecologist contacted for advice.

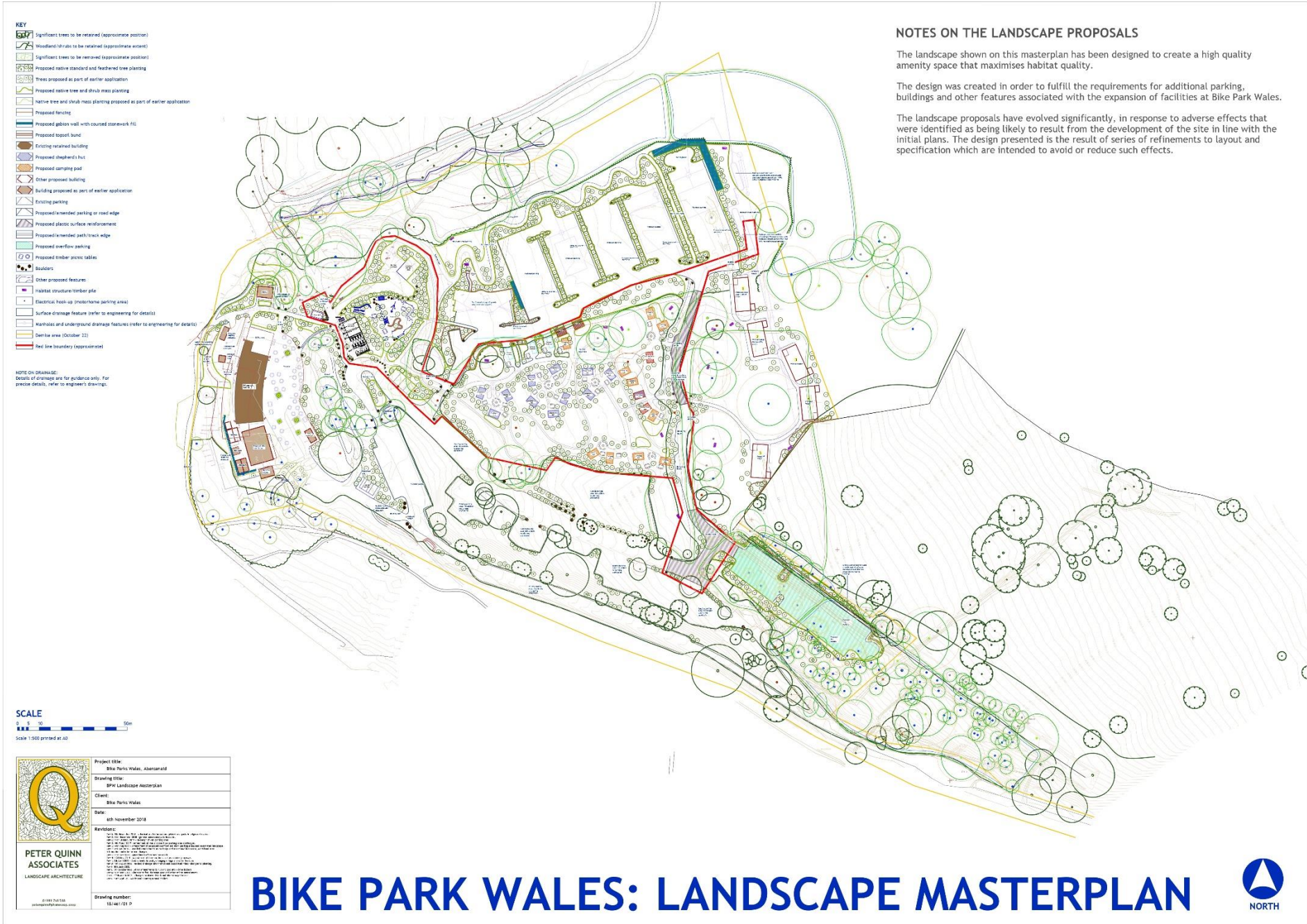
Conclusion

The site was not considered to have changed materially since previous surveys were undertaken on the site, and therefore any previously written reports by Wildwood Ecology regarding the proposed development are considered to continue to be accurate in their content and recommendations.

It is considered that the Non-Material Amendments being made to proposals will have no significant impacts on protected species or habitats.

It is also considered that the mitigation recommendations made within previously submitted *WWE22067 ECIA REV D (27/03/23)* and *WWE25107 PEA – Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2025)* remain relevant with regards to the Non-Material Amendments being made to proposals.

Appendix I - Proposed development



Appendix II - Habitat plan



Key



Boundary

Habitats



g1c- bracken



g1d- other lowland acid grassland



h3h- mixed scrub



r1g- other standing water



u1b- developed land; sealed surface



u1c- artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface



u1e- built linear features



w1f- lowland mixed deciduous woodland

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Survey images (Taken during 2025 PEA Update Survey)



Figure 4: Small drainage pond present on site



Figure 4: typical view of habitat within woodland



Figure 6: Path through woodland



Figure 7: Area of predominantly bracken



Figure 8: Path through woodland