Green Infrastructure Statement

Proposed manure store at Hugh Lanes, Isycoed, Whitchurch

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016, provides a context for the delivery of multi-functional green infrastructure. Its protection and provision can make a significant contribution to the sustainable management of natural resources, and in particular to protecting, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems in terms of the diversity within and connections between ecosystems and the extent and condition of these ecosystems, so that they are better able to resist, recover from and adapt to pressures. This means that the development of green infrastructure is an important way for local authorities to deliver their Section 6 duty.

Green infrastructure is capable of providing several functions at the same time and as a result offers multiple benefits, for social, economic and cultural as well as environmental resilience. The components of green infrastructure, by improving the resilience of ecosystems, can result in positive benefits to well-being including flood management, water purification, improved air quality, reduced noise pollution and local climate moderation, climate change mitigation and food production. These benefits are important in urban environments where they can facilitate health and well-being related benefits of open space, clean air and improved tranquillity, for example, as well as creating a sense of place and improved social cohesion. In addition, green infrastructure has a role in protecting local distinctiveness, providing economic benefits and social and community opportunities.

It is recognised that all development proposals need to go through a step wise approach when considering green infrastructure, to ensure any development has a net gain in terms of the environment.

We have carried out this approach below:

The Step-Wise Approach

1. a) The first priority for planning authorities is to avoid damage to biodiversity in its widest sense (i.e. the variety of species and habitats and their abundance) and ecosystem functioning. Where there may be harmful environmental effects, planning authorities will need to be satisfied that any reasonable alternative sites (including alternative siting and design options) that would result in less harm, no harm or benefit have been fully considered.

The proposal does not damage any biodiversity, in that the site is on improved grassland, and therefore we feel the proposal does not cause any harmful environmental impact.

b) Proposals in statutory designated sites are, as a matter of principle unacceptable, and therefore, must be excluded from site searches undertaken by developers. This principle

also extends to those sites containing protected species and habitats which are irreplaceable and must be safeguarded. Such sites form the heart of resilient ecological networks and their role and the ecosystem services they provide must be protected,

maintained and enhanced and safeguarded from development. It will be wholly exceptional for development to be justifiable in such instances.

This site is not within any statutory designated site.

2. When all locational, siting and design options for avoiding damage to biodiversity have

been exhausted, applicants, in discussion with planning authorities must seek to minimise the initial impact on biodiversity and ecosystems by:

• maintaining the largest possible area of existing habitat supporting biodiversity and

functioning ecosystems, particularly Section 7 habitats and species where present, by

minimising development size and appropriate orientation on site, paying due regard to

the potential for continued long term maintenance and management of retained areas to benefit biodiversity;

The proposal looks to retain as much of the existing habitat as possible.

• ensuring that retained habitats continue to be well connected to adjacent habitats to

provide connectivity for key species and ensuring that the favourable conservation status of local species populations is maintained.

• retaining existing features, develop a management plan for their future care (e.g., trees,

hedgerows, species rich grasslands, heath, wetlands, ponds and freshwater habitats)

and use appropriate buffers to protect these from construction and operational impacts, and

• using proven innovative/creative solutions (where required) to minimise damage and

maintain existing biodiversity features and ecosystems in tandem with robust monitoring and rectification strategies.

There is limited habitat on site, and the placement of Woodcrete bird and boxes provide a natural gain on site.

3. a) Where, after measures to minimise impact, biodiversity and ecosystems could still be

damaged, or lost through residual impacts, the proposed development should mitigate that damage. Mitigation measures must be put in place to limit the negative effects of a development.

3.b) Effective mitigation or restoration measures should be incorporated into the design proposal following the consideration of steps one and two above. Mitigation or

restoration measures must be designed to address the specific negative effects by

repairing damaged habitats and disturbed species. They should seek to restore in excess of like for like, accounting for disturbance and time lags for the recovery of habitat and

species, and in every case, mitigation or restoration measure should seek to build

ecosystem resilience within the site and where possible the wider area. In some circumstances, where like for like mitigation measures are not possible, particularly in respect of restoration measures, it may be necessary to consider on site compensation measures in the first instance. In designing mitigation measures where uncertainty exists, applicants should follow the precautionary principle and assume a significant effect. Offsite compensation measures (as set out in step four below) should be considered as a last resort.

The proposal will not have any environmental impact and in so far will have a betterment effect.

4. When all the steps above have been exhausted, and where modifications, alternative sites, conditions or obligations are not sufficient to secure biodiversity outcomes further onsite/immediately proximate, and as a last resort off-site compensation for unavoidable damage must be provided. This must be of significant magnitude to fully compensate for any loss.

In the absence of a planned approach, compensation measures must be guided by place-based evidence and the onus are on applicants to address the following:

a. Off-site compensation should normally take the form of habitat restoration, or habitat creation, or the provision of long-term management agreements to enhance existing habitats and deliver a net benefit for biodiversity. It should also be informed by a full ecological assessment to establish a formal baseline before habitat creation or restoration starts and secured far enough in advance before the loss of biodiversity on site.

Not applicable given that the proposal has no environmental impact.

b. The Green Infrastructure Assessment should be used to identify suitable locations for securing off-site compensation. Where possible, a landscape–scale approach, focusing on promoting wider ecosystem resilience, should help guide locations for compensation.

The Green Infrastructure Assessment should provide a spatial guide to opportunities already identified for securing a net benefit for biodiversity. Using the assessment will help determine whether locations for habitat compensation should be placed close to the development site, or whether new habitat or additional management located further away from the site would best support biodiversity and ecosystem resilience at a wider scale.

No offsite compensation is required given there will be no environmental impact.

c. Where compensation for specific species is being sought, the focus should be on maintaining or enhancing the population of the species within its natural range. This approach might also

identify locations for providing species-specific compensation further away from the site. Where they exist, Spatial Species Action Plans should be used to help identify suitable locations.

d. Any proposed compensation should be place based, take account of the Section 6 Duty (Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty), the DECCA framework and appropriate ecological advice from the local authority Ecologist, NRW and, or a suitably qualified ecologist.

5. Each stage of the stepwise approach must be accompanied by a long term management plan of agreed and appropriate avoidance, minimisation, mitigation/restoration and compensation measures alongside the agreed enhancement measures. The management plan should set out the immediate and on-going management of the site, future monitoring arrangements for all secured measures and it should clearly identify the funding mechanisms in place to meet the management plan objectives. The management plan must set out how a net benefit for biodiversity will be achieved within as short a time as possible and be locally responsive and relevant to local circumstances.

As confirmed within the steps above, there is limited biodiversity potential on site, and the proposed plans will provide a natural gain.

6 Finally, where the adverse effect on biodiversity and ecosystem resilience clearly outweighs other material considerations, the development should be refused.

It is clear the proposal does not have any adverse effect on biodiversity or ecosystem resilience and therefore should be considered acceptable.