

Utopia City – Consideration of widening central landscape corridor

1. As part of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) consultation response on the Strategic Ecology Corridor (P/2025/0431) they flagged the following on the Utopia City / Land North of Bryn Lane planning application (P/2023/0497) regarding the central landscape corridor (identified below, as per the submitted landscape masterplan). This note provides a response, noting the corridor is proposed to be a width of 38m.

We continue to advise that the ecological functionality of the on-site provision for the separate application P/2023/0497 could be improved through widening the existing central corridor as we have concerns over the width and proposed shared use for paths and fitness equipment. Consideration should be given to this on the live planning application P/2023/0497.



2. Utopia City was allocated for employment use within the 'found sound' version of the Wrexham LDP, with no guidance provided within planning policy on what an appropriate width for the central landscape corridor would be. Equally, neither Planning Policy Wales (PPW11) nor TAN 5: Nature Conservation and Planning set out any prescribed widths for ecology corridors. Instead, these promote high quality green infrastructure and ecological connectivity which is achieved through the proposals.

3. Furthermore, TEP (the Applicant's Ecologist) have confirmed that there are no fixed guidelines they are aware of which stipulate what an adequate width of a wildlife corridor should be. NRW have not provided any guidance on what an appropriate width would be.
4. As proposed, the central landscape corridor is substantially wider than the hedgerow bases (c.3-4m) that Great Crested Newts can currently use as terrestrial habitat in an otherwise intensively used agricultural landscape. This is appropriate for a species which has a maximum adult overall length of up to about 170mm. Furthermore, the inclusion of stepping stone ponds within the design which would likely be the focal point of any movement within the corridor.
5. To robustly test NRW's ask, SGP (the Applicant's masterplanner) have undertaken an analysis which shows that increasing the central corridor by c. 25% (i.e. a meaningful increase) to be c. 50m in width leads to a 15,000 sq. ft loss of floorspace from the masterplan. This would impact on Unit 1 - the largest unit in the masterplan – which may compromise the ability to attract tenants requiring the very largest units in the region.
6. This would inevitably reduce the overall number of jobs able to be achieved across Utopia City. In turn, this would undermine the strategic purpose of the Wrexham Flintshire Investment Zone, which seeks to maximise employment, business growth and private sector investment. Utopia City is a critical site within this. The layout of the scheme is directly aligned to the Investment Zone objectives to grow jobs and economic opportunity across the region.
7. Furthermore, Nicholsons (the Applicant's landscape architect) considers that there is little to be gained from any further widening with their discipline in mind. A corridor is a linear connecting feature that forms part of a wider framework. The current width sits well with the scale and proportions of the surrounding landscape areas and there is a consistency that is both legible and works ecologically. The value of the corridor is more than its width. There are elements in the central corridor such as the existing trees and ponds, new ponds, and footpaths which all sit comfortably within the space allocated. It is a sheltered and intimate space, noting that any widening changes this character.
8. In terms of NRW's comments about shared space, the illustrative masterplan shows footpaths through the central corridor recognising its ability to serve multiple purposes. This has been a factor in establish a 38m width which is considered substantial. However, the Applicant would be willing to consider installing a modest boundary treatment around any footpaths (likely in the form of a low fence). This would be confirmed via detail provided under a planning condition and/or via a future license application.
9. In conclusion, an exercise has been undertaken to assess whether the central corridor can be meaningfully widened. This has demonstrated that to do so would reduce the amount of developable area within the masterplan, conflicting with other objectives around job creation and delivery of employment floorspace. In addition, there are landscape reasons why the existing width should be considered appropriate.
10. In absence of any requirement for specific widths in planning policy or wider guidance, it is considered that the existing layout of the central corridor is appropriate. The Applicant has recently submitted plans for a Strategic Ecological Corridor which will deliver a substantial amount of land dedicated for ecological purposes. This groundbreaking scheme will represent the most significant step forward in terms of ecology provision within the Wrexham Industrial Estate in recent memory. This will not be achievable without being able to obtain planning permission for Utopia City.

11. In light of the above, it is requested that NRW consider the existing width of the central corridor acceptable. We would also request that NRW prepare an updated consultation response for the Utopia City application, noting that matters have moved on significantly since their letter dated November 2023 (but issued in September 2024) with a reference of CAS-262275-Z0R7. This should confirm any outstanding matters that need resolving prior to determination of the planning application, noting what has previously been required on other schemes within the Wrexham Industrial Estate (e.g. the FI Real Estate / Kingmoor site). This is especially noting NRW are now satisfied with the amount of ecological mitigation land being provided for Utopia City.