



Pont-rhyd-y-cyff, Maesteg Candidate Site Assessment:

Landscape & Visual Appraisal

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for Jehu/Waterstones
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Plans

Layout Sketch Plan with selected Viewpoints

Viewpoints & photos

Photo Viewpoint 1: From Bridgend Road looking east onto the site frontage

Photo Viewpoint 2: From bridleway within the site, looking south

Referenced Documents

- Bridgend County Borough Local Development Plan 2018-2033 Preferred Strategy Consultation Document October 2019
- Bridgend County Borough SPG 19 Biodiversity & Development: A Green Infrastructure Approach 2014
- A Landscape Character Assessment for Bridgend County Borough LUC 2013
- Illustrated Sketch & Concept Layout, Spring Design, August 2019
- Tree Survey, Treescene Ltd, March 2020
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Hawkeswood Ecology, April 2020

Pont-rhyd-y-cyff, Maesteg Landscape & Visual Appraisal

1. Introduction

1.1. Catherine Etchell Associates has been commissioned by Boyer Planning to prepare an abbreviated Landscape & Visual Appraisal (LVA) for a candidate housing site. The site lies to the south of Pont-ryd-y-cyff, in the Maesteg and Llynfi Valley Regeneration Growth Area.

1.2. This Appraisal assesses the effect of the proposal on views and landscape character, and makes recommendations for mitigation.

1.3. This LVA

- Identifies the visual and landscape character impacts which the proposed development would have on the surrounding landscape;
- Examines how the proposals respond to Planning Policy, in particular LANDMAP and Green Infrastructure Strategy
- Describes potential mitigation measures to avoid, reduce, remedy or compensate for identified effects and how the current proposed layout may best respond to reduction and amelioration of adverse potential visual impacts.

2. Qualifications & Experience

- 2.1. This report has been carried out on behalf of Catherine Etchell Associates by Catherine Etchell BSc MA Dip(Landscape Design) CMLI.
- 2.2. Catherine Etchell is a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute and her qualifications include a Masters Degree and Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from The University of Sheffield. Catherine has been working in urban and rural development since 1989 initially in the Public Sector (Planning) and in the last 22 years as Director of Catherine Etchell Associates. Over this period she has undertaken many projects relevant to this study including landscape design, planning and landscape & visual assessment, acting as expert witness for both public and private sector and lecturing on Landscape Masterplanning at the University of Wales, Cardiff.

3. Methodology

- 3.1. This report follows the Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition), produced by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. The methodology has been applied using desktop study, field assessment and photographic site survey (but not photomontages). A 'Landscape & Visual Appraisal' (LVA) is appropriate for sites which do not need a more thorough and detailed 'Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment'.
- 3.2. Site context in terms of location, landscape, and ecology is described in **Section 4**.
- 3.3. **Section 5** is based on desk top study and refers to the Local Development Plan (LDP) and planning policies including Green Infrastructure SPG, the LANDMAP database and Landscape Character Assessment'
- 3.4. Using field assessment and views analysis, **Section 6** considers potential visual effects arising from the proposed development. Photographs were taken with a 31.25 lens (equivalent to 50mm on a 35mm camera).
- 3.5. The Site was visited on 7 April 2020. Weather conditions were clear and occasionally overcast, giving very good visibility. Visiting the

site in good visibility is recommended by the Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact in order to obtain good distant views. Also recommended is to visit during winter months when screening from natural vegetation will be more limited.

- 3.6. Potential viewpoints were selected to include views from valued landscapes, and also by looking outwards from the site. Walking and driving around the site confirmed **two key viewpoints** and determined the general extent of visibility.
- 3.7. **Section 8** gives a conclusion of findings and design recommendations. These can be carried forward into preparation of a Landscape Strategy.

4. Site & Landscape Context

Site Location

- 4.1. The Site is located in the Llynfi Valley in Bridgend County Borough. It lies to the south of Maesteg and north of the M4 corridor, at OS Grid Ref SS871888. It is accessed from the A4063 (Bridgend Road) which links Maesteg to Bridgend and the M4.
- 4.2. The site consists of 3no. distinct areas of grassland, separated by 2no. mature tree corridors. One corridor is a former tramroad, and consists of two rows of mature trees with a wide central area with self-regenerating vegetation. The other tree corridor is a former overgrown hedgebank.
- 4.3. The site slopes down steeply to the vegetated corridor of the River Llynfi and a tributary stream of the Llynfi along the eastern boundaries. To the north the PROW crosses the mainline railway line.
- 4.4. The site wraps around Pont-rhyd-cyff. Pont-rhyd-cyff and the adjacent Llangynwyd (to the west of Bridgend Road) represent the southernmost extent of the existing Maesteg settlement area.
- 4.5. The northern third field is extremely wet and it is not proposed to build here.
- 4.6. The site frontage is open and borders a wide grass verge (outside the site) along Bridgend Road.
- 4.7. The site is crossed by 2no. linked Public Rights of Way which connect to footpaths crossing the railway line and accessing countryside to the north and south.
- 4.8. The semi-rural location is typified by an undulating landscape with small farmsteads, considerable tree cover and enclosed grazed fields, leading up to wooded valleys and upland pastures. Landscape character is discussed further in Section 5.

The Proposal (Refer to Layout & Viewpoints Plan)

- 4.9. The current consideration is for two fields to be developed for housing, with the northernmost third field retained as a PROW link and green corridor.

- 4.10. The proposal includes two-storey residential units and garages with associated access roads, parking, lighting, footpaths, substation etc
- 4.11. Existing landscape infrastructure is to be retained within the development

5. Review of Planning Policy

National Designations

- 5.1 **Landscape designations:** The site does not lie within any statutory landscape designation such as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 5.2 **Nature conservation designations:** The site is not covered by any statutory nature conservation designation such as Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 5.3 The woodland corridors are of importance visually and strategically for their mature trees and as wildlife corridors. They qualify as **UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats**. These are detailed in the Hawkeswood Ecology Appraisal.

Local Planning Policy and Local Designations

- 5.4 **Bridgend County Borough Local Development Plan 2006-2021** was adopted in 2013. A replacement LDP is required for 2018-2033 and the current consultation document identifies the Maesteg and Llynfi Valley as a Regeneration Growth Area.
- 5.5 Nineteen hectares of land south of Pont Rhyd-y-cyff, which includes this site, is proposed as Mixed Use Development i.e. residential, commercial, leisure and employment.
- 5.6 **Bridgend County Borough SPG 19 Biodiversity & Development: A Green Infrastructure Approach**

The site contains several GI Assets as identified in SPG19. These are shown below:

Green Infrastructure Approach: Assets & Opportunities

Asset	Opportunity
1. Amenity green space: former tramway	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. houses face onto tramway 2. POS provision 3. PROW and bridleway link to countryside 4. natural supervision 5. route to school 6. established street trees 7. attractive setting for residential area 8. provide landscape infrastructure to screen and soften development 9. existing leaning oak used as climbing tree 10. wildlife corridor 11. biodiversity benefits 12. cleaner air
2. Amenity green space: northern field	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. POS provision 2. PROW and bridleway link to countryside 3. school study area 4. attractive setting for residential area 5. wildlife corridor 6. biodiversity benefits including grassland species 7. cleaner air
3. Natural and semi-natural features: woodland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. attractive setting for residential area 2. provide landscape infrastructure to screen and soften development 3. wildlife habitat with little disturbance, linking to wildlife corridor 4. biodiversity benefits 5. cleaner air
4. Natural and semi-natural features: hedgerow	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. provide landscape infrastructure to screen and soften development

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. link into new garden hedges 3. bring wildlife into new gardens
5 Natural and semi-natural features: watercourses (River Llynfi and tributary outside site on boundary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. provide rich and diverse habitats for invertebrates, bats and birds 2. link to the wildlife corridors running throughout site 3. scope for integrating into SUDS scheme to enhance streetscene for example through swales and rain gardens, ensuring site run-off is filtered and returns to watercourse
6. Natural and semi-natural features: wetland	Refer to '2. Amenity green space: northern field ' above
7. Green corridors: river corridor	Refer to '5 Natural and semi-natural features: watercourses ' above
8. Green corridors: Rights of Way	Refer to '1. Amenity green space: former tramway ' and '2. Amenity green space: northern field ' above

LANDMAP

5.7 LANDMAP is used as the baseline for defining landscape character and sensitivity in order to assess the landscape impact of proposed development. It is defined by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) as *"the all-Wales GIS-based resource where landscape characteristics, qualities and influences on the landscape are recorded and evaluated into a nationally consistent spatial data set."*

5.8 LANDMAP consists of five aspects – Geological Landscape, Landscape Habitats, Historical Landscape, Cultural Landscape, and Visual & Sensory. The key LANDMAP aspect areas that relate to the site and the surrounding area within 1km are set out in the table below:

Visual & Sensory	Llynfi Valley VS884	Maesteg VS351		Garth Hill VS811
Classification	Mosaic lowland valley	Urban		Hillside and Scarp Slopes Grazing
Evaluation	Moderate	Low		Moderate

Geological Landscape	Llynfi Valley GL039	
Classification	Glacial Mountain Valley	
Evaluation	Moderate	

Landscape Habitats	LH010	LH009		LH002
Classification	Improved grassland	Broadleaved Woodland		Residential/ Green space
Evaluation	Moderate	High		Low

Historic Landscape	H02 Maesteg HL242	H01 Llangynwyd HL227	H03 Llynfi Valley Agriculture
Classification	Communication	Irregular Fieldscape	Other Fieldsapes
Evaluation	Outstanding	Outstanding	Moderate

Cultural Landscape	Llynfi, Garw and Ogmere Valleys CL023	Designated Landscapes CL056	Llangynwyd CL020
Classification	Other Urban	Land divisions	Folklore/Folk memory
Evaluation	Moderate	High	Outstanding

5.9 Other aspect areas within 1km of the site are not included above due to being:

- Low evaluation: or
- Not intervisible with the site; or
- Having only a minor part of the aspect area within 1km.

5.10 The Visual & Sensory aspect area which contains the site is described as follows:

The **Llynfi Valley Visual & Sensory** aspect area is a pleasant rural landscape in valley landform, with no significantly distinctive features. The site lies in the north west corner of this aspect area. It is summarised as:

“A very broad valley trending northwest/southeast with smaller subsidiary valleys trending approximately north/south rising from the valley floor at 50m to the upper slopes at 150mAOD, with gently rolling hillsides opening to the south/urban edge of Bridgend ... valley floor characterised by strong field pattern of hedges which contributes to feeling of controlled /safe landscape ... scattered small settlements and farmsteads within a rural setting...

Overall evaluation: Moderate

This is a pleasant valley slightly spoilt by urban edge boundaries, but very deserving of local importance

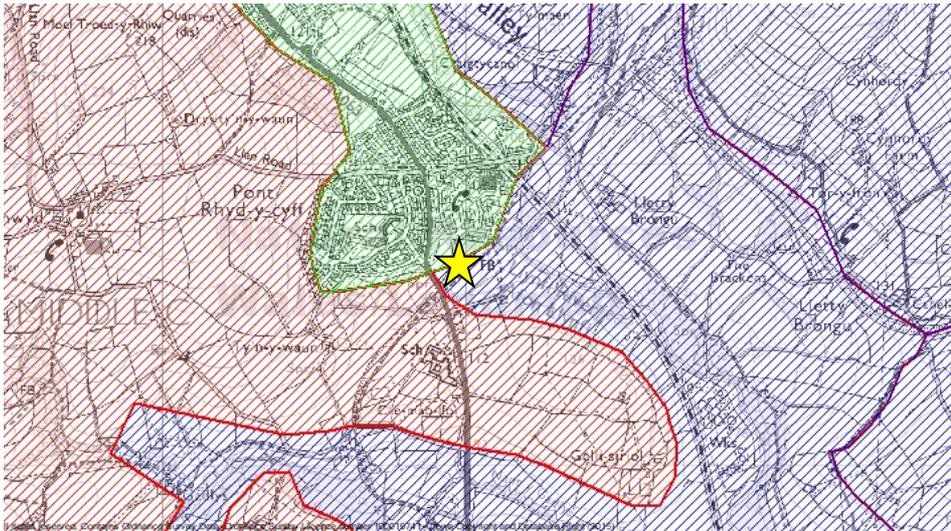
Scenic evaluation: Moderate- partially enclosed views, but relatively attractive within valley

Integrity: Moderate - urban edge detracts from otherwise relatively unspoilt landscape

Character value: Moderate - moderate sense of place

Rarity: Moderate

Key qualities and elements to conserve: pattern, field boundaries”



LANDMAP Llynfi Valley Visual & Sensory Aspect Area
The yellow star indicates the location of the site.

- 5.11 The north western part of the site is shown as being in the Maesteg aspect area, but due to an imprecise plotting of the aspect area boundaries on LANDMAP.
- 5.12 In the **Historic Landscapes** aspect, the site lies within the Maesteg aspect area which is evaluated as **Outstanding**. It is considered an important industrial communications/settlement corridor, including the Bridgend Road and the railway. **The old tramway on the site is part of the original Dyffryn Llynfi and Porthcawl Railway Company's 1825 tramroad to the coast. This is considered to be one of the key elements of the aspect area.**

Landscape Character Assessment

5.13 Fifteen Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) are identified in Bridgend County Borough, each with its own character, identity and 'sense of place'. The LCA within which the site lies is LCA2: Llynfi Lower Floor and Valley Slopes.

5.14 Key characteristics of LCA2 include:

- Llynfi river
- Views to prominent hill summits
- Riparian woodland, creating a sense of enclosure and shelter
- A sense of naturalness and tranquillity

All of these **represent typical characteristics** of the site.

5.15 Key landscape sensitivities to development-led change include valued semi-natural habitats such as **riparian vegetation, broadleaved semi-natural woodlands, rush pasture and scrub**. The site layout proposes the retention of these habitats.

5.16 The Assessment proposes to **protect the tranquil and undeveloped nature of the Llynfi tributary valleys**.

5.17 The Assessment proposes using traditional management techniques, **promoting natural regeneration and where possible extending areas of riparian vegetation, wet grassland and scrub**

5.18 It also recommends **creating, extending and linking semi-natural woodland and wetland habitats**.

6 Assessment of Visual Effects

- 6.1 The Views Appraisal assesses the visual impact of the development through consideration of representative viewpoints. These are selected as described in Section 3 Methodology above. The two views are representative of typical views and are shown on the plan below.
- 6.2 Due to the varied and undulating topography and extensive tree cover on the valley floor and extending up surrounding slopes, inter-visibility with surrounding roads and footpaths is extremely limited to non-existent. The tree cover within the site itself will considerably limit future views even in the context of the proposed development.
- 6.3 A potential third viewpoint was identified as from footpaths high on Moel Cynghordy. Due to coronavirus restrictions, these footpaths were not walked. However, due to convex hillside topography it is likely that the view would be lost as height was gained, and, where the site would be visible, it would form a very small part of the view and would blend in with the adjacent landscape of mixed rooftops and tree canopies. The views of the hillside from the site itself are considered important as being characteristic of the local landscape.
- 6.4 Viewpoint 1 is seen as a key viewpoint, highly visible from passing traffic and pedestrians on Bridgend Road, and local residents. As the site slopes away down the valley, it is this frontage which provides an immediate impression of the site. The wide open grass verge which runs between the road and the site is outside the site. Views across this verge will be an important component of the street scene. For this reason it would be undesirable to look onto closeboard fences. Three possibilities for treatment of this frontage are as follows:
- Continue a typical neighbourhood treatment (as in the houses opposite) by fronting onto Bridgend Road;
 - Continue the proposed tree and hedge buffer (to the north of the site access) between the grass verge and the closeboard fence, to link in with the woodland north of Parc-tyn-y-waun;
 - Use a more aesthetically pleasing boundary treatment e.g. stone faced wall, softened by climbing plants and trees planted in back gardens

6.5 Viewpoint 2 is taken in Field 3 and is visible to those on the PROW entering the site from the north. Since the field and surrounding trees are being retained, the close view will not be greatly altered. In the far view, houses will be visible behind the tree bank running long the northern edge of the housing site. For this reason it would be ideal to see the gardens and house frontages, rather than closeboard fencing.

7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 7.1 The **site's keys assets** described in section 5.6 – woodland, hedgerows, riparian vegetation and wet grassland – **are all to be retained**. This accords with the approach of the Landscape Character Assessment and **ensures that the existing landscape infrastructure will be in place to screen and soften the proposed development and provide wildlife corridors which link to surrounding countryside**.
- 7.2 **Inter-visibility with the surrounding countryside is remarkably low**, even without leaf cover, by virtue of the surrounding wooded valley landscape. The development will be screened and integrated into the landscape by the tree corridors within the site, and **will ensure that the valued landscape character described by LANDMAP and the LCA is not unduly compromised** by the development.
- 7.3 It is important that the **value of the tree corridors is recognised as an asset to the development** rather than a constraint. These historic trees are an important resource for **amenity and wildlife connectivity**. In addition, the **former tramroad is given 'outstanding' classification** in LANDMAP's Historic Landscapes aspect area. It gives the ideal **opportunity to re-route the PROW through the site and provide public open space**.
- 7.4 **Houses facing onto the former tramroad and tree bank** on the northern boundary would enable these established trees to be appreciated while forming an **avenue along new residential access roads**. It would also allow the tramroad to be utilised as a **safe footpath and open space with good natural supervision**, and increase the width of the resource.
- 7.5 The site is bounded by and accessed from Bridgend Road and therefore **views of the site from Bridgend Road are of key importance**. Houses on the opposite side of the road face onto the main road and it would **contribute to the character of the streetscene** if the site was similarly designed. Alternative treatments for woodland buffer or walled boundary are described at Section 6.4

Key Recommendations

- 7.6 **Retain and enhance the existing green infrastructure assets** as summarised in the table at Section 5.6. This will provide an attractive setting to the development, contribute to an interconnected network of public access and wildlife corridors linking to landscape infrastructure on the valley floor and sides, and provide green space provision for future residents.
- 7.7 **Limit use of closeboard fencing adjacent to green corridors**, in order to allow views in, encouraging **natural supervision of children's play** and to **prevent accumulation of rubbish** thrown over back fences.
- 7.8 **Ensure that the existing trees are retained in their entirety, without their health or aesthetics being compromised** by changes in level or retaining

walls, or buildings sited too close to canopies or rootzones. It is important that tree canopies are correctly plotted on the plan and considerations of slope and boundary treatment made at an early stage. **Any back gardens bordered by existing trees need to be of sufficient length to accommodate the trees** without cutting back the branches to provide shed space etc

- 7.9 **Provide an attractive site frontage in keeping with the typical residential area**; ensure that houses front onto Bridgend Road to provide continuity to the street scene.

Layout Sketch Plan & selected Viewpoints



Viewpoints and photos

Viewpoint 1 into site from Bridgend Road: shows wooded former tramroad beyond the open frontage and views to Moel Cynhordy beyond



Viewpoint 2 from within northernmost corner of site on the PROW, across Field 3 wet grassland towards oaks on old hedgebank



view towards Pont ryd y cyf from centre of site



tree bank between housing site and field 3



former tramroad wooded corridor



wide grass verge outside western site boundary (Bridgend Road frontage)