

TORFAEN
COUNTY
BOROUGH



BWRDEISTREF
SIROL
TORFAEN



Torfaen Replacement Local Development Plan (2022-2037)

Cynllun Datblygu Lleol Newydd Torfaen (2022-2037)

Call for Candidate Sites: Ecology Survey Guidance Note

*Galwad am Safleoedd Ymgeisiol:
Nodyn Canllaw Arolwg Ecolegol*

May 2023 / Mai 2023

An Executive Summary of this document is available in Welsh and English versions

Mae Crynodeb Gweithredol o'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg ac yn Saesneg

Introduction

This guidance note has been prepared to assist proposers of candidate sites with regards the ecological information required to support Candidate Site Assessment for the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP). The published Candidate Site Submission Guidance Note (May 2023) identifies that all sites progressing to Stage 2 of the Assessment will need a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report to be submitted during the Second Call for Sites / Call for Additional Supporting Information. Any sites for which there is a known ecological resource should provide the appropriate survey work with the initial site submission. This Ecology Survey Guidance Note was originally published in November 2020 and has been republished to support the new Call for Candidate Sites process. It is being provided at the earliest opportunity to enable maximum available time during the summer season for survey work to be prepared.

Overview of the Call for Candidate Sites

The Council will undertake an initial 8 week Call for Candidate Sites, publicised in accordance with the Community Involvement Strategy and facilitated by OpusConsult. Submissions will be invited from interested parties who wish to have land considered for inclusion within the RDLP, either for development, re-development or protection from development. Potential land uses include housing, employment, community facilities, tourism, green infrastructure, waste, health, education, social care, Gypsy and Traveller provision, retail, recreation, renewable energy, biodiversity, transport infrastructure and minerals.

Previously submitted candidate sites (2018 or 2020/21) and existing Local Development Plan allocations without current planning consent will need to be resubmitted. If a candidate site was ruled out previously, or the site was allocated but has not been developed, any new submission should consider the reasons why the site has not progressed and provide any additional information (e.g. surveys) to explain how any constraints can be overcome and why the site should be reconsidered for allocation.

All sites submitted during the 'Call for Candidate Sites' will be assessed using the Council's candidate site assessment methodology. The methodology is available on the Council's web site and provides more detailed information on how the Council will consider the information provided on the candidate site submission form.

A Second Call for Sites running concurrently with the Preferred Strategy consultation will accept new sites and provide existing site proposers the opportunity to submit additional supporting information to address any outstanding issues. Stage 2 viability assessments (DVMs) and Preliminary Ecological Assessment Reports will be required at this time. It is not expected that the Council will accept any new Candidate Sites following the close of the Second Call for Sites.

Baseline Ecological Information

To inform the allocation and deliverability of candidate sites through the RLDP process in line with relevant policy and legislation, Torfaen County Borough Council requires the submission of baseline ecological information. This methodology has been prepared in order to ensure that there is a consistent approach to this submission and that the quality of the information provided is adequate.

Site Appraisals should be presented in a report and describe the existing ecological value of the proposed Candidate Site, principally based on botanical survey but with consideration of other potential Protected or Priority species that may be present. Sites must be also assessed for their potential to qualify wholly or in part as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) using the Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales.

Following site appraisal, an evaluation of status or potential impact on the biodiversity of the site must be made and classified as either: High, Medium or Low value. This status will be quality assured and checked by the Council through the Candidate Sites Assessment process.

In addition to this, GIS (Geographical Information Systems) data in the format of shape files should be provided to provide visual representation of the ecological status of each site.

Requirements for Candidate Site Assessment

Due to the large number of candidate sites proposed, the Council requires a consistent approach to ecological data gathering and summarisation. All Appraisals must comply with the [CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal](#) and be undertaken and reviewed by CIEEM members only. All appraisals must include a summary sheet to be used by the LPA (template included at the end of this document). **The RLDP must be based on robust evidence and our expectation is that this guidance is followed.**

Desk-Based Study - The desk based study shall be based on the following as a minimum:

- A 1km SEWBRc data search for Protected and Priority Species;
- A 1km SEWBRc data search for existing designations including SACs, SPA, Ramsar site, SSSIs, Local Wildlife Sites, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. This must include 'reasons for designation' for LWS/SINCs;
- Use of the Ancient Woodland Inventory to identify woodland designations ASNW, PAWS etc.;
- Review of any previous walkover undertaken for the adopted LDP; and
- Appraisals will be expected to consider any relevant ecological records that have been previously generated by studies to inform planning undertaken on or near the sites.

Field Assessments - The optimum period for the assessment of biodiversity and habitats is between the months of April -July. Sites are to be surveyed according to the methodology detailed in the 'Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey'. The following details and features must also be noted:

- Habitats present and features of nature conservation interest including Priority Habitat (Section 7 Habitat¹);
- Protected or Priority (Section 7) species - signs indicating presence and potential for the habitat to support such;
- Site of Importance for Nature Conservation - assessment of the condition of the site with respect to its potential to qualify as a SINC;
- Consideration of all hedgerows in the context of the Hedgerow Regulations 1997;

¹ Environment (Wales) Act 2016

- Veteran trees - presence of over-mature trees;
- Consideration of the value of the site in terms of habitat connectivity / ecosystem resilience using best available guidance; and
- Requirements for further ecological survey.

Expertise of consultants - The information will need to be prepared and reviewed by an appropriately experienced ecologist that is a member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

Biodiversity Evaluation - Using the results of the desk-based survey and field assessments, an evaluation of status or impact of the biodiversity of the site shall be made and classified as either: High, Medium or Low value.

SINC Identification - Local Development Plan Candidate Sites **must be assessed against the criteria in the ‘Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South East Wales’.**

Summary of Outputs - The following will be expected to be submitted to the LPA as a supporting document.

1. **Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (PEAR)** - A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report (PEAR) in accordance with the [CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal](#) / [Guidelines for ecological report writing](#).
2. **Site summary form** - A Site Summary Form shall be completed for each Candidate Site based on both field survey and desk-based assessments. A blank Site Detail Form and accompanying explanatory notes are provided in Annexes 1 & 2.
3. **Site Values** - For all sites, the overall value for biodiversity will need to be defined (see evaluation criteria below). The Council may adjust this value depending on further ecological survey and evidence prior to the Deposit Plan.
4. **SINC Assessment** - Candidate sites/parts of sites must be considered for the potential for them to be of SINC quality. If the site, or part of the site meets the SINC criteria, any designation will be undertaken by a SINC expert panel.

Evaluation Criteria - Sites must be evaluated using the following criteria drawn together using the methodology for the adopted Local Development Plan, Ratcliffe Criteria² and Local Wildlife Site guidelines³. The evaluation will be checked and quality assured by the Council. **Deliberate underestimation of site value could jeopardise consideration of the site for inclusion in the Deposit Plan.**

HIGH (Red)

- Candidate Site includes land designated as SAC/SPA/Ramsar/SSSI
- Site wholly designated as Local Wildlife Site/SINC/ASNW
- Site identified as Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) quality during field assessment
- Site is in the majority (>50%) composed of Priority Habitat(s) (Section 7) Environment (Wales) Act 2016
- Site of existing value for connecting semi-natural habitats in the landscape which is considered to be critical in the context of a protected species or protected site
- Protected species recorded on site to an extent that development will not be possible

² Ratcliffe, 1977

³ South Wales Wildlife Sites Partnership, 2004 (as amended)

MEDIUM (Orange)

- Site close / adjacent to a SAC/SPA/Ramsar/SSSI/LWS/SINC/ASNW
- Site habitat(s) close to SINC quality but threshold for designation not reached
- Part of the site includes habitats that meet LWS / SINC threshold
- An already designated LWS/SINC present within a candidate site of overall lower biodiversity value
- Presence of Priority Habitat (Section 7) within the candidate site (except hedgerow)
- 'Important' hedgerow/s present
- Veteran / over mature tree(s) present
- Site of existing value for connecting semi-natural habitats in the landscape as identified in the ecological connectivity assessment and/or during field surveys.
- Protected species recorded / reasonable likely to be found on site but unlikely to prevent development if appropriate mitigation and compensation provided

LOW (Green)

- Site not near any protected sites SAC/SPA/Ramsar/SSSI/LWS/ANSW
- Site assessed as not of SINC quality
- Limited or no features of biodiversity interest
- No priority habitats on site (with the exception of hedgerows)
- Site of very limited value for connecting semi-natural habitats in the landscape
- No protected species on or near site

Annex 1

Candidate Site Reference No: CS-

Site General Information	
Name:	Grid Reference:
Current land use & management:	Size:
Proposed use:	Form Completed by:
Overall Site Evaluation: HIGH / MEDIUM / LOW	

Site Summary Table

SEWBRReC unique data code:		Section 7 Habitat(s)	
Statutory Designated Site(s)		Protected Species	
Non Statutory Designated Site(s)		Section 7 Species	
SINC Recommendation		Ecological Connectivity	

Statutory Designated Sites

Is the site within or adjacent to an International or European Designated Site? (Special Protection Area, Ramsar Site or Special Area of Conservation) *(Underline the relevant designation)*

- Whole of site
- Part of site
- Directly adjacent/within 250m buffer
- Within 500m buffer
- Within 1km buffer
- No

Is the site within or adjacent to a Nationally Designated Site? (National Nature Reserve or Site of Special Scientific Interest) *(Underline the relevant designation)*

- Within
- Part of site
- Directly adjacent/within 250m buffer
- Within 500m buffer
- No

Non Statutory Designated Sites

Is the site within or adjacent to a pre-designated Locally Designated Site? (Local Wildlife Site / Site of Importance for Nature Conservation or Ancient Semi Natural Woodland)

- Within
- Part of site
- Directly adjacent/within 250m buffer
- Within 500m buffer
- No

List All Relevant Statutory and Non Statutory Designated Sites identified by the desktop study:

SINC Recommendation

Is the whole site or part of the site of SINC (LWS) quality? (*underline whole or part as appropriate*)

Yes

Whole

Part

Qualifying criteria

Borderline

No

Has the Torfaen CBC Ecologist been contacted to discuss what further information may be required?

Yes:

No:

Date:

Priority Habitats and Important Features

Phase 1 Habitat	Wales Priority Habitat (Section 7)	% of whole site

Are there any **veteran trees or over-mature trees** on site?

Yes

No

If 'Yes' how many and what species?

Does the site have any **hedgerows**?

Species-rich (high) - potential Hedgerow Regs Quality

	Length (m)
--	------------

Species-poor (medium) - Has some potential

	Length (m)
--	------------

Species-poor (low) - Single species dominant AND Gappy

	Length (m)
--	------------

No

--

Does the site have any **water features** present?

Ponds

--

Streams

--

Ditches

--

Other:

--

No

--

Ecological Connectivity

Adjacent Land Uses & Habitats

Does the site have any ecological connectivity value to either adjacent habitat or the wider landscape?

Critical connectivity:

Existing Connectivity

No connectivity:

Connectivity Opportunity:

Protected Species

Have protected species been recorded at the site / reasonably likely to be present at site?

Confirmed

Reasonably likely

No and unlikely to be present

List Species: SEWBRc record	Evidence of presence on site (seen directly or field signs)	Potential to be present on site (habitat and location mean that it is likely)

Priority Species

Are there records for Priority (Section 7) Species (not included above)?

Yes

Potential

No

List Species: SEWBRc record	Evidence of presence on site (seen directly or field signs)	Potential to be present on site (habitat and location mean that it is likely)

Conclusions

What additional ecological surveys/assessments will be required?

To determine if the site could be allocated for the purpose identified	Prior to the submission of planning application to influence site design etc.
--	---

Summary of potential biodiversity constraints

Recommended avoidance / mitigation / compensation measures

Enhancements that could be delivered through development including ecological connectivity opportunities



Annex 2: Notes to Accompany Site Detail Form (Torfaen County Borough Council reserves the right to amend any Site Detail Form upon detailed consideration of the site and quality assurance of the information submitted)

Site General Information - Site reference number, name, National Grid Reference, size (ha) and proposed use. 'Current Use & current management' describes the use of the site at the time of surveying and how it appears to be managed.

Overall Site Evaluation - To be completed based upon this guidance. One of the evaluation categories should be chosen i.e. **High / Medium / Low**. This evaluation could be subject to change upon consideration of the site and quality assurance by the Council.

Summary Table - The summary table gives a quick reference guide to the ecological constraints of the site. The summary needs to show an existing protected site (**yes**), adjacent sites within 250m (**adj**) adjacent sites within 500m (**adj**) and no protected sites within 500m (**no**). Note that development can potentially affect protected sites that are further than 500m away.

Non-statutory sites need to show an existing site (**yes**), adjacent sites within 250m (**adj**) adjacent sites within 500m (**adj**) and no protected sites within 500m (**no**).

SINC recommendation indicates whether the whole site is recommended for SINC designation (**yes**), part of the site is recommended for SINC designation (**part**), the site may meet the criteria following further survey and examination (borderline site - **border**), or the site is not recommended for SINC designation (**no**).

Wales Priority Habitat (Section 7) is considered according to the table. This shows whether these habitats cover over 50% of a site (**yes**), less than 50% of a site (**part**) or are not present (**no**).

Projected and Priority species are considered regarding presence (**yes**), reasonable likelihood of presence / possible presence (**poss**) and likely absence (**no**) of Protected and Priority species are indicated in the summary table.

Ecological connectivity is considered regarding the importance of that connectivity from critical (**crit**), some (**conn**), to no connectivity (**no**).

Statutory Designated Sites - The information regarding designated sites shall be obtained via SEWBRc. Some interpretation of that data will need to be undertaken.

Non Statutory Designated Sites - The information regarding SINC/LWS sites shall be obtained via SEWBRc (site name and reason for designation).

Designated ancient woodland is defined as ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) – areas that have been wooded since at least 1600. ASNW is listed on Ancient Woodland Inventory 2011 and available on the [Lle](#) website. However, in Torfaen, a large number of ASNW are designated as SINC and shall therefore be generated during the above data search.

SINC Recommendation - This section indicates whether the whole site or part of the site meets the criteria for SINC designation in Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales. The criterion under which the site qualifies shall be noted. The LPA Biodiversity & Ecology Officers should be contacted for relevant templates and to discuss the value of the site / part of the site.

Priority Habitats and Important Features - Habitats as defined by the Phase 1 survey guidelines and Wales Priority Habitat (defined as those listed as Section 7 Habitats of Principal Importance for

Conserving Biological Diversity in Wales under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016) shall be listed in the table. A % value for the habitat types shall be listed.

Guidance for assessment of the importance of hedgerows and veteran/over mature trees is included in Annex 3 & 4.

Ecological Connectivity - Sites shall be assessed for existing value for connecting semi-natural habitats in the landscape using Ecological Connectivity Assessment and/or during field surveys. Both habitats and species need to be considered. Opportunities for delivery of habitat connectivity to be listed under the Enhancements section of the form.

Protected species - These tables indicate the presence or potential presence of protected species, based on SEWBRc records, the desk survey and field survey results. Species with protection or designation at several levels are listed under their highest degree of protection only.

Field signs and sightings are those recorded during the Phase 1 habitat survey.

Potential presence is based on the habitats on and adjacent to the site, the ecology of the species, and knowledge of the species distribution.

Protected Species are defined as those species listed on Schedules 2 and 4 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) or any post Brexit equivalent legislation AND Species protected under UK legislation i.e. those species listed under Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) or the Protection of Badgers Act, 1992. Species protected from sale only are excluded.

Wales Priority Species are defined as those listed as species of Principal Importance for Conserving Biological Diversity in Wales under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Conclusions - Additional surveys and assessments are listed. These are based on the potential presence of protected species. Any surveys that may be necessary prior to the allocation of the site should be undertaken.

Potential constraints are summarised, based on the findings of the desk-based assessment and field survey, as recorded in previous sections.

Recommendations for mitigation and enhancement are suggested. These are intended as an indication only, as further survey will be needed to inform mitigation, and the design and purpose of the development will determine ecological impacts and influence mitigation and enhancement possibilities.

Annex 3: Hedgerow Classification

- HIGH:** Species-rich containing at least five native woody species in a 30 metre sample. Consider features such as banks, ditches, standing trees, ground flora associated and connecting hedges/woodland areas.
Four woody species are recorded and other features are considered important. This would include, potential dormouse habitat.
- MEDIUM:** Less than five native woody species in a 30 metre stretch, without other features present.
Less than four native woody species, with other features present
- LOW:** Less than four native woody species, without other features present. Gappy hedges, newly planted.

Annex 4: Veteran and Over Mature Tree Classification

- HIGH:** Veteran trees >3.7m circumference, 1.3m from base (to include native and non-native species)
Large over-mature trees >2m circumference, or estimated to be over 200 years old, which exhibit characteristics such as dead wood, rot hollows and bracket fungi. To include native and non-native species.