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PLANNING

**LAND AT GREEN GATES FARM,
ABERGELE ROAD, ST ASAPH
DESIGN, ACCESS AND PLANNING STATEMENT
DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
JULY 2024
2023.136_02**

Conwy | 20 Connaught House, Riverside Business Park, Benarth Road, Conwy LL32 8UB

Chester | 1 Aldford House, Bell Meadow Business Park, Pulford, Chester, CH4 9EP

Design, Access and Planning Statement



Status of report:	Draft for PAC	V1.0	July 2024
Author:	Sioned Edwards MRTPI		
Checker:	Marc Hamilton		
Reviewer:	Sioned Edwards MRTPI		
Approved by:	Sioned Edwards MRTPI		
Document control:	CAD.01		

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Design, Access and Planning Statement accompanies a full planning application by Denbighshire County Council for demolition of existing buildings, change of use of land from agricultural land to a new nature reserve and habitat creation comprising of the restoration of existing ponds, the creation of new ponds, the creation of a wetland area adjacent to two small watercourses and creation of woodland and grassland habitat areas, erection of a Biodiversity Hub building to provide educational facility and construction of permissive pathways on land at Green Gates Farm, Abergele Road, St Asaph, LL17 0LE.
- 1.2 This application represents phase three of habitat creation lead by Denbighshire County Council at Green Gates farm. Phase one comprises of the establishment of a County Tree Nursery. Phase two comprises of the creation of a 31 acre nature reserve which is subject to a separate planning application which has recently been submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA). A fourth phase of development is also proposed by way of a one acre brownfield site creation – the proposals for the fourth phase are yet to be developed. The areas for each phase are identified in Figure 2.1.
- 1.3 Following the enactment of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) the requirement for pre-application consultation on major development schemes was implemented. This includes development carried out on a site having an area of one hectare or more. Therefore, as the site area proposed is nearly 16 hectares, this triggers the need to undertake a Pre-Application Consultation.
- 1.4 The requirement to carry out pre-application consultation falls under Section 17 of the Act and the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012 (DMPWO) as amended by the 2016 Order. Guidance on carrying out the pre-application consultation requirements within the Act has been provided by the Welsh Government set out in Article 1 of the Town and Country Planning DMPWO (Amendment) 2016 ‘Guidance on Pre-application Consultation’.
- 1.5 This Design, Access and Planning Statement is issued as part of a suite of documents for Pre-Application Consultation prior to the submission of a formal planning application.
- 1.6 As required by the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order (Amendment) 2016 the statement aims to address the following matters;

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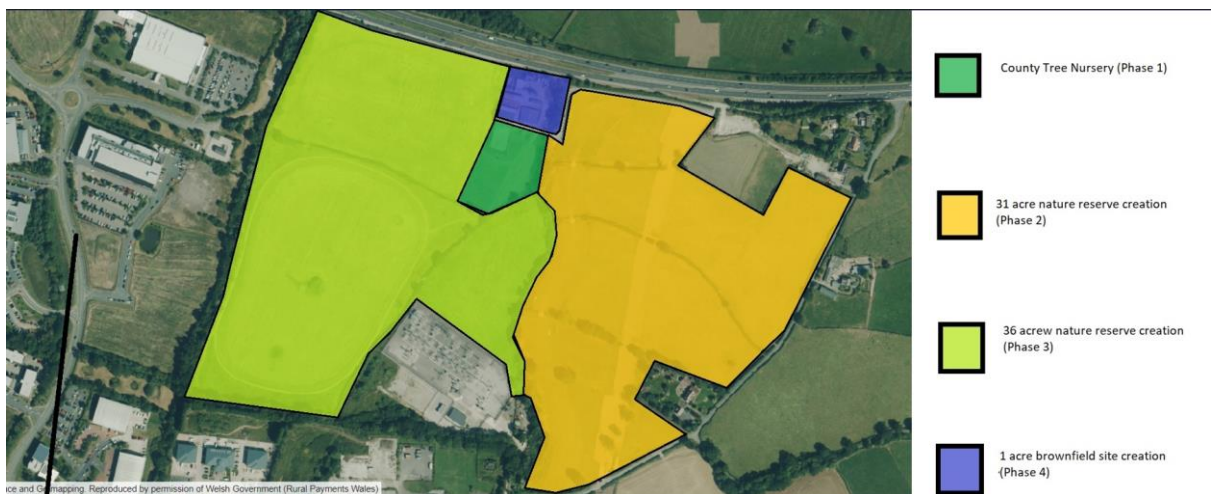
- Explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development;
- Demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the development and how the design of the development takes that context into account;
- Explain the policy or approach adopted as to access, and how policies relating to access in the development plan have been taken into account; and
- Explain how any specific issues which might affect access to the development have been addressed.

1.7 The adopted local plan is the Denbighshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2006-2021.

2. The site and context

- 2.1 The site comprises nearly 16 hectares which includes agricultural fields, an area of hardstanding and derelict buildings located at the former county farm known as Green Gates Farm in St Asaph. The site comprises of land located to the west and adjacent to the existing farm buildings within the main farmyard, which are now derelict and redundant, and to the existing County Tree Nursery.
- 2.2 The proposed development forms part of phase III of habitat creation at Green Gates farm which is being led by the applicant. The first phase of development comprised of the establishment of a County Tree Nursery. Phase two comprised of the creation of a 31 acre nature reserve which is subject to a separate planning application which has recently been submitted to the LPA. A fourth phase of development is also proposed by way of a one acre brownfield site creation – the proposals for the fourth phase are yet to be developed. The areas for each phase are identified in Figure 2.1.
- 2.3 The extent of the application site (phase III) is identified by light green shading in Figure 2.1. The other phases of habitat creation are also identified. Photographs of the application site have been included as part of the submission documents.

Figure 2.1 Aerial image identifying various phases of nature conservation creation at Green Gates farm. This application relates to phase 3.

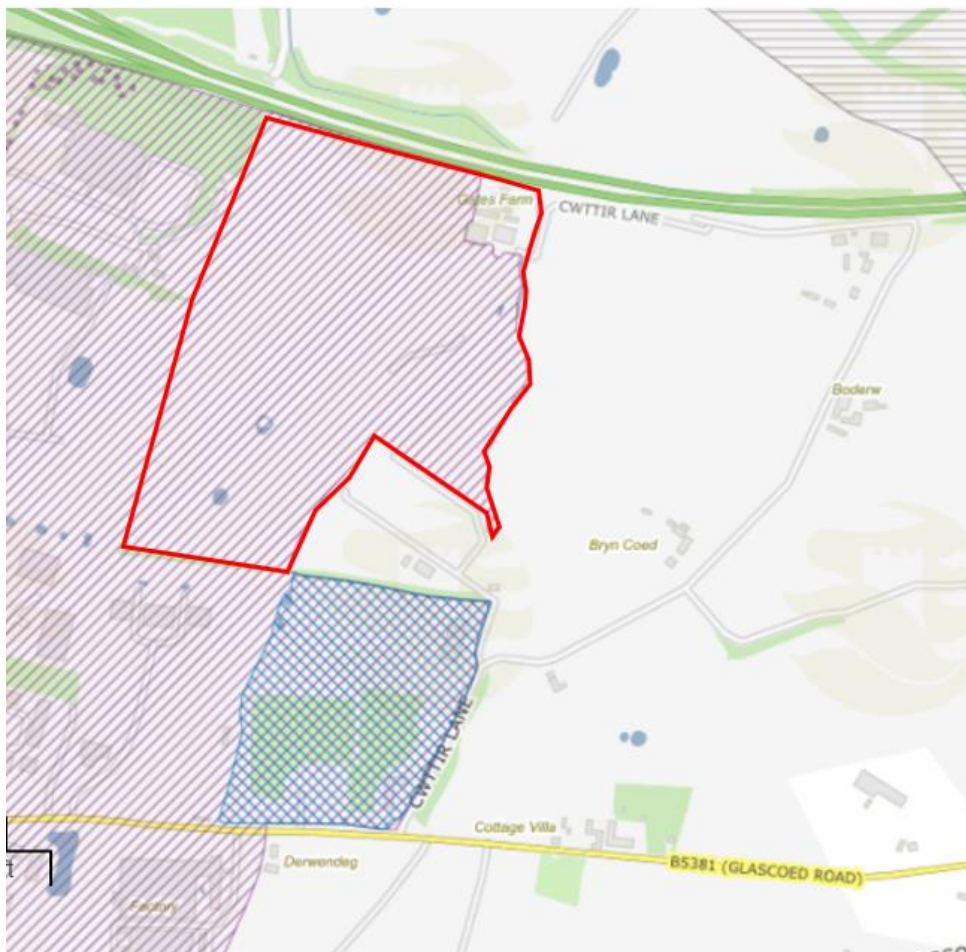


- 2.4 The site has been identified as Grade 3b agricultural land on the Welsh Government agricultural land classification predictive map. It is currently comprised of species poor grassland and was previously heavily grazed by horses.

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- 2.5 The application site lies immediately to the south of the A55 dual carriageway to the north. Land to the east forms part of the second phase of habitat creation at Green Gates Farm. St Asaph electrical substation lies to the south-east of the application site with the Vista brownfield site and office development forming part of the St Asaph Business Park located to the south and to the west which includes The OpTIC Centre and offices for TRB.
- 2.6 Vehicular access to the application site is via an existing access track which runs from Cwttir Lane further east and runs along the south of the A55, providing access to Green Gates Farm. There is an existing bridge crossing a stream which runs along the application site's eastern boundary.
- 2.7 The vast majority of the application site (all land except for the farmyard at Green Gates Farm) forms part of an Employment land allocation in the Denbighshire LDP. The extent of the employment allocation is identified by purple lines in Figure 2.2 with the application site outlined in red.

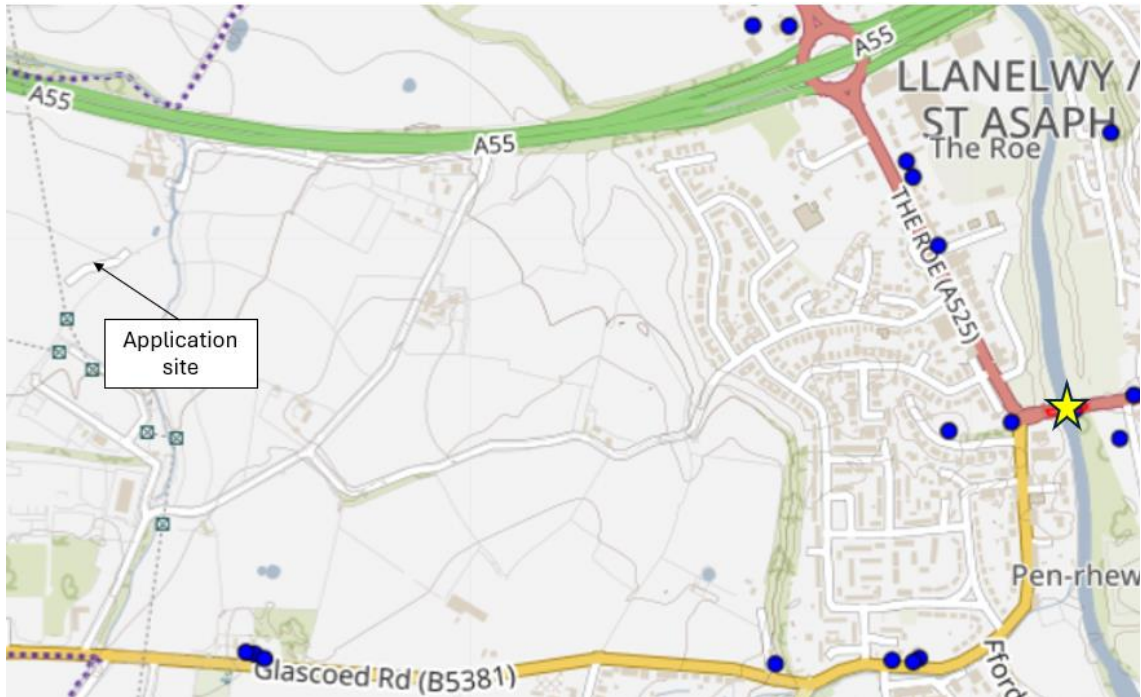
Figure 2.2 Extract of Denbighshire LDP map



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- 2.8 The site is also located around 1.3km of the St Asaph Bridge, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The location of the monument in relation to the application site is provided in Figure 2.3 below.

Figure 2.3 Location of St Asaph Bridge (star) in relation to the application site (Google Maps)



3. The proposed development

Use

- 3.1 The proposed development is for the change of use of agricultural land to create a new nature reserve at the site, with access into the site for public use to the northern part of the site. No public access would be available to the two southern fields (except on guided walks and visits).
- 3.2 The proposed development would form the third phase of habitat creation at Green Gates Farm which is being led by Denbighshire County Council as the applicant.
- 3.3 The derelict farm house and farm buildings at the site would be demolished.

Layout and access, appearance, amount and scale

- 3.4 The existing area of hardstanding at the farmyard would remain as hardstanding and would either be repurposed to provide car parking spaces or to be broken up to create cracks and crevices.
- 3.5 The northern part of the site would include a proposed footpath/track that would provide a permissive path leading to the viewing mound. Engineering works would be undertaken in this area reusing ground dug up from creating pods, to create a viewing platform. A spiralling footpath would lead up to the viewing platform at the top of the man-made mound which would be around 5m in height. Steel railing would be provided around the edge of the spiralling footpath.
- 3.6 Deer protection fencing (timber, 2m high) would be provided around the area of County Coppice along the northern boundary and along the two southern fields as shown in blue in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Extract of site plan showing Deer protection fencing in blue



- 3.7 Two ponds (GG4 and GG6) are proposed to be restored with six additional ponds to be created.
- 3.8 The proposed habitat areas also include species-rich grassland, marshy grassland, reedbed and pond edge plants, fen-type habitats, hedgerows and planted woodland blocks.
- 3.9 The proposed development would contribute towards helping Denbighshire County Council achieve its targets in relation to their declared Climate and Ecological Emergency, and will move the Council further towards their goal of becoming an ecologically positive council.

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- 3.10 The new permissive route would provide an additional area that would be accessible within nature to workers/ volunteers at the County Tree Nursery who currently walk along roads and pavements next to busy roads to access their place of work. The development would also provide those workers with access to nature during their recess/lunch breaks. This would be in addition to the permissive pathways to be provided as part of phase II of the habitat creation development.
- 3.11 The permissive route would also provide further access to nature for local residents and for staff working at the neighbouring St Asaph Business Park. This is in line with the objectives of the Welsh Government 'Local Places for Nature' grant allocation, which is partly funding the works.
- 3.12 Notwithstanding the above, the pathway would be located towards the northern part of the site, leaving the remainder of the site to the south for biodiversity to thrive.

Landscaping

- 3.13 Extensive soft landscaping is proposed within the site to conserve, enhance and support biodiversity within the nature reserve. Proposed planting plans and ecological enhancement are provided in more detail within the proposed plans and supporting documents submitted with this application.

4. Policy context

National planning policy and guidance

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040

- 4.1 Future Wales – the National Plan 2040 is the recently produced national development framework which sets the direction for development in Wales to 2040 at a strategic level. It is a development plan with a strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy, achieving decarbonisation and climate-resilience, developing strong ecosystems and improving the health and well-being of our communities.

Planning Policy Wales Edition 12, 2023

- 4.2 The primary objective of PPW is to ensure that the planning system contributes towards the delivery of sustainable development and improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, as required by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other key legislation and resultant duties such as the Socio-economic Duty. A well-functioning planning system is fundamental for sustainable development and achieving sustainable places.
- 4.3 PPW defines “sustainable development” as “the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals. Acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle means that a body must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.
- 4.4 Paragraph 4.5.1 of PPW states that “[r]ecreational spaces are vital for our health, well-being and amenity, and can contribute to an area’s green infrastructure. They provide a place for play, sport, healthy physical activity and a place to relax often in the presence of nature, and they contribute to our quality of life. Networks of high quality, accessible green spaces and recreation spaces will also promote nature conservation, biodiversity and provide enjoyable opportunities for residents and visitors to participate in a wide range of physical activities. These activities are important for the well-being

of children and adults and for the social, environmental, cultural and economic life of Wales”.

Technical Advice Notes (TAN's)

4.5 Planning Policy Wales is supplemented by guidance contained in Technical Advice Notes (TANs). The following are relevant to this application:

- TAN 5: Nature Conservation and Planning;
- TAN 12: Design;
- TAN 16: Sport, Recreation and Open Space;
- TAN 23: Economic Development; and
- TAN 24: The Historic Environment.

Building Better Places - The Planning System Delivering Resilient and Brighter Futures (2020)

4.6 This guidance emphasises the importance of where we live and the quality of the environment around us. It emphasises the importance of ‘Placemaking’ principles and identifies eight issues which need to be resolved across Wales, including:

- Active travel: exercise and rediscovered transport methods;
- Green infrastructure, health and well-being and ecological resilience;
- Improving air quality and soundscapes for better health and well-being.

Local planning policy and guidance

4.7 The application site lies within Denbighshire County Council and the local planning policy context is set out within the adopted development plan, the Denbighshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2006 – 2021, which was adopted in 2013. The relevant policies are set out below:

- Policy PSE 2 – Land for employment uses;
- Policy RD1 – Sustainable development and good standard design;
- Policy BCS11 – Recreation and Open Space;
- Policy VOE5 – Conservation of natural resources;

4.8 Additionally, the following Local Planning Authority’s Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is relevant to this application:

- Conservation and Enhancement of Biodiversity; and

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- Recreational Public Open Space.

5. Main considerations

Principle of development

- 5.1 The development is mainly for the change of use of land, with ancillary development proposed, to create a new nature reserve. The majority of the application site (except the area of hardstanding around the farmyard) forms part of an employment allocation in connection with the St Asaph Business Park. Therefore, the main issues to consider are the loss of allocated employment land and the use of the site for a new nature reserve.
- 5.2 As the application site is identified in the LDP as land for employment, policy PSE 2 is applicable. It advises that land and premises at the St Asaph Business Park is safeguarded and allocated as a high-quality employment site where proposals will be supported for B1 and B2 general industrial.
- 5.3 The proposal would introduce a nature reserve use to the site which would be a departure from the Development Plan.
- 5.4 Technical Advice Note (TAN) 23 provides guidance on matters relating to economic development and recognises the diverse range of employment uses that are present in the economy in Wales. TAN 23 was published in February 2014, which is after the adoption of the Denbighshire LDP.
- 5.5 Paragraph 4.6.9 of TAN 23 provides guidance on the situations where existing employment sites could be release for other uses and reads:

“Existing employment sites should only be released for other uses if one or more of the following apply:

- *they have poor prospects of being re-occupied for their previous use;*
- *the particular market that the site is part of is oversupplied;*
- *the existing employment use has unacceptable adverse impacts on amenity or the environment;*
- *the proposed redevelopment does not compromise unduly neighbouring employment sites that are to be retained;*
- *other priorities, such as housing need, override more narrowly focussed economic considerations; and/or*

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- *land of equal or better quality is made available elsewhere, even if this is not within the local planning authority boundary”.*
- 5.6 The development of the site as proposed on a safeguarded employment site is considered to comply with the following relevant criteria (in accordance with TAN 23):
- *“they have poor prospects of being re-occupied for their previous use”;*
 - *“the proposed redevelopment does not compromise unduly neighbouring employment sites that are to be retained;”*
- 5.7 When the adjoining St Asaph Business Park was being developed, infrastructure and services to serve the business park were laid across the application site, which has severely constrained the extent of developable area available which could be developed to deliver an employment use at the site. This means that the application site has poor prospects of ever being developed for employment purposes.
- 5.8 The proposal relates to habitat creation as part of a nature reserve, that would form part of a wider scheme of habitat creation being led by Denbighshire County Council. It is not considered that releasing the application site to form part of a nature reserve would unduly compromise the neighbouring employment sites, the majority of which have been developed, with the exception of the Vista site to the south, which benefits from a hybrid planning permission.
- 5.9 The agricultural farmstead at Green Gates Farm is currently redundant; it is currently used as the site of Denbighshire County Council’s County Tree Nursery. The Council’s work to date has encouraged a large number of volunteers at the site, and recent project work with local schools has shown that there is a clear demand for nature based activities within the local community.
- 5.10 By creating the resources, and focusing on education and demonstrating best-practice approaches to restoring nature conservation, the provision of the nature reserve would provide residents and volunteers alike with the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the restoration of the environment.
- 5.11 The proposal would provide a permissive path with a viewing platform within the site to allow access to nature for local residents, workers at the nearby St Asaph Business Park to the west, and volunteers at the tree nursery. Additionally, the nature reserve would link directly with the tree nursery as the biodiversity enhancements (wildflower creation, tree planting, etc) would feature stock produced at the nursery itself. This would build upon the proposals for a nature reserve on land immediately to the east

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which forms part of a separate planning application currently being considered by the LPA.

- 5.12 There are no specific policies within the LDP which relate to the creation of new nature reserves or public open space within the Plan area. However, the general thrust of Policy BCS11 seeks to support the protection and enhancement of public open space, allotments and amenity greenspace provision. The justification text for the policy states that “[n]ational guidance recognises the linkages between opportunities for exercise and people’s general health and well-being”, and it is considered that the proposal would encompass these principles through the provision of a nature reserve which would be accessible to the public. The proposal would provide access to nature for local residents/workers/volunteers during their lunch breaks or before/after work, which would improve well-being and health.
- 5.13 The proposed development also seeks to improve public safety through the creation of a permissible pathway and viewing platform within the northern part of the site. The new permissive route will provide direct access to nature for a large number of local residents, workers and volunteers who currently walk along the narrow road Cwttir Lane, and along the A55 to the north.
- 5.14 Therefore, it is considered that the proposed development would be acceptable in principle.

Heritage assets

- 5.15 The site is also located within around 1.3 km of the St Asaph Bridge, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Given the nature of the proposed development and the separation distance, it is not considered that the proposed development would have any impact upon this heritage asset.

Biodiversity

- 5.16 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been prepared and submitted as part of this planning application, setting out the ecological constraints of the site and identifying any protected, priority, designated or otherwise important species. Due to the nature of the application, a wide range of ecological enhancements and mitigation measures are proposed to ensure optimum conservation and biodiversity enhancement is achieved.

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- 5.17 The interventions would be monitored using a variety of standard wildlife and habitat survey methodologies to record changes over time and to help guide future management.
- 5.18 Planning Policy Wales (PPW) (Edition 12), 2024 advises that the quality of the built environment should be enhanced by integrating green infrastructure into development through appropriate site selection and use of creative design. It advises that with careful planning and design, informed by an appropriate level of assessment, green infrastructure can embed the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services into new development and places, help to overcome the potential for conflicting objectives, and contribute to health and well-being outcomes.
- 5.19 PPW advises that a Green Infrastructure Statement should be submitted with all planning applications and should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development and will describe how green infrastructure has been incorporated into the proposal. A Green Infrastructure Statement has been prepared and submitted with this application accordingly.

6. Other design considerations

Design and layout

- 6.1 The proposed layout of the nature reserve is shown in Figure 6.1 below. The proposals would include restoration of existing ponds, the creation of new ponds, the creation of a wetland area adjacent to two small watercourses and creation of woodland and grassland habitat areas, construction of a permissive pathway and engineering works to create a raised viewing area together with associated works. This would build upon the nature reserve proposed as part of phase II (subject to a separate planning application).
- 6.2 The plan is supported by expert designs to ensure that the nature reserve would provide the greatest benefit to biodiversity and build on the important neighbouring habitats in line with the DECCA principles of ecosystem resilience.

Figure 6.1 Proposed Site Layout



Environmental sustainability

6.3 In terms of environmental sustainability, consideration has been given to the effect of the proposed development on the environment. By its very nature, the proposal would result in a significantly positive impact upon the environment through the creation of a new nature reserve with a minimum of 20% canopy cover, helping Denbighshire County Council achieve its targets in relation to their declared Climate and Ecological Emergency. As stated previously, the scheme has been designed so as to ensure that the nature reserve would provide the greatest benefit to biodiversity and build on the important neighbouring habitats in line with the DECCA principles of ecosystem resilience.

Community safety

6.4 The proposed development has been designed with the safety and well-being of future users being a key consideration as well as the need to protect and enhance the safety of the surrounding community. It is not considered that the proposed development will have any detrimental effect on community safety or on the amenity of the residents of nearby residential properties. Indeed, the creation of the permissive pathway through the site would provide safe pedestrian access routes within the site for local residents and workers/volunteers alike to utilise.

7. Accessibility

Planning policy

- 7.1 The relevant national policies and guidance relating to accessibility are set out within:
- Planning Policy Wales, Edition 12, (2024); and
 - Technical Advice Note 18 'Transport' (2007).
- 7.2 The relevant planning policies within the adopted LDP are as follows:
- Policy ASA3 – Parking standards.
- 7.3 The Council's SPG "Parking Requirements in New Developments" is also relevant to the application.

Movement to, from and within the development

- 7.4 Vehicular access to the site would be via an existing access track which serves Green Gates Farm from Cwttir Lane to the east. The access track runs along the south of the A55. This would provide access to the parking area proposed on the existing area of hardstanding at the farm yard of Green Gates Farm.
- 7.5 Access within the wider site would then be limited to pedestrian access along the permissive pathway around the northern part of the site, providing access to the viewing platform. Maintenance access would be provided for agricultural machinery from the car park. No access would be provided to the southern part of the site.

Sustainability

- 7.6 PPW supports sustainable means of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport, over travelling by private car. TAN 18 encourages development to take place in areas which would reduce car dependency and increase social inclusion.
- 7.7 The proposal would discourage the use of private vehicle by local residents, workers at St Asaph Business Park and volunteers at the tree nursery, through the introduction of a pedestrian pathway away from the busy and narrow roads which would provide safe pedestrian access in the area. The very nature of the proposal is to promote health and well-being amongst local people.

Parking

- 7.8 It is the intention of the proposal to discourage reliance on private vehicles and promote walking, and therefore, limited parking is provided as part of the proposal which includes 18 car parking spaces for staff. The nature reserve would be targeted at local residents/workers/volunteers to use and therefore parking for the general public would not be required. Indeed, it is the view of the applicant that providing car parking would encourage the use of cars, which would be contrary to the purpose of a carbon storage and nature scheme.
- 7.9 The same approach has been taken as part of the second phase of development to create a nature reserve on land to the east of the application site.
- 7.10 Glascoed Nature Reserve is located to the south-west of the site and is accessible via Llys Edmund Prys. No parking is provided to serve this nature reserve either; pedestrians are able to access the site on-foot.
- 7.11 It is considered that the proposed new nature reserve at Greengates Farm would be a similar set up to Glascoed. There is already a high level of foot traffic generated by the tree nursery and business park, as well as local residents going for walks, etc and therefore, it is reasonable to expect that people will access the site on foot.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The proposal which forms the subject of this application relates to the demolition of existing buildings, creation of a nature reserve and habitat creation comprising of the restoration of existing ponds, the creation of new ponds, the creation of a wetland area adjacent to two small watercourses and creation of woodland and grassland habitat areas, construction of a permissive pathway and engineering works to create a raised viewing area on land at Greengates Farm, Abergele Road, St Asaph.
- 8.2 The proposal would result in the creation of a new nature reserve, enriched with a wide range of biodiversity enhancement, helping Denbighshire County Council achieve its targets in relation to their declared Climate and Ecological Emergency. The scheme has been designed so as to ensure that the nature reserve would provide the greatest benefit to biodiversity and build on the important neighbouring habitats in line with the DECCA principles of ecosystem resilience. This phase of works would build further upon the habitat creation to be provided as part of the second phase of development (which is subject to a separate planning application).
- 8.3 The provision of permissive paths within the site would allow access to nature for local residents, workers at the nearby St Asaph Business Park and volunteers at the County Tree Nursery, improving health and well-being, in line with national and local planning guidance.
- 8.4 Consideration has also been given to the principle of releasing allocated employment land to create a nature reserve, potential effects on heritage assets, visual impact, and highway safety, and the development is not expected to give rise to additional harmful impacts in this respect.
- 8.5 As demonstrated throughout this report, we consider the proposal to be in accordance with the adopted policies in in the LDP, as well as the overarching principles of the PPW. Therefore, we consider the proposed development acceptable in its submitted form.

CADNANT

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Conwy | 20 Connaught House, Riverside Business Park, Benarth Road, Conwy LL32 8UB
| 01492 581800

Chester | 1 Aldford House, Bell Meadow Business Park, Pulford, Chester CH4 9EP
| 01244 621007

www.cadnantplanning.co.uk