

Retrospective Application for Minerals Consent Rhuddlan Bach Quarry, Brynteg

Ecological Statement

Introduction

This document has been produced to inform a retrospective application for the quarrying of a small area of land on the edge of the existing Rhuddlan Bach Quarry, Brynteg, Anglesey.

Rhuddlan Bach Quarry has an existing consent for the quarrying of material within a red line boundary as shown on Figure 1. This permission was granted in 2016 following a consolidating planning application to regularise various consents for quarrying, extension and restoration.

Quarrying works have been ongoing since 2016, in accordance with the consolidated consent. In April 2020, Etive Ecology was advised that a small area of land outside of the consented quarrying area had been subject to vegetation clearance and preparation for quarrying. This parcel of land lies within the quarry ownership and the operator had unwittingly commenced work on this area, assuming that it was included within the existing consent. Upon realising that this was not the case, all works in the area ceased whilst a revised consent was obtained.

This document provides a summary of the ecological features of the land parcel, their condition and value prior to the commencement of works. An assessment of the scale of impacts arising from the loss of these features, as well as any legislative constraints, is also provided. The document concludes with a review of the restoration measures proposed for this area.

Ecological Baseline

To inform the 2016 application an ecological appraisal was undertaken for the site by Etive Ecology Ltd (July 2016), comprising an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey. The following is a summary of the ecological features of value associated with the Rhuddlan Bach Quarry site as a whole:

- Six statutory nature conservation sites <1km, including Cors Goch SSSI/SAC/Ramsar/NNR located 114m to the northeast.
- Three non-statutory nature conservation sites <1km, including Cors Goch NWWT Reserve immediately adjacent to the north.
- Medium sized GCN population adjacent to the west.
- Potential for roosting bats within former farmhouse buildings and a mature ash tree.
- Nesting birds present including sand martin, oystercatcher and jackdaw.
- Potential for reptiles to be present in margins of the site and in adjacent habitat.
- Japanese knotweed present on site.

The parcel of land in question is a triangular area lying immediately adjacent to the northern site boundary. In 2016 the area comprised the following ecological features / value:

- A triangular block of semi-natural broadleaved woodland characterised by hazel and blackthorn scrub with occasional ash. The woodland is perched on a limestone

outcrop, which limits root depth and therefore prevents the establishment of any mature trees of notable size or stature.

- Potential for the area to support various species of breeding bird.
- Negligible value to amphibians, reptiles, badger but may support an interesting assemblage of invertebrates or calcareous woodland flora.

Etive Ecology Ltd were appointed in June 2020 to undertake a review of the ecological impacts of the unauthorised clearance works. A site visit was undertaken by Russell Grey (BSc, MCIEEM, CEnv). The area of land was found to comprise a bare limestone outcrop, surrounded by quarried land. The flat limestone platform comprises bare ground, broken limestone fragments and scattered ruderals and early colonising species such as creeping thistle, ragwort, mullein, red campion and ground ivy. The boundary to the north of the cleared area comprised a defunct native hedgerow of hazel and blackthorn, with a dilapidated cloddiau and scattered foxglove, ivy and bramble.

Following the clearance works, the parcel of land is now of very low ecological value.

Ecological Impacts

It is not possible to definitively establish or assess the ecological impacts of the clearance due to the absence of baseline information of the area pre-clearance. The 2016 survey work did not establish a detailed ecological baseline for the area as it lay outside of the red-line boundary. However, based on the limited information from the 2016 survey, existing desk-study data and the 2020 site survey, it is possible to predict the likely ecological impacts arising from the unauthorised clearance works:

- Permanent loss of an established block of semi-natural broadleaved woodland, dominated by hazel. *Local value.*
- Direct impacts on any nesting birds within the area at the time of clearance. *Local value.*
- Direct impacts to invertebrates and any terrestrial mammals present at the time of clearance. *Local value.*

The overall scale of these likely impacts is local and the magnitude of the impacts is small, given the size of the area cleared within the local context.

Relevant Legislation

Section 7 of The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 replaced the 'Biodiversity duty' in Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, which requires all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out their functions. This is commonly referred to as the 'Biodiversity duty'. The Section 7 list is used to identify those habitats and species of Principal Importance in Wales under the Environment (Wales) Act. The list includes *lowland mixed deciduous woodland* and *hedgerows*, both of which have been adversely affected by the clearance works. The impacts on these habitats would be a material consideration as part of the determination of any application for consent.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) offer legal protection to all wild birds (with few exceptions) during the breeding season. Under the act it is an offence to damage or

destroy any active nest, eggs or young birds within a nest. It is highly likely that the area would have supported active nest sites during the period March – August inclusive.

Proposed Restoration

The existing restoration plan for Rhuddlan Bach Quarry is to establish a calcareous grassland across the majority of the site, interspersed with native hedgerows of hazel, blackthorn, gorse and hawthorn. The recently cleared area of woodland was to be retained as an existing landscape feature.

The revised restoration proposal for the site does not include the recreation of the woodland block. Instead the proposals include the extension of hedgerow H1 and the reinforcement of the northern boundary hedgerow through native planting. The proposed species mix remains the same as the agreed scheme and matches the species lost by the recent clearance works.

The proposed scheme will still deliver a scheme of biodiversity enhancement that is not significantly affected by the loss of this small area of woodland.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the unauthorised clearance of a parcel of land outside of the consented quarry represents a minor adverse impact on the overall ecological value of the site. The clearance itself may have impacted nesting birds and has resulted in the loss of a small area of Habitat of Principal Importance in Wales.

The revised restoration scheme incorporates the former woodland block into the calcareous grassland and proposes an increase in new hedgerow and the enhancement of the existing northern boundary hedgerow, to compensate for the losses in native shrub and scrub species.

Overall, the clearance has resulted in a short to medium term adverse impact at the local scale, which will be offset by a suitably designed restoration scheme that will deliver biodiversity gains across the whole Rhuddlan Bach Quarry site.