

STRATEGIC PROJECTS

Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route Phase 4

Design and Access Statement

February 2024

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1 Introduction

1.1. Purpose of Planning Design Access Statement

- 1.1.1. This Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been prepared to support and help understand the application for full planning permission for Phase 4 of the Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route.
- 1.1.2. It has been carried out in accordance with guidelines set out in the *Design and Access Statements in Wales (WAG) June 2017* and is a statutory requirement for major developments.
- 1.1.3. Phase 4 is classed as a major development as it is on a site with an area of 1 hectare or more.
- 1.1.4. All documents and drawings referenced within the DAS have been made available online for review during the Pre-application Consultation and will be submitted as part of the planning application.

1.2. Summary of the Proposal

- 1.2.1. The Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route (the Route) is a new walking and cycling route between Maerdy and Stanleytown in the Rhondda Fach Valley. The route will follow the alignment of the former railway line along the valley floor and will include links to local communities, shops, schools and leisure facilities.
- 1.2.2. The Route has been split into five phases. Phase 1 will be completed in January 2024 and Phase 2 during Spring 2024. Phase 3 and 4, depending on funding availability, will be completed during Spring 2025 and Phase 5 during Spring 2026. Again, depending on funding availability.

1.3. Site Location

- 1.3.1. Phase 4 of the Route will be constructed along the former railway line between Maerdy and Tylorstown, with a link to Avon Street, Ferndale. It will start at the southern end of Phase 2 (X:, Y:) and end at the footbridge leading to the Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre (X:, Y:).



Figure 1 – Location Plan

2 The Brief and Vision

2.1. Brief

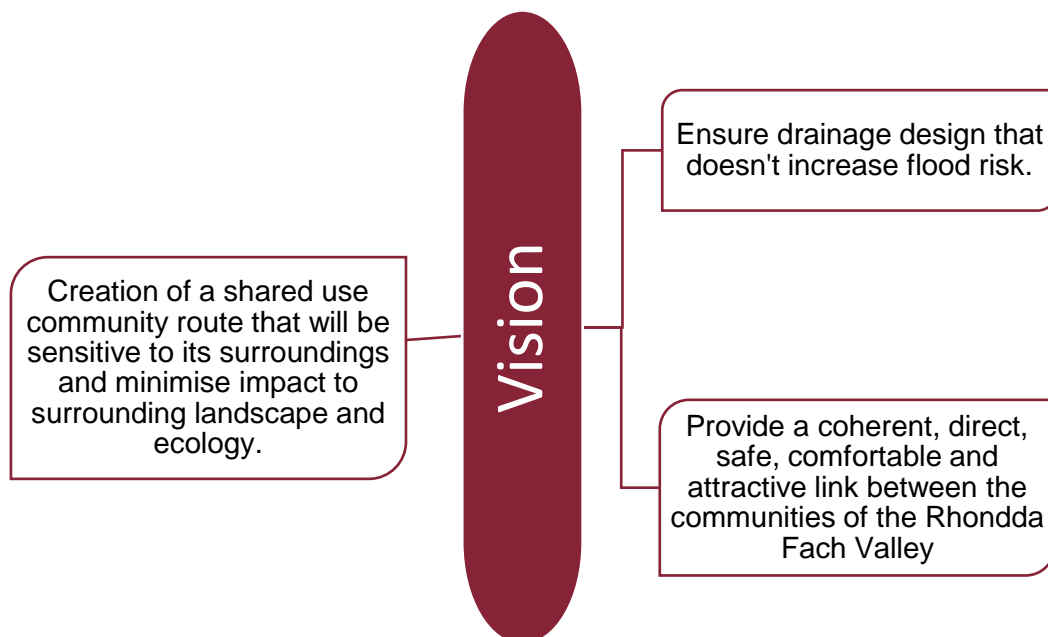
2.1.1. The brief is to continue the construction of the Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route south along the former railway line between Maerdy and Tylorstown, whilst also providing a link to Avon Street, Ferndale.

2.1.2. Phase 4 will be approximately 3.1km long, including the Avon Street link, and will meet the five key requirements of an active travel route (coherent, direct, safe, comfortable and attractive), as set out in the Active Travel Act (ATA) Guidance.

2.1.3. The objectives of the proposals are as follows:

- Create a more sustainable means of transport as an alternative to motorised vehicles.
- Reduce air pollution and improve the local community's health.
- Minimise and mitigate any adverse effects on local ecology.
- Ensure that the design meets the Statutory National Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems.

2.2. Vision



3 Site and Context Analysis

3.1. Site Location and Context

- 3.1.1. The proposed Route is around 7km long, starting in Maerdy at coordinates X:297100,Y:199285, and ending in Stanleytown at coordinates X:301030, Y:194660.
- 3.1.2. Phase 4 will continue the Route south, starting at the end of Phase 2 and ending at the footbridge leading to the Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre in Tylorstown.

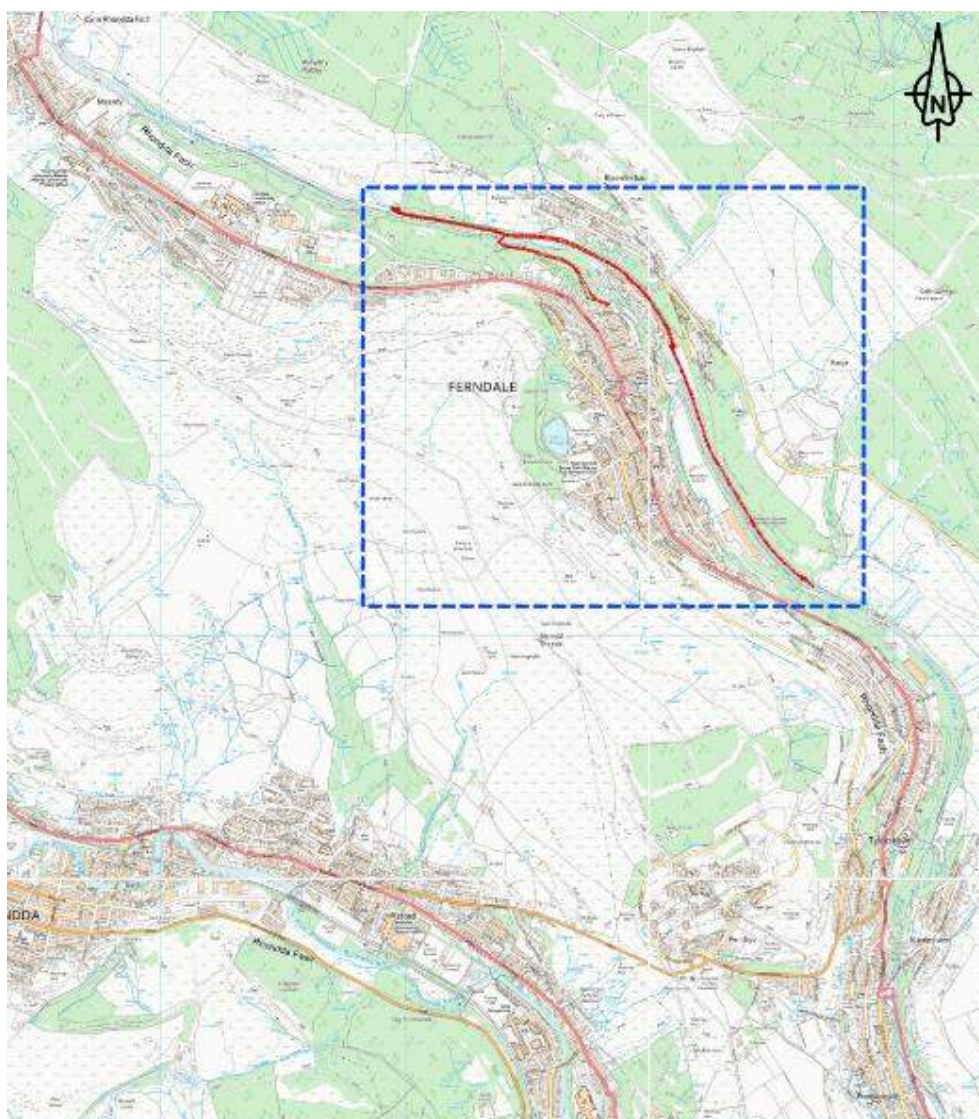


Figure 2 – Site Location

- 3.1.3. Figure 3 shows a plan of the key opportunities and constraints of the site. This chapter will discuss those opportunities and constraints in further detail.

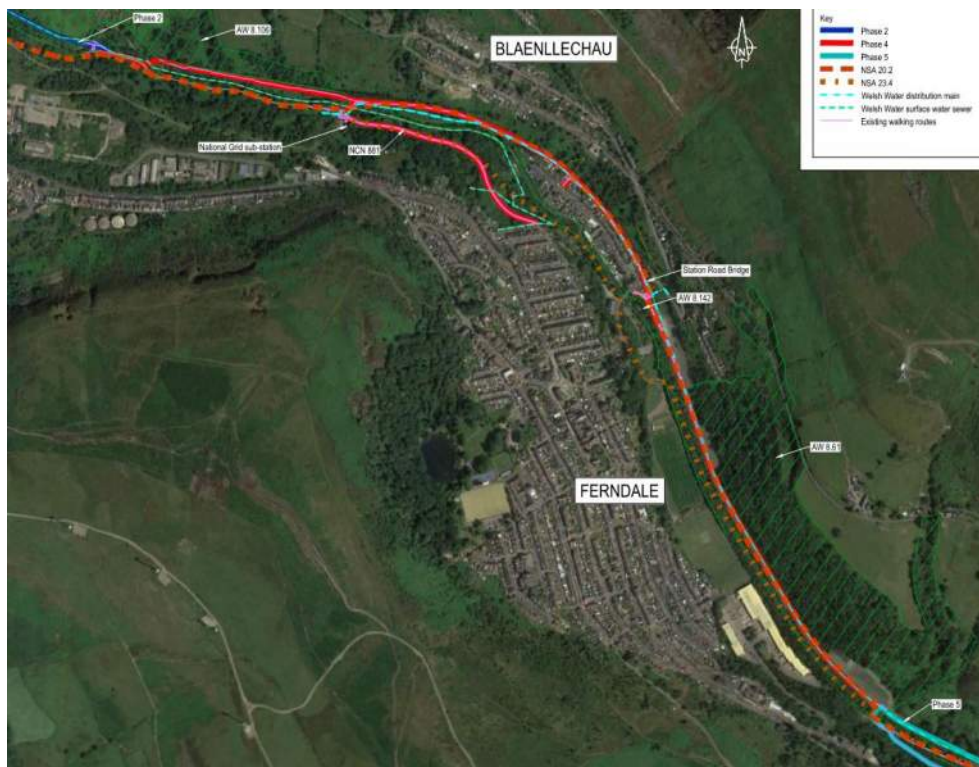


Figure 3 - Key Opportunities and Constraints Plan

3.2. Existing Use of the Site

- 3.2.1. The existing site mostly consists of unmade footpaths, cycle routes and maintenance tracks, which are used for recreation as well as providing access to the rear of properties on Taff Street, Ferndale and to the National Grid sub-station. Figures 4,5,6,7, and 8 include photographs of the existing site.
- 3.2.2. The proposed site is within the ownership of RCTCBC and Railway Paths Limited.



Figure 4 – Photograph of northern end of scheme showing approach to new Blaenllechau North Bridge



Figure 5 – Photograph of former railway line adjacent to the Rhondda Fach river



Figure 6 – Photograph of rear of Taff Street



Figure 7 – Photograph of existing unmade cycle track at the southern end of the site



Figure 8 – Photograph of Avon Street link

3.3. Planning Context

The RCT Local Development Plan includes a Proposals Map. The Proposals Map illustrates those areas of land, which have been specifically allocated for development or are subject to protection through the planning process. In the vicinity of Phase 4 there are three relevant policies:

- Policy NSA 23.4 – Cycle Network Improvements
- Policy NSA 20.2 – Major Road Schemes
- Policies AW 8.61, AW 8.106 and AW 8.142 – Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment

More information regarding how these policies influence proposals for the site are contained in Chapter 5 of this report.

3.4. Public Rights of Way

- 3.4.1. There are no public rights of way (PROW) intersecting Phase 4 according to RCT's PROW GIS data, however, existing footpaths and National Cycle Network Route 881 do, as shown on Figure 3.

3.5. Designated Sites

- 3.5.1. Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – The closest site is Craig Pont Rhondda SSSI which is 2.3km south of the Phase 4 site.

-
- 3.5.2. RAMSAR sites (wetlands of international importance), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) – None in the local vicinity.
- 3.5.3. Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) – The site is adjacent to the Taff and Rhondda Rivers SINC (AW8.142), Cefn Craig Amos SINC (AW8.106) and Blaenllechau Woodland SINC (AW8.61).
- 3.5.4. Ancient Woodland – There are four ancient woodland sites adjacent to the proposal three of which are classed as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland and one which is classed as Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site.
- 3.5.5. Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM)– There is one SAM site 1200m west of the proposal named Mynydd Ty'n-tyle Cairns.
- 3.5.6. Listed Buildings – There are no listed buildings within 200m of the site.
- 3.5.7. Registered Parks and Gardens – None in the local vicinity.

3.6. Ecology

- 3.6.1. Numerous ecological surveys have been done for the project, including:
- A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the full route in January 2022, consisting of an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey. A previous PEA was carried out in January, March, and April 2019 of the full route.
 - A walkover of Phase 4 was carried out in September 2023 to assess the route in further detail once comprehensive plans were available.
 - A desk study was undertaken January 2019 and updated in May 2023.
 - A Preliminary Roost Assessment was undertaken at the existing bridge Blaenllechau South, consisting of a field survey undertaken in July 2023 following best practice in line with the Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 3rd edn (Collins 2016).
 - A badger visual survey was carried out along the full route in September 2023.
 - An otter survey was carried out at Phase 1, 2 & 3 in May 2023 and at Phase 4 and 5 in September 2023.
 - A great crested newt (GCN) habitat suitability index was carried out on suitable waterbodies across the full route in May 2023.

- eDNA testing for GCN was carried out on suitable waterbodies along the full route in June 2023.
- An invasive species walkover was undertaken along the full route in September 2023.
- An Ecological Impact Assessment (Document Ref.: WWE22181 4 & 5 EclA).

3.6.2. The site and adjacent areas have been classified according to Phase 1 habitat types.

3.6.3. The distribution and extent of these habitats are illustrated in the extended Phase 1 habitat plan, which is included in the Ecological Impact Assessment (Document Ref.: WWE22181 4 & 5 EclA). A full species list is also included in the Ecological Impact Assessment.

3.7. Ground Conditions

3.7.1. A Ground Investigation Report (GIR) (Document Ref. GC3569-RED-74-ATR-RP-D-0005) has been completed to provide a geotechnical assessment of the ground and groundwater conditions of the site.

3.7.2. The GIR includes the following:

- An evaluation of the Preliminary Sources Study Report and available ground investigation (GI) information.
- A description of the ground and groundwater conditions and their implication on the proposed scheme.
- The site wide geotechnical material.
- An assessment of the geotechnical risks.

3.7.3. The report should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Preliminary Sources Study Report, Ref: GC3596-RED-74-ATR-RP-D-0001
- Coal Mining Risk Assessment, Ref: GC3596-RED-74-ATR-RP-D-0002
- Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route (Phases 3, 4 & 5) – Ground Investigation, Factual Report, Report No. G23011. Jackson Geo Services, April 2023

3.8. Topography

- 3.8.1. The longitudinal levels of the site slope gently down the valley along the former railway line, however, the site is bounded by the river Rhondda Fach and the steep hillsides of the Rhondda Fach valley. Figure 10 shows the site's contours.



Figure 9 – Site Topography

3.9. Hydrology

- 3.9.1. The proposed site has a series of existing drainage ditches, streams and culverts.
- 3.9.2. According to NRW's Flood Map for Planning the majority of the proposal is outside of river flooding extents, however there is a small area north of Avon Street with a 1% chance of flooding. The maps also show that there is a 1% chance of flooding from streams that run perpendicular to the route towards the river Rhondda Fach.
- 3.9.3. There is potential to cause pollution to the River Rhondda Fach and local surface water elements during the construction and operation of the proposed scheme. Unfavourable impacts during construction and operation may occur from:
- Increased pollution due to the disturbance of colliery materials.

- Pollution runoff from the proposal.
- Damage of existing surface water elements during construction.

3.10. Access

3.10.1. The site is accessible from four locations: Avon Street, Taff Street and Station Road, Blaenllechau with limited access for small vehicles via Station Road, Maerdy and Phase 2 of the Route. Figures 12, 13 & 14 show photographs of each location.

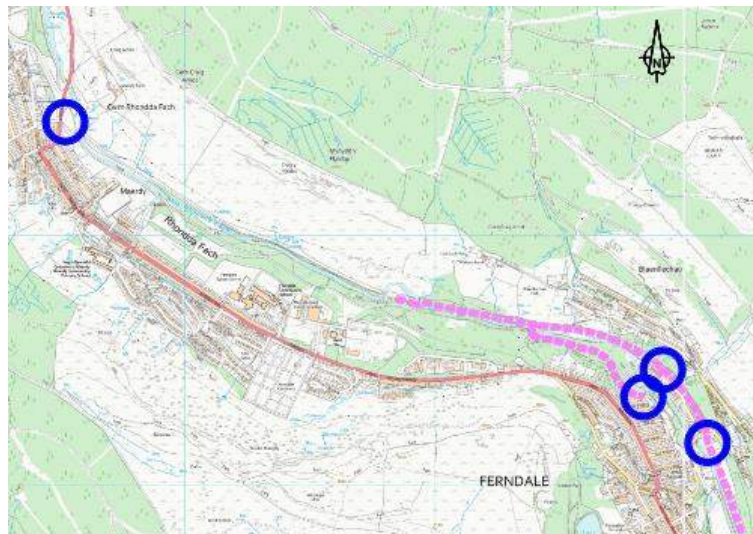


Figure 10 – Site Access Plan



Figure 11 – Station Road, Maerdy



Figure 12 – Avon Street



Figure 13 – Taff Street



Figure 14 – Station Road, Blaenllechau

3.11. Utilities

- 3.11.1. Two Welsh Water mains are present within the site as well as a Welsh Water Sewer.
- 3.11.2. A low pressure gas main crosses the route south of Station Road Bridge.
- 3.11.3. Refer to Figure 3 for utilities locations.

4 Design Development

4.1. History

4.1.1. A feasibility study was carried out during 2019 by Sustrans. The study presented the following four options for the Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route:

- do minimum
- on highway route
- using the existing river side path
- using the disused railway line

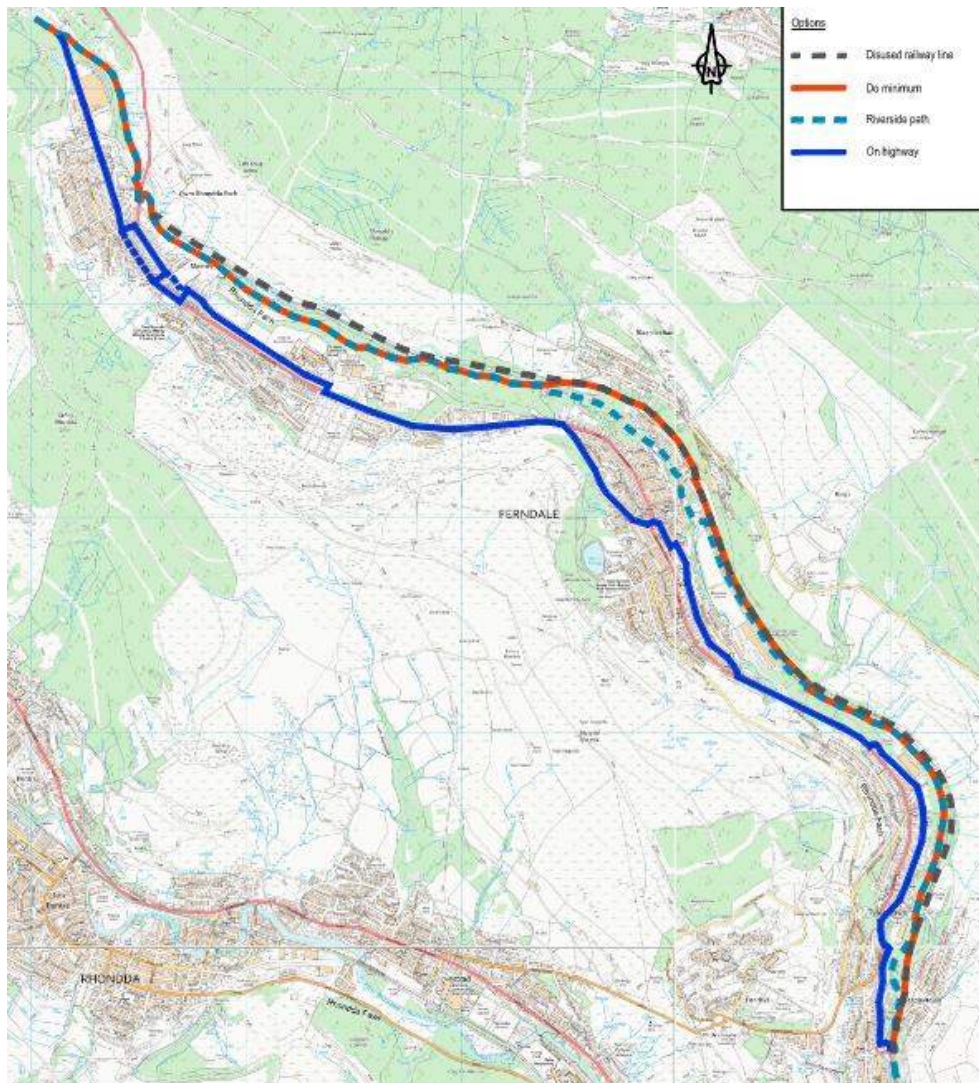


Figure 15 – Sustrans Options

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- 4.1.2. The do minimum option proposed using the existing unsurfaced paths and bridges to create a traffic free route along the valley floor and would be accompanied by the installation of minimal signage to guide users along the route.
- 4.1.3. The on highway route would use a combination of the side roads, back lanes and the A4233, through Tylorstown, Ferndale and Maerdy.
- 4.1.4. The existing riverside path route would use a network of paths that lie between the main residential areas of the Rhondda Fach and the west side of the river.
- 4.1.5. The disused railway line route would follow the alignment of the former railway line that operated until the closure of the Maerdy colliery in 1986. The disused railway line is mainly on the east side of the river.
- 4.1.6. The study concluded that the preferred option should be a combination of the riverside path route and the disused railway line route. Further information regarding the study can be found in the Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route Feasibility Study.
- 4.1.7. RCTCBC undertook further analysis of the preferred option presented by Sustrans during 2021 and 2022, based on site walkovers, additional topographical survey information and ecological surveys, and determined that the most feasible option would be to use the disused railway line.
- 4.1.8. RCTCBC's Strategic Projects Design Team subsequently developed the design of the route to meet Active Travel Act guidance and the Statutory National Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems.
- 4.1.9. The route was separated into five phases to suit design resources and funding availability.
- 4.1.10. To inform the design and to meet the various legislation numerous studies were commissioned, including:
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
 - Ecological Impact Assessments
 - Preliminary Sources Study Report
 - Coal Mining Risk Assessment
 - Ground Investigation Report

- 4.1.11. The design of Phase 1 and 2 was undertaken during the financial year 22/23. The construction of Phase 1 is due to be completed in January 2024 and Phase 2 construction during Spring 2024.
- 4.1.12. Phases 3 and 4 are currently at detailed design stage and are subject to planning permission, SAB approval and future funding allocation. Phase 4 is the subject of this planning application.
- 4.1.13. The design of Phase 5 will be developed during the 24/25 financial year, contingent on funding availability, and will require planning and SAB approval before it can be constructed.

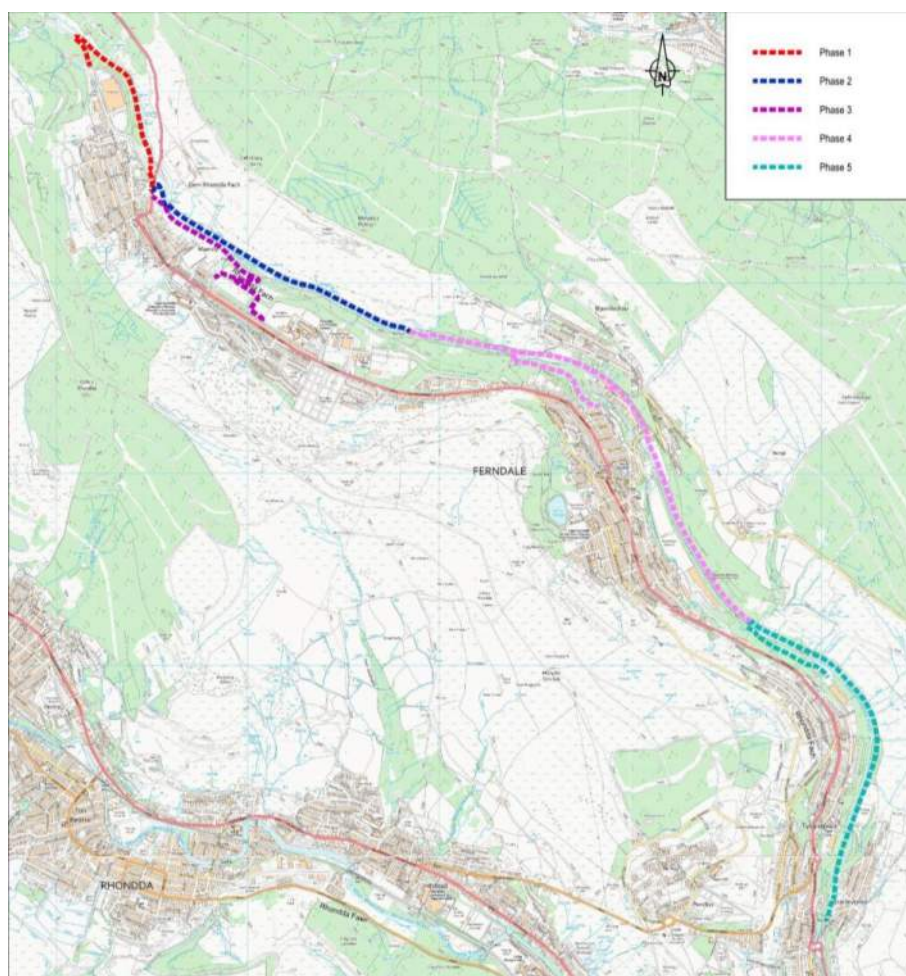


Figure 16 – Phasing Plan

5 Proposal

5.1. Description of the Proposal

- 5.1.1. This section should be read in conjunction with general arrangement drawings P187-S4-71-02, P187-S4-71-03 and P187-S4-71-04.
- 5.1.2. The proposal is to construct a new walking and cycling route that adheres to the five key principles of an active travel route (comfort, safety, directness, coherence and attractiveness), as stated in the Active Travel Act Guidance.
- 5.1.3. A shared pedestrian and cycle track is proposed with a minimum width of 3.0m to allow sufficient width for pedestrians and cyclist to interact safely and in comfort. Figure 17 shows a typical cross section of the route.
- 5.1.4. The Route will offer a far safer and more direct route for cyclists than the existing on road alternative through Tylorstown, Ferndale and Maerdy. The high vehicle volumes, narrow carriageways, on-street parking and steep gradients makes cycling through these communities uncomfortable and unsuitable for most users.
- 5.1.5. The route's setting, away from motorised vehicles, adjacent to the river Rhondda Fach and amongst the natural flora, will create visual and sensory interest for users.
- 5.1.6. In order to demonstrate coherence and continuity with the wider active travel network, the Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route will form part of National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 881. NCN Route 881 starts at Llest-Wen Reservoir and finishes at Pontypridd. At Llest-Wen Reservoir it links with NCN Route 47 and at Pontypridd it links with NCN Route 4. Once completed, NCN Route 881 will provide a direct route between the Rhondda Fach Valley and Pontypridd and will include links to shops, schools, public transport and leisure facilities.

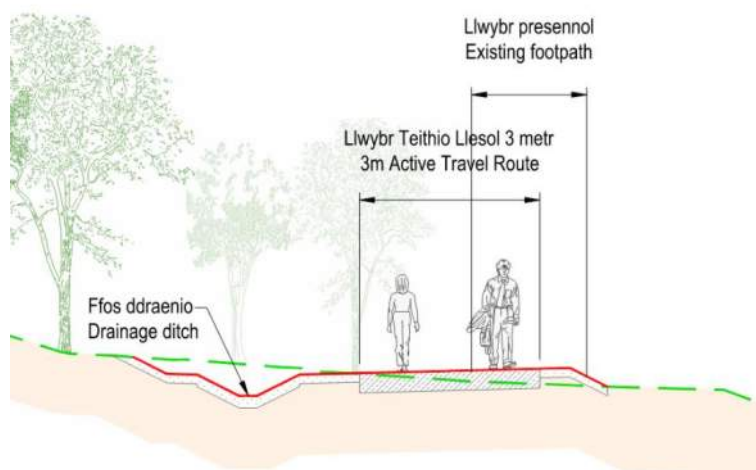


Figure 17 – Typical Active Travel Route Cross Section

5.2. The Route's Design

- 5.2.1. The proposed route will be constructed of sections of permeable asphalt pavement, as shown in Figure 18, and sections of typical non-permeable asphalt pavement to suit the ground conditions and constraints of the site.

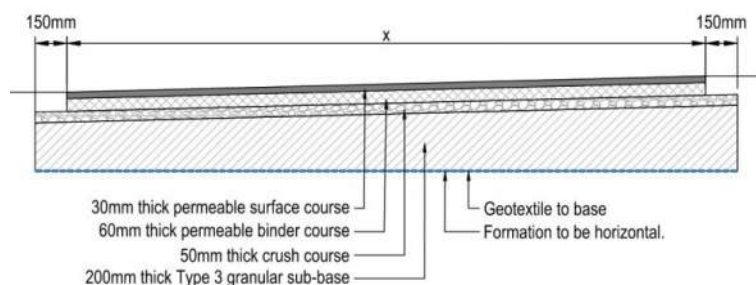


Figure 18 – Typical Permeable Paving Construction

- 5.2.2. The permeable and non-permeable asphalts have a negative texture which will significantly reduce the effort needed to push or cycle, adding to user comfort. The permeable asphalt will also allow water to flow through the pavement, preventing ice from forming on the surface, improving the safety of the route for users.
- 5.2.3. To link the Route, which runs along the valley floor, and Ferndale, which is on the hillside, steeper gradients cannot reasonably be avoided. However, where possible, they will be kept to a maximum of 5% (1 in 20), the desirable maximum for a walking and cycling route. Cambers

and crossfalls will be kept at 2.5% (1 in 40) to increase comfort and to reduce the energy use of users.

- 5.2.4. Corduroy paving will be used at each access to the route to warn blind and partially sighted users that they are entering the shared route.

5.3. Site / Vegetation Clearance

- 5.3.1. Site clearance will be undertaken within the site extents and red line boundary shown on drawing P187-S4-71-01. Vegetation clearance within the ecologically sensitive areas will be undertaken under the supervision of an ecologist and in accordance with a Precautionary Working Method Statement. Further information regarding control measures that will be implemented to prevent impacts on the onsite designated sites, priority habitats, and protected species are detailed in the Ecological Impact Assessment.

5.4. Fencing and Bollards

- 5.4.1. Post and four rail fencing will only be located where there is risk of falls.
- 5.4.2. Bollards will be located at each access point to the route to prevent access by unauthorised vehicles. A minimum width of 1.5m will be provided between bollards and the edge of route to accommodate the full range of cycles and to avoid excluding any potential users.

5.5. Drainage

- 5.5.1. A detailed description of the drainage proposals can be found in drainage drawings P187-S4-71-07, P187-S4-71-08, P187-S4-71-09 and P187-S4-71-10.
- 5.5.2. A separate application will be made to the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) Approval Body to determine the proposals compliance with the Statutory National Standards for SuDS.

5.6. Traffic Signing And Road Markings

- 5.6.1. New signs designed in accordance with the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) will be erected along the proposed route to help users navigate their way around unfamiliar areas and to highlight connections to and from adjacent routes and destinations.

5.7. Departures / Relaxations

- 5.7.1. There are no departures or relaxations from the relevant standards.

5.8. Construction Noise And Working Hours

- 5.8.1. Construction of the proposed route will generate noise and vibration from earthworks, spreading fill and compaction, along with vehicle movements from construction plant and heavy goods vehicles.
- 5.8.2. The normal working hours within the Site shall be Monday to Friday between 0800 and 1800 hours and Saturday between 0800 and 1300 hours, with no working anticipated on Sundays and bank holidays.

5.9. Construction Phasing and Programme

- 5.9.1. The anticipated construction start date is late summer 2024 and is expected to take approximately 8 months to complete.
- 5.9.2. The site compound is expected to be located adjacent to Station Road Bridge, Blaenllechau.
- 5.9.3. All supply chain construction traffic will be working under a site method statement for the delivery of plant, machinery and materials to the site. The method statement will contain any timing constraints, authorised access routes and protocols that will be in place for receiving such deliveries.
- 5.9.4. Prior to construction the site will be completely fenced off to prevent any unauthorised access.
- 5.9.5. Prior to exiting site, vehicles will be mechanically cleaned to remove excessive detritus.
- 5.9.6. Effective planning and management of dust control requires a thorough understanding of the construction programme, the operations and their likely impact due to variable weather conditions. The Health and Safety and environmental procedures document should outline remedial actions to be taken to mitigate the situation.
- 5.9.7. Vehicle movements will be generated to and from the site due to delivery of construction materials.

5.10. Air Quality

- 5.10.1. Since no motorised vehicles will be permitted on the route, the air quality is not expected to change.

5.11. Noise and Vibration

- 5.11.1. Since no motorised vehicles will be permitted on the route, no additional noise or vibration is expected.

5.12. Access

- 5.12.1. Phase 4 will be accessed by users from Phase 2 of the Route, Avon Street, Taff Street and Station Road, Blaenllechau.
- 5.12.2. Signing will be provided along the route to help guide users to their destination.

5.13. Movement

- 5.13.1. Once completed, the Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route will provide a safe, off-road, route along the valley floor south as far as Stanleytown. It will provide links between communities, links to schools, leisure facilities and shops. It will also link to existing shared use routes, allowing users to commute further down the valley towards Porth.
- 5.13.2. The Route will also encourage walking and cycling for leisure.

5.14. Waste Management

- 5.14.1. The construction of the proposed scheme will require excavation works. As far as is reasonably practicable, suitable excavated material will be reutilised on site. Any unsuitable material will be taken to a licensed landfill.
- 5.14.2. A Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP) will be developed during the construction works to identify and manage the types and quantities of waste and would set out how these wastes would be reduced, reused managed and disposed.

5.15. Sustainability

It is anticipated that all fill material required for the proposed works will be surplus material acquired from the site's excavation works. This will have a significant impact on the amount of deliveries required and the amount of material taken to landfill.

5.16. Landscaping Proposals

- 5.16.1. This scheme seeks to retain the colliery spoil topsoil and reuse it to preserve the local seedbank.
- 5.16.2. The trees and shrubs in this area are young saplings from nearby trees. New trees will not be introduced. It is expected that natural regrowth will occur over the next few years.

5.17. Ecology Proposals

- 5.17.1. Where possible the existing onsite habitat will be retained to ensure that species are not adversely affected by the development. Native species of local provenance will be used for any new planting on the site.
- 5.17.2. Bird nesting boxes and bat roosting boxes will be incorporated within adjacent woodland. A range of types should be used in order to cover a variety of species.
- 5.17.3. A Landscape and Ecology Management Plan is proposed for the wider scheme to detail ongoing management of the full proposed site.

5.18. Community Safety

- 5.18.1. The provision of the active travel route will provide a safer off road option for the non-motorised users, and will provide links to local communities, schools, businesses and community and leisure facilities along the Rhondda Fach Valley.

5.19. Response to Planning Policy

- 5.19.1. Planning Policy Wales – Edition 11 (PPW) and the National Development Framework (i.e. Future Wales – the National Plan 2040) set out how the planning system at a national, regional and local level can assist in delivering the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government through Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) and Local Development Plans (LDPs).

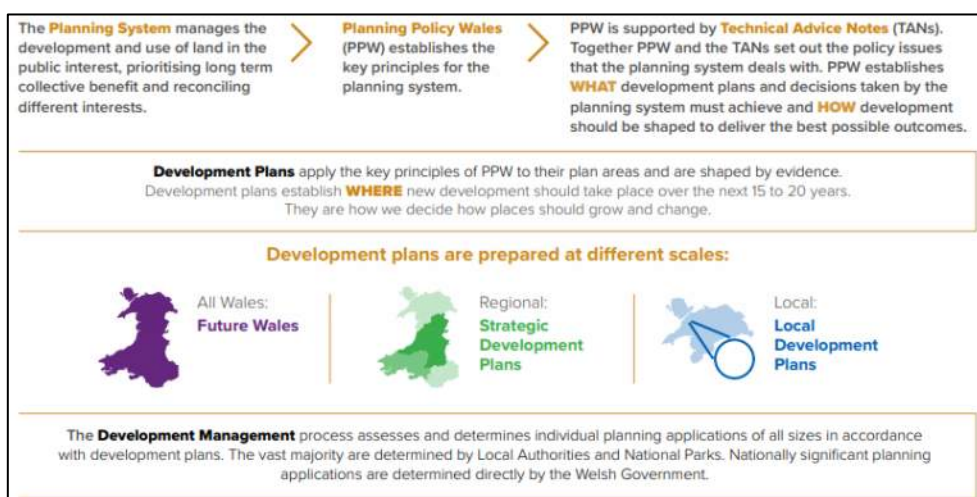


Figure 19 – Illustration taken from PPW showing how the different tiers of the development plan cumulatively address issues contained in Planning Policy Wales

- 5.19.2. Up-to-date development plans are the basis of the planning system and set the context for rational and consistent decision making. Plans at all levels of the development plan hierarchy must be prepared in accordance with national planning policies. Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the adopted plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Development plans must show how places are expected to change to accommodate development needs over the plan period. They provide certainty for developers and the public about the type of development that will be permitted at a particular location. There are three types of statutory development plans: The National Development Framework, SDPs and LDPs.
- 5.19.3. LDPs must be in general conformity with The National Development Framework (i.e. Future Wales– the National Plan 2040) and SDPs and therefore this section describes how the proposed development accords with the existing Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan 2006-2021 (RCTLDP). The RCTLDP was adopted on 2nd March 2011 and will continue to be applicable until the new RCTLDP is adopted in 2026.

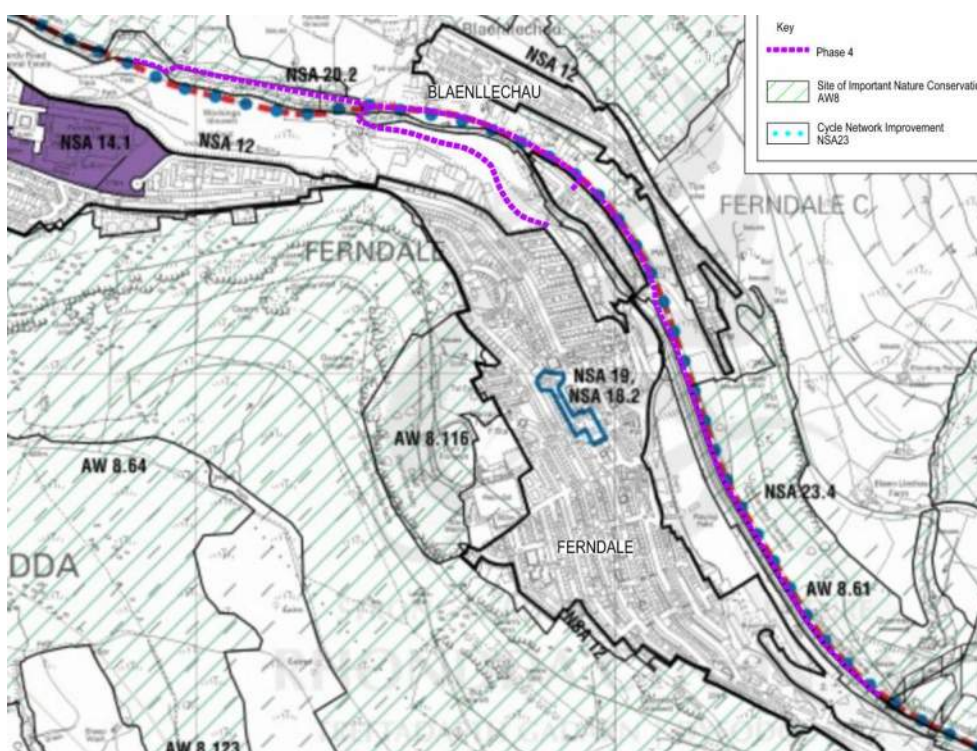


Figure 20 – Proposal Map taken from Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan 2006 – 2021

5.19.4. The RCTLDP includes a Proposals Map. The Proposals Map illustrates those areas of land, which have been specifically allocated for development or are subject to protection through the planning process. Figure 20 shows an extract of the Proposals Map in the vicinity of Phase 4 of the Route.

5.19.5. Each note on the plan, for example NSA 23.4, refers to a policy. The policies which are relevant to this application are briefly described below:

Policy NSA 23.4 – Cycle Network Improvements

5.19.6. According to Policy NSA 23 of the RCTLDP ‘the existing network of cycle paths and community routes will be extended, improved and enhanced to include schemes at Pontygwaith to Maerdy’. Phase 4 will form part of the route between Pontygwaith and Maerdy.

Policy NSA 20.2 – Major Road Schemes

5.19.7. According to Policy NSA 20.2 of the RCTLDP ‘land will be safeguarded and provision made for the development of the strategic highway network in the Northern Strategy Area, including Upper Rhondda Fach Relief Road.’ The Route, which Phase 4 is a part of, will not compromise any future plans to construct the Upper Rhondda Fach Relief Road.

Policy AW8 – Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment

5.19.8. According to Policy NSA AW8 of the RCTLDP ‘Rhondda Cynon Taf’s distinctive natural heritage will be preserved and enhanced by protecting it from inappropriate development.’ AW8.142 refers to the Taff and Rhondda Rivers which are Sites of Important Nature Conservation. A Construction Environmental Management Plan and a Precautionary Working Method Statement will be produced to detail pollution prevention controls to prevent impacts on the Rhondda Fach river during the construction phase. For further information regarding the Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment refer to the Phase 4 Ecological Impact Assessment. AW8.61 refers to Blaenllechau Woodland and AW8.106 refers to Cefn Craig Amos, both are Sites of Important Nature Conservation and are located on the hillside above the proposed route. Neither will be affected by the proposed works.

6 Summary

6.1. Summary

- 6.1.1. The proposal is to continue the construction of the Rhondda Fach Active Travel Route south along the former railway line between Maerdy and Tylorstown, whilst also providing a link to Avon Street, Ferndale.
- 6.1.2. The proposed route will improve strategic Active Travel connectivity within Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 6.1.3. It will provide a safer active travel route for commuters travelling down the valley and pupils of Ferndale Community School to walk or cycle to school.
- 6.1.4. The proposed scheme is supported by policy NSA23 in the adopted RCTLDP, which seeks to promote walking and cycling as a substitute for shorter car journeys.
- 6.1.5. The design and construction of Phase 4 will acknowledge the sensitivity of its natural surroundings by adhering to the biodiversity mitigation and enhancement measures recommended in the Ecological Impact Assessment for the site.
- 6.1.6. Construction working hours will be constrained and the phasing and programming of site works planned to reduce impact on residents and local businesses.
- 6.1.7. As demonstrated within this Planning Design and Access Statement, the proposed development adheres to national, regional and local planning policy, whilst contributing to the over-arching objective of sustainable development. It is therefore respectfully recommended that this planning application should be granted permission.