



Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We are engineers and educators, experts and advocates. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

Sustrans works in partnership, bringing people together to find the right solutions. We make the case for walking and cycling by using robust evidence and showing what can be done.

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## Executive Summary

Sustrans have undertaken a preliminary ecological appraisal to inform the creation of a new traffic-free path between land to the north of Grovesend and Pontarddulais. This report considers three main (Option 1, 2 and 3) and a single subsidiary alignment (Option 1a). The different route options are located within a variety of different habitats incorporating wooded and scrub covered former railway lines, road verge, existing earth tracks, way leaves and paved paths.

In order to provide an initial assessment of the likely ecological constraints of this proposal, a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) has been conducted. The field work which underpins this PEA comprised of two separate visits completed on 14<sup>th</sup> June and 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> October 2018. The PEA provides a summary of the assessments completed to date and as such an assessment of nature conservation sites, habitats and protected and notable species identified along the route and details mitigation, where required to address the potential ecological impacts identified.

None of the route options are considered likely to have significant direct or indirect impacts on any nationally or internationally designated sites of wildlife conservation interest. Options 1 and 2 will have direct and significant impacts upon four non-statutory wildlife sites – Coed Bach Park SINC, Loughor to Pelligaer Railway SINC, Waungron to Gowerton Line SINC, Waungron Marsh SINC. The different route options would result in the loss of 0.0004 – 3.4% of the habitats within these designations. Option 2 would also have a minor adverse effect on M4 Corridor SINC, but this is not considered likely to be significant as the area to be impacted is less than 0.08% of the total designated area.

Path improvement works are proposed within woodland listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory, within Coed Bach Wood (ASNW). Works within Coed Bach Wood are relatively small scale and would focus on improvements to existing surfacing. Mitigation and compensation measures, agreed in-consultation with NRW will be required to allow works to take place within Coed Bach Wood.

Overall the scheme will result in the direct loss of semi-natural habitat. The overall area of habitat loss is not considered to be high (c.0.17 – 1.65ha) as several of the route options are physically constrained (preventing opportunities to widen the route). However, given the high nature conservation value of the wider corridor, the works could result in a reduction in structural and species diversity. As such a series of indicative mitigation and enhancement measures have been set-out within Section 7.

The PEA has identified that water vole and otter are unlikely to be impacted by the proposals. Surveys completed to date would suggest that protected species of amphibian are likely to be absent, although further survey of a single water body within Coed Bach Park is recommended. Mammal activity, including entrance holes suggestive of badger usage were found. Further badger survey is recommended. The scheme will also have direct impacts upon suitable nesting habitat for birds, as the scale of clearance in association with either of Option 1 or 2 are relatively high, liaison with NRW including the preparation of a Woodland Management Plan is recommended.

Based on the findings of the field survey, it is recommended that Option 2 is not progressed. This is due to the extent of level change n(a)]TJETBTpanTBTt123g4(-)-4(d)-4(a TfnsB)6(thMp9vr)-3(e)(ue)]9d3(gle)7(-)-4(

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## Priority habitats within 1km of the proposed route

\*These are species which have European and/or UK Legal Protection, Section 6 species (Environment (Wales) Act, UK BAP Priority Species, Global Red List, British Red Data Book, Nationally Rare & Scarce, RSPB Red and Amber Birds, Welsh Vascular Plant Red Data List, Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Species, and Locally Important Species as identified by local experts.

### 1.2.1 Habitat Survey

An initial habitat survey of the proposed route was undertaken on 14

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large number of species, including bivalve molluscs, worms, burrowing urchins, brittlestars and sand stars.

1310 Salicornia and other annuals colonizing mud and sand – The SAC supports pioneer glasswort *Salicornia* spp. which along with the other habitats present provide a complete sequence of saltmarsh vegetation.

1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalis maritimae*). The SAC includes a full range of salt marsh vegetation incorporating areas of high and low marsh, with grazed salt marshes supporting areas of sea rush *Juncus maritimus* and marshmallow *Althaea officinalis* being of significant important.

Other primary reason for designation include the presence of an Annex II species:

1130 – Twaite shad *Alosa fallax*. **Members of these species are known to migrate through the waters of the SAC to reach spawning sites in the Afon Tywi.**

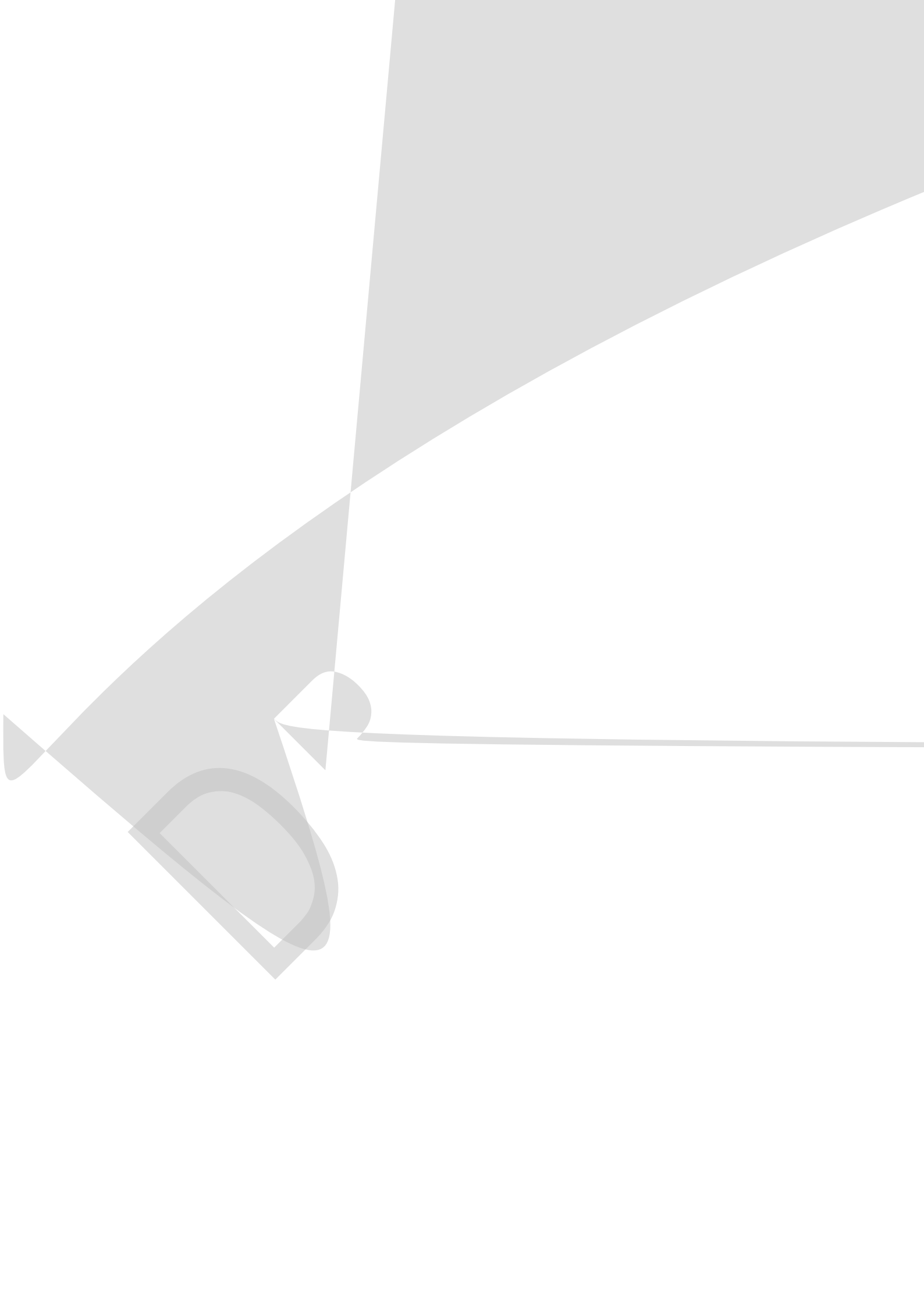
Secondary reasons for designation include:

Presence of internationally important populations of sea lamprey *Petromyzon marinus*, river lamprey *Lampetra fluviatilis*, Allis shad *Alosa alosa* and otter *Lutra lutra*

The accompanying SSSI which covers the section of the SAC closest to the site (354.2ha) makes the following additional observations:

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## Buildings and Hardstanding

Several structures were recorded along the three route options, for clarity these are summarised in the table below;

| Structure ID | Name                        | Route Option / NGR           | Description   |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| B1           | Redundant agricultural shed | 1 and 2 /N SN<br>59773 00960 | Corrugated metal shed. Exposed brick to east and southern elevation. Remote from proposed path. |

B2

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### 3.1 Importance of habitats present

Several Habitats of Principal Conservation Importance, listed under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act were recorded along the route. The following table should be studied in conjunction with Figures 3.1.1 and 3.1.2.



Table 3.1.1 – Summary of Section 7 habitats along Option 1, 2 and 3 of proposed traffic free route between Grovesend and Pontarddulais \* - Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland

























Drawing 1.1: Phase 1 Habitat 1 Map

## 3.2 Fauna

### Amphibians and Reptiles

No records for amphibian were reported by LERC.

An eDNA assessment of Pond 1 (within 30m of Option 2, see Target Note 45, Fig. 1.7) was completed in June 2018. The eDNA returned a negative result (Appendix 1), Based on this assessment, great crested newt are considered likely to be absent from Pond 1.

Another potential water body marked on the OS Map was identified in the north-western corner of Coed Bach Park (see Target Note 20, Figure 1.4 above). This pond was visited in June 2018 and was found to be dry, with little sign of significant or sustained inundation, which is typically a requirement for amphibians to breed successfully.

A further pond (not shown on the OS map) was identified within Coed Bach Park (Target Note 17, Figure 1.4 above). This pond was not subject to an eDNA assessment as the site visit was timed outside of the approved window. Based on the high quality of this pond in terms of its condition and

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Significant deadwood habitats were noted within the blocks of woodland north and south of Allt-Y-Graban Road. Hanging deadwood was also noted on several of the mature trees within these compartments.

Habitat piles and lying deadwood was also noted within the stand of mature semi-natural woodland within and bounding Coed Bach Park. These habitats have the potential to support a number of important sacrophyllic (deadwood loving) beetle species.

### Mammals (excluding bats)

Records for two protected and notable mammal species were identified by the LERC within the 1km search area. Species reported included otter and water vole.

No records of badger, hazel dormouse, polecat *Mustela putorius*, hedgehog, stoat or weasel were returned as part of the search.

The balance of records related to otter. No signs of otter activity were found as part of the assessment, although it should be acknowledged that a detail search for signs of these species was not undertaken. The majority of watercourses were considered unlikely to provide suitable foraging, or commuting grounds for these species as they were relatively narrow, supported low water levels with significant levels of potential prey species considered likely to be absent.

No evidence of water vole was found as part of the assessment, however access to several of the watercourses was restricted and a detailed assessment was not completed.

Based on the a visual assessment of habitats along the different watercourses mapped, they were considered unlikely to provide optimal foraging grounds for these species owing to their relatively low water levels and lack of palatable herbaceous and grass species along the banks.

No evidence of hazel dormouse was found (e.g. typically chewed hazel nuts), but a detailed assessment for these species was not undertaken as part of the assessment. Habitats considered to be of higher suitability included the mature woodland and scrub habitats. Those associated with the former railway corridor north and south of Allt-Y-Graban road appeared likely to provide a good potential dispersal route for dormouse. However, the comparatively species poor composition of these habitats combined with the relatively low cover of other fruiting species (e.g. bramble, honey suckle) may suggest that these habitats may not provide ideal foraging opportunities for these species.

Suspected signs of badger activity including sett entrances and snuffle holes were recorded and mapped as part of the assessment. Two groups of mammal holes were identified in association with the former track bed and western face of the former railway line to the north and south of Allt-Y-Graban Road (Target Notes: 3, Figure 1.1 and 14, Figure 1.2). A cluster of snuffle holes were also noted (Target Note 12: Figure 1.3). Evidence of rabbit and fox activity was also recorded.

No evidence of hedgehog, polecat, stoat or weasel was discovered as part of the assessment, although an exhaustive search for evidence of these species was not undertaken. Suitable habitats for these species including for the purposes of foraging and sheltering was identified along the three route options assessed.

### Bats

All of the habitats along the route supported linear and point features of value to foraging bats. Likely hotspots of bat activity were associated with:





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| Site of Interest to Nature Conservation Interest | Option likely to give rise to an impact | Anticipated impact   | Likely effect in absence of mitigation   |
|--|---|--|--|
| SINC. 238.                                       |   | Temporary and permanent loss of scrub and tree along edge of B4096 to allow widening of existing footpath. Potential disturbance and compaction of adjoining soils within root protection areas of trees to be retained. | Anticipated loss or damage of 0.071ha. Total mapped area is 92.3ha.<br>c.0.08% of designated habitat to be impacted by the proposals). |

Table 4.2: Assessment of likely impacts and effects on non-statutory nature conservation sites along Options 1, 1a, 2 and 3 of proposed new traffic free route between Grovesend and Pontarddulais.

### 4.3 Plants and Habitats

Path surface is absent along the majority

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## 6 Index and Bibliography

Bat Conservation Trust (2012) *Bat Surveys: Good practice guidelines*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

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## Appendix 1 - eDNA results

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