

**SWISS GABLES,
DYFFRYN,
NEATH
HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT**



March 2022

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Authorship and Acknowledgements

This Heritage Impact Assessment is written by Nathan Goss, Director of Nathan Goss Conservation on behalf of Mrs Jade Miller. It was commissioned on 1st March 2022 to inform proposals for the repair of Swiss Gables, Dyffryn, Neath.

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1.2 Location

Swiss Gables occupies an idyllic position next to St Matthews Church in Wales, in the popular village of Dyffryn. Which is in the Neath suburb area of Bryncoch, only about a mile away to the east across the river Clydach. Neath town centre is about 3 miles to the south-east.

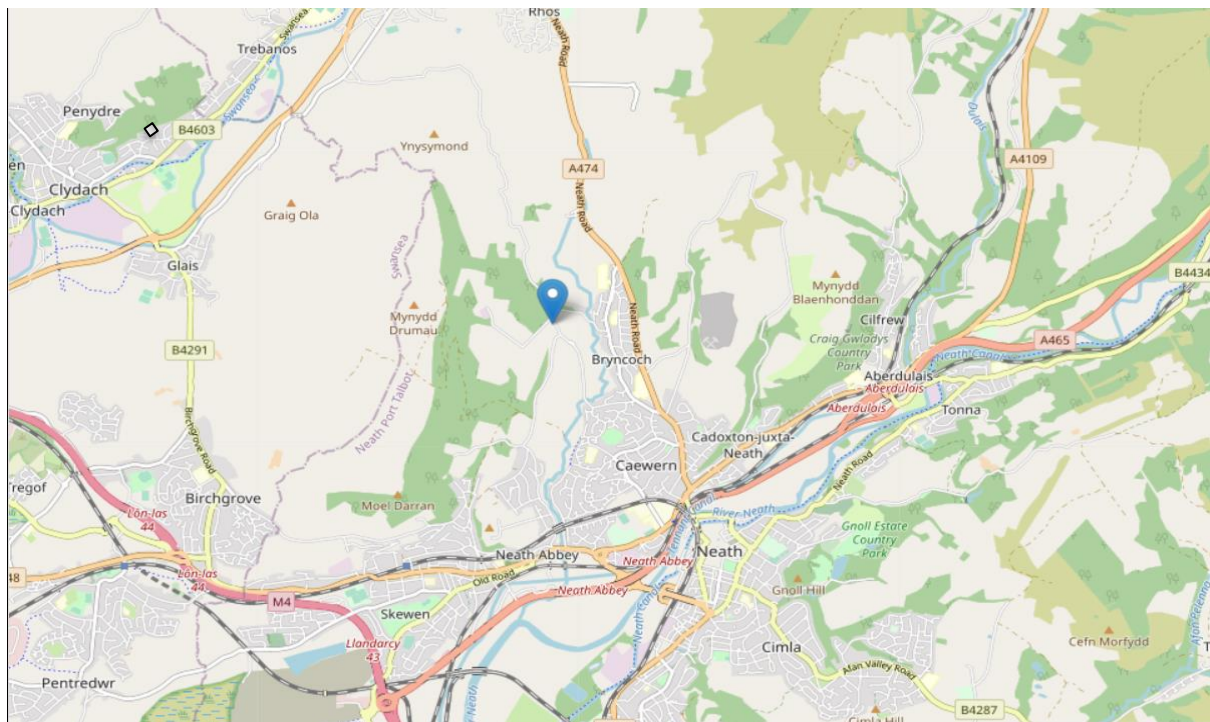


Fig. 1 Aerial view marking location of Swiss Gables © Google.co.uk

1.3 Methodology

The purpose of this Heritage Assessment is to fully understand the heritage asset and its vulnerabilities and then assess the likely impact on the heritage of the proposed restoration/conservation of Swiss Gables.

The process for writing a heritage report is in line with the philosophy first set out in the Burra Charter in 1979 and last updated in 2013 (The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 2013.) It sets out a methodology that is adopted by ICOMOS and used throughout the world. The objective is to identify the place and its associations, then assess its significance, identify obligations arising from this significance, gather information about other factors affecting the future of the place and develop a policy for its future. The assessment also follows the approach set out in Cadw's Conservation Principles document (Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales, March 2011) as well as that set out in the more recent Annex 1 of the Consultation on best-practice guidance documents associated with the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Annex 1 is entitled Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales and sets out the general principles to consider when planning changes to historic assets.

This report is based primarily upon a detailed site survey in March 2022 and subsequent desk-based research.

1.4 Designations

Swiss Gables was designated a Grade II listed building on the 22nd December 2003. The house lies within the Dyffryn Clydach Community which has approximately twenty-one listed buildings, nineteen of which are Grade II and two are Grade II*.

Statutory protection, under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that works that affect the special character or appearance of a listed building require listed building consent.

2.0 Understanding

2.1 Origins and uses of Swiss Gables

Swiss Gables was built as a vicarage to St Matthews Church and was constructed between 1881-4 to the design of Henry Ward of Stafford (architect) for Howel Gwyn of Dyffryn (local councillor, MP, High Sheriff and direct descendent of the fifth century prince of Brycheiniog). The vicarage is said to have cost the exceptional sum of £7,000, more than the church which cost £4500, and was built for the first vicar, the Rev J.L. Thomas who moved in in 1884.



Fig. 2 Extract from the Dyffryn Clydych 1888 Tithe map showing the footprint of Swiss Gables © Ilgc.org.uk

2.2 Exterior of Swiss Gables



Fig.3 West Elevation



Fig.4 East Elevation



Fig.5 South Elevation



Fig.6 North Elevation

2.3 Roof & Attic of Swiss Gables



Fig.7 Centre gutter with foliage growth to chimneys



Fig.8 North attic space

Fig.9 South attic space



Fig.10 Chimney foliage growth (South Elev)

2.4 Grounds of Swiss Gables

Surrounding the Victorian mansion are approx.1.7 acres of mature trees, shrubs and well-manicured gardens. There is a garage to the rear of the property and a stable.

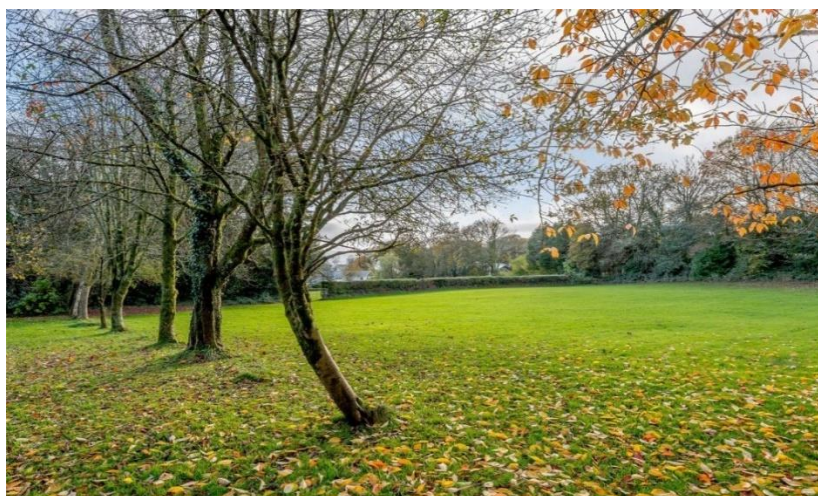


Fig.15 Gardens looking west ©Savills



Fig.16 Gardens looking east ©Savills



Fig.17 Stables to rear of house ©Savills

3.0 Understanding the setting in Swiss Gables

Swiss Gables is a striking former vicarage that has stunning architectural features and an interesting history. It has been in the ownership of the present owners for over 52 years.

The Mansion is designed in a Victorian Gothic style which was so fashionable at the time of construction.

Entry is through a rather grand porch which has a tiled floor, cusped pine roof trusses and a pair of Tudor-arched half-glazed doors c/w coloured glass. Each door has a painted

inscription over it, saying 'Pax intrantibus' and 'Salus exeuntibus' – together they translate into “Peace to those who enter, good health to those who depart”. The hall also has a coloured tile floor, which reaches the stairs at the far end of the room. The hall is lined with well-made pitch-pine woodwork, doors that have 6 long panels and deep-chamfered frames with moulded architraves. The grand large staircase has an open well, turned balusters, big chamfered Gothic newels with inset quatrefoils, roundels and rounded finials.

The south west dining-room has a timber chimney piece with a carved frieze of linked roundels rosettes, tapered piers and embossed patterned tiles.

The south east drawing room has a timber fireplace with a carved lily on each pier and panelled frieze with inset tiles of delicate design, probably early Arts and Crafts type. In the corners of the fire surround is a bat and a bird (night and day) in blue-grey and gold, four tiles of William Morris-like scroll and two centre tiles each quartered with rising and setting sun, waxing and waning moon design also in blue.

In the north east of the property, now a kitchen, retains moulded cornice. The service wing is entered from a door at the foot of the staircase, this has a short-tiled passage, which runs north towards the garden door and down a longer passage west of the second larger kitchen.

The large servant's kitchen and store rooms are of a large size with high ceilings, these are very basic. Behind a wall to the east is a very large bricked up fireplace, which supplied the whole house.

There are cellars under the rear section of the main house, which house the coal shoots for the many fireplaces.

The first floor has an arch on its landing and plainer Gothic chimneypieces to most bedrooms, that are painted with patterned tiles to grate surrounds.

The property's timber framing appears remarkably to be more than decorative, the posts are 9" square, matching the thickness of the yellow brick walls. The framing and windows are said all pitch-pine. The roof is made up of banded with polychromatic fish scale plain tiles with terracotta crested ridge tiles and finials. Tall yellow brick chimneys on stone plinths rise into the sky, these have diagonal shafts and stone caps.

The windows are slightly proud of its wall face, they are made with mullions-and-transoms, the majority of which are at mid height, with roll mouldings and metal opening lights.

All its gables have remarkably ornate carved bargeboards with pendant finials.

The east front of the three bays has two gables, a large three-light window each side of timber porch, there is a smaller three-light window each side of the jettied gables, while the centre window has two small fixed lights. Right up in the top of the gables you find two little

attic windows. There is some decorative framing to the front gable that includes diagonal beams, opposed curved beams and panelling. There is a timber-framed porch which also has a Tudor-arched front door with cusped traceried side lights, with quatrefoil with coloured glass.

The south elevation has a projected gable to its right with a canted ground floor. There is some wooden diagonal cross bracing and a carved rosette in a centre panel just under the first floor three-light oriel window. The carved brackets carry the jettied attic gable, this has a quatrefoil pattern panel and herringbone bracing. There is some patterned framing below the oriel window and to its sides on both floors. The majority of the tall chimney shafts on the ridge can be seen on the west end.

To the rear of the building is the service range this has a band of decorative framing between floors, carved rosette in its gable. Two tall ridge stacks can be seen. W end of service wing has two big three-light kitchen windows, diagonal bracing in the panels above and a first floor three-light. There is a two-light attic window in the gable.

There is a single storey outbuilding running north to south, it has a single-light each side of door, a banded tile roof and small end chimney.

4.0 Condition of Swiss Gables

Swiss Gables has suffered the same fate as many large houses/mansions throughout Wales and the UK. Where very little maintenance has been carried out on the property. The gutters are blocked, windows are unpainted, there are missing roof tiles.



Fig.18 Chimney foliage

As you can see from the pictures above the many chimneys that rise up into the sky above the mansion have had no maintenance allowing buddleia and Scots pine to take root.

There are numerous areas where the cast iron guttering has split, this is due to lack of maintenance. The gutters have been allowed to block mainly with leaf foliage from many of the overhanging trees, the leaf foliage holds water and then freezes during a cold spell, expands and splits the cast iron.



Fig.19 Split cast iron guttering and blocked drains on the roof

As you can see from the photo above the secret lead valley gutter within the many pitches of the roof is blocked with foliage (assumed damaged) and grass has started to grow. There is a drain that feeds down via the attic and down through a fake wall within the property's walls.

There are several places where the gutters, downpipes and secret valley are affecting the internal decor of the building. Paint, plaster and floor tiles are being damaged through water ingress.



Fig.21 Water ingress damage to walls and ceilings



Fig.22 Water ingress damage to ceilings and tiled floors



Fig.22 Water ingress damage to ceilings and tiled floors

5.0 Understanding Significance & Heritage Impact

5.1 Summary Statement of Significance

If Swiss gables is assessed as a mansion or even a rectory with special architectural interest and as an elaborate half-timbered house of late Victorian date, with original interiors. (as per CADW listing), then it is a well-preserved example. The architectural detailing of the property is aesthetically pleasing and is not repeated in the near vicinity.

Swiss Gables is a fine example of a Victorian gothic building and its significance is heightened slightly because of its uniqueness. Its architectural detailing internally and externally is very pleasing, decorative in some areas but surprisingly simple in others.

With all this in mind it is best to assess Swiss Gables as a decorative, rare example of fine Victorian gothic architecture and as an example of significance to the locality, the man whom built it and the nation as a whole.

The primary significance of Swiss Gables is its fine unspoilt decorative architectural details.

5.2 The proposed development

The proposed development is to restore/conservate the mansion.

Exterior

- Remove and replace the broken tiles on all roof elevations. Number unknown – estimate between 75 to 100 – mix of reds and blacks. Samples of new reclaimed tiles can be supplied (photo ref 1.0)
- Re-new 1no concealed lead valley, they are approx. 1m wide x 2.5m long, new code 5 sand cast lead, dressed to fit the gutter, returned up the roof and over the tilting fillet and fixed according to LSA best workmanship guidelines (photo ref 1.2)
- Re-new lead flashings to 6no chimneys with code 4/5 sand cast lead, fixed and welded, using existing cut channels in the bricks. Follow LSA best workmanship guidelines (photo ref 1.2A)
- Remove broken sections of cast iron guttering and replace with matching new cast iron guttering – 150mm x 100mm moulded ogee (photo ref 1.3)
- Remove, repair (weld) and re-fix the cast iron hoppers – approx. 380mm x 230mm x 150mm (photo ref 1.3)
- Remove and replace 100mm ½ round plastic and aluminium gutters, to cast iron to match other elevations – 150mm x 100mm moulded ogee (photo ref 1.4)
- Remove and change a north elevation door/frame to match the older one on the same elevation (photo ref 1.5) – door and frame to be made in Douglas fir softwood, frame to have a hardwood cill approx. dims 2.5m (H) x 1.4m (W) includes fanlight at .45m (H)
- Remove and repoint all the defective lime pointing to all the chimneys (Photo ref 1.1) – matched to pre mixed Rhondda lime mortar (Ty Mawr)
- Remove and renew defective flaunching to all the chimneys (Photo ref 1.1 and 1.2)
- Carefully dismantle any loose bricks, remove the foliage, rebuild using the same bricks bedded in lime mortar - matched to pre mixed Rhondda lime mortar (Ty Mawr) (Photo ref 1.1)
- Remove, re-fix loose tiles to verges on North and South elevations of the roof (photo ref 1.1)

- Re roof outbuilding (Photo ref 2.1)

Interior

- Install a new heating boiler and replace the radiators, the pipe runs for the new system will follow the original pipe runs which are present. The boiler is sitting in exactly the same place as the old one. There are no new holes through walls, ceilings or floors for the new pipe runs. (Photo ref 1.6)
- Remove and install 2no new kitchens – The kitchens are being installed in exactly the same layout as the originals, no new holes or pipe runs are being made. (Photo ref 1.7) (see plans attached)
- Install new electrics and upgrade fuse boards – The electrics to the property are in poor condition. We will follow existing electrical wire runs where possible, surface mount any new electric cables/fittings and cover with flush fitting conduit. There are pipe and electrical runs under the floorboards, they can quite clearly be seen and followed. The floorboards are loose and unfixed, attics are easily accessible. An electrical scheme will be produced before any work will take place.
- Remove and install 2no new bathrooms - The bathrooms are being installed in exactly the same layout as the originals, no new holes or pipe runs are being made. (Photo ref 1.7A) (see plans attached)
- Open up and make wider the rear kitchen doorway into the pantry (Annex to the rear) (Photo ref 1.9)
- Remove door/frame and architraves to the 1st floor bathroom, turn 90 degrees and re-fit in new aperture in hallway (Annex to the rear) (Photo ref 2.0)

5.3 Assessment of Heritage Values

Changes within the historic environment are inevitable and conservation is often more about the careful management of that change rather than the prevention of it. New work must respect the setting and significance of the historic assets affected and this report explains both the significance of the house and its heritage values and how this need not be adversely affected through its restoration.

Cadw, following the lead set by Historic England, published Conservation Principles 2 setting out how historic assets should be managed to sustain their values.

The preceding part of this Heritage Impact Appraisal has described the heritage asset and explained its significance. The next stage is to test this understanding against the conservation principles adopted by Cadw on behalf of Welsh Government.

These principles start from the point of view that changes within the historic environment are inevitable and that conservation is often more about the careful management of that change rather than the prevention of it. The guidance set out by Cadw requires that:

“New work must respect the setting and significance of the historic assets affected. The quality of design and execution must add value to that site and its setting, both now and in the future.”

It sets out criteria for how significance can be evaluated, considering Evidential, Historical, Aesthetic and Communal values and says that:

“The significance of an historic asset embraces all of the cultural heritage values that people associate with it”.

5.3.1 Evidential Value

This derives from those elements of an historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity.

At Swiss Gables the evidential value is strong. The building looks like and was built as a mansion and is still one today. Internally the plan and detailing are unmistakably that of something that was built as a mansion. The evidence shown within this document proves that this mansion is of high heritage value on account of there not being many Victorian gothic properties in this locality. I don't believe you can compare this mansion to St David's Church, Neath (Victorian Gothic design) or Margam Castle as they are extremely different in design and use. Swiss Gables has great importance and significance and has strong value nationally.

5.3.2 Historical Value

This derives from how the historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement. This can be less tangible than the evidential value but are nonetheless important.

As we know the former vicarage to Dyffryn church was built between 1881-4 to the design of Henry Ward (Stafford) for Howel Gwyn of Dyffryn. The vicarage is said to have cost the exceptional sum of £7,000, more than the church which cost £4500, and was built for the first vicar, the Rev J.L. Thomas who moved in in 1884.

From a young age Howel was sent to Swansea Grammar School, and placed under the charge of the Rev Daniel Anderson, a well-known scholar, who was at that time the head-master. It is interesting to note that two at least of his fellow- students attained fame - Sir William Grove, who rose to the English Bench, and the late Rev Dr Thomas Cann, of Canterbury.

Aspiring to political honours, Mr Gwyn contested Falmouth in a Conservative interest in 1847, and was returned by a good majority. He continued to represent that borough until 1857. He sat for Brecon from 1866 to 1869, and contested the county of Brecon in 1874, but was defeated by Mr W. Fuller Maitland. He Was high sheriff of Glamorgan in 1837, when

her Majesty ascended the throne, high sheriff of Carmarthen in 1838, and of Brecon in 1843. Although Mr Gwyn was a Conservative and a Churchman, he did not allow sectarian distinctions to interfere in his relations with the people of his own parish.



Fig 23 Howel Gwyn - Neath Port Talbot CC ©

Howel Gwyn was a generous benefactor to the town he was revered for his paternalism having made substantial gifts and land for St David's Church, Alderman Davies School, the building of the Constitutional Club and St Matthew's Church, Gwyn Hall and Dyffryn where he is buried. At his mansion in Dyffryn he hosted an annual fete for his tenants and provided the Christmas luncheon at the Neath Union Workhouse.

Taking all this information into consideration Swiss Gables has strong historical value.

The real value for Swiss Gables is derived from the contribution it makes to the history of and the development of Dyffryn.

5.3.3 Aesthetic Value

This derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from an historic asset.

This report has set out why Swiss Gables is architecturally of interest and an exceptional example of its building type. It has aesthetic value on account of its untouched Victorian gothic style.

Overall, it has strong aesthetic value.

5.3.4 Communal Value

This derives from the meanings that an historic asset has for people who relate to it or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

Swiss Gables was built as a rectory/mansion for St Mathews Church, Dyffryn. All the stone for both structures was quarried from Howel's own establishments. It is believed that local tradesmen were used to build both properties, keeping the skills local and raising the income in the local communities, which he had a great interest in. In 1889 the local community and council installed a statue in his remembrance. He was a prominent public figure and benefactor in Victorian Neath society. During his political career he had served as alderman, town councillor, mayor, High Sheriff of Glamorgan, and MP for Brecon and Falmouth.

It has medium communal value.

5.4 Assessment of Heritage Impact

The analysis of heritage values shows that subject to good design the building has considerable capacity for change without adverse impact on the significance and heritage values.

The original architectural character of Swiss Gables is robust and the repair of the missing roof tiles and re-lime pointing of the chimneys will be an enhancement to the building. Further enhancement can be achieved through the removal/replacement of a modern door/frame from the north elevation, removal of the plastic guttering, repair/ replacement of the cast iron gutters, scarfing of the rotten windows, decoration and repairing water damage

Even though the building has been occupied fully (recently changed hands), it has deteriorated quite badly and this is mostly down to no maintenance. Furthermore, this project enables the restoration/conservation and use of traditional materials to extend the longevity of the mansion.

Overall, the proposed scheme affords the opportunity to restore and conserve this listed building. It will preserve what is most significant about Swiss Gables and will, in the process, give it a sustainable future. It is important to note that the building is deteriorating, it is deemed that work should start without hesitation, to prevent the building suffering any further, if this is not the case then i can see further irreversible water damage to internal decorated ceilings, walls and floors.

As a guide, i believe the majority of the work that is mentioned within this document does not need listed building consent, but i see it as a way of documenting the alterations that are desperately needed.

6.0 Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance

6.1 Key Legislation

The statutory protection, under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as amended by the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016, means that any

works that may affect the character of the listed building, or any of its ancillary buildings, as one of special architectural or historic interest need listed building consent. There is a presumption in the Act that Welsh Ministers will have “special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Listed building consent is obtained from the local planning authority, and in this case has been applied for from Neath and Port Talbot Council alongside the planning application.

6.2 Local Planning Policy

The Council’s Local Development Plan 2011 - 2026, adopted in January 2016, sets out objectives and policies relating to the conservation of the built environment.

The built environment and historic heritage will, where appropriate, be conserved and enhanced through the following measures:

- 1. Encouraging high quality design standards in all development proposals;*
- 2. Protecting arterial gateways from intrusive and inappropriate development;*
- 3. Safeguarding features of historic and cultural importance;*
- 4. The identification of the following designated sites to enable their protection and where appropriate enhancement:*
 - (a) Landscapes of Historic Interest;*
 - (b) Historic Parks and Gardens;*
 - (c) Conservation Areas;*
 - (d) Scheduled Ancient Monuments; and*
 - (e) Listed Buildings and their curtilage.*

6.3 National Planning Guidance

National Policy on the historic environment and the development in the setting of listed buildings is set out in Welsh Government’s Planning Policy Wales (Edition 8, January 2016) and in particular in Chapter 6, Conserving the Historic Environment.

It states at 6.2.1 that one of its objectives is to “safeguard the character of historic buildings and manage change so that their special architectural and historic interest is preserved” and another is to “preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas, while at the same time helping them remain vibrant and prosperous”.

6.4 Cadw guidance on Assessing Heritage Impact

In 2016 Cadw published draft guidance on Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales explaining how vital it is to understand the implications of any proposed change before development is consented. It describes heritage impact assessment as a “structured process” to be summarised in the Heritage Impact Report.

Accordingly, sections 2 and 3 of this report have set out the understanding of Swiss Gable’s character and significance and that of its surrounding heritage and section 5 sets out the assessment of the heritage impact.

7.0 Access

Heritage impact assessments are required to consider, as part of the evaluation of potential mitigation, what increased access to the heritage can be offered. In this case the site is private. As this building is part of a private house there will be no access to the public. There will therefore be no public access to the heritage and no further access is required.

8.0 Summary

This Heritage Impact Assessment has set out the history and significance of Swiss Gables, Dyffryn. It has shown how its architectural character as a rectory/mansion is of great interest. There are no other comparable in the close vicinity or in Neath and Port Talbot.

The overall assessment serves as justification for making the changes necessary to renovate Swiss Gables. The objective is to provide a low maintenance and sustainable home for the future. The roof will be repaired, its chimneys will be stripped of its foliage, re-pointed in lime, flanchued and have new lead flashings and aprons. Exchanging the present plastic and aluminium guttering for cast iron guttering and repairing the existing will speed up and ensure the removal of rainwater. Once the water ingress problems have been resolved, the repair and decoration of the internal walls will lift the appearance of each room, and remove unwanted moisture from within the mansion.

Installing new kitchens, bathrooms, a heating system and open up and move 2no doorways will help adapt the building for modern living, which i believe is crucial to the survival of buildings like this.

Crucially this report has shown how, since the mansion was first built, its character and appearance, and that of its setting, has been preserved but its decline has been solely due to lack of maintenance and the age of the property. This history of negligence cannot be repeated or the significance of this building will be lost.

Swiss Gables is a very commanding property perched on a slight hill overlooking the valley towards Bryncoch, its surrounded by fantastic architecture and surprising as it may seem this does add extra weight to the merits and urgency of getting this building repaired. Having the mansion conserved would not only restore its essential character but would also enhance the vista as you drive by.

In summary the report has assessed the capacity for change and tested that against the proposed development and demonstrated how the heritage asset will be sufficiently protected, and indeed enhanced, through the proposed restoration and conservation.

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