



Impression showing view of the Visitor Centre across the lake from the dam adjacent to Pond Cottage.

LANDSCAPE

Visitor Centre Landscape

The design for the Visitor Centre landscape will respond to the proposals for the building and the principle of establishing a series of identifiable arrival points for visitors, which take advantage of the stunning views across the Fishpond lake.

The main pedestrian entrance point from the car park will be via an elevated pathway through the existing trees, which delivers people to the first floor level. This will utilise a combination of metal and timber, responding to the materiality of the regenerated Visitor Centre building and will weave through the existing tree canopy. Moving across the first floor entrance terrace, this route will extend down to the ground floor level via a generous external staircase aligned with an amphitheatre of wide stepped seating providing external areas to inhabit. Internal floor finishes generally align with external finishes at both ground and first, extending key spaces out into covered areas and external rooms defined by soft landscaping.

To the west of the Visitor Centre is the existing children's play area, which caters for younger children. This will be retained with hard landscaping creating a more defined link between the building and the area. This will include further seating opportunities flowing down from the terrace at first floor level. The grass area to the north and west of the play area will continue to be used as a picnicking space. The building itself will be further embedded within the landscape through planting beds and green roofs at first floor level, allowing vegetation to climb and cascade over the plinth, giving the impression that the building has been given back to nature.



Visitor Centre Landscape - Precedent Images showing the stepped seats of High Line, New York (Top) and the Treetop Walkway at Westonbirt Arboretum (bottom)

Soft landscape Scheme

The soft landscape scheme for the new visitor centre at Gnoll park seeks to achieve a number of aims concerning landscape character, visual impact and amenity as well as making a significant contribution to biodiversity enhancement.

The proposed scheme seeks to anchor the new building into the landscape, retaining surrounding existing trees and grassland where possible. A large proportion of the roof of the building will be green utilising locally sourced wildflowers and grasses. Where new planting and enhancement is required at ground level, the scheme creates a transition from ornamental formal planting upon the building terraces out to wild meadow grassland, wildflower turf and native tree and shrub planting further out.

The visual impact of the new building is softened through the use of the green roof, trailing and climbing plants on portions of the façade and surrounding native tree and shrub planting. Key views towards the lake are preserved as well as inter-visibility between the visitor centre and adjacent play area.

A range of planting types have been used which will have a positive impact on the sites biodiversity, including native trees, native shrub and hedgerows species, meadow grassland and wildflower turf, flowering climbers and a range of ornamental species. The planting has been chosen to fit its location and microclimate so as to enable straight forward management and maintenance over the long term in order to realise maximum biodiversity benefits. The planting at the northern side of the building seeks to contribute to the drainage scheme by creating a rain garden for infiltration of surface water runoff. This planting also provides a damp habitat beneficial to wildlife at the quieter northern side of the building.

The soft landscape scheme comprises a number of typologies which will be clearly defined and set out within the management plan for the site together with management objectives and maintenance operations consistent with best practice.



Soft landscaping mood board - showing some of the proposed plants and planting strategies around the Visitor Centre.

ECOLOGY + BIODIVERSITY

Ecology

Please refer to the development control section of this report for Park designations.

To inform detailed design proposals, a 'Visitor Centre Bat Survey and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal' was prepared by the Ecologist (Planning +Consultancy) Countryside and Wildlife Team Neath Port Talbot CBC. This supplements existing known information. Engagement with ecology has helped ensure that proposals are fully integrated within their existing natural setting whilst sensitively managing and enhancing habitats and features.

Wherever possible the detailed design proposals have been adapted to suit the ecological sensitivities identified through the site surveys with the aim of keeping ecological impacts to an absolute minimum. Please refer to Ecology report.

Arboriculture

In addition to the extended Phase 1 habitat surveys, an arboricultural impact assessment has been undertaken of the Visitor Centre site to record information on all trees and hedges on, or within influencing distance of, the proposed development areas, in accordance with BS 5837.

The results of the site survey and associated desktop searches was provided in the form of a Tree Constraints Plan showing tree locations, canopy extents, Root Protection Area (adjusted to reflect site conditions and constraints to root growth) and tree quality categorisation for the site.

Full survey data and management recommendations in response to any existing or developing defects, hazards and opportunities are also noted.

This information has been used to facilitate discussion regarding tree retention and removal, and assess the potential impacts on retained trees from the detailed design schemes, with the aim of keeping tree impacts to an absolute minimum and identifying opportunities to enhance. Trees identified as trees of landscape and amenity value have been retained where possible to help maintain integrity and maturity of the landscape, and aid integration of the development within the existing site and wider landscape.

The tree constraints have been drawn on the existing and proposed plans, submitted as part of this application, and should be referred to for a detailed analysis of how the building has been designed to respond to these constraints.

Any loss of trees and/or vegetation, in order to facilitate the development, will be offset by new native or wildlife friendly tree planting across the site. Refer to Arboriculturalist information for details.