



Hiraeth:

PROJECT CONTEXT STATEMENT

Gnoll Estate Country Park | Neath | Neath Port Talbot | SA11 3BS

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FOREWORD

Address:

Gnoll Estate Country Park
Neath
Neath Port Talbot
SA11 3BS

Unitary (Local) Authority:

Neath Port Talbot

Grid Reference:

SS763972
E 276282
N 197202



curvy.data.cable

Listing:

Gnoll Estate Country Park is a grade II* designated parkland which contains several

Ownership

Gnoll Estate Country Park is owned by Neath Port Talbot Council. Evolved from the landscaped grounds of the former Gnoll House, the park offers spectacular views across the county borough, allied with way marked trails through woodlands and grasslands, marshes and reservoirs. In addition to this, the area contains many fragments of history that tell the evolution of the town including the ruins of Gnoll House. Activity is now centralised around a visitor centre constructed in the 1990's, allied with the many accessible children's play parks that are largely focussed around the main fishing pond.

To arrange a site visit, please contact the Client representative using the following details:

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Project Manager/ Rheolwr Prosiectau

T. 07735 098 495
E. n.g.richards@npt.gov.uk
www.npt.gov.uk

The consultant team responsible for this planning application are as follows:

Andrew Scott Ltd

Lead Contractors and delivery partners coordinating the RIBA stage 3 works and advising on the viability and build ability of the proposals.

Design Manager in charge of the project: Luke Rees

Andrew Scott Ltd | The Grange | Margam | Neath Port Talbot | SA13 2SP

T. 01639 889 800 Ext 1142

Hiraeth Architecture Ltd

Architects advising upon the architectural and conservation aspects of the project.

Director in charge of the project: Michael Plageman

Hiraeth Architecture | The Maltings | East Tyndall Street

Cardiff | CF24 5EA

T. 029 2035 1645

Asbri Planning

Planning Consultants providing planning advice, coordination and support with regards to the proposed repair and alterations

Director in charge of the project: Richard Bowen

Asbri Planning | Suite D | 1st Floor | 220 High Street

Swansea | SA1 1NW

T. 07825 597 796

McCann and Partners Consulting Engineers

Engineers advising upon mechanical and electrical aspects of the scheme including capacity and installation

Manager in charge of the project: Geraint Hopkins

Office 2.02 | Bay Technology Centre | Baglan Energy Park

Port Talbot | SA12 7AX

T. 01792 794285

Jubb Civil and Structural Engineers

Civil and Structural Engineers who have appraised the existing structure of Pond Cottage, together with addressing structural aspects of the proposals. In addition to this they have been responsible for drainage and SAB design.

Manager in charge of the project: Graeme Smith

2A Oak Tree Court | Mulberry Drive | Cardiff Gate Business Park

Cardiff | CF23 8RS

T. 029 2052 4446

Davies Landscape

Landscape architects responsible for landscape proposals

Manager in charge: Miles Gray

Office 1C | 1-2 King Street Stroud | Gloucestershire | GL5 3BS

T. 07983 610 065

Neath Port Talbot Ecologist (Consultancy + Planning)

Ecologists advising on all aspects of biodiversity and ecology proposals.

Consultant in charge of the project: Megan Price

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council | The Quays | Brunel Way | Baglan Energy

T. 07816973877

Neath Port Talbot Arboriculturalist (Consultancy + Planning)

Arboriculturalist advising on all aspects of the growing, maintaining, managing and removal of woody plants

Consultant in charge of the project: Nick Thomas

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council | The Quays | Brunel Way | Baglan Energy

T. 01639 686 197

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UPRN	Zone	Originator	Role	Type	File number	Suitability	Rev
2080	00	HIR	A	RP	06806	S2	P1
Suitability		S2 - Issued for Information					



Aerial View of Groll Estate Country Park showing the immediate context of Neath to the South West

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document sets out the context for Planning proposals evolved during the RIBA Stage 3 development phase for Gnoll Estate Country Park – a largely 18th century landscaped area of historic interest. Commissioned by Andrew Scott Ltd on behalf of Neath Port Talbot Council, and following a successful LUF funding application in 2022, the study has looked at the existing knowledge and research base for the project and the proposed site in general, analysed the existing physical site context and set out the existing planning context. In reviewing similar, existing schemes, aspirations for the ongoing sustainability of the park have subsequently been developed - both in terms of carbon footprints and economic sustainability.

The study shows that the proposals present a unique opportunity for Gnoll Estate Country Park. Whilst the park is a valued community facility currently, the loss of the house has without a doubt undermined the rationale of the reason for the existence of the landscape. This has had a detrimental effect on both the historic and evidential value of the site as a whole, but also on the wider Neath area, including the Neath Valley. The house was a dominating factor in the landscape – visible from the developing town of Neath below, with panoramic views over the valley from above. Its loss consequently has had an inevitable effect on the identity of the surrounding communities.

Despite this, the park still retains the potential to meet both the existing and evolving demands and aspirations of its community. This can be enhanced through a reconnection with the past. In delivering the scheme, opportunities exist to harness the skills and resources of the borough, including innovative construction systems and available local

materials. The proposals have the potential to bring together Neath Port Talbot Council, the Woodland Trust, Welsh Government and community groups in a collaborative manner, to deliver on the significant capital funding and grant aid that the scheme has attracted. This forms a sound basis for future collaborative ventures that will see the park both sustainably delivered and sustainably run.

To facilitate this, a phased approach has been developed, with this project acting as the initial phase. The key interventions are focussed around the following areas:

- The repurposing of Gnoll House ruins and the cellars
- Landscaping interventions across the park
- The demolition of the existing Visitor Centre and new build replacement
- The refurbishment of Pond Cottage as a tea room
- Structural Engineering interventions
- The repair and restoration of the kitchen garden as the setting for new visitor accommodation

The proposals reflect the very best principles in contemporary architectural design, together with project and design management, which are required to deliver an integrated and efficient process. They also enshrine the principles of sustainability as a matter of course, together with setting out and managing the necessary quality aspects of the project. In this manner it will enable the delivery of an iconic, aspirational and sustainable park that is befitting of its community and the wider region, reinstating the parkland as a key focal point of Neath and the wider Vale.



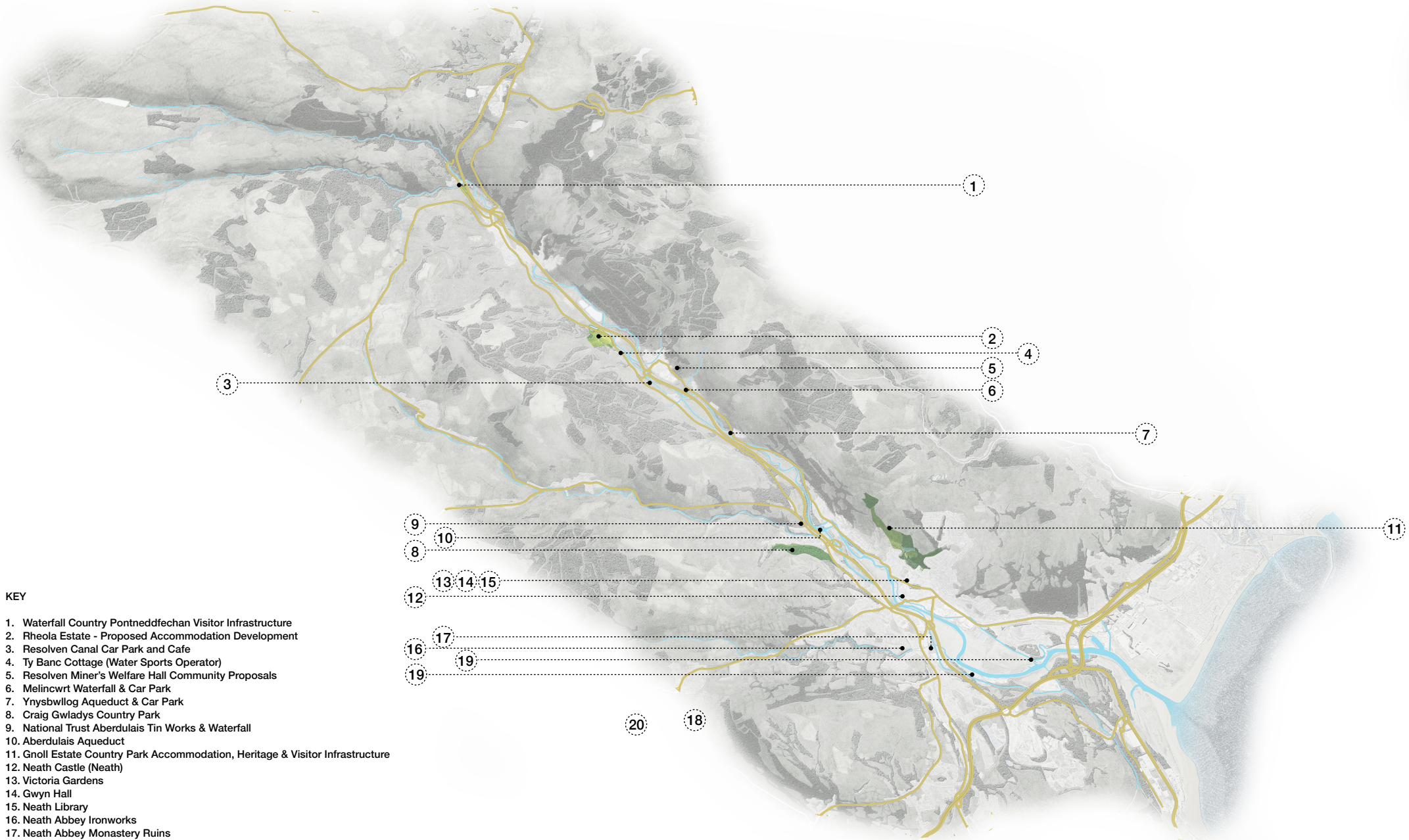
Pond Cottage, viewed from the north east

INTRODUCTION

Further to the invitation for local authorities across Wales to develop grant application proposals to Welsh Government for Levelling Up Funding, Neath Port Talbot Council appointed Hiraeth Architects to lead a multi-disciplinary team of consultants in the generation of design proposals for the restoration and enhancement of Gnoll Estate Country Park. The Levelling Up Fund 'is especially intended to support investment in places where it can make the biggest difference to everyday life, including ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and coastal communities. It is also designed to help local areas select genuine local priorities for investment by putting local stakeholder support...at the heart of its mission'.

Andrew Scott have subsequently led the consultant team in developing the RIBA Stage 3 process in conjunction with Neath Port Talbot Council and their Projects' Team to evolve the project brief and design responses. Consequently this document collates existing briefing information generated by the Local Authority through research into the local community, the heritage asset and associated business planning, to provide a shared vision for the parkland that underpins these proposals.

The proposals directly look to address the key element of the Levelling Up Fund – the infrastructure of everyday life - focusing on the needs of the individual place and the strategic case for investment to improve people's lives and in the case of Neath, returning pride in the local community.



KEY

- 1. Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure
- 2. Rheola Estate - Proposed Accommodation Development
- 3. Resolven Canal Car Park and Cafe
- 4. Ty Banc Cottage (Water Sports Operator)
- 5. Resolven Miner's Welfare Hall Community Proposals
- 6. Melincwrt Waterfall & Car Park
- 7. Ynysbwilog Aqueduct & Car Park
- 8. Craig Gwladys Country Park
- 9. National Trust Aberdulais Tin Works & Waterfall
- 10. Aberdulais Aqueduct
- 11. Gnoll Estate Country Park Accommodation, Heritage & Visitor Infrastructure
- 12. Neath Castle (Neath)
- 13. Victoria Gardens
- 14. Gwyn Hall
- 15. Neath Library
- 16. Neath Abbey Ironworks
- 17. Neath Abbey Monastery Ruins
- 18. Clydach Valley
- 19. Neath Canal & Tennant Canal
- 20. Swansea Canal

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The Gnoll Estate Country Park project is an exciting, dynamic initiative to plan, co-ordinate and deliver activities related to the environment, heritage and tourism across the park, working in conjunction with the Levelling Up Funding programme in Neath. This will change the reality and perception of the area and its community, and promote it and the wider region as a highly-desirable place to live, work and visit, importantly with tangible economic benefits.

Through the Local Authority, existing strategic locations that already serve local communities and attract visitors have been identified and assessed as being suitable to be developed into a network of proposals up and down the Vale of Neath corridor. Importantly, this approach is not simply about physical infrastructure development or the buildings themselves at each of the locations. Rather, in keeping with the aims and aspirations of the Well Being of Future Generations Act in Wales, the aim is for sites to develop and deliver against the following themes and opportunities:

- A high-quality user and visitor experience with excellent facilities and amenities, including exemplary environmental standards
- The development of educational, skills and training opportunities
- The encouragement and support of active lifestyles to improve health and wellbeing, acting as focal points and locations for formal and informal outdoor activities, including green social prescribing
- Promotion and use of local healthy food and produce to support wellbeing, and boost and help sustain the local/foundational economy
- The inclusion, fostering and development of local community and enterprise involvement in running the sites.
- Enhancing the natural environment of the park to support and increase biodiversity and ensure resilience to change (including climate change) is improved.

The intention is to utilise key sites in the Vale to spread the benefits across the wider valleys. As well as destinations in their own right, these key sites should tell the stories of the Vale of Neath and vitally act as launchpads that encourage local people and visitors to explore and discover the surrounding area, including the towns and villages, and the wider landscapes. As part of a wider vision, the sites should connect physically where possible, through high-quality walking and cycling routes and public transport improvements to encourage wellbeing and exploration of the valleys.

The Criteria for the Key Sites

The generally agreed principles in assigning the key sites are as follows:

- Provide a memorable and outstanding visitor and user experience - 'Wow' factor
- An evolving creative approach to interpretation and promotion including developing narratives around the landscape, biodiversity and culture of the immediate area and the Vale of Neath
- The diversity of the different sites is embraced to reflect the identities of the different communities, enhancing the visitor experience
- Connectivity (physical and digital) with other key sites to provide a coordinated, complementary approach that supports a consistent high-quality offer at each
- Launchpads to encourage and enable wider exploration of local towns and villages developing strong links to local communities.
- Provide opportunities to develop longer walking and cycling trails and routes to strengthen local and landscape-scale habitat connectivity enhancing our natural resources within the Vale of Neath and the wider South Wales area.

As one of the key development sites evolving from this, the essential outputs for Gnoll Estate Country Park are described as:

- Reinstating the significance of the park as a key historic development in the establishment of Neath and the wider Vale of Neath
- High-quality visitor facilities including café/visitor centre
- High environmental standards and commitment to contribute to wider ecosystem enhancement Green Key (or equivalent) environmental standards for accommodation if applicable
- Commitment to promoting the Vale of Neath through co-branding and appropriate signage and creative interpretation at the site
- Commitment to the enhancement of park biodiversity through sensitive interventions that work with and promote nature and are part of a site wide management and conservation strategy
- Commitment to development of the following:
 - High-quality, sustainably produced local healthy produce procured locally and used on site
 - Hosting of guardians/rangers to support educational and interpretation activities concerning the landscape and heritage in the local area and the wider Vale
 - Health and well-being orientated exercise, nutrition and social inclusion linked to wellbeing, e.g. DDA compliant, dementia friendly, biodiversity rich, facilities for families, health programmes
 - Good sustainable transport links especially around active travel (cycling and walking)
 - Involvement of community organisations and enterprise partners such as the Woodland Trust and the Friends of the park, as appropriate, in operating and/or supporting the sites to foster local involvement and develop foundational economy opportunities.