



Neath.

**ZONE 07_WOODLAND PLAY AREA-
HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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



Aerial View of Groll Estate Country Park showing the immediate context of Neath to the South West and the proposed site circled in red.

FOREWORD

Address:

Gnoll Estate Country Park
Neath
Neath Port Talbot
SA11 3BS

Unitary (Local) Authority:

Neath Port Talbot

Community:

Tonna

Grid Reference:

SS76529 97358
E 276529
N 197358



horns.trend.handle

Location:

The proposed site is located in Gnoll Estate Country Park. A grade II* designated parkland.

This document has been produced to support a planning application to the Neath Port Talbot Council for the construction of a new woodland play area at Gnoll Estate Country Park. It is to be read in conjunction with the associated information and drawings produced by the consultant team, and in particular the Gnoll Estate Country Park Context Statement by Hiraeth Architecture, which sets out a more detailed history of the site and wider project development.

The proposals are born out of a wider desire to reinstate Gnoll Estate Country Park at the historic heart of its community, providing an iconic, aspirational and sustainable parkland that is a gateway to the wider Vale of Neath Heritage Corridor. The overall scheme is subject to individual applications that coincide with the project programme. The effects and implications of changes beyond the immediate application area have therefore been borne in mind when assessing the impact of proposals.

Ownership

The Gnoll Estate Country Park is largely owned by Neath Port Talbot Council and has evolved from the landscaped grounds of the former Gnoll House. Set within 200 acres of woodland and open spaces, the Park is renowned for its picturesque beauty and although its historic character has been somewhat diluted through the loss of the original country house and associated ornamental planting, many of its structural elements remain intact and it continues to be a major attraction for both locals and visitors. Activity is now centralised around a visitor centre constructed in the 1990's, allied with the many 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:

Nick Richards

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

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

CONTENTS

Site Context and Analysis	2
History and Importance of the Site	5
The Brief	10
Development Control	11
Involvement	14
Overview of Proposals	15
Assessment of Impact and Mitigation	19
Appendices	24
Contact	26



UPRN	Zone	Originator	Role	Type	File number	Suitability	Rev
2080	07	HIR	A	RP	06804	S2	P2
Suitability		S2 - Issued for Information					



View of the across the fishpond looking from the northwest to the south

SITE CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS



OS map showing wider topography around the proposed site for the temporary cafe.

Park Access

The main vehicular access to the park is via Fairyland, connecting the park with the town centre via a residential area comprising post-war housing. Various pedestrian routes run throughout the park and link to the wider surrounding context including the Grade II listed War Memorial Gates at the south of the estate. Recent acquisition of Brynau Wood and Farm to the east of the park by The Woodland Trust provides further opportunity to extend walking routes and increase the permeability of the park.

Location and Topography

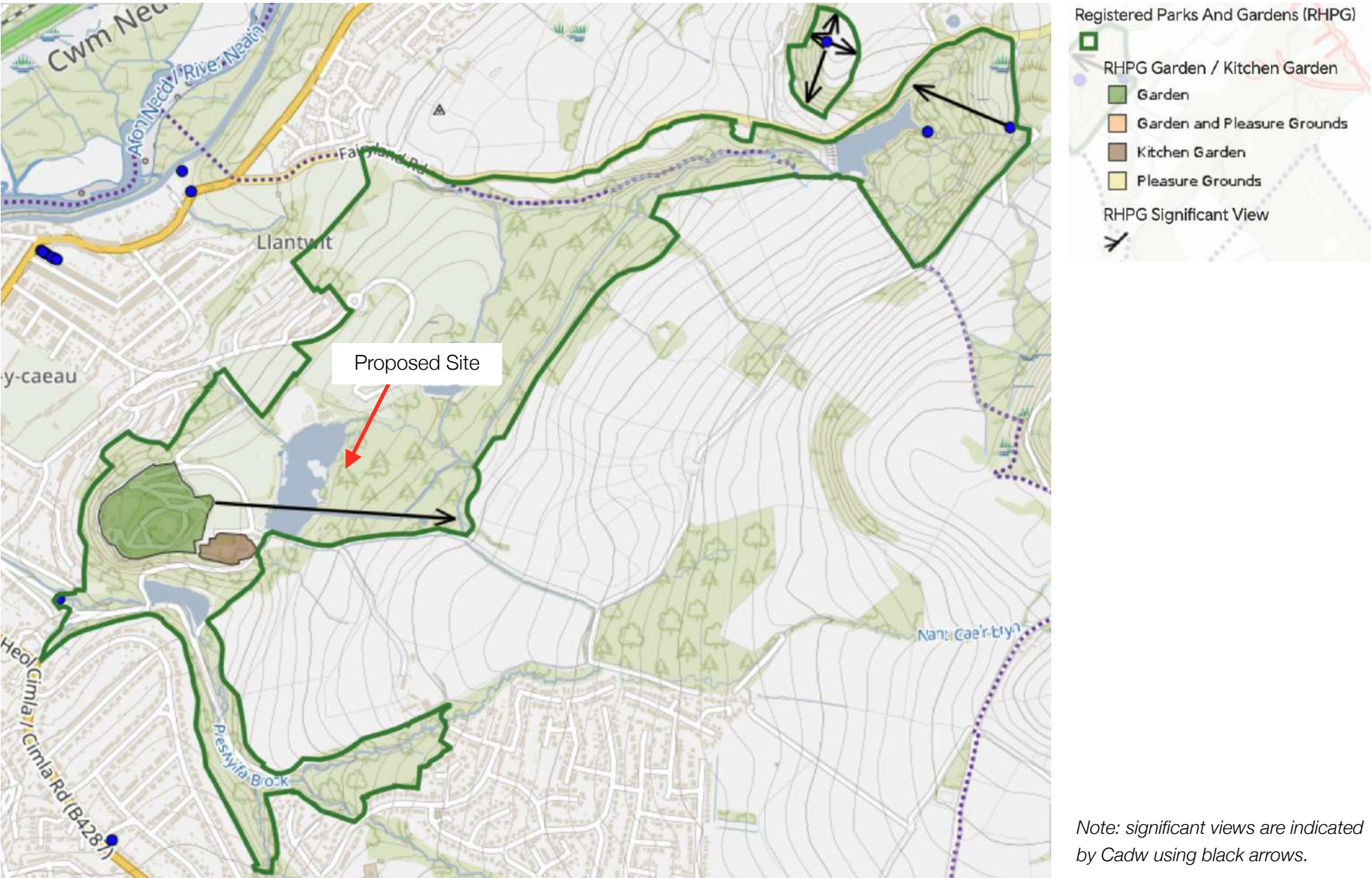
The proposed site for the adventure play area sits along the existing footpath to the east of the fishpond. From the fishpond, the ground gradually rises to the east and the dense woodland opens on to a clearing known as Brynau Farm. Within Fishpond Wood there are a number of smaller waterways, linking between the reservoirs and servicing the formal cascades.

Pedestrian Access

Footpaths run across the park and provide a number of walking routes for visitors. The footpath runs around the perimeter of the Fishpond, linking to other walking routes through the woodland. The route around the fishpond is the most popular amongst visitors due to its location near to visitor facilities and the car park, the views across the fishpond and its general connectivity to the rest of the park.

Adjacent features

The proposed site located directly east of the footpath that runs along fishpond, this is screened somewhat by a bank of trees on the western side of the footpath adjacent to the water. The formal cascades sit to the south of the Site and the Visitor Centre sits to the northwest, on the opposite side of the fishpond.



Note: significant views are indicated by Cadw using black arrows.



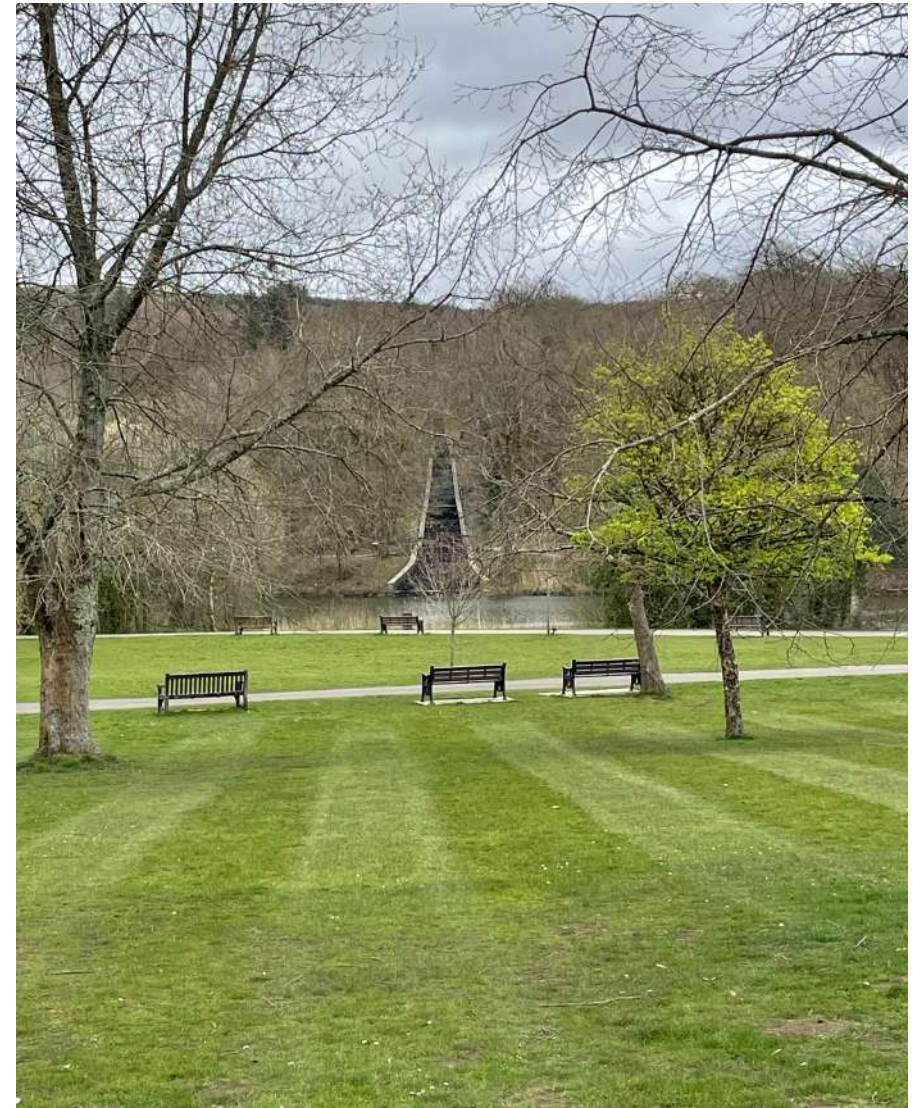
Map by B. Jones (1740-1764) shows the fishpond with adjacent woodland. The map shows the extent of landscaping that took place in the early 18th century, in particular the formal avenue to Gnoll House that aligns with the cascades to the East within Fishpond Wood.

HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE SITE

Historical Overview

Fishpond Wood is a mature woodland that forms part of the landscaped grounds of Gnoll Estate Country Park. This site was historically part of the Gnoll Estate and formed the pleasure grounds for the principal manor house. The estate underwent significant expansion during the late 17th and early 18th century when it was under the ownership of the Mackworth Family. 1695-1704 was a crucial era of development that included the extension of the house and the creation of the ponds. The landscape is an inherent reflection of the house and alterations to its design, directly correlating to the evolution of industrial processes under the Mackworths. The family displayed their wealth through innovative grand landscape gestures.

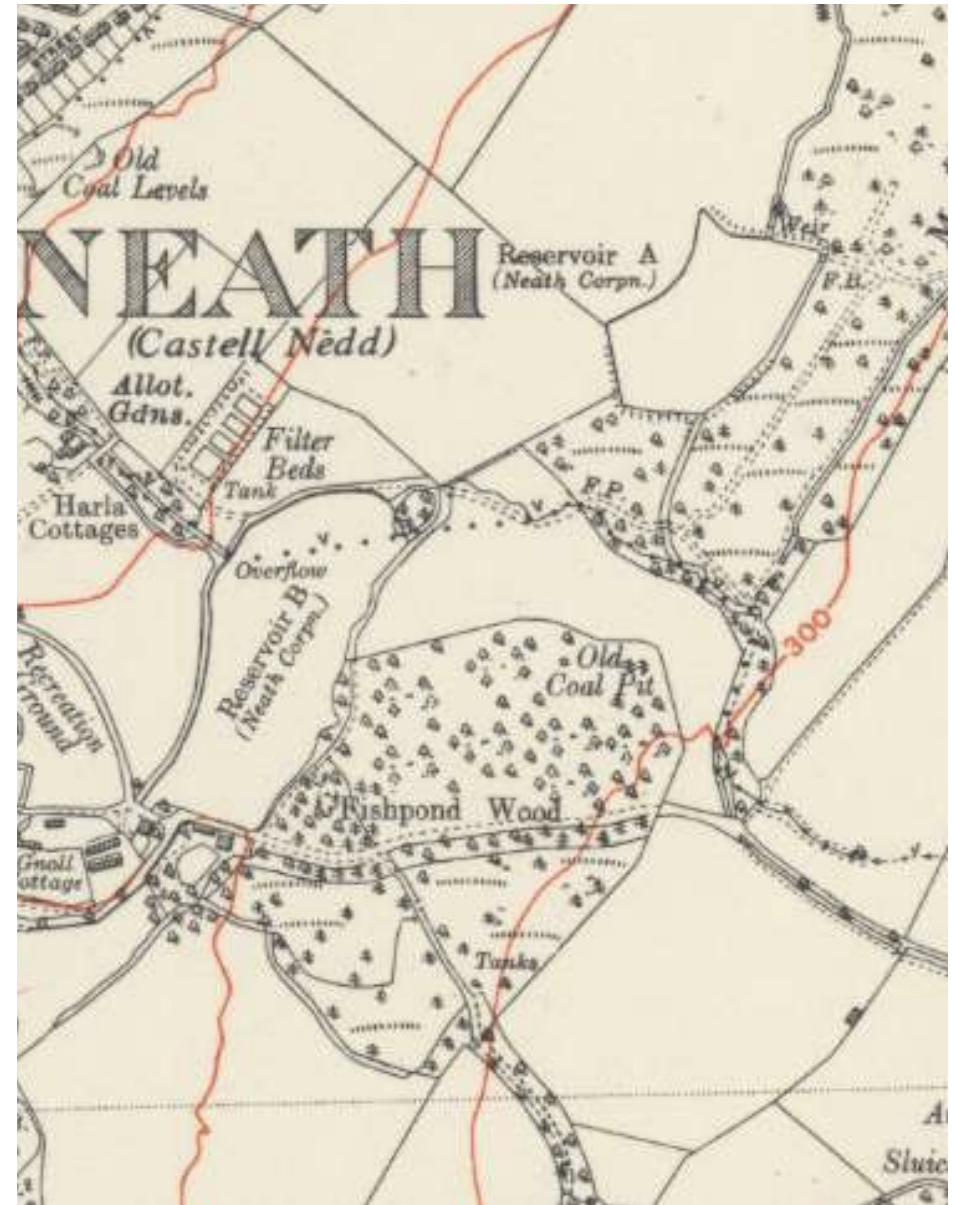
A series of reservoirs were added to the estate during this time to serve the copper mines owned by the Mackworth family. The Fishpond is the largest of these reservoirs and is a dominating feature of the landscape. Fishpond wood lies directly to the east of the Fishpond, separated only by a footpath. The two are closely linked and historically formed part of the cohesive, formal landscape. Fishpond Wood further holds significant importance in that it is the location of the formal cascades that were constructed to align with the formal avenue and offer a principal view of the landscape from Gnoll House. This has been identified by Cadw as a 'significant view'. Despite the later neglect of the estate, the woodland has remained a consistent element within the landscape since its formation in the 18th century, and therefore holds significant historical value.



Principal view from Gnoll House Ruins to the cascades, the proposed site is located outside of this but sits within the contextual landscape.



Glamorgan Sheet XVI surveyed 1876 to 1877, published 1884.



Glamorgan Sheet XVI.SW revised 1948, published 1951.

Landscape Character

The heritage of Gnoll Estate Country Park has been explored within the Conservation Management Plan (CMP), which subdivides the park into 7 defined landscape compartments. For each compartment, a key approach has been summarised. The proposed site is located within compartment B, Fishpond and Fishpond Wood.

The CMP describes the wood as:

‘a deciduous woodland characterised by gigantic beech trees and ancient lime. In springtime, the woodland floor is encased in a carpet of bluebells. The cascades also reside in fishpond wood. The path from the top of the cascades runs alongside the leat (a trench for bringing water to a mill wheel). This is a wonderful sight in summer with dozens of jewel bright damselflies and dragonflies patrolling its length.’ The document later suggests that ‘the aim here should be to repair the cascades and also undertake a survey of all mature trees. A woodland management plan should be drawn up.’

In this context, the principal of of introducing a play area within the woodland needs to be sensitively managed and screened from principal views.

(Right) Views across the fishpond from the north (top) and south (bottom), this demonstrates the significance of the woodland to the landscape character and furthermore its visibility in principal areas of the park.

(Following page) Extract from Conservation Management Plan - Landscape Compartment Designations



The Gnoll CMP

Figure 9
The Gnoll Landscape
Compartments

Legend

-  A - The House and Gardens including kitchen garden
-  B - Fishpond and Fishpond Wood
-  C - The Pleasure Grounds / Recreation Ground
-  D - Mosshouse Wood
-  E - Preswylfa Dingle and Lower Pool
-  F - Memorial Garden, Gates and Gnoll Brook
-  G - The Picturesque Landscape

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database rights 2022

Drawn by: CL	Checked by: IB	Date: 11/04/22
-----------------	-------------------	-------------------



Overview of Social and Communal Value

The central part of the park surrounding the Fishpond forms the core area for recreational activity within the parkland. Equally, it has significant connection to the history and development of the estate, in particular the 18th century landscaping works that took place. It is therefore of high social and communal value as a publicly accessible historic park and garden and visitor attraction.

There has always been a strong connection between Gnoll Estate Country Park and the wider community and since the estate came under the ownership of Neath Port Talbot Council it has transitioned from private to public ownership. In turn, the parkland has consistently remained a popular destination for visitors. In the past, the reservoirs were popular for swimming and boating, whilst today visitors participate in a range of activities throughout the parkland including, walking, golf and fishing. The Visitor Centre acts as a communal hub and is the current focal point for tourism in the park as the primary location of public facilities.

Works to Gnoll Estate Country Park are being undertaken in order to encourage visitors to the parkland and improve facilities. Designated play areas have a significant role in the attraction of visitors and the quality of visitor experience. Therefore there it is likely that the regeneration of play facilities will improve the social and communal value of park.

Local Facilities

The Gnoll Estate Country Park is well connected to the surrounding area with good transport links, more details of which can be found within the Project Context Document by **Hiraeth** Architecture.



View of existing woodland play area in the location of the new proposals.

THE BRIEF

The proposed scheme provides a timely opportunity to improve Gnoll Estate Country Park for the community of Neath, with the additional aim of attracting a wider audience to visit the park. This has broad ambitions to enhance and contribute to the local economy and will be achieved, in part, through the development.

- A new woodland play area within Fishpond wood, adjacent to the Fishpond to improve visitor attraction.
- Providing a landscape to screen proposals from significant views within the historic parkland

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

This document is supported by Planning Statement/Detailed Covering Letter by Asbri Planning and should be read in conjunction with the enclosed information.

Policy Context

Please refer to the supporting information produced by Asbri Planning which has been submitted as part of this application.

Local Development Plan

For details regarding the local development plan please refer to the Project Context Document produced by Hiraeth Architecture and the planning statement by Asbri Planning.

Relevant Designations

Historic Parks and Gardens are part of Wales' national identity. Registration identifies parks and gardens which are of special interest to Wales, and that reflect aspects of Welsh life, including places to live, work and play. The resource is worthy of protection as they provide a connection to the lives and ambitions of past generations. They are valuable and distinct places that should therefore be recognised and safeguarded for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

Inclusion on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens is not a preservation order. However, such areas are identified in order to help protect their special interest, and, if necessary, manage their change so that they remain viable and sustainable in a changing social context.

The following statutory designation applies to the Gnoll Estate Country Park in which the visitor centre is located:

Gnoll Estate and Country Park -

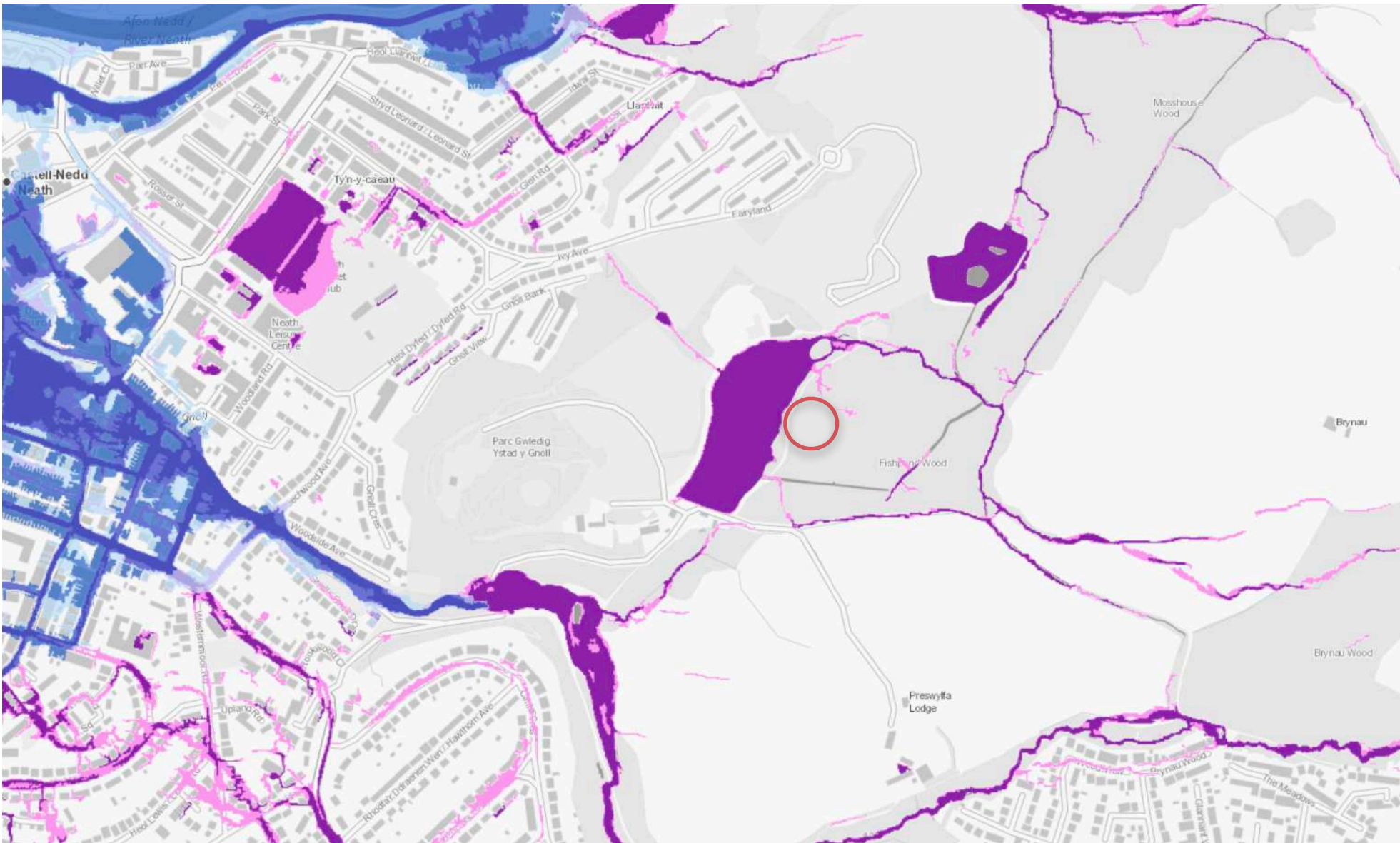
Registered Historic Park and Garden (Grade II*)

'It is registered for the survival of its largely eighteenth-century landscape park, which is of great historic interest, in its original rural setting above Neath. It lies on the flank of the Vale of Neath, long famed for its picturesque beauty. The landscape of The Gnoll is exceptional for its combination of industrial and ornamental functions and for its strong visual relationship with the surrounding countryside.'

For further listings relating to Gnoll Estate Country Park please refer to the Project Context Document.

Flood Risk

Flood risk assessments are used to show how the flood risk to a site, or elsewhere as a result of proposed changes to the site, can be managed as part of a development proposal. The red circle locates the proposed site for the adventure play area. The map demonstrates that the site sits outside any Flood Risk Zone. Therefore a flood risk assessment will not be required going forwards.



Extract from the Flood Map for Planning, showing site and flood zones. Proposed site location circled in red.

Ecology

Gnoll Estate Country Park is a designated Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) (NPTSINC036) by the Local Planning Authority through the Local Development Plan (2011- 2026).

Bats and their roosts are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). Under Regulation 3 (4) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994, local planning authorities, in exercise of their functions, are to have regard to the provisions of the 1992 *Habitats* Directive (92/43/EEC) in so far that they might be affected by those functions

Bat surveys have been carried out by Neath Port Talbot Ecologist (Consultancy + Planning). In terms of wider biodiversity, the ecologists have also had input into the development proposals. These are detailed in the Bat Surveys and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal prepared by the Ecologist (Planning +Consultancy) Countryside and Wildlife Team Neath Port Talbot CBC, and that accompany this application.

The reports look to cover ecological mitigation measures in relation to the particular habitats, any protected species and the proposed works. Details of ecological mitigation measures to be implemented prior to and during construction to protect and mitigate effects on important ecological features within the site are covered within the Ecology report and should be referred to in full as part of this application.

Arboricultural Impact and Tree Protection Orders

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment has also been carried out as part of the development proposals by Neath Port Talbot Arboriculturalist (Consultancy + Planning). This is also attached to the application.

Previous Planning Applications

Please refer to the Project Context Document for details of previous planning applications pertaining to the site.



Existing planting is both ornamental and more natural in nature, giving a diverse habitat across the site.

INVOLVEMENT

Community

Extensive consultation has been undertaken with the Neath Port Talbot Council's Project Advisory Group throughout the project. This group has been chosen to represent the interests of the many staff and volunteers that input into the management and running of the Gnoll Estate Country Park. Consequently the proposed scheme is representative of their involvement and decision making and validation.

Wider consultation has also been undertaken with the surrounding community with the Community Council, neighbours and interested parties to explain the scheme and its wider benefits. This follows initial consultation with the community on the LUF developed scheme, the responses to which have been considered and incorporated into the proposals where possible. The outcomes of this consultation have been summarised by Planning Solutions Ltd. Overall, this consultation revealed some clear feedback, which has amended the overall park strategy (refer to Project Context document).

Pre-Application Consultation Response

A comprehensive, positive and constructive pre-application consultation process has been undertaken with input from Cadw, Ecology and Arboricultural consultants proving to be particularly valuable to the scheme development. A more formal response has been collated by Asbri Planning that accompanies this application, whilst subsequent discussions and development of the proposals, have looked to address the points raised.

Ongoing engagement

Cadw

Given the sensitivity of the designated context as a grade II* listed parkland, ongoing discussions have been held with Cadw, to ensure that the design development has been carried out in dialogue where possible.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSALS

Changes to the historic and traditional environment (whether designated or not) are inevitable in order to maintain and secure our heritage for future generations. Such development is often born in response to social, cultural and economic changes within society generally, and in this case the renewal of facilities for visitors at the Gnoll Estate Country Park is a critical element of the council's strategy to promote the Park and wider Vale of Neath region as a highly-desirable place to live, work and visit with tangible economic benefits. This will ultimately facilitate the management of the wider landscape so it can be retained and enhanced as a large scale designed landscape that celebrates its associations with the town of Neath, its pioneering development of industrial processes, and as a valuable asset to its surrounding community.

The wider proposal for the park therefore seeks to facilitate the enhancement of Gnoll Estate Country Park, in terms of its evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal value whilst improving the economic sustainability of the commercial offer in line with similar destinations across the region. It looks to build on existing successful commercial offers and broaden the demographic and seasonality whilst representing the unique values of its location.

Taking into consideration the requirements of the brief; the historic context of the park, the consultation responses; and the constraints of the site, a strategic approach has been developed. These key considerations represent a framework for the response to the contextual analysis. The overall proposals for the parkland respond to the specifics of the site in terms of views, topography, access and community need.

Construction of a new woodland play area to Fishpond Wood

As part of the wider proposals, it is proposed that a new woodland play area is constructed to an existing clearing to the east of the Fishpond, within Fishpond Wood. This includes a large birds nest structure (approx. 7-8m tall) with climbing elements and slides positioned centrally within the play park. Secondary structures include tunnels, zip wires and a pendulum rope swing. In addition, the proposals include a smaller dedicated 'junior zone' to suit children aged 2 to 8. This has soft surfaces, low climbing structures and play panels. The play area also includes a designated picnic area.

The play area is intended to be inclusive and accessible, with pathways and equipment to accommodate children with different abilities. Ground surfaces are to be covered with impact-absorbing materials and clear signage will be in place to ensure the safety of both children and parents.

Although the proposals are sited in an existing clearing, the extent of installations will require further clearing of the woodland. There are currently 3 play parks within Gnoll Estate Country Park, one adjacent to the Visitor Centre, one adjacent to the car park and a third small play area within Fishpond Wood. It is the third smaller play park that is proposed to be replaced with the outlined proposals.

The following description has been provided by the play park provider:

'Nestled within an exciting woodland, the adventure play area will stand as a beacon of excitement and exploration for children of all ages. This dynamic playground is designed to spark imagination and physical

activity, featuring a variety of engaging structures and play zones that cater to different age groups and interests.

At the heart of the play area lies the large birds nest structure, an impressive and intricate construction that captures the essence of play. This towering centrepiece is crafted from robust, weather-resistant materials, designed to resemble a giant bird's nest. Children can climb through a network of woven ropes and platforms, experiencing the thrill of elevation and the joy of exploration. The nest is spacious enough to accommodate multiple children, providing plenty of room for imaginative play and cooperative adventures. There are several options to exit the tower via slides, the best being the high one at the top of the tower!

From the birds nest, a linking path meanders through the woods and has 2 tunnels which finally join into two exhilarating zip wires. These zip wires are a favourite among thrill-seekers, offering a rush of adrenaline as children zip through the air. The path to the zip wires is designed with natural play in mind, featuring different surfaces, textures and tunnels. Once at the starting platforms, children can choose their zip wire and race each other by soaring down, experiencing the exhilaration of speed and the joy of flight.

Adjacent to the Tower is the pendulum rope swing, another highlight of the play area. This swing is suspended from a tall, secure frame, allowing children to swing back and forth with a broad, sweeping motion. The pendulum swing offers a different kind of thrill, combining the excitement of swinging with the sensation of flying through the air. It's a perfect activity for children looking to test their bravery and enjoy a dynamic, motion-filled experience.

Understanding that younger children need their own safe space to play, the adventure play area also features a dedicated junior zone for ages

2-8. This smaller area is thoughtfully designed with age-appropriate equipment and activities. Soft surfaces, low climbing structures, and interactive elements like play panels ensure that toddlers can explore and have fun in a safe environment. The toddler area is near the picnic spot and away from the more adventurous zones, providing parents with peace of mind as their little ones play.

Safety is a paramount concern throughout the adventure play area. All structures are constructed with high-quality materials and will be regularly inspected to ensure they meet stringent safety standards. The ground surfaces are covered with impact-absorbing materials to cushion falls, and clear signage guides children and parents alike.

The play area is also designed to be inclusive and accessible, with pathways and equipment that accommodate children with different abilities. This commitment to inclusivity ensures that all children can enjoy the adventure, making the play area a welcoming space for the entire community.

This adventure play area is more than just a playground; it's a realm of imagination and excitement. It's a destination that children will want to visit over and over again. From the towering birds nest to the thrilling zip wires and pendulum swing, there's something for every child to enjoy. The thoughtful inclusion of a junior area ensures that even the youngest adventurers have a place to explore. This play area stands as a testament to the joy of outdoor play, encouraging children to be active, imaginative, and daring.'

Landscaping to the Play Area

Planting proposals have been developed in order to provide screening of the play area from views in the surrounding landscape. The rationale for this has been described by the Davies Landscape Architects in the following:

'The main objective of the soft landscape scheme is to successfully integrate the new play area into its woodland setting and minimise any resulting visual impact. The design seeks to achieve this by firstly retaining as many trees and as much vegetation as possible in and around the new play equipment. Where vegetation has to be removed to facilitate the installation suitable native planting is proposed to knit these areas back into the surrounding woodland, maintain and enhance biodiversity and provide a natural backdrop to the play space. Higher density native deciduous tree and scrub planting is proposed to the west side adjacent to the larger play equipment to bolster existing visual screening in views across the lake from the visitor centre and wider parkland. New tree planting has been specified at extra heavy standard and semi mature sizes to ensure they play an instant role in achieving the above and native scrub planting has been specified at 90-120cm to also play an instant role whilst still being small enough to benefit from faster establishment. It is anticipated that the combination of retained trees and vegetation and proposed new deciduous native planting will provide sufficient density of branch structure to provide good screening even in the winter months.'



View of the existing tree line between the proposed site and the fishpond.



ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT AND MITIGATION

The following page summarises the assessment of the impact of the woodland play area proposals on the existing heritage values of Gnoll Estate Country Park. It is measured against the following four values in accordance with Cadw's Conservation Principles for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment in Wales:

Evidential Value – Value deriving from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.

Historical Value - Value deriving from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.

Aesthetic Value – Value deriving from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

Communal Value – Value deriving from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Proposal	Justification	Significance	Potential Impact of Proposal	Activity required to assess impact	Value based judgement	Possible mitigation
The proposals include the construction of a new woodland play area to Fishpond Wood incorporating: - Large birds nest structure with climbing and slide elements; - 2 tunnels; - 2 zipwires; - Pendulum rope swing; - 'Junior zone' play area for younger children with low climbing structures and smaller play items; - And a dedicated picnic area.	General Overview – Gnoll Estate Country Park is a grade II* designated formally designed park encompassing wider informal areas. Its main phases of construction include the 1720's, 1740's, 1776-1790, 1811-1861 and 1899. Gnoll house, which was once at the heart of the landscape was an example of a 'country estate' built by the nouveau-riche with the great wealth that had been acquired on the back of industrialisation. Whilst the house has since been demolished, the parkland is now under the ownership of Neath Port Talbot Council and provides an important recreational space for the community. Likewise it forms an integral part of the historic and present day identity of the local population. The proposals form part of a wider scheme to improve visitor facilities within the Gnoll Estate Country Park. Consequently, there is a desire to build on the existing play park provision with more diverse equipment in a more immersive environment, with a view to generating more visits and extended dwell time at the park.	Evidential Value – Gnoll Estate Country Park is a surviving example of 1720s/40s landscape design in Wales, with elements of the early layout by Thomas Greening still identifiable. It also retains evidence of its connections with development of industry in Neath, including pools and waterways associated with the nearby copper works. The proposals are located within Fishpond Wood, an area of mature woodland to the east of the largest reservoir known as the Fishpond. This area of the park holds significant evidential value as it formed part of the early 18th century landscaping of the estate in which the cascades were constructed and the woodland subsequently formed a principal view from Gnoll House. This view across the landscape has been highlighted as a significant view by Cadw, although the proposed site does not sit directly in this line it lies within its context. In particular, the density of the surrounding woodland frames the opening to the cascades highlighting it within the landscape.	Evidential Value – The proposals for the play area have the potential to negatively impact the evidential value of the park as works are located in an area of significant evidential value and require the removal of a substantial portion of the existing woodland. However, improved facilities within the park enhances visitor experience and provides an opportunity to promote tourism, therefore allowing for further interpretation of the parkland and its evidential value.	Historical research into Gnoll Estate Country Park to date has been required to justify the proposals. There should be accurate and ongoing recording of the park and its historic structures. Documenting the structures should continue throughout the construction process as necessary. This should be undertaken through drawn, photographic and written recording. Careful consideration of proposed design and materials to ensure they are sympathetic to the surrounding Grade II* listed parkland in terms of appearance and properties. Consultation with arboriculturalist to determine the effect of development on historic tree lines.	Evidential Value – The proposed woodland play area will inevitably have an impact on the evidential value of the park as it will be a noticeable alteration to a significant part of the landscape which explains how the park was used by previous generations. Although an area of the Fishpond wood has already been given over for use as a play area and the proposed area of clearance avoids healthy mature trees, the further clearance of the woodland will likely alter its outward appearance and a lack of density could impact wider views. Mitigation will inevitably be required to minimise the impact of proposals on principal views across the landscape. In particular, screening of large play equipment will be needed to be achieved using existing and new planting schemes.	Careful consideration of siting and materials to ensure they are sympathetic to the surrounding Grade II* listed parkland in terms of appearance and properties. In addition, the scale of play equipment should be carefully considered for their potential visual impact and to minimise the loss of historic woodland. Planting proposals should increase the density of vegetation and trees in order to screen the play equipment and minimise the affect on potential views and vistas of the parkland.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Proposal	Justification	Significance	Potential Impact of Proposal	Activity required to assess impact	Value based judgement	Possible mitigation
		Historical Value – Gnoll Estate Country Park is important because it acts as a historical touchstone. It links the past to the present and enables people to connect across time and generations. This is enhanced by the historic record and photographs of the landscape. At the height of its influence, Gnoll House and its surrounding landscape were central to the industrial development of Neath, embodying the great wealth that came with it. In particular, Fishpond Wood was a significant element in the early 18th century landscaping works undertaken by Sir Herbert Mackworth who engaged with Thomas Greening to create a garden in the emerging style of that time, including woodland areas, a principal avenue to Gnoll House and, later, the formal cascades. These more formal gardens developed following the creation of the reservoirs to serve the family's copper mine and subsequently the landscape features are important markers in the development of the estate.	Historical Value – The proposals have the potential to negatively impact on the historical value of the surrounding parkland. The play area requires the clearance of an area woodland, albeit of poor quality, therefore changing it from its historic state of flora and vegetation to that of a play park. This has the potential to affect the perception and understanding of the woodland in this area. There are some positive impacts of the proposals, in particular it will attract new visitors to the parkland which encourages the interaction and interpretation of the historic Gnoll Estate.		Historical Value – The wider improvements to the visitor experience at the Gnoll Estate Country Park, facilitates visitors to reengage with the history of the park and wider area of Neath. However, the proposals must be sensitively managed in the historic context and significant views across the landscape that intentionally formed part of early 18th century landscape proposals need to be protected. Therefore mitigation would be required for the proposals to be reasonable.	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Proposal	Justification	Significance	Potential Impact of Proposal	Activity required to assess impact	Value based judgement	Possible mitigation
		Aesthetic Value – Gnoll Estate Country Park has aesthetic value as a significant 18th century landscaped estate which retains many of its early features. The existing Fishpond wood in particular holds aesthetic value in the context of the surrounding park and falls adjacent to the significant view from Gnoll House to the cascades. The dense woodland provides a backdrop to the cascades, framing this within the landscape. Moreover, the woodland is an important feature surrounding the largest of the three reservoirs and the proposed site can be seen in several views across the Fishpond.	Aesthetic Value – The proposals have the potential to adversely affect the surrounding landscape. In particular, the key views and vistas may be interrupted by the play area. As such the proposals require careful consideration of their siting and landscaping. In addition, the choice of materials and scale of equipment could negatively impact the aesthetic value if not considered in its woodland context.		Aesthetic Value – The proposals to improve the parkland create a demand for improved play parks close to the central areas of activity. However, further intrusion into the woodland presents potential disruption of key views and vistas thereby impacting the aesthetic value. The detrimental affects may reasonably be mitigated by thoughtful planting schemes which screen the play area from significant views. It is particularly important that planting takes place on the east side of the path to ensure there is sufficient tree coverage beyond the existing tree line on the bank to the west of the path. Likewise, in order for the proposals to be deemed appropriate they need to suitably reflect the natural surrounding environment in their material and scale.	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Proposal	Justification	Significance	Potential Impact of Proposal	Activity required to assess impact	Value based judgement	Possible mitigation
		Communal Value – Gnoll Estate Country Park holds significant communal value derived in part from its status as a source of identity for Neath - both as a municipal park and for its historical connections to the area and development of industry. The park is a significant place for leisure and is a focus of the immediate community. The community of Neath have great affection for The Gnoll and families have strong connections going back generations. The accessible play areas perform a critical function in allowing community engagement with parkland and therefore hold significant communal value in their own right. It is important that there are designated safe play areas for families that area adjacent to primary public facilities.	Communal Value – A new play area will likely have a positive affect on the visitor experience and improve the communal value. The regeneration of facilities in this way also ensures its longevity going forwards. The new facilities have the potential to attract new visitors to the park and allow more people by consequence to interact with the history of the estate and thereby increasing its communal significance. Increased visitor numbers brings with it increased revenue and subsequently allows for the ongoing management of the park and for it to remain a financially sustainable public facility.		Communal Value – Gnoll Estate Country Park forms a source of identity for the people of Neath. The neglect of facilities reflects on wider society and contrastingly their renewal is likely to have a positive effect on the wider area. Likewise, the proposals seek to provide the desired play facilities that will attract more family visitors to the park, likely increase the number of visitors that interact with this heritage asset and encourages multi-generational engagement. This will improve the communal value and have a positive influence on the wider estate.	

APPENDICES

Registered Historic Park & Garden



Details				
Reference Number	Name	Grade	Date of Designation	Status
PGW(Gm)50(NEP)	The Gnoll	II*	01/02/2022	Designated

Location			
Unitary Authority	Community	Easting	Northing
Neath Port Talbot	Tonna	276824	197582

Broad Class	Site Type	Main phases of construction
Gardens, Parks and Urban Spaces	Formal and informal park; Victorian pleasure grounds; walled kitchen garden	1720s; 1740s; 1776-90; 1811-61; 1899

Description
Summary Description and Reason for Designation The Gnoll was located on a prominent, steep-sided hill or knoll, on the east side of Neath. It is registered for the survival of its largely eighteenth-century landscape park, which is of great historic interest, in its original rural setting above Neath. It lies on the flank of the Vale of Neath, long famed for its picturesque beauty. The landscape of The Gnoll is exceptional for its combination of industrial and ornamental functions and for its strong visual relationship with the surrounding countryside. The eighteenth-

century landscaping is of several phases, including an exceptionally interesting early transitional layout by Thomas Greening, in the style of Stephen Switzer, with formal and informal elements, including a (restored) formal cascade. The following phases include an outstanding informal cascade of the 1740s and the later eighteenth-century follies of a rock-hewn grotto and the Ivy Tower, which forms a prominent landmark in the Neath valley. Although the park's historic character has been somewhat diluted through the loss of the house and planting, most of its structural elements remain intact or have been restored or rebuilt. Most of the major developments in the park and grounds took place during the eighteenth century under the ownership of the Mackworth family.

The park lies on elevated, rolling ground on the south flank of the Vale of Neath. It is linear, orientated north-east by south-west. Its eastern, upper side is largely wooded, its western side more open. On the east the ground rises towards the high ground of Cefn Morfydd, while to the south and west it drops below the park to the town of Neath. The house is sited on a prominent hill at the south-western end of the park. There are three ponds and a late nineteenth-century reservoir, to supply water for coal mining and copper smelting, and for ornament.

South of the house site, at the south end of the park, is the wooded Preswylfa valley, largely deciduous, with the Great Pond half way along it. To the north is an open area of parkland, the largest pond, the Fishpond, and a smaller pond with two small islands. Fishpond Wood is mature woodland containing the (restored) formal cascade to the east and remnants of a more extensive lime avenue. This is aligned on a long formal axis from the north end of the hill on which the house stood, across the ha-ha and up the cascade to Brynau Wood and Cefn Morfydd, beyond the park.

The northern part of the park comprises open ground on the western side, now partly a golf course, and Mosshouse Wood, mixed woodland which extends from Fishpond Wood on the south to high ground on the north. It contains the reservoir and a long, informal Grade II Listed cascade (LB 22870). There are also several eighteenth-century follies including the rebuilt 'gazebo' and a Grade II Listed Grotto (LB 22860). The final feature of the landscape park is Grade II Listed Ivy Tower (LB 11768), a prominent eighteenth-century eye-catcher folly tower situated on a hilltop to the north of Mosshouse Wood, overlooking the park and the Vale of Neath.

There have been several entrances at The Gnoll, only two of which remain in use. An entrance with imposing castellated stone archway and a simple iron gate now lies on Gnoll Avenue. Inside the entrance the former drive, now a public road, is lined with pines, leading to the Grade II Listed War Memorial Gate of Honour entrance (LB 11784). Inside, a tarmac drive runs eastwards up the Preswylfa valley. A former entrance at the end of Gnoll Avenue is marked by Grade II Listed gate & lodges (LB 11782).

The garden and pleasure grounds lie on the hill on which the house once stood. The garden consists of the terrace to the west of the house site, which looks out over the town and beyond. It is a rectangular grassy platform bounded with a low stone parapet wall on the west and a revetment wall on the east, accessed from the house by a flight of steps. Below is an area of deciduous woodland with ornamental understorey. At the north end is a curving recessed stone seat and a yew on a small mound. To the south of the house is the oval forecourt area, with grass in the centre. Two paths now lead into it.

The grounds lie mainly to the east of the house site but also on the slopes of the hill to the west and south.

The crown of the hill is occupied by wooded grounds laid out informally, with paths and a few open areas. The south side is bounded by a stone revetment walling. Below on the south-east is a walled enclosure, formerly the herbaceous garden but now rough grass. On the hill summit is the bowling green, a roughly circular level lawn surrounded by rhododendrons and mixed trees. To the north is a gentle slope down to a long, level, grass terrace running east-west from the north end of the house to a ha-ha on the east. North of the terrace is an area of mixed ornamental woodland and shrubs, with some bamboo clumps.

The former kitchen gardens lie to the east of the pleasure grounds, on ground sloping gently to the south, and have origins in the mid-eighteenth century. To their west is Groll Cottage, or Little Groll House, and garden. The kitchen gardens forms three compartments. The northernmost is roughly oval in shape, partially walled and under rough grass. The others occupy a roughly rectangular area adjoining on the south, bounded by walls 2.5m-4.5m high with a wide entrance at the east end. The east compartment is on two levels; on the upper one is a modern glasshouse; on the lower one are two long, parallel ranges of single-storey stone and brick bothies. To their south are three modern glasshouses set at right-angles to the bothies. The third compartment, to the west, is roughly square, the south-east corner rounded and with an entrance towards the west end of the south side. Tipping has raised the ground level in this compartment.

Setting - The Groll stood on a prominent, steep-sided hill or knoll, hence its name, on the east side of the town, the park lying on the flank of the Vale of Neath, well known for its picturesque beauty. Urban expansion means that the town now abuts the southern and western margins of the park.

Significant views - From the main west front of the house there were magnificent views out over the town and Vale of Neath, and from the pleasure grounds views east towards the higher ground of Cefn Morfudd. The view eastwards from the end of the pleasure ground terrace is across the sloping park to the Fishpond and up the cascade on the wooded slope beyond. The Ivy Tower folly, at the north end of the park, afforded panoramic views over the park and the Vale of Neath.

Sources:
Cadw Historic Assets Database (ref: PGW(Gm)50(NEP)).

Cadw : Registered Historic Park & Garden

[Records 1 of 1]



CONTACT

Hiraeth.

Alice Smith
BSc(Hons), MSc

Hiraeth Architecture | The Maltings | East Tyndall Street | Cardiff | CF24 5EA

T. 029 2002 5814 | E. alice@hiraetharchitecture.co.uk