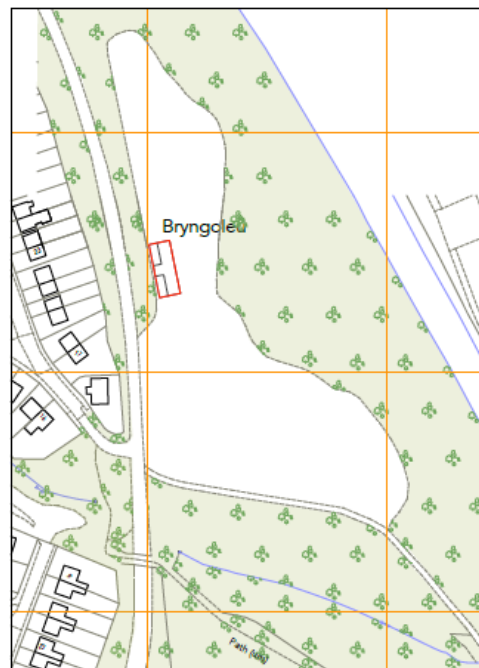


Proposed Outdoor Classroom and Welfare Room at Patsy's Field Bryngoleu

Supporting Statement

Proposed Development

The proposed development is for two log cabins with covered area to form an outdoor classroom area and wellbeing space for the local community to experience the nature and open space of Bryngoleu (known locally and here as Patsy's Field). The use of the site is for informal and formal recreational and leisure activities that reconnect the community with nature. We need the cabins to provide essential shelter, basic needs such as safety, warmth, lighting and hand washing. It will provide a much-needed sheltered classroom facility to invite the community to come and learn all about nature in their local area. The Welfare Room will be a quiet, warm, safe, space to help increase physical and mental wellbeing close to nature. The rooms will be manned by staff and volunteers and the buildings will be locked and secured when there are no staff or volunteers on site. The structures are essential for this form of education and community integration in the environment. We will provide creative sessions for experiential learning and wilderness skills. It is also proposed to provide solar PV on the roof of the connecting area so that we can provide a small amount of 'off grid' power to the buildings. Lighting is essential for these forms of learning and wellbeing.



Location and layout of the proposed outdoor classroom for illustration purposes only.

The education element of the project will enable essential conservation, maintenance and appropriate clearance of the site to take place, as well as litter picking and mulching where relevant. We will make bird boxes, hedgehog houses and bat boxes. Further to this, two H factor staff having recently been trained in tree surgery and maintenance, can address any ongoing needs eg Ash Dieback, in consultation with the Council's Countryside department.

Our aim is to duplicate educational and recreational activities on the site moving towards social and green prescribing. H Factor partner the highly successful [Cynon Valley Organic Adventures](#) in the delivery of activities and qualifications. Our most experienced staff trained with CVOA and transferred to permanent work with H Factor as environmental champions. A third staff member is currently facilitating a successful project where a GP cluster refers patients to improve their emotional well-being. Shelter, warmth and lighting are essential for this type of activity and prescribing.

These activities will continue to bring additional skills to the local community and enhance the local rural and urban economy.

One of the most important factors for the design of the buildings is for them to be secure from break ins and vandalism. We will store communal tools and resources here and will need to prevent the buildings being used for trespass, illegal refuge and fly tipping.

The cabins selected, include an industry-leading 4-point locking system and additional shoot bolt locking. 24mm double glazing are made from Spruce, with precision cut tongue and groove and will be assembled on site with the community. We are aware of some open space projects that have shipping containers but due to the value of Patsy's field in the landscape and its ecology we have not chosen this option, whilst we have not sacrificed security. We have also orientated the buildings to minimise the impact in the landscape.

The site

Patsy's Field comprises an open grassland area, mixed woodland and scrub. The river Taff runs to the south of the site with some parts of the riverbank wooded and some parts with open vegetation. Currently, there are several pathways, a bench, and the remains of the old railway line which is now used as a footpath.

Along the footpath to the north is a primary school and nursery (Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug), and on the west side, abutting Patsy's Field is Bryngoleu housing estate.

The proposed siting for the development is at the start of a clearing between two wooded areas. The area was suggested by Tom Bramley, Landscape Officer, as possibly being suitable, for a previously proposed apple orchard. Following community consultation, the orchards were sited at Afon Taf High School, Greenfield School, Rhyd Y Grug and Ynysowen Schools. The first 40 trees were planted in a local community garden and fostered by families in the community.



H Factor continue to work with the community engagement officers at the local schools. They have recently organised planting, clearing & and solar bench making days at the schools and woodland areas. The primary schools, in particular, have shown enthusiasm for weekly visits to the Patsy's site to build on this learning. They have their own Forest School & Bushcraft tutors able to support the schools' requests to engage with the woodland sites.

Following the necessary consultation processes, the Estates Department of the Council provided a licence to H Factor in 2021 & 2022. The license allowed the community to use the area for specific holiday activities and family events and to run activities providing community engagement at the site. This included the need for a classroom facility & adjoining welfare facility for more informal community gatherings and annual seasonal activities. The 2022 Mayor, Councillor Declan Salmon visited the activities and reported favourably on the climate change awareness being shared with the families in attendance.



Previous issues

In the colder months Patsy's Field is mainly used by dog walkers. The site has in past, been used for bonfires and for young people to gather and camp. In recent years, litter has been the biggest issue at Patsy's Field, with sources coming from the campers, and other people walking along the pathway, but also from fly-tipping happening within one of the stream valleys and the back gardens of people living along the old railway line. Dog mess can be a problem at the field, especially in the entrance to the park near the vehicle barrier at Bryngoleu road, despite there being a dog waste bin here.

There is much documented evidence that community involvement in landscape management can reduce arson attacks, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour. This is a key aim of the proposed development. [Social Farms & Gardens](#) have long held experience of this being a major benefit of community green space projects.

The Applicants and Background

The application is submitted in the names of three local organisations.

[H Factor Group Cyf](#), [The Carbon Economy College](#) & [Afon Gwreiddiau Environmental](#).

H Factor Group are a place-based regeneration enterprise located in Aberfan, Mount Pleasant & Merthyr Vale which was set up in January 2020 to address entry level training for jobs in the emerging Carbon / Green Economy.

The catalyst for their on-going community enterprise work, is their flagship community energy model, a project that attracted £1.2 million funding via WEFO to install a mix of renewable energies on community buildings and surplus land. The communities could use the renewables installed to generate, store and reduce their growing energy. The project 'AMMV Energy Worxs' is the funded vehicle to address skills shortages in community energy installations and land management skills. The installations bring with them a community benefit fund that can be used to maintain and invest in land and buildings they have acquired for the community.

AMMV Energy Worx and H Factor Directors were active partners in the stakeholder group for [Project Skyline](#). The much-acclaimed feasibility project operated in 3 different areas in South Wales. The project looked at the benefits to deprived communities if they were able to take long-term stewardship of the lands that surround them. Creating jobs and futures through land-based enterprises and energy.

In Aberfan, Mount Pleasant & Merthyr Vale. (Ynysowen Ward) the feasibility was Youth led. The feasibility reported young people saw the benefits to local people and to tourism if they could develop an area of unused / unloved land into an area to develop informal recreation leisure activities that brought local residents, children's schools and groups nearer to nature and improved wellbeing.

Since the feasibility stage and resulting [Report](#), *Valleys Skyline*, has emerged. It is funded through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government and runs from late 2021 to June 2023. This project will give 4 post-industrial communities, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Treherbert, Caerau, and [Ynysowen](#), improved access and control over aspects of immediate landscape. Re-connecting communities to public land so that they can manage the land for environmental, health, social, and economic benefits. In each community we will be supporting community stewardship and enhancement of the natural environment.

This proposed development is funded under this income stream and is central to achieving the success of the project and its long term aims.

The **Carbon Economy College employed 32 people on 20 week paid placements**. The CEC trained local people in jobs that would fit this aim. 14 people are still employed in the community.

- 8 Bushcraft Leaders & Forest School Tutors.
- 4 Mentors & Coaches
- 4 Outdoor play workers.
- 2 Facilitators able to receive referrals from a GP social prescribing cluster.
- 2 High ropes practitioners
- 2 Tree cutting specialist
- 8 Strimmers & chain saw operatives.
- 4 Wood chipper operatives.
- 2 EV charger point fitters.
- 4 Solar Bench / Shelter installers.



These skills and experience will enable us to look after the land and nature at Patsy's Field, erect and maintain the classroom & welfare areas, manage the land and protect our valuable

environment. The proposed development will be another flagship, with an example of an off grid self-powered facility made from wood and protected by the environment will enable us to teach how electricity is powered by the sun and stored in batteries. To meet an obligation to improve access for all an EV charger point can be fitted to assist disabled cyclist and residents with limited mobility who use electric scooters. H Factor are currently discussing this with the MTCBC Tourism strategy & Destination Merthyr.

Community Engagement and Activities

Between 2018 and 2021 Coed Lleol and the Wildlife Trusts carried out a 'Connecting People and Nature' exercise in the rural wards of Merthyr. Patsy's Field was included in this project. Their outputs report is available [here](#). Its aims were to '*encourage access, use and management of local green space for the benefit of the health of the environment, individuals, and the community*'.

Through the project, participants were encouraged to engage in regular volunteering on management tasks and to take ownership of the designated sites. Engagement with the local primary school and nursery saw many litter picks, vegetation clearance, bulb planting, den creation and path improvement. A hedgehog house and bird boxes were installed. CPaN also ran a 12-week OCN course at this site with residents from Bryngoleu House (run by the Shaw Trust) doing a mix of crafts, conservation work, cooking and creating a fire pit area. The focus was on educating local people to enjoy and understand the management of local greenspace longer term. Patsy's Field has some issues with invasive non-native species, including Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam, and some native species namely bramble. Some clearance took place as part of this project but it was commented in the outputs report that a concerted effort over several years will be required.

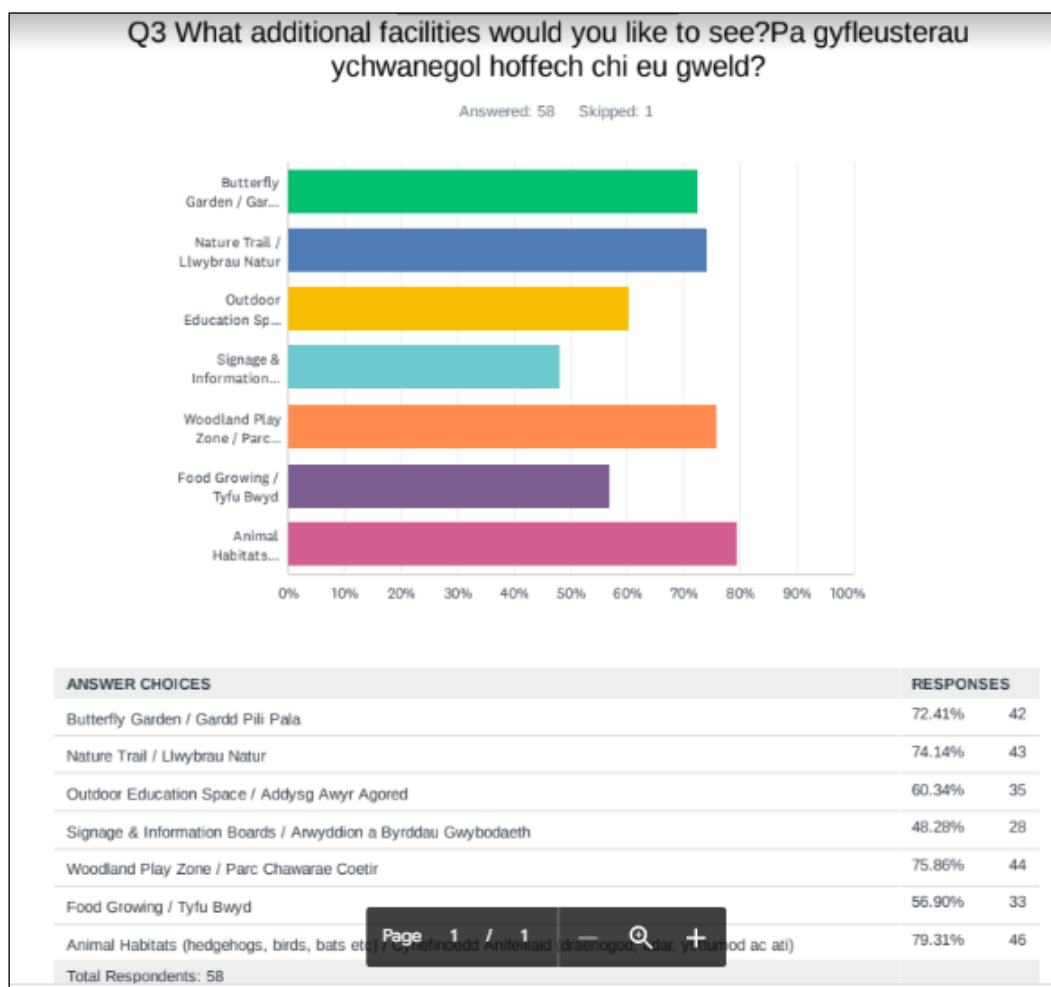
The CPaN project has been able to engage with some local people to promote the park and help connect residents with the wildlife found at Bryngoleu. It is anticipated that by working with the local school, a lasting connection can be made and that the school might be encouraged to use this local space for education and activities providing a huge benefit with the children. Encouraging a greater use by the school could also encourage greater use by the local community (especially families) and help to discourage anti-social behaviour. The site is still largely unknown by the local community and underused. Project Skyline has some funding and hopefully, they will use the management plan and improve the access to the site for all. CPaN has a good relationship with Skyline and has attended planning meetings. Longer-term impact and sustainability At Bryngoleu the level of community engagement was somewhat less than expected, and even with extensive use of social media, posters, newsletter articles and email contacts, it seemed hard to reach local people who wanted to attend the sessions and opportunities CPaN were offering.

The AGE & H Factor approach has been to widen the choice of times the community can engage with activities. We now offer full days of holiday activities. We have established AGE as a local community growing group with an interest in nature and the outdoors. AGE were able to engage and establish a community group able to carry out some of the longer-term management aims for the site.

A management plan was produced for Bryngoleu through the project and this has been shared with Merthyr Council. CPaN project staff were initially involved in the Skyline partnership group and decisions regarding what could be delivered by our environmental project teams at Bryngoleu. The AGE / H Factor approach has built on the work of the CPaN project at Bryngoleu, widened the opportunities for community engagement and listened to the wider community. The activities contained in the application to manage this land on a long -term license are listed in the application.

Participating respondents answered a series of surveys and face to face discussions that brought further and more up to date evidence that the desire to continue with various supported nature-based activities was still very popular with families and young people.

A VR simulation project enabled those interested to add pictures of what they wanted to see at the site. A nature trail, a butterfly garden and an outdoor education space featured strongly amongst the community preferences.



H Factor, using the award of the Skyline (WEFO) funding, plan to continue this community engagement, ownership and education of Patsy's Field. In order to do this successfully and over a sustained period of time, a sheltered outdoor classroom and wellbeing facility is needed.

Estates Colleagues at Merthyr Council, have granted a licence to H Factor and Skyline to carry out holiday activities and family events there to bring the local community into the site for education and enjoyment. The community have shared their joy at the area being licensed for organised activities and having supported the proposal through film recordings and surveys.

Consultation and engagement activities with the community continued into 2021, 2022. Those consultations have continued into 2023, where funds for the proposed activities have already been approved.

Paragraph 5.5.7 states

“Planning authorities should adopt positive approaches to proposals which utilise previously developed or disused land and water bodies for tourism uses, particularly in relation to urban regeneration”.

Paragraph 5.6.4 further states.. *“To unlock the full potential of rural areas, planning authorities should adopt a positive approach to employment arising from foundation and innovative and technology based sectors, including research and development, in addition to employment arising from the traditional agriculture, forestry and leisure sectors. Proposals for diversification, new startups and micro-businesses should also be encouraged, where appropriate, to generate new job and wealth-creating opportunities”.*

The proposed development is for an outdoor classroom and wellbeing/ welfare building to serve the local community of Bryngoleu and Aberfan. We believe that the proposed development is wholly in line with these local and national policies and fully justified by the extensive feasibility, community engagement and licensing of the site for this use. Without the classroom and wellbeing/ welfare rooms the long term rural and urban regeneration for this area will be lost. As stated above, we need the cabins to provide essential shelter, basic needs, such as, warmth, lighting and hand washing and to provide a sheltered classroom facility to invite the community to come and learn all about nature in their local area and to increase wellbeing. The structures are essential for this form of education and wellbeing improvement. We will provide creative sessions for experiential learning and wilderness skills. It is also proposed to provide solar PV on the roof of the connecting area so that we can provide some ‘off grid’ power to the buildings. Lighting is essential for these forms of learning. We believe, without the buildings and the formal and informal activities the community will not be enticed to use the space in accordance with the strategic aims of the WEFO funding which are the result of the community consultation exercises and engagement activities that have been outlined above. Certainly, local skills and jobs would not result which is the long-term aim of this package of support. The aims and vision of the Bryngoleu Ecological Management Plan (see below) would also not be realised.

Policy EnW5 allows for development within a **special landscape area** where -

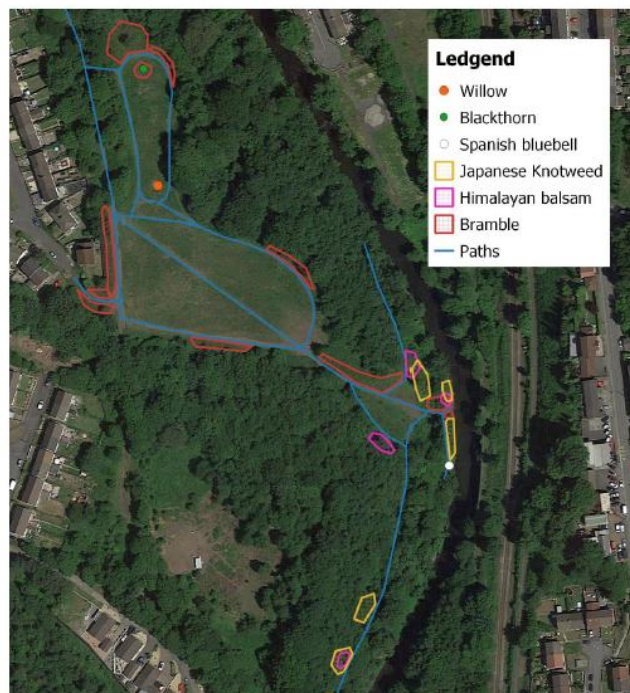
It can be satisfactorily demonstrated that: a) It would not cause unacceptable harm to the character and quality of the landscape setting of the County Borough; b) Development within Special Landscape Areas are sensitive to their special characteristics; c) Development respects the local distinctiveness and historic character of the landscape; d) Development will safeguard local landscape character and landscape features, including views, which make a significant contribution to the character, history and setting of the locality; e) Development secures the enhancement of the character, appearance and quality of the landscape, through restoration, management or enhancement where possible; f) There is no satisfactory alternative and the benefits associated with the development can be demonstrated to outweigh the harm; and g) Where damage to local landscape character cannot be avoided appropriate mitigation has been secured.

We have been mindful of important views across the valley from Patsy’s Field and the characteristics of the Pontygwaith SLA. We have carried out feasibility and widespread consultation exercises to discover the best locations for uses and sensitive and small structures at Patsy’s Field. We have been informed by The Bryngoleu Ecological Management Plan 2020 – 2022, written by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales as part of the ‘Connecting People and Nature Project’ funded by the Welsh Government’s Rural Development Programme. We also engaged in early consultation with the Wildlife Trusts and Tom Bramley, the Council’s Landscape Architect in 2020.



Bryngoleu Ecological Managen

We have sought to avoid the semi natural broad-leaved woodland, SINC areas, Marshy Grasslands, streams and sensitive areas at Patsy's Field. We have also proposed the location for the cabins because they will be screened by a band of trees and a pathway. We believe this to be the least intrusive location on Patsy's Field taking account of neighbourhood consultation and the landscape and biodiversity qualities of the site. We have also orientated the buildings being mindful of the characterises of the SLA.



The Ecological Management Plan had this to say on access and recreation potential at the site..

The access and public use value of the park can potentially bring many benefits both for the residents and for the environment in general. Access to the park and the opportunity to engage in activities there can help to enhance quality of life and assist in raising environmental understanding and awareness. However, these potential benefits need to be balanced against the negative effects of access and public use, such as disturbance to wildlife, erosion of the landscape and littering or fly-tipping.

Objectives:

- *Encourage community use and enjoyment of Bryngoleu.*
- *Increase visibility and the welcoming nature of Bryngoleu.*
- *Increase use of Bryngoleu as an educational resource.*
- *Increase knowledge of the biodiversity present in the site.*
- *Set up regular monitoring of specific species/habitats*

We have noted the contents of the Councils [SPG on Nature and Development](#) and feel it aligns well with our objectives for the site following early engagement with the Wildlife Trusts and its Ecological Management Plan. Early and central aims of this proposed development have been to enhance the conservation value on the site and in the siting of the cabins will avoid any harm to the biodiversity and landscape credentials of Patsy's Field. The installation of the education and wellbeing facility will provide much needed and clear opportunities for benefiting to Biodiversity. We will create new habitats and enhance the existing ones in consultation with the Council's Ecologist and other accredited wildlife experts. We intend to manage and monitor biodiversity at Patsy's Field and would be happy to comply with a condition of this nature.

We have located the proposed development outside the areas of constraint (and at a higher level of ground) as shown on the NRW Development Advice Maps which are the current form of guidance for development and flood risk.



We feel that the proposed development closely aligns with the Council's [Statement of Well-being](#) objectives and its duties under the **Well Being Of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**. It is very much this type of community development that is needed if the Council is to achieve its duties. We will be supporting the Council through the core aims of this funded project to achieve the following objectives;

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Working Life - People feel supported to develop the skills required to meet the needs of businesses, with a developing, safe infrastructure which makes Merthyr Tydfil an attractive destination.

Environmental Wellbeing - Communities protect, enhance and promote our environment and countryside.

Living Well - People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health.

The Councils Single Integrated Plan Outcomes are also closely aligned to the outcomes of this proposed development which will enable the Council to;

Single Integrated Plan

Our Vision for Merthyr Tydfil

To strengthen Merthyr Tydfil's position as the regional centre for the Heads of the Valleys, and be a place to be proud of where:

- People learn and develop skills to fulfil their ambitions;
- People live, work, have a safe, healthy and fulfilled life; and
- People visit, enjoy and return.

Our Priority Outcomes

- People in Merthyr Tydfil have the opportunity and aspiration to learn and develop their skills to maximise their potential;
- People in Merthyr Tydfil benefit from a strong, sustainable and diverse economy;
- People, who live and work in Merthyr Tydfil are supported to enjoy a healthier and better quality of life;
- People enjoy a vibrant, attractive, safe and sustainable place in which to live, work, play and visit.

Conclusion

We hope the planning authority agrees with the Applicants that the proposed siting of the education and wellbeing cabins are essential and located in the most appropriate location at Patsy's Field taking account of community engagement and expert opinions. If the planning authority has any queries or concerns please, please contact our agent Lucie Taylor (lucie@farmgarden.org.uk or 077801 15292) who is a Chartered Town Planner managing the Welsh Government funded [Community Land Advisory Service Cymru](#) for Social Farms & Gardens and is a key partner in the delivery of the WEFO funded Valleys Skyline.