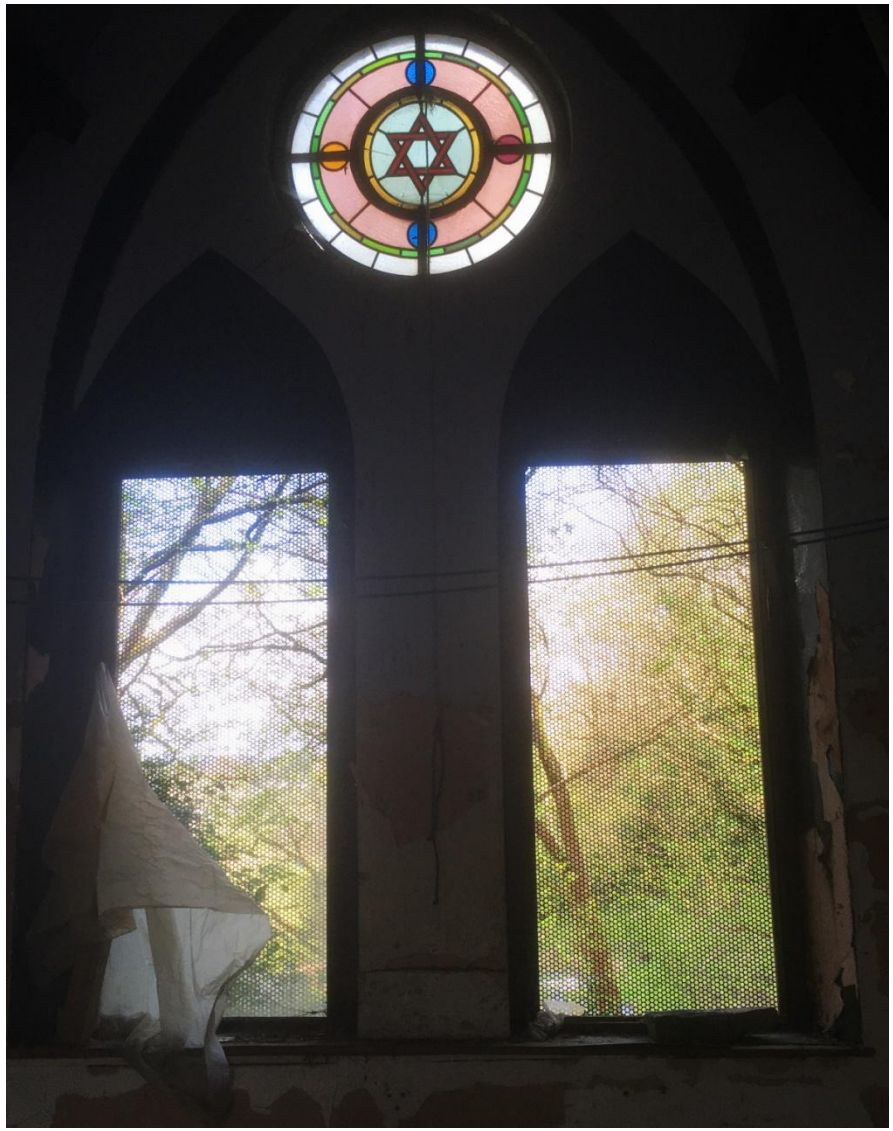


MERTHYR TYDFIL SYNAGOGUE PROJECT

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STATEMENT

by

BRONWEN THOMAS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

for

FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH HERITAGE

FINAL: August 2025

BRONWEN THOMAS C.M.L.I.
Top Studio, Model House Craft & Design Centre
Bull Ring, Llantrisant, CF72 8EB (01443) 230075
bronwen.thomas@btinternet.com
www.bronwenthomas.com

INTRODUCTION

This Green Infrastructure Statement (GIS) has been prepared by Bronwen Thomas Landscape Architect (BTLA) in support of the planning application and listed buildings applications for the Welsh Jewish Heritage Centre at the former Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue and Primrose Hill. BTLA was appointed to the design team for this project in July 2024.

The GIS is compliant with Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council planning policy. In particular, the following policies are relevant:

- Policy SW11: Sustainable Design and Placemaking;
- Policy EnW1: Nature Conservation and Ecosystem Resilience;
- Policy EnW2: Internationally and Nationally Protected Sites and Species;

It is deemed to be proportionate with the size of the site and type of the proposed development.

In accordance with PPW, the 'Step-wise Approach' of Avoid; Minimise: Restore/mitigate; Compensate/enhance has been taken in considering the green infrastructure to show that the proposed development will provide long-term net benefits for biodiversity. This is shown as a table towards the end of this GIS.

The GIS makes reference to other reports which provide further detail.

- **Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) August 2025 by Wildwood**. This supersedes the Draft Preliminary Ecological Appraisal/Preliminary Roost Assessment (PEA/PRA January 2024) by Wildwood.
- **Arboricultural Report by Arboricultural Technician Services (ArbTS)** was produced in March 2025 and includes Tree Survey Data, Tree Constraints Plan, Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Tree Protection Plan and Arboricultural Method Statement. This was preceded by the draft tree survey produced in 2023.
- **Landscape Strategy Statement by Bronwen Thomas Landscape Architect August 2025** which was finalised following updated and detailed ecological survey and assessment reports. This outlines the principles developed for the design of the grounds of the site

Proposals drawings :

Synagogue:

Synagogue Bat Roost Proposals rev.A

Synagogue Garden and Primrose Hill forecourt:

MTSP-P-005 Landscape Assessment, Constraints & Opportunities
MTSP-P-010 Landscape Layout

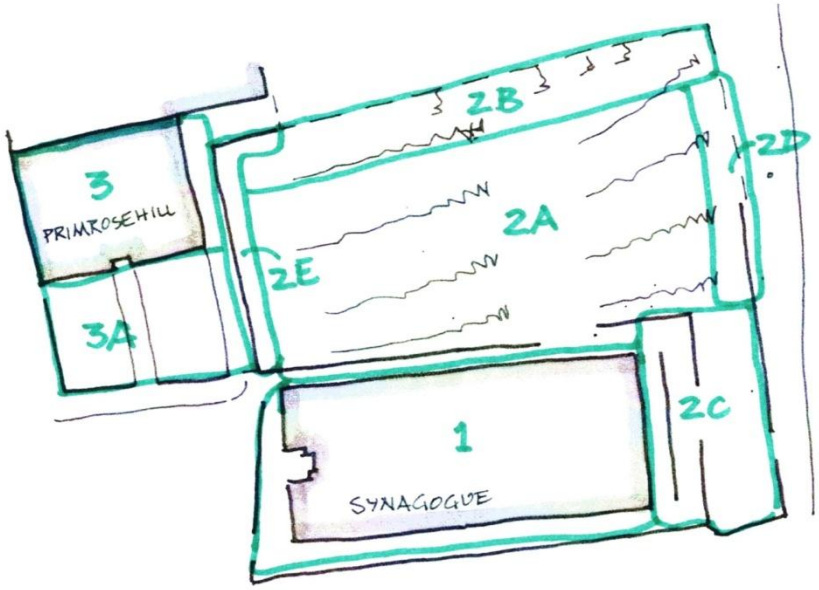
THE SITE

The proposed development site is within the Thomastown Conservation Area. It comprises:

- Derelict Grade 2 listed Synagogue, dated 1875;
- Derelict land to north and to the east of the Synagogue and within its curtilage (referred to here as the 'Synagogue garden site');
- Partially tenanted Grade 2 listed Primrose Hill, dated 1850, plus its forecourt.

It is located on the west-facing slopes of the Taff valley, within the mainly 19th century residential suburb immediately east of the town centre. To the west and south are terraced housing with small gardens. To north and east of the site are larger properties with mature gardens, plus small areas of woodland linking up the hillside to Thomastown Park and beyond.

Designated sites: The River Taf non-statutory Site of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) is almost half a kilometre away and all other SINCs are more than 1km distance. The nearest statutory site is the Cwm Taf Fechan Woodlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at nearly 2km distance.



The site showing component parts

EXISTING GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

1 Synagogue building: The currently four-storey building (lower ground floor, ground floor, first floor, second floor with loft/roof space above) has been derelict for over 20 years, its last use having been as a gym, and is in poor condition. Emergency repair work including roof patching to address water ingress was carried out in 2020.

Bat surveys were carried out by Wildwood in 2024. These are detailed in the EcIA report. The loft/roof space is being used as a maternity roost by brown long-eared bats. It is also used as a night roost for lesser horseshoe bats, and day roost for serotine bats, common and soprano pipistrelle bats. There is evidence that bats use the whole building for flying - there are no closed doors and an open hatch to the roof space - and that the louvred openings, high in the gable ends, are the main access points. There was also evidence of a maternity roost in the lower ground floor.

2 Synagogue garden site:

2A To the north of the Synagogue building, the core of the site is mainly wooded (semi-natural mixed woodland), with primarily self-sown sycamore and ash trees, and an understorey of bramble, nettles and ivy. Many of the trees are clad with ivy to greater or lesser degree and may provide nesting sites for birds and roosting and foraging bats. The Arboricultural Report identified three of the sycamore trees are Category B (Moderate - desirable for retention) and the remainder as Category C (Low - optional for retention). Throughout the area there are self-sown saplings of native trees. There is also evidence of a variety of rubbish and stone tipped , probably mainly from clearances within the Synagogue.

2B The northern boundary is banked down to the adjacent garden. This area has a variety of mainly native trees and shrub species including willow, yew, hawthorn, as well as ash and sycamore, many of which are crowded and etiolated. None of these are Category B or more. and most are of insufficient size to be considered in the tree report.

2C To the rear (east) of the Synagogue there are old stone steps and retaining walls in a state of near-collapse, being held up with temporary timber strut supports. A small group of ash (Category U - Poor - unsuitable for retention) and yew saplings have taken hold in the walling and adjacent strip of land.

2D Towards the eastern upper boundary of the site, and to the rear of the synagogue, there is a stone retaining wall, restored in recent years and up to 1.2m high up to the lane that serves two properties to the east. Atop and immediately adjacent to this wall (on the boundary of the development site) are two mature ash trees (Category C) and a large multi-stemmed sycamore (Category B).

2E A 2.5m high ivy-clad stone retaining wall, dropping down to the Primrose Hill forecourt, forms the western edge of the synagogue garden site. This is topped by the remains of an overgrown privet hedge.

Synagogue garden site generally

The PEA/PRA evaluated the whole of the synagogue garden site as being of local ecological importance. Its main ecological value is for foraging (and maybe roosting) bats, which are European Protected Species.

There are no non-native invasive species on the site.

The site is considered to contain suitable habitats for amphibians, reptiles, badgers and hedgehogs as well as birds. There has, however, been no incidental evidence recorded, and the connectivity for amphibians and reptiles is poor.

Surveys show that there appear to be no drainage issues on the garden site. There is no evidence of water pressure building up behind the retaining walls, nor are there any areas of poor drainage on site. The soils and sub-strata therefore have good capacity to cope with current levels of surface water run-off.

Soil conditions have not been surveyed. It is likely, however, that there is a good depth of topsoil as the grounds have never had any built development on them and therefore it is unlikely that there is contaminated soil.

There is a moderate level of light pollution from street lights.

There has not been public access to the synagogue grounds. Its current derelict and overgrown state means that it is both unsightly and unusable with little social value. It has been subject to abuse in recent years as a place for drug taking and there is some contamination with used needles and other paraphernalia.

3 Primrose Hill House: The house is divided into rented flats, with the ground floor and second floor occupied and the basement and first floor currently unoccupied. The building is mainly in reasonable condition. No bat surveys have been carried out in the building.

3A Primrose Hill forecourt: This is mainly poor semi-improved grassland which is kept mown. It is used for access to Primrose Hill and as a garden for the tenants. There are mature privet hedges (plus a few additional species) along the frontage and the western boundary.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Synagogue: The proposed development will involve the repair and restoration of the Synagogue and its adaptation into the core of the Welsh Jewish Heritage Centre. The main works comprise:

Internal:

- removal of second floor and reverting to balcony all round
- re-roofing
- roofspace
- insertion of lift shaft
- fitting out of all floors for visitor use

External:

- cleaning and repairs to external stonework;
- replacement windows and doors;
- new door accessing onto garden;
- renewal of front access steps

Synagogue garden: The grounds to the north of the Synagogue will be brought into use as a garden for visitors and an integral part of the project experience. The main works comprise:

Main garden (areas 2A & 2B)

- removal of trees and large shrubs (approx 20 no.) and scrub/ground cover vegetation;
- ground works to form terraces supported by gabions;
- central paved space, surrounded by gabion seating;
- footpaths with ramps and steps as necessary leading down the slope, plus small sitting rest areas and new flight of steps down from garden in south west corner;
- ramped emergency access for vehicles from north east corner to central space and door access;
- security lighting
- low level lighting of pedestrian areas;
- new tree planting;
- native hedge restoration/improvements (north boundary) including pruning, transplanting and new planting;
- restoration of privet hedge (west boundary);
- mixed ornamental and native shrub and ground cover planting throughout

Rear (east) of Synagogue (area 2C)

- new retaining walls;
- gravel terrace with step access from garden;
- 3no. adjoining timber roofed enclosures for plant and air source heat pump for the Synagogue, and storage shed on terrace

Primrose Hill House: The basement and ground floor will be converted for office and community use relating to the Welsh Jewish Heritage Centre, whilst the upper two floors remain as tenanted accommodation. The main works comprise:

- internal alterations and repairs to basement and ground floor;
- replacement windows to basement;
- fire exit door on ground floor, in former side door location;
- general external repairs to drainage, walls

Primrose Hill forecourt: This will be used as a gathering space and access for visitors. The main works comprise:

- minor improvementsrestoration of the hedges and grass,
- restoration of the central path,
- removal of closeboard fence and replace with low stone wall,
- hardstanding/enclosure for bins.
- clearance of ivy from retaining wall.

BIODIVERSITY MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT

From the start, full account has been taken of green infrastructure and of the likely impacts on biodiversity and their mitigation, plus enhancements with the design of the restoration of the Synagogue and Primrose Hill House, and the development of the garden. These measures are to be fully integrated with the construction methodologies, the completed development and its future maintenance.

There has been careful consideration of the mitigation measures for bats in the **Synagogue**, in line with listed building requirements as well as re-creating suitable environment for several species of bat to use the building for roosting, hibernating and maternity roost without jeopardising the integrity of the heritage value of the building.

The **Synagogue garden** aims, amongst other considerations, to enhance the biodiversity of the site and wider connectivity with other habitats. This will be achieved by creating the basis for more varied habitats than the current poor-quality woodland. Therefore woodland links, varied shrub and herbaceous planting to provide pollen, food and shelter for a wide range of insects are being proposed.

The restoration works to **Primrose Hill House and forecourt** will have a low impact on biodiversity.

The following 'Stepwise' table shows how this overall enhancement for green infrastructure will be achieved, providing a net benefit for biodiversity.

STEP-WISE APPROACH TABLE

	Avoid	Minimise	Mitigate/restore	Compensate/enhance	Maintain/manage
Synagogue					
Bats	Works required to roof and ceilings, and in the lower ground floor mean that disturbance of bats is **unavoidable** during construction.	Timing of works to avoid disturbance to maternity and hibernation roosts: Basement - April-October First & Second floor - Oct-April Roof strip/repairs - Sept/Oct or March/April	European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) to be sought. Full mitigation details will be subject to agreement with NRW. Dedicated bat loft to rear of roof space, with bat access tiles in roof and ridge, plus repairs to louvred opening in gable end, plus a fly-in hopper access on north/east (garden) side. Use of 'BatSafe TLX' or Siga Majcoat 350' membranes in roof.	n/a	Completed building to be monitored in accordance with EPSL Access via service hatch for monitoring by Licenced Bat Worker .
Synagogue garden					
Trees	In order to create an attractive and usable garden space, and to carry out the building works to the Synagogue, the loss of some trees (mainly poor quality) is **unavoidable.**	Protective fencing to retained trees during clearances and construction, in accordance with the Tree Protection Plan	Planting of 13no. native and other wildlife-friendly trees. The replacement of 3 trees for every one that is removed, as advocated in PPW, is unrealistic and	Transplanting of native tree saplings prior to general clearance and the retention of saplings to enable them to grow to maturity will greatly increase the overall future tree cover where appropriate.	Establishment maintenance of new planting, including watering, fertilising, stakes/ties, replacement of dead trees

	Good quality mature trees will be retained where they form parts of the boundary screening. This includes a large multi-stemmed sycamore and a linear group of willow/hawthorn/sycamore		unachievable.		
Shrubs/hedges		Protective fencing to retained trees/shrubs during clearances and construction.			Establishment maintenance of new planting, including watering, fertilising, pruning, weeding, replacement of dead plants
Bats	Timing of tree removal Inspection by licensed ecologist of trees immediately prior to felling to avoid roosting bats	External lighting will be low level and in accordance with a sensitive lighting plan following Bat Conservation Trust guidance	Additional tree planting to provide future foraging/ communiting/roosting opportunities	2no. bat boxes installed on suitable existing trees prior to commencement of works	Monitoring of bat activity in accordance with EPSL
Birds	Pre-works check by ecologists for nesting birds throughout	Tree and scrub clearance to be outside bird-nesting period If nests found: Buffer put in place until birds have fledged.	Additional tree and shrub planting to provide future nesting and feeding opportunities	Bird boxes	n/a
Other fauna (mammals,rep	Pre-works site walkover by ecologists to check	If fauna found to be present, timing of works	n/a	Additional opportunities for habitat	n/a

tiles, amphibians, insects)	for presence of fauna	to avoid damage		creation/enhancements Log piles/retains Open stonework in gabions	
Soils	Disturbance of in-situ soils over most of the site is **unavoidable** in order to achieve a usable garden. No disturbance to soils within hedge areas with protective fencing	Removal and on-site storage of topsoil and sub-soil as necessary to allow for groundworks in accordance with Code of practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites and Soil Management Plan	Re-use of on-site soils for new planting, with appropriate enhancement	n/a	n/a
Primrose Hill House					
Bats	Classified as 'low suitability' for roosting bats.No works to roof.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Primrose Hill forecourt					
Grass	**Unavoidable** damage likely if used for temporary storage during construction	Restrict storage areas to avoid compaction and contamination in accordance with Soil Protection Plan	Soil restoration Re-sowing of grass to include appropriate native species mix	n/a	Regular mown grass
Hedges	Loss of hedges will be avoided	Protective fencing during construction	Formative pruning and other works	n/a	Regular pruning and removal of 'weed' species
Ivy on retaining wall	Clearance is **unavoidable** to allow for inspection/repairs to the wall, and for access	Clearance restricted to wall itself, retaining	n/a	n/a	Regular infrequent clearance of any re-growth that will damage wall