



HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Rose Retreat Spa, Cyfarthfa Park, Merthyr Tydfil

Planning Application Ref: P/26/0041



TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. WIDER HISTORIC CONTEXT – CYFARTHFA CASTLE & PARK.....	4
3. IMMEDIATE SITE CONTEXT.....	5-6
4. PROPOSAL	
Design Approach & Architectural Response.....	7-8
Scale, Form & Visibility.....	8-9
Landscape-Led Material Palette.....	9
Public Use, Wellbeing & Recreation.....	10
5. PLANTING PLAN	
Historic Planting Character.....	10-11
Green Roof.....	11
Plant Management.....	12
6. ARCHAEOLOGY & REVERSIBILITY.....	12
7. CONCLUSION.....	12

1. INTRODUCTION

This Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been prepared in support of the planning application for the erection of a single-storey extension, timber screen, patio, landscaping works and associated ecological enhancements at The Rose Retreat Spa, Cyfarthfa Park, Merthyr Tydfil.

The proposal seeks to modestly expand the existing spa's capacity and introduce dedicated outdoor relaxation spaces for guests, who currently have no private outdoor amenity without being overlooked from the public street.

The application site is located within the Grade II* Registered Historic Park and Garden of Cyfarthfa Castle and within the Cyfarthfa Conservation Area. Cadw requested that a Heritage Impact Assessment be prepared to assess the impact of the proposed development on the significance and setting of the historic park and garden.

This document has been prepared in accordance with:

- Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12)
- TAN 24: The Historic Environment
- Cadw's *Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales*
- Cadw's *Managing Change to Registered Historic Parks and Gardens in Wales*

The assessment has been prepared proportionately to the scale and nature of the proposed development.

2. WIDER HISTORIC CONTEXT – CYFARTHFA CASTLE & PARK

Cyfarthfa Castle is widely regarded as the grandest and best-preserved Ironmaster's residence in Wales. The Grade I listed castle was designed by architect Robert Lugar in 1824–25 for the ironmaster William Crawshay II and constructed using locally quarried stone.

The castle was built during the height of Merthyr Tydfil's industrial expansion, when the Cyfarthfa Ironworks had become one of the largest and most significant ironworks in the world. The Crawshay family's industrial success transformed Merthyr from a small settlement into a global centre of iron production.

Earlier family residences became increasingly engulfed by the expanding ironworks, leading to the construction of Cyfarthfa Castle as a new family home overlooking the industrial town below.



Historic image of Cyfarthfa Ironworks following its closure in 1919, with Cyfarthfa Castle visible in the background.

Following the decline of the iron industry and the departure of the Crawshay family in the late nineteenth century, the estate later transitioned into public ownership. The castle was subsequently converted into a museum, gallery and school, while the wider grounds became a municipal public park.

Today, Cyfarthfa Park extends to approximately 160 acres and contains formal gardens, lakes, recreational spaces and extensive mature planting, remaining one of the most significant public green spaces within Merthyr Tydfil with strong communal and recreational value.



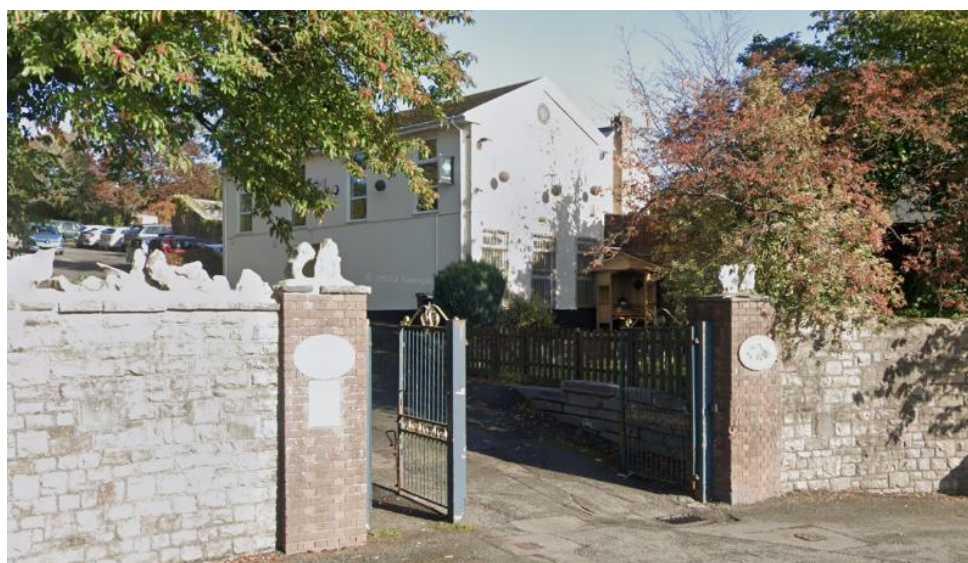
Present-day image of Cyfarthfa Castle showing the formal landscaped gardens to the front of the estate.

3. IMMEDIATE SITE CONTEXT

The application site is positioned adjacent to one of the secondary entrances to Cyfarthfa Park, forming part of the transition between the urban edge and wider parkland landscape. The entrance is characterised by mature planting, stone walls and decorative entrance gates, creating a softer and more landscape-led character than the grand principal castle entrance. The images below show the relationship between the park entrance, surrounding landscape and existing spa site.



Annotated site diagram showing Cyfarthfa Castle, key parkland features, entrances and the application site highlighted in red.



View of the secondary park entrance showing the metal gates, stone boundary walls and brick gate piers.



View from inside the secondary entrance showing the park access and green landscape setting to the left.



View from within the entrance looking towards the existing spa garden and application site.

The existing spa building is modest in scale and domestic in appearance. It is not a listed structure and is physically separated from the principal parkland by the access drive to the car park. The frontage presently has a fairly domestic and functional appearance, with exposed storage, security features and open seating areas offering limited privacy for spa users. The garden is mainly lawn, basic timber fencing and a limited number of trees. As a result, the existing frontage currently makes a limited contribution to the historic character of the park.

The mature trees, existing planting and traditional natural stone boundary wall were identified from the outset as important features contributing to the green and historic character of the park entrance. The proposals seek to retain and enhance these features while improving the frontage to better respond to its surrounding landscape and the operational needs of the spa.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Design Approach & Architectural Response

Development within or adjacent to a Grade II* Registered Historic Park and Garden requires careful consideration of the significance, setting and character of the historic landscape. A range of architectural approaches were explored during the design process, including traditional stone-built extensions and designs more closely matching the existing house. However, these approaches were not pursued, as stone structures reflecting the character and materiality of the castle were considered too visually heavy and risked creating a false sense of history by blurring the distinction between historic and new elements. A more domestic approach was also avoided, as it risked reading as a simple house extension rather than a public wellness and recreational space. As the existing spa building itself holds limited historic or architectural significance, directly copying its style was not considered necessary.

Instead, the design approach focuses on a contemporary lightweight response drawing from the strongest and most recognisable qualities of the park entrance itself, particularly the mature trees, greenery, natural materials and existing stone boundary walls.

For a more detailed discussion of the design approach, architectural inspiration and profile of the designer, please refer to the accompanying Design Statement document ref: 2434_902.



3D computer-generated visual showing the proposed single-storey extension set back within the site and integrated into the surrounding landscape.

Inspiration is drawn from the historic role of parkland pavilions, which were traditionally lightweight structures used for shelter, leisure and relaxation within parks and gardens. Pavilions have long formed part of designed historic landscapes, adding visual interest and amenity while remaining visually secondary to the wider parkland setting.

Contemporary examples such as the Serpentine Pavilion programme in Kensington Gardens demonstrate that this tradition remains as relevant today as it was in the Victorian era, with lightweight contemporary architecture continuing to complement rather than compete with sensitive historic landscapes.



Photo gallery showing examples of pavilion structures from the Serpentine Pavilion programme.

4.2 Scale, Form & Visibility

The proposal has been carefully designed as a modest single-storey structure, with the depth and footprint shaped around existing trees to avoid impacts on root protection areas and ensure no trees or hedgerows are lost as part of the development. A larger or two-storey form was avoided to ensure the extension remains visually secondary within the parkland setting and does not compete with the wider historic landscape. From the public realm, the extension sits within the backdrop of the mature tree canopy. The use of natural timber, green roofing and layered planting helps integrate the structure into the surrounding vegetation, ensuring the historic metal gates, stone boundary walls and brick gate piers remain the defining feature of the park entrance.



View of the approach showing the single-storey extension and green roof blending into the surrounding trees and landscape.



Perspective view from the approach showing the extension blending into the surrounding landscape from a distance

4.3 Landscape-Led Material Palette

The material palette has been carefully selected to reflect the natural woodland character of the park entrance and wider historic setting. Timber screening is proposed using reclaimed and locally sourced timber, helping reinforce the landscape-led character of the proposal while adding another layer of connection to the history of the site. Much of Cyfarthfa's historic character is shaped by materials rooted in the local area, from the locally quarried stone of the castle walls to the ironwork of the entrance gates, reflecting the industry and identity of Merthyr Tydfil.

Proposed external seating and terrace areas to the rear of the spa would also utilise locally sourced natural stone paving to reflect the material character of the wider park setting and existing boundary walls, helping soften the appearance of the development and integrate it more naturally within the site.



Visual showing the proposed timber screen, retained stone wall and frontage planting beds, with existing mature trees in the background helping integrate the extension into the surrounding landscape setting.

4.4 Public Use, Wellbeing & Recreation

Following the decline of the Crawshay family's industrial interests, the estate passed into public ownership, establishing the park as a place of community value and civic pride it continues to hold today. The proposed spa development continues this tradition, reinforcing the park's historic identity as a place of retreat and wellbeing. The proposals would also provide wider social and economic benefits through upgraded facilities and increased visitor numbers, encouraging greater engagement with the park and its heritage.

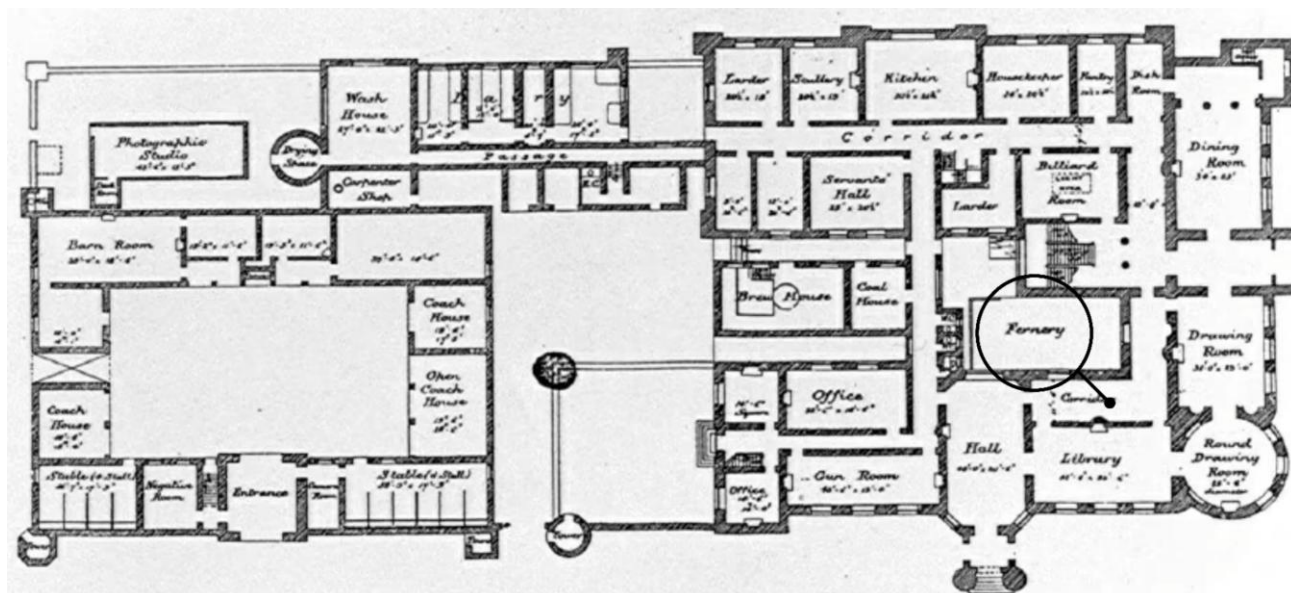
5 PLANTING PLAN

Historic Planting Character

The planting strategy forms an important part of the wider design approach, helping strengthen the relationship between wellness, landscape and the historic identity of Cyfarthfa Park.

Inspiration has been drawn from the Victorian tradition of immersive woodland gardens, ferneries and ornamental planting. Ferns held a particularly strong cultural connection to Merthyr Tydfil and the Crawshay family during the Victorian period, becoming highly fashionable within homes, gardens, clothing and decorative arts. Historical accounts suggest that fern collecting became so popular during the Victorian "pteridomania" (fern fever) craze that, within many industrial communities, people prioritised purchasing ferns and exotic plants despite often difficult living conditions.

Cyfarthfa Castle previously contained its own Victorian fernery, located off the main hall beneath a glazed roof at the heart of the castle, which is currently undergoing restoration.



Historic floor plan of Cyfarthfa Castle with the former Victorian fernery highlighted.

The proposed landscape scheme seeks to celebrate this aspect of the site's Victorian heritage through a fern-rich planting palette, strengthening the connection between wellness, landscape and the historic identity of Cyfarthfa Park.



Images of the restored Victorian fernery at Ascog Hall, Scotland, illustrating the lush woodland atmosphere typical of nineteenth-century ferneries and garden retreats.

Historic records and exhibition accounts also show the Crawshay family developed an interest in rare and exotic planting, with references to banana trees, coffee plants, egg plants, rare ferns and unusual tropical species grown within the estate gardens and glasshouses. Records referred to the gardens as being maintained “*in the highest possible state of perfection*”, containing exotic plants “*rarely seen at public exhibition*”. This reflected the wider Victorian fascination with botanical collecting, status and horticultural experimentation.

While the proposed planting strategy remains primarily woodland and fern-based to reflect the wider landscape setting of the park, a small number of more unusual or architectural feature plants may also be introduced as a contemporary interpretation of the Crawshay family's historic interest in exotic planting and horticultural display. The planting strategy has been informed through discussions with a local horticultural specialist closely involved with the park and its planting history, helping ensure the proposals respond positively to both the historic character and ecological conditions of the site.

South Wales, and particularly the Merthyr Tydfil area, provides an ideal climate for recreating a Victorian-style fern garden due to its high rainfall, mild temperatures, humidity and naturally green landscape character. Ferns thrive in cool, damp and shaded environments, conditions commonly found within the valleys and woodland areas surrounding Cyfarthfa Park.

The proposed planting palette has therefore been selected not only for its historical relevance to Victorian fern gardens, but also for its suitability to the local climate and long-term resilience.

5.1 Green Roof & Biodiversity

The proposed biodiverse roof will comprise a sedum planting system selected for biodiversity value, seasonal variation and resilience to the Welsh climate. The roof is expected to incorporate a mix of low-growing sedum species such as *Sedum album*, *Sedum spurium*, *Sedum acre* and *Sedum reflexum*, providing a varied palette of greens, reds and seasonal flowering tones throughout the year.

These species are well suited to shallow substrate green roof systems and are capable of tolerating periods of both heavy rainfall and drier weather conditions, making them appropriate for the exposed and changeable climate conditions typically experienced in South Wales.

The varied tones, textures and seasonal flowering of the sedum planting will help the roof read as an extension of the surrounding landscape rather than a conventional roof structure.

5.2 Planting Management & Long-Term Maintenance

The proposed planting and long-term management approach has also been informed through discussions with a local horticultural specialist involved in the planting and maintenance of the wider Cyfarthfa Park grounds.

The intention of the landscape scheme is to create a dense and naturalistic woodland character inspired by Victorian ferneries, using a mix of evergreen and seasonal planting to maintain year-round greenery, texture and biodiversity value. Over time, the planting would gradually establish and further soften the built form within the landscape setting.

Ongoing management would include seasonal pruning, removal of dead fronds where necessary, mulching, moisture retention and replacement of failed planting if required.

5. ARCHAEOLOGY & REVERSIBILITY

Heneb identified the potential for archaeological remains to survive beneath the site and recommended a programme of archaeological mitigation secured by planning condition. Subject to the recommended archaeological condition, any impact on archaeological remains can be appropriately managed and mitigated.

The lightweight pavilion-style structure has also been designed to minimise long-term impact on the site from an archaeological perspective. Unlike a heavier permanent design, the proposal adopts a lighter and more reversible approach which could be altered or removed in the future with limited disturbance to the ground beneath, helping preserve the long-term archaeological potential of the site.

6. CONCLUSION

The proposed development has been designed to respond sensitively to the prominent and historically significant setting. The existing spa building and garden are not listed and hold no significant historic or architectural interest in their own right, meaning the proposed works would not result in harm to any significant historic fabric. The single-storey form, natural materials, green roofing and layered planting palette ensure the proposal remains visually subordinate within the wider landscape.

The design approach draws from the strongest qualities of the park entrance itself, particularly the mature greenery, woodland character and natural materials, rather than attempting to replicate the historic architecture of the castle and estate. The proposal takes inspiration from traditional parkland pavilions and garden structures designed to sit lightly within the landscape and remain visually secondary to the surrounding planting and trees. The use of lightweight, contemporary and partially reversible construction methods also helps minimise impact on the historic and archaeological significance of the site, allowing for future alteration or removal with limited disturbance to the ground beneath.

The proposed landscaping scheme actively reinforces and enhances the historic identity of Cyfarthfa Park, drawing on the Victorian fernery tradition closely associated with the Crawshay family and the wider cultural heritage of Merthyr Tydfil.

The proposal also continues the long-established role of Cyfarthfa Park as a place of public recreation, relaxation and wellbeing, providing social and economic benefits through improved facilities, increased visitor numbers and support for local tourism. In doing so, the proposal is also considered to contribute to the well-being goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Subject to the archaeological mitigation condition recommended by Heneb, it is considered that the proposed development would cause no harm to the significance or setting of the Registered Historic Park and Garden, the Cyfarthfa Conservation Area, or any associated listed structures. The proposals are therefore considered to protect, conserve and enhance the special interest of the historic park and garden, in accordance with the requirements of Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12), TAN 24, and the relevant Cadw guidance documents.