



In the summer of 2022, Neath Port Talbot submitted an ambitious application to the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) for a heritage led restoration and enhancement at Gnoll Park. Ultimately being successful, this presentation documents the key aspects of the proposals, which are currently being evolved with a view to making the necessary statutory applications. Feedback is therefore being sought from the community and other interested parties with regards to the LUF proposals.

Please be aware that these proposals are currently at concept stage and are subject to change.

Scan to give feedback

Feedback can also be given by visiting: [www.gnollstatecountrypark.co.uk/investment](http://www.gnollstatecountrypark.co.uk/investment)

# History

Gnoll House was built by Sir Herbert Mackworth in 1776-8 and designed by architect John Johnson of Leicester. It is a reflection of the historic significance of Neath as a developing centre at the beginning of the world's copper manufacturing industry, and an example of a 'country estate' constructed by the nouveau-riche in an attempt to illustrate a newly acquired status. Although the house has been demolished, the surrounding park and gardens have grown to encompass considerable value for the people of Neath for leisure and interaction. It is also much appreciated by its visitors as an active centre within Neath, and as a place of cultural and historical importance.

# Vision

The project seeks to deliver against the following aims:

- Support well-being through access to and participation in heritage, nature and outdoor activity
- Enhance the natural environment
- Develop the quality and value of the visitor economy
- Increase 'pride of place' within the context of the Vale of Neath's wider offer.

*'Heritage is integral to our culture, people's sense of identity and sense of belonging which in turn impacts on people's health, wellbeing and social inclusion. Heritage and culture also contributes to the economy, supporting paid employment, helping to attract inward investment and generating value through voluntary action - part of our wider place shaping agenda'.*

# Overall Park Strategy



Overall Park Strategy

# Key Elements

To enhance the visitor offer, through the inclusion of family attractions and improved catering offer by:

- Consolidating and restoring key heritage features, including the cascades, opening up the cellars in Gnoll House and reintroducing key historic vistas, alongside wider park interpretation.
- Re-developing the Visitor Centre to include improved and additional facilities.
- Evolving the play and activity offer, including a natural adventure play area
- Introducing a new boathouse, incorporating a kiosk with lakeside terrace to serve the play facility and encourage visitors to explore the wider site and circular walking routes on offer.
- Improving the network of paths and trails and links with the Woodland Trust land.
- Extending car parking provision and rationalising the arrival sequence to the park.
- Undertaking biodiversity improvements.
- Introducing tourist accommodation, to enable overnight stays, that will increase the visitor spend to positive effect on the local economy.



[B3] Conceptual image showing Woodland Play - sculptural elements that offer informal play that links with interpretive themes in this part of the site.



## Gnoll Park - Visitor Facilities - Overview

A4

**Reinstate the Gnoll House ruins as a central point within the wider parkland**

This redirection of focus, will give wider understanding as to why Neath and the parkland exists and re-establish the connection between the house and the estate, lost following the demolition of the property in the 1950s.

**Reference the rich, cultural history of Neath Port Talbot**

Build upon connections between NPT and those at the forefront of entertainment including Richard Burton, Anthony Hopkins, Michael Sheen, Bonnie Tyler, Rob Brydon, Max Boyce, and Siwan Roberts.

**This will be achieved by giving the site new and flexible uses, centred around 2 key elements:**

- The repair of the cellars and repurposing of them to provide education space and a virtual reality interpretative experience.
- The constructing of a robust and permanent performance space with associated electrical provision within a wider, landscaping scheme, including the reinstatement of the formal terraced gardens, capable of accommodating musical, theatrical and cinema events.



Gnoll House does not currently reveal itself to be the historic heart of the park. It is an underused area of the periphery of the park. The cellars are inaccessible to the public and the current covering buildings are incongruous to the setting.



The proposal better defines and interprets the footprint of the original house, through hard and soft landscaping whilst also providing viable new uses: including cinema screenings/ musical and theatre performances, alongside education provision and interactive interpretation to the cellar.



Internal view of the existing cellars.

C3

**Upgrade and extend the Visitor Centre to provide a wider range of facilities for the community**

- Exploit the location of the existing Visitor Centre to give internal spaces clear views over Fish Pond, allowing residents and visitors to absorb the historic landscape of The Gnoll.
- Increase the legibility of the existing visitor centre and visitor flows/ usable space, through its extension and reconfiguration.
- Increase the offer for visitors to include:
  - Better orientated WCs (to include a Changing Places WC)
  - Re-configured Café with improved kitchen facilities and storage, including a mezzanine space with framed views over the lake.
  - Multi-level soft play area for children's indoor play
  - Flexible rooms for display, improved interpretation/ exhibition and use by the local community for various events and classes
  - Dedicated space for the Friends of The Gnoll to equip the group with a space to facilitate the work they do, alongside a Rangers' Office.



Whilst functional, the current visitor centre/ café fails to deliver on its potential to provide an inspirational visitor experience. The building does not have a clear orientation and therefore as a visitor it is hard to understand how to navigate the building 'correctly'. The architecture is defensive and views over the lake and views into the internal spaces aren't maximised. This reduces the engagement with the parkland.



Internal view of the proposed amendments



The proposal creates a new building as a modern interpretation of the arts and crafts movement with steep roof pitches, echoing Pond Cottage on the opposite side of the lake, to provide additional facilities. Views are framed and a better connection is made with the parkland.

A9/ 10

**Restore the historic Kitchen Gardens and provide a series of accommodation units within the park for tourism**

This will be achieved through:

- The repair of Pond Cottage to accommodate holiday stays;
- The repair, reconstruction and repurposing of the existing redundant buildings of the former service yard to create holiday units around a landscaped central courtyard, set within a more organically laid-out landscape;
- Restoration of the landscape of the formal kitchen garden to Gnoll House, helping to inform the narrative of the estate for visitors to the park;
- Insertion of Kitchen Garden Holiday Lodges (high quality wooden pods: lightweight structures, sitting lightly on the ground to provide bedroom, living, kitchen and en-suite facilities). These would be arranged to further enhance and reinterpret the former kitchen garden.
- Provision of discretely located parking for the accommodation in the existing service yard. This will involve upgrading the existing service yard buildings and setting out parking on a gravel surface.



Schematic plan showing the layout of the restored Kitchen gardens and associated visitor accommodation



**Gnoll Park - Visitor Facilities - Key Aspects**