



DEVELOPMENT OF CEFN ISAF FLATS AND THE SETTING OF HERITAGE ASSETS

**PONTYCAPEL ROAD
CEFNOED Y CYMMER
MERTHYR TYDFIL
CF48 2RA**

HERITAGE STATEMENT



February 2024

Edward Holland

Holland Heritage

www.hollandheritage.co.uk



CONTENTS

Introduction	Pg. 2
Historic Assets within the Study Area	Pg. 4
Defining and Analysing the Setting	Pg. 8
The Development Site and the Nature of the Proposed Change	Pg. 12
Evaluation of the potential impact on the Setting of Historic Assets	Pg. 13
Options to mitigate or reduce potential impact	Pg. 15
Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance when considering change	Pg. 16
Summary	Pg. 17

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Authorship and Background

This heritage report is written by Edward Holland, Director of Holland Heritage. It was commissioned on 10th February 2023 by Geraint Jones of Asbri Planning on behalf of Merthyr Valley Homes. This report is to inform proposals to redevelop the site.

Illustrations supplied or sourced for this document are credited accordingly and all other photographs are copyright Holland Heritage. All rights are reserved. Other than for the purposes of the Planning application for which this report is written, no part of this document may be reproduced or published in any form or by any means, including photocopying, without the prior permission of author and client.

1.2 Location

Cefn Isaf lies on the south side of Pontycapel Road to the south of the High Street at Cefn Coed y Cymmer (National Grid Reference: SO 0326 0769).



Figure 1 Aerial View (annotated to identify Cefn Isaf) © www.gridreferencefinder.com

1.3 Methodology and Purpose

The purpose of this heritage report is to fully understand the potential impact of this development on neighbouring heritage assets. In pre-application advice the Local Authority has specifically asked for the impact on the settings of Cefn Railway Viaduct and on the Cyfarthfa Conservation Area to be assessed.



The assessment process follows the approach set out by Cadw in Conservation Principles¹ and in best-practice guidance documents associated with the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016 including *Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales, May 2017* and *Managing Change to Listed Buildings in Wales, May 2017* and *Managing Conservation Areas in Wales, May 2017*. This report follows the four stages of assessment set out in Cadw's guidance document '*Setting of Historic Assets*' published in 2017. This advises that any such assessment should start with identifying the historic assets, then defining and analysing their setting, then evaluating the potential impact of change or development and finally considering options to mitigate the impact of a proposed change or development.

This report is based upon a site survey on 26th January 2023.

¹Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales (Cadw, Welsh Government, March 2011).

2.0 Historic Assets within this study area

2.1 This is the first of the stages set out in Cadw’s best-practice guidance, intended to assist decision makers and developers in avoiding harmful impact on the setting of an historic asset². This stage identifies the heritage that needs to be considered in the context of this assessment. The study area is that to which the proposed development can reasonably be related and that which is capable of experiencing heritage impact.

3.2 In this case consideration focuses primarily on the Cefn Railway Viaduct and the Cyfarthfa Conservation Area as being the primary heritage assets within the settings of which Cefn Isaf lies.

3.3 The study area for the purposes of this report covers a 1km radius and the **listed buildings** within this area are shown in the table below:

Listed Building Name	Approximate Distance from Cefn Isaf	Grade	Cadw Ref:
Cefn Railway Viaduct	c.250 – 275m	II*	11377 and 11382
Hen Dy Cwrdd Unitarian Chapel	c.200m	II	11512
Vaynor War Memorial and railings	c.220m	II	81200
Carmel Chapel and Schoolroom	c.220m	II	11513
Old Cefn Bridge	c.470m	II	11378 and 27061
Pont y Cefn	c.475m	II	11383 and 27062
Pont y Cafnau	c.760m	II*	11408
Limekilns S of Cefn Bridge	c.580m	II	17932
Cyfarthfa Castle	c.975m	I	11396
School at Cyfarthfa Castle	c.975m	I	11397
Fountain below S Terrace at Cyfarthfa Castle	c.965m	II	11398
Gatepiers at Driveway Entrance to Cyfarthfa Castle	c.995m	II	11399

² *Managing Setting of Historic Assets*, (Cadw, Welsh Government - May 2017)

Railings at Driveway entrance to Cyfarthfa Castle	c.995m	11	11400
Park Wall Flanking Railings at Driveway Entrance to Cyfarthfa Castle	c.995m	II	11401 and 11402
Pandy Farmhouse	c.995m	II	11404
Clock Tower at Pandy Farm	c.995m	II	11405
Barn at Pandy Farm	c.985m	II	11406
L-Plan Stable ranges Pandy Farm	c.985m	II	1407
Tabor Independent Chapel	c.530m	II	21317
Church of St. John the Baptist	c.410m	II	81185

3.4 The 1km radius study area also includes the following **Scheduled Ancient Monuments**:

Scheduled Ancient Monument Name	Approximate Distance from Cefn Isaf	Cadw Ref:
Tai Mawr Leat for Cyfarthfa Ironworks	c.240m at its nearest point	GM 479
Gurnos Quarry Tramroad and Leat	c.350m at its nearest point	GM 478
Pont y Cafnau Tramroad Bridge	c.760m	GM 424
Remains of Blast Furnaces Cyfarthfa Ironworks	c.855m at its nearest point	GM 425

3.5 The 1km radius study area also includes the following **Registered Historic Park and Gardens**

Registered Historic Park and Garden Name	Approximate Distance from Cefn Isaf	Cadw Ref:
Cyfarthfa Castle	c.620m at nearest point	PGW(Gm)1(MER)
Cefn Coed Cemetery and Jewish Burial Ground	c.625m at nearest point	PGW(Gm)70(MER)

3.6 Cefn-Coed y Cymmer also lies within the Merthyr Tydfil **Registered Historic Landscape** (Cadw reference HLW (MGI) 2).

3.7 Cefn Isaf is outside the **Cyfarthfa Conservation Area** but it is noted here as a heritage designation within the 1km radius study area. The nearest part of the boundary is approximately 120m south of Cefn Isaf.

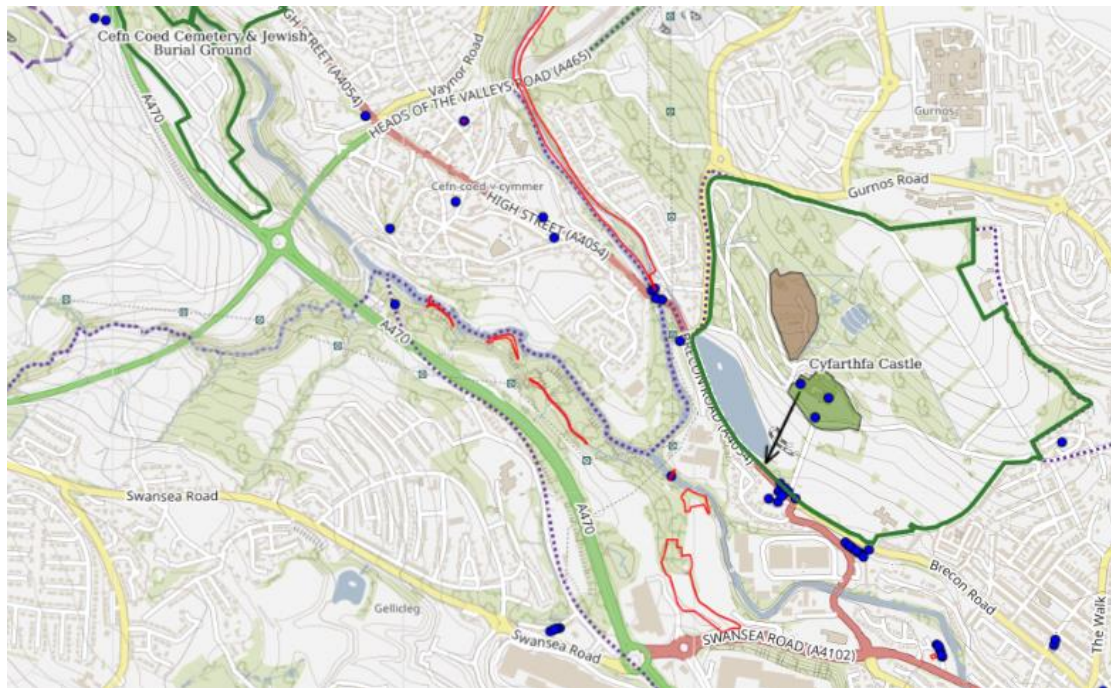


Figure 2 Map showing key heritage designations relevant to the assessment of the proposed development © Cadw Cof Cymru

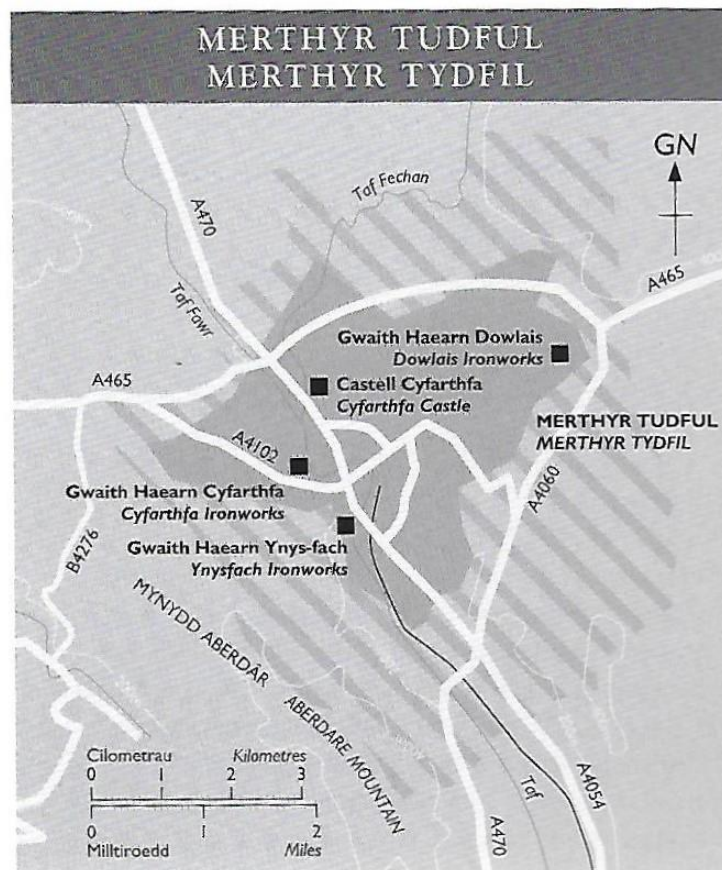


Figure 3 Extract from Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales © Cadw, Crown Copyright

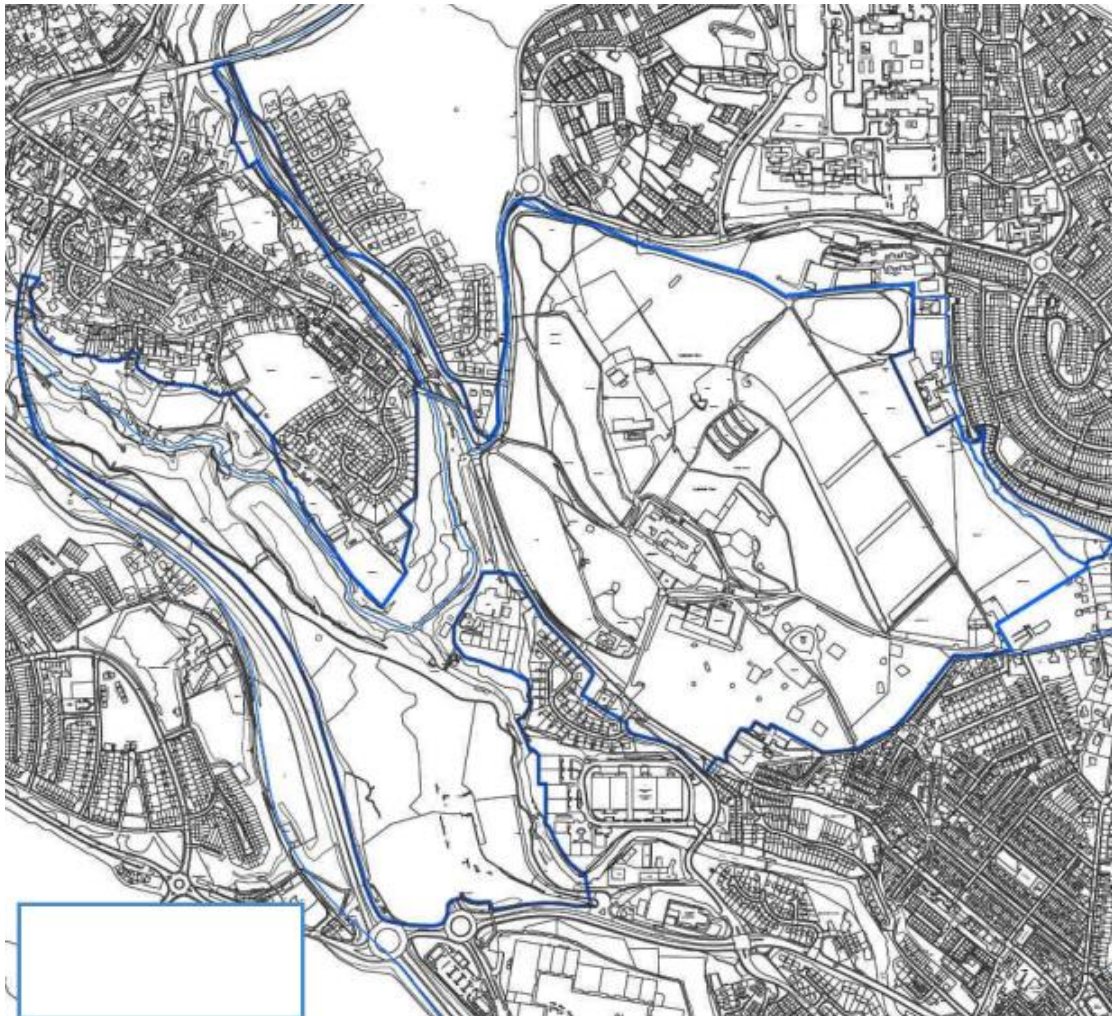


Figure 4 Cyfarthfa Conservation Area Boundary Plan © Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

3.8 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has compiled a list of 109 Locally Listed Buildings of which 13 are within the 1km radius study area. These include the former Ebenezer Chapel, 120m east along Pontycapel Road, Nos 161-164 High Street approximately 250m north-east of Cefn Isaf and a cluster of public houses (Station Hotel, Railway Inn and Drovers Arms) approximately 300m north of Cefn Isaf.

3.9 The Historic Environment Record (www.archwilio.org.uk) does not include any records on the proposed development site of Cefn Isaf.

4.0 Defining and Analysing the Setting

4.1 This section defines and analyses the setting to understand how it contributes to the significance of the relevant historic assets identified in stage 1, and, in particular, the ways in which the assets are understood, appreciated and experienced.

4.2 Cadw defines 'setting'³ as including the surroundings in which the heritage asset is "understood, experienced and appreciated, embracing present and past relationships to the surrounding landscape." The guidance document explains that "the importance of setting lies in what it contributes to the significance of a historic asset". It adds that "the setting of a historic asset can also include less tangible elements. These may include function, sensory perceptions or historical, artistic, literary or scenic associations."

4.3 Cefn Isaf itself is a modern, c.1970s, three-storey, development of apartments built of pale brick elevations under monopitch roofs. It is formed of two parallel blocks set into the slope and the lower block is stepped out providing each floor with glazed verandahs. The development can be clearly seen on Pontycapel Road and from the deck of the former Cefn viaduct but it has no impact on the nearby Conservation Area. Cefn Isaf has insufficient architectural interest of its own to merit preservation or to prevent future redevelopment.

4.4 Pontycapel Road is narrow and its winding route follows the contour from the High Street west towards the viaduct. It is characterised by a variety of buildings, mostly two-storey terraces, some of mid-19th century origin. Gaps in the street frontages are often bordered by rubble stone boundary walls. At the east (High Street) end of the street is the listed Carmel Welsh Baptist Church and further along is the unlisted Ebenezer Chapel. The more famous Hen dy Cwrdd Unitarian Chapel, whose origins date back to the mid-18th century, lies on Old Chapel Road c.200m north west of Cefn Isaf. Cefn Isaf itself is the tallest building on the street and, combined with its scale, results in it being an overly dominant feature of the streetscape. Once past Cefn Isaf the Viaduct comes into view and the road widens out where it splits with one arm continuing west towards the viaduct and the other climbing up the hill the Cefn Coed Club building. This is as large a structure as Cefn Isaf but the Club is more dominant in long views as it is further up the slope.

³ *Managing Setting of Historic Assets in Wales*, Cadw Welsh Government, May 2017, p.2



Figure 5 Hen Dy Cwrdd Chapel

4.5 Cartographic research shows that there were previous buildings on the site of Cefn Isaf (e.g. Glamorgan Sheet XI.NE published in 1901 and XI.4 published in 1919). In the earlier map just below the road and then by 1919 a range directly fronting the street had been added. The site was entirely redeveloped in the later 20th century when Cefn Isaf was constructed.

4.6 The area around Cefn Isaf has few buildings that stand out as making a positive contribution and Cefn Isaf itself makes a negative contribution when close to it. This assessment is accentuated by its current abandonment and poor condition. When viewed from the viaduct the eye is naturally carried further along the river valley towards Cyfarthfa and is not particularly drawn to the built-up area of Cefn Coed y Cymmer but if that area is viewed from this high vantage point it is the Club building that is the most intrusive.

4.7 The boundary of the Cyfarthfa Conservation Area runs c.30m below the lowest part of Cefn Isaf and at this point it includes a partly tree-covered green area sloping down towards the river Taf Fawr. This branch of the conservation area is to protect the valley floor and to include the Tai Mawr Leat for the Cyfarthfa Ironworks. There is a northern branch of the area that includes the Gurnos Quarry Tramroad and Leat but this is, at its nearest

point, 350m from Cefn Isaf and for the most part considerably more. The primary part of the conservation area is however that to the east around Cyfarthfa Castle and its associated parkland. This is at least 600m south-east of Cefn Isaf.

4.8 The primary structure to the west end of the study area is the Cefn Railway Viaduct and it be clearly seen from Pontycapel Road from just beyond Cefn Isaf. The fifteen-arch viaduct is widely regarded as one of the finest in Wales and is distinctive for its elegant curve, impressive height and slender piers. It was opened in 1866 to carry the Brecon, Newport and Merthyr Railway over the Taf Fawr and it was designed by H Conybeare & A Sutherland.



Figure 6 Cefn Railway Viaduct

4.9 The primary heritage significance to the east is Cyfarthfa Castle, together with its parkland setting, associated listed buildings and the industrial archaeology of Pont y Cafnau Bridge and the remains of the Blast Furnaces for Cyfarthfa Ironworks. Cyfarthfa Castle is a Grade I listed building of architectural and historical importance. The iconic castellated mansion was built in 1824-5 to the designs of Robert Lugar for William Crawshay II. The siting of the house deliberately allowed the great ironmaster to look out over his ironworks, which at the time was the largest of its kind in the world. In 1909 the castle was acquired by Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council and it became a school, for which large additions were

made in 1912. Inevitably there were periodic building alterations carried out for the school and in 2014 it finally closed. Meanwhile, the south-eastern part of the castle became a museum in 1910 and remains in this use today. The museum contains a diverse collection of 19th and 20th century art including paintings by the important Merthyr artist Penry Williams. The Scheduled Pont y Cafnau (c.1794) is of undoubted national importance as it is believed to be the earliest known iron railway bridge and was associated with the Cyfarthfa Ironworks.



Figure 7 Cyfarthfa Castle



Figure 8 Late below Cyfarthfa Castle

5.0 The Development Site and the nature of the proposed change



Figure 9 Cefn Isaf Flats

5.1 This section describes the site on which the change is proposed before going on in the subsequent section to cover stage 3 of the four stages set out in the Cadw guidance.

5.2 As described above, Cefn Isaf itself is a modern, c.1970s, three-storey, development of apartments built of pale brick elevations under monopitch roofs. It is formed of two parallel blocks set into the slope and the lower block is stepped out providing each floor with glazed verandahs. Cefn Isaf has insufficient architectural interest of its own to merit preservation or to prevent future redevelopment.

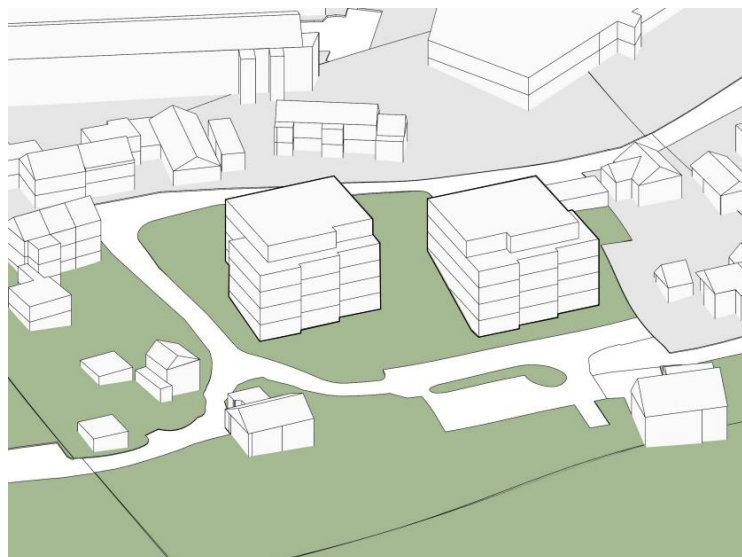
5.3 The proposed change is to demolish the existing structures and to replace with a new residential development comprising 40 flats in a mixture of one and two bedroomed units.

6.0 Evaluation of potential Impact on the Setting of the Historic Assets

6.1 Stage 3 considers how the proposed development site described in the previous section relates to the heritage assets discussed in Stages 1 and 2. It evaluates the impact on the heritage significance of the proposed change and, in particular, on the setting. In considering the impact on setting it is important to note that the capacity for change is high on account of the limited quality of the existing building.



Figures 10 & 11 Cefn Isaf massing – Existing(above) & Proposed (below) © Coffey Architects



6.2 The illustrations above show that the proposed scheme occupies the same site but with the buildings set further back from the road than the existing. The street is characterised by two-storey dwellings and so the existing three-storey frontage at the street’s narrowed point appears overly

dominant. Setting the new build back will therefore create some enhancement to the street and potentially will open-up long views of the viaduct that at present cannot be experienced until further along the street.

6.3 The elevations are proposed to have roughcast green render to the lower levels with a smoother finish render to upper levels. Glazed tiles are proposed for the entrance surrounds.



Figures 12 and 13 Cefn Isaf elevations - view from south (above) and from east (below) showing how the development is set into the hillside © Coffey Architects



6.4 The development has the potential to have high visual impact due to the steepness of the hill and the height of the proposed buildings but this would not result in significant harm to the setting of the designated or non-designated heritage assets. The area has changed so dramatically that it can sustain this further change.

6.5 The proposed scheme would have no direct impact on the appearance or significance of designated historic assets or on non-designated structures. In terms of archaeology, it is known that groundworks in this area can uncover remains revealing further evidence of the former industry but here the existing development of the site is likely to have already compromised the archaeology of the site.



7.0 Relevant Planning Policy and Guidance when considering change

7.1 Local Planning Policy

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's Adopted Replacement Local Development Plan 2016 – 2031, adopted in January 2020, sets out a wide range of objectives and policies including those relating to the historic environment.

Policy CW1 – The Historic Environment states

The integrity of our historic environment assets will be conserved and enhanced. Development proposals will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated they would preserve or enhance the architectural quality, character or the historic or cultural importance of our designated historic environment assets..... Although much of our historic environment is fragile and can easily be compromised by poor design...."

7.2 National Planning Guidance

7.2.1 National Policy on the historic environment is set out in Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12, February 2024 - Chapter 6, Distinctive and Natural Places). This recognises that the historic environment is a finite resource and can only be maintained for future generations if the individual historic assets are protected and conserved.

Section 6.1.5 states that Cadw's published Conservation Principles highlights the need to base decisions on an understanding of the impact a proposal may have on the significance of an historic asset.

Section 6.1.6 sets out the Welsh Government's specific objectives for the historic environment as being to:

- protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Sites;
- conserve archaeological remains, both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and the economy;
- safeguard the character of historic buildings and manage change so that their special architectural and historic interest is preserved;
- preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas, whilst the same time helping them remain vibrant and prosperous;
- preserve the special interest of sites on the register of historic parks and gardens; and
- protect areas on the register of historic landscapes in Wales.



7.2.2 Technical Advice Note 24 published in May 2017 sets out general guidance on the management of the historic environment, heritage impact and setting of historic assets.

Paragraph 1.15 states that:

“Heritage impact assessment is a structured process that enables the significance of a designated asset to be taken into account when considering proposals for change. Heritage impact assessments should be proportionate both to the significance of the historic asset and to the degree of change proposed, and should include sufficient information to enable both the significance of the asset and the impact of change to be understood. The results of the heritage impact assessment should be summarised in a heritage impact statement which must form part of any listed building consent, conservation area consent and, when requested, scheduled monument consent applications.”

Paragraph 1.26:

“It is for the applicant to provide the local planning authority with sufficient information to allow the assessment of their proposals in respect of scheduled monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas, registered historic parks and gardens, World Heritage Sites, or other sites of national importance and their settings. These principles, however, are equally applicable to all historic assets, irrespective of their designation.”

7.3 **Cadw’s Published Guidance**

In May 2017 Cadw published relevant guidance documents, one on Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales and another on Setting of Historic Assets. They explain how vital it is to understand the implications of any proposed change before development is consented. They explain why the process of Heritage Impact Assessment can help make positive changes to historic assets.



8.0 Summary

This report has set out the required understanding of the historic character and significance of the historic assets close to the existing Cefn Isaf Flats. In particular, it has assessed the setting of the Cefn Railway Viaduct, with which there is intervisibility. It has concluded that the existing buildings have a negative impact on the area on account of being of significantly greater scale than the neighbouring traditional buildings. However, when seen in long views from the viaduct there are other equally large buildings that stand out such as the Cefn Coed Club. The proposed development will result in change to site but the overall impact on the heritage will be neutral as the greater mass will be mitigated by improved materials and design. The special architectural and historic character of the neighbouring conservation area and heritage assets will be preserved.