Cyfarthfa Park receives an early Christmas gift of £1.96m from HLF

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The Grade II* registered park covers 65 hectares and occupies a prominent position overlooking the town and what remains of the historic Cyfarthfa Ironworks. It provides the backdrop to the Grade I listed Cyfarthfa Castle, home to the Crawshay family, and is the best example of a 19th century Ironmaster's residence to have survived in South Wales.

The money will enable Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) to carry out vital restoration to the historic landscape of the Park including vital repairs to the bandstand, walled garden and glass houses. Plans also include the reconstruction of the Bowls Pavilion and improved visitor facilities.

Cyfarthfa Castle and Park is already the county borough's most important tourist attraction and was ranked number seven in the Top 50 Valleys Essentials list of things to see and do in the area, voted for by local people. The long term plan is to develop Cyfarthfa Park into a key visitor destination in the valleys region and to achieve Green Flag status. The project will contribute to Merthyr Tydfil's wider regeneration scheme.

The restored gardens and glass houses will be a base for the existing dedicated Friends Group allowing them and new volunteers to take part in a range of visitor events and activities, including garden and warden roles, heritage visitor guided walks and event assistants. The funding will also support the employment of a heritage officer, volunteer programme coordinator and warden to ensure the future management and maintenance of the park.

An apprentice programme forms a significant part of the project which will give local people the chance to get 'hands-on' construction and horticultural training, particularly in traditional skills such as stone wall building. The funding will support the development and expansion of the existing "Growing to Succeed" programme with an additional 40 members of the community expected to get involved.

Dan Clayton Jones, Chair of HLF in Wales, who is stepping down at the end of December, said: "Today's investment is a great way to end the year and my time with HLF, and will provide Cyfarthfa with much-needed financial support. This Park, which now belongs to the people of Merthyr Tydfil is a reminder of the great wealth amassed by the iron trade aristocracy of South Wales and the role Merthyr Tydfil played in the industrial revolution.

"The funding will return the historic landscape of the park to its former glory while making it a fantastic green space for local people to enjoy, explore and learn from. It is great to see so many opportunities being made available for local people to learn traditional and horticultural skills, and in doing so play their part in taking our heritage into the future."

Morgan Chambers, Chair of the Friends of Cyfarthfa Park Group, said: "This provides us with an exciting opportunity to pursue our Community Involvement and Volunteer Programme for Cyfarthfa Park; a park for the people. It will help people to learn about their own heritage, encourage our community to take an active role in the project and contribute towards decision making."

Cllr. Derek Games, Heritage Champion, said: "This is fantastic news for Merthyr Tydfil. The essential funding will enable us to work with the community to conserve and enhance the industrial heritage and historic features in Cyfarthfa Park. The programme will celebrate the park's role in Merthyr Tydfil's industrial past and enhance investment to ensure that

the park meets visitor expectations and national standards. This truly will make Cyfarthfa Castle and Park the jewel in the crown.”

First Minister Carwyn Jones said: “Merthyr Tydfil is steeped in industrial heritage which defines the area to this day. The social fabric of a traditional mining community is still very much alive and it is important we protect that heritage and use it as a cornerstone to regenerate the town and raise the profile of the area.

“Welsh Government and Heritage Lottery funding is promoting tourism and job creation in Merthyr, encouraging economic activity and developing skills on a local level. Community participation will be key to the continuing success of this project.”