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# Cwmavon Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (April 2011)



TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

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# Cwmavon Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

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Contents: *April 2011*

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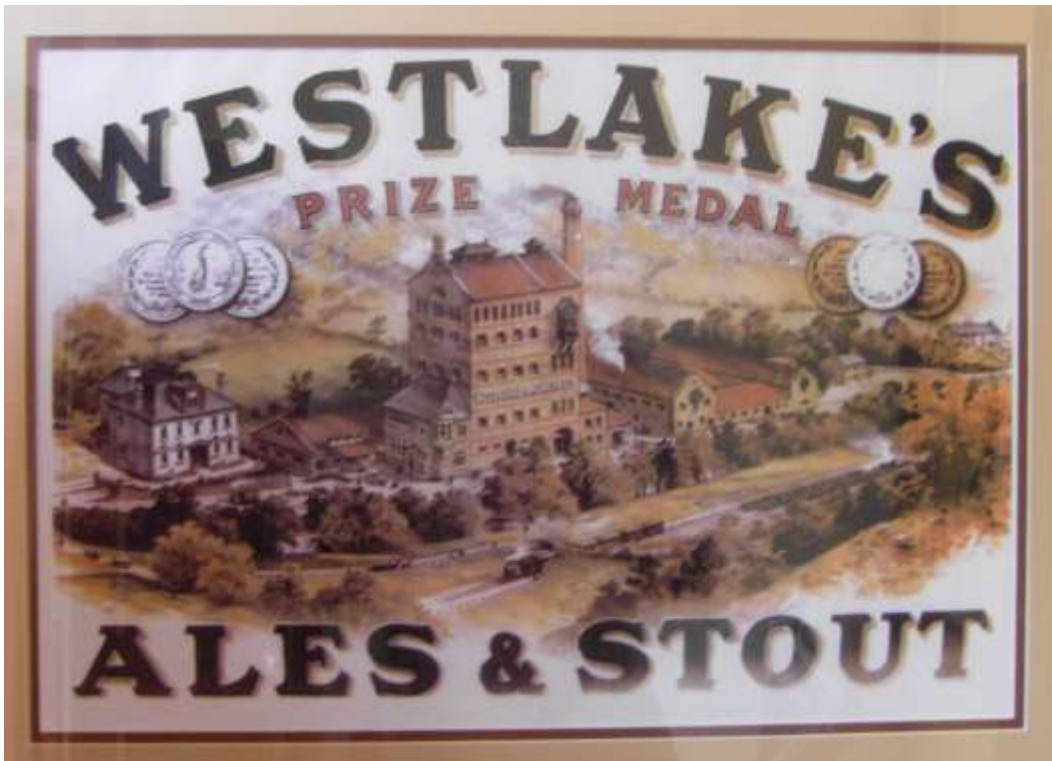
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## Summary of the special interest of the Conservation Area

The aim of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is to assist Torfaen County Borough Council to protect and enhance the landscape and built heritage of Cwmavon at the southern end of the World Heritage Site. Also the aim is to enable the public to recognise both the benefits of living in a Conservation Area and their own responsibilities for its future protection.

The location, heritage and character of the Cwmavon Conservation Area make it an important element behind the story of the history of this eastern valley. Its significance results both from the quality of the steep valley environment and the impact of the historic industries that led to the establishment and growth of the scattered settlement in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. The lack of replacement industry and the changes in agriculture resulted in a fall in population and limited redevelopment. This has resulted in large areas of the historic landscape remaining, though the low level of economic activity has also contributed to the extensive erosion of built heritage detail.

It is the location of the Conservation Area within the industrial remains of the World Heritage Site that provides the opportunity for its future preservation and enhancement. The protection and regeneration of the Conservation Area will play an important role in establishing the local heritage as an additional attraction for visitors and a positive experience for residents.

Cwmavon is a scattered settlement forming the gateway area at the southern end of the World Heritage Site. The Conservation Area includes key heritage buildings, examples of the historic transport infrastructure and the surrounding valley setting with areas of the pre industrial agricultural landscape. Within this boundary, Character Areas have been identified which provide examples of differing types of development and land use.

An analysis of current conservation concerns identifies the positive assets and the negative issues. The prime assets include the scattered heritage buildings, the landscaped setting in a steep valley, and the relics of the historic industries and transport systems. Several negative factors are identified, particularly the impacts of economic decline which has left unused buildings and a general sense of neglect. This includes examples of both poor maintenance and inappropriate repair which have led to deterioration and loss of some architectural and heritage details.

Management and enhancement proposals are described including: the identification of a property suitable for local listing; a review of the boundary; principles for maintenance and repair; principles for new development; the opportunities for enhancement; advice using design guidance, the potential for future Article 4 (2) Direction removing permitted development rights from the Conservation Area; and the involvement of the community.





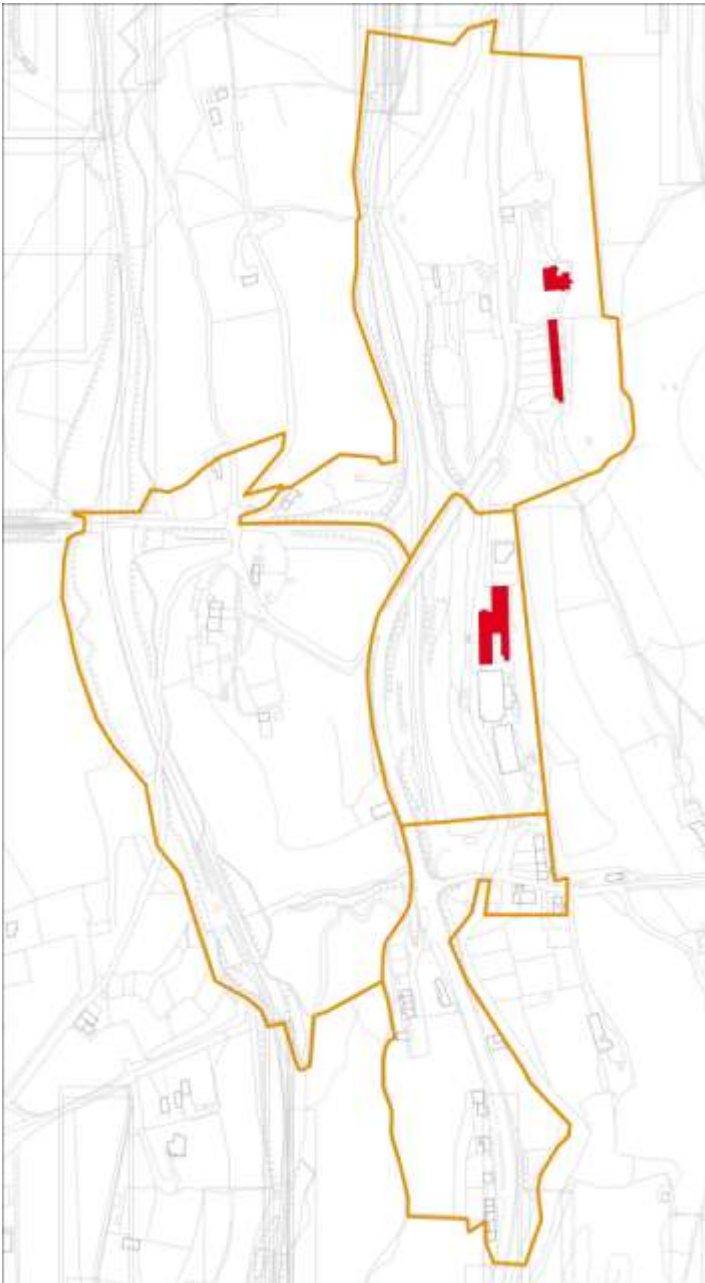
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# CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Current status of Cwmavon Conservation Area

The Cwmavon Conservation Area is set within the Afon Lwyd valley at the southern end of the Blaenavon World Heritage Site. The area was designated in 1984 under Section 277 of the Town & Country Planning Act, 1971, now replaced by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990 and includes eight Listed buildings.



*Figure 1.1 Conservation Area Boundary and Listed buildings*

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## 1.2 Statutory background

Conservation Areas were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and are defined as *“areas of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”*. Conservation Area designation is more dependent on the overall quality and interest of an area, rather than individual buildings, although it is common for such areas to contain a number of Listed Buildings.

Designation as a Conservation Area has a number of implications. Most importantly, Torfaen County Borough Council is required to give special attention to preserving and enhancing the Conservation Area while exercising their planning functions. In addition, planning consent must be gained for certain types of development which are elsewhere classified as permitted development, such as various types of cladding, dormer windows, satellite dishes and radio masts/antennae. Consent is further required for the demolition of buildings within Conservation Areas. Designation also brings controls over works to trees.

The protection of an area does not end with conservation area designation. Planning Policy Wales 2011 Section 6 “Conserving the Historic Environment” requires that Local Authorities prepare detailed assessments of the special interest, character and appearance of their Conservation Areas. This character appraisal defines and analyses the special qualities and the architectural and historic interest that warranted the Conservation Area designation. Section 6.3.2 states that *“Conservation Area character appraisals can assist planning authorities in the exercise of their planning and development control functions”*.

Local Authorities are under a duty from time to time to *“formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas”* - Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas (LBCA)) Act 1990, s.71.

## 1.3 Planning Policy framework

The Cwmavon Conservation Area lies within the coverage of the Torfaen Local Plan, adopted July 2000. This provides the approved basis for development control policies. The plan has strong conservation / heritage policies, which seek to conserve and enhance the built environment especially in conservation areas and in relation to listed buildings.

The built environment conservation policies in the Local Plan are based on current government planning guidance and Welsh Office Circular 60/96 “Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology” and Circular 61/96 “Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas”.

Statutory planning policies affecting the urban and rural areas within the World Heritage Site are contained in sections of the Torfaen Local Plan (Adopted 2000), which seek to ensure that the special quality and character of a Conservation Area is preserved and enhanced. These aims are included in the Torfaen Deposit Local Development Plan 2011.

The existing Local Plan contains a number of policies that aim to protect the appearance, character and setting of Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. These

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include policies that support and elaborate the Gwent Structure Plan objective '*to protect sites and buildings of archaeological and conservation importance from inappropriate development and enhance their setting and character through a positive approach to conservation.*'

Policies H1 and H2 protect Conservation Areas through controls on development and demolition, or part demolition of any building or feature

Specific policies are identified for historic buildings and archaeology. In particular, both Policies H3 and H4 control development that affects Listed buildings and their settings; and Policy H5 controls development on, or adjoining a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Archaeology is protected by Policy H6 covering both nationally and locally important archaeological remains, and where required, expects field evaluations and rescue of remains.

Local Plan Policy H7 emphasises that 'development proposals which are of such a scale that they would adversely affect or visually impinge upon the overall integrity of the Landscape of Outstanding Historical Interest at Blaenavon will not be permitted.'

These policies are set out in full in the Torfaen Local Plan documents.

WAG Planning Policy and TAN12 provide overall guidance, and Design and Access statements are required in Wales for planning applications and Listed Building consents from June 2009. These cover accessibility; environmental sustainability; character; movement to, from and within a development; and community safety. This will ensure that appropriate design principles and concepts have been considered and enable the particular concerns within the Cwmavon Conservation Area as identified in this document to be applied.

## 1.4 Purpose of the Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan

This Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan has been prepared in response to the guidance outlined above and, as such, discharges the Torfaen County Borough Council obligations and duties under the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990, as well as complying with Cadw's recommendations. The Appraisal forms the basis for the Conservation Area Management Plan recommendations and the review of the Conservation Area boundary. The complete document will form a background document which supports the Blaenavon World Heritage Site Design Guide SPG and will be a material consideration when considering applications for development within the Conservation Area. This document offers guidance on the important issues but does not provide detailed Action Plan recommendations.

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## 2. Location and setting

### 2.1 Location and population

Cwmavon is situated in the Afon Lwyd valley the most eastern of the South Wales valleys, two miles from Blaenavon to the north, and 4 miles from Pontypool to the south. The eastern ridge of the South Wales coalfield outcrops on this hillside and coal, iron ore, fire clay and limestone are all easily accessible.

The Cwmavon Conservation Area covers an area of 19.72 hectares and was designated in 1984. It includes the historic buildings scattered along the valley bottom and their setting.

The traditional tramway and rail links through the area are no longer useable, namely the tramroad built 1796, the 'low-level' and 'high-level' rail lines and the tramroad incline between Varteg and Cwmavon. It is the road connections (the A4043 road from Blaenavon to Pontypool), and Shop Road, a side road that zigzags up the valley side to Varteg, that provide the main transport linkages.



Figure 2.1 Location of Cwmavon

Cwmavon lies in a narrow valley location and has faced the loss of local employment in its traditional sectors of industry and agriculture. Given the open countryside character of the settlement and the lack of suitable development opportunities within the urban settlement it is becoming more of a dormitory location.



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## 2.2 Landscape setting

The scattered settlement of Cwmavon and its surrounding Conservation Area follows the steep wooded valley of the Afon Lwyd. The boundary includes the river course along the narrow valley bottom, though in some places it opens into level fields which are part of the traditional field pattern, and sections of the steep well wooded valley sides which include a larger area below the hill-top settlement of Varteg.

Although the Conservation Area is small and includes a limited number of buildings, it has a rich historical and cultural heritage. Information derived from the Historic Landscape Characterisation Study of Blaenavon indicates that in the wider character area within which the Conservation Area is located, scattered farmsteads were formally the dominant settlement pattern and while some later C19 farmhouses survive, some of the earlier examples are now cleared or in ruins. In the actual Conservation Area however there appears to have been very few farmsteads or any other form of settlement until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The dominant visual characteristic is the valley form and woodland forestation including a mixture of replanted ancient woodland, other broadleaf woodland and twentieth century plantations. This woodland is important to the setting of the Conservation Area.

The area is characterised by the surviving irregular field pattern that evolved with traditional boundaries of dry-stone walls and hedges, some now replaced with timber railings. Other agricultural related features include agricultural buildings, sheepfolds, and the remains of quarries and limekilns.



*Views from above the valley showing the traditional field patterns, the scattered farm buildings and both the ancient woodland and plantations.*

Throughout the Conservation Area one is aware of the sense of enclosure created by this north – south valley and its wooded slopes. Views along the Cwmavon Road change with the bends in the road. The area to the north is more open with riverside fields, whereas the valley is narrower in the south with much of the surrounding land use

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hidden by trees. More dramatic views can be seen from higher land, particularly from Shop Road where one can look down on Cwmavon House and Forge Row.



*Views from the road in the north showing the level riverside fields.*



*The rocky outcrops along the river bed indicating the narrower valley in the south.*



*View from the top of the western slopes showing the historic buildings on the eastern side of the valley set in a landscape of broadleaf woodland and C20 plantations.*

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## 3. Historic development

### 3.1 Origins & historic development of the settlement

This description of the origins and historic development of Cwmavon provides a summary of the important characteristics of its growth to be considered in this Appraisal and Management Plan.

#### 3.1.1 Origins of Cwmavon

The pre industrial post medieval settlement landscape consisted of scattered farmsteads set within their own agricultural holdings. While very few buildings of this period survive in the Afon Lwyd valley, most have been altered or rebuilt in the nineteenth century with further changes in the twentieth century. Many of the early farmsteads are now either ruinous or are in areas given over in the twentieth century to forest plantation.

The impact of industrialisation began with the opening of a forge in Cwmavon which was linked with Blaenavon Ironworks, probably employing the puddling process. Its first phase of activity appears to have been quite short, but it was revived in the 1820's, from which time it was linked with the Varteg ironworks to the west. Forge buildings were usually insubstantial and there are no remains above ground at Cwmavon, but the site has remained undeveloped and the remnants of the forge's water supply are intact. The forge at Cwmavon had bellows and hammers operated by water power. Whilst the superstructure of forge buildings are sometimes insubstantial, the foundations of the walls and in particular the bases of machines such as forge hammers and furnaces are normally substantial. Therefore remains of the forge and its infrastructure can be expected to survive below ground.

Across the road, a terrace (Forge Row) which originally consisted of twelve dwellings was built for forge workers in 1804. It was probably rebuilt in the 1820s by the Blaenavon Company and repaired again by the British Historic Buildings Trust in 1987-88. It has been described as the finest surviving terrace of early workers' housing in the South Wales valleys and is Listed Grade II\*.

On the same side of the road and next to Forge Row, a large detached dwelling, Cwmavon House (Listed Grade II), was built for the Ironmaster who revived the forge in the 1820's. At this time the Varteg Company operated a foundry and engineering works on the site at Cwmavon capable of boring steam engine cylinders.

Quarries were located in the area near to the forge and other terrace housing associated with these and the railways were constructed along the Cwmavon Road. Partial remains of early to mid C19 tramroad inclines serving small quarries with a link to the Blaenavon ironworks survives. A substantial tramroad incline was built in 1861 which linked Varteg Hill Colliery with the Monmouthshire Railway at Cwmavon station. This was replaced in 1878 by the line from the colliery to the Blaenavon – Brynmawr Branch.

The Conservation Area also includes other important transport links. This includes a tramroad, engineered by Thomas Dadford in 1796, which ran close to the Afon Lwyd from Blaenavon ironworks terminating at Pontnewynydd and provided access to the Brecon and Monmouthshire canal. This route was superseded after the construction of the Eastern Valley Section of the Monmouthshire Railway, in 1854. The latter became



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known as the 'low level railway' to distinguish it from the LNWR Blaenavon – Brynmawr Branch line, which opened in 1868 further uphill on the west side of the valley. In 1877 the LNWR Abersychan extension to the Blaenavon – Brynmawr line was completed. This closed in 1953 and the Monmouthshire Railway closed in 1962.



*Forge Row, Cwmavon*

The turnpike road from Pontypool to Blaenavon over Varteg Hill (B4246) was constructed in 1847 and so avoided the Cwmavon valley. The Cwmavon Road (A4043) was well established by the end of the C19, and follows the route of the early tramroad between Blaenavon and Pontnewynydd.

In 1900 the Westlake's Brewery which is Grade II Listed, was built to supersede the brewery opened in the 1880s in Blaenavon. Though it established a chain of pubs by 1907, in the 1920s business declined and brewing ceased in 1928. The former brewery has now been converted to a plastics factory. No other significant industries operate now within the Conservation Area.

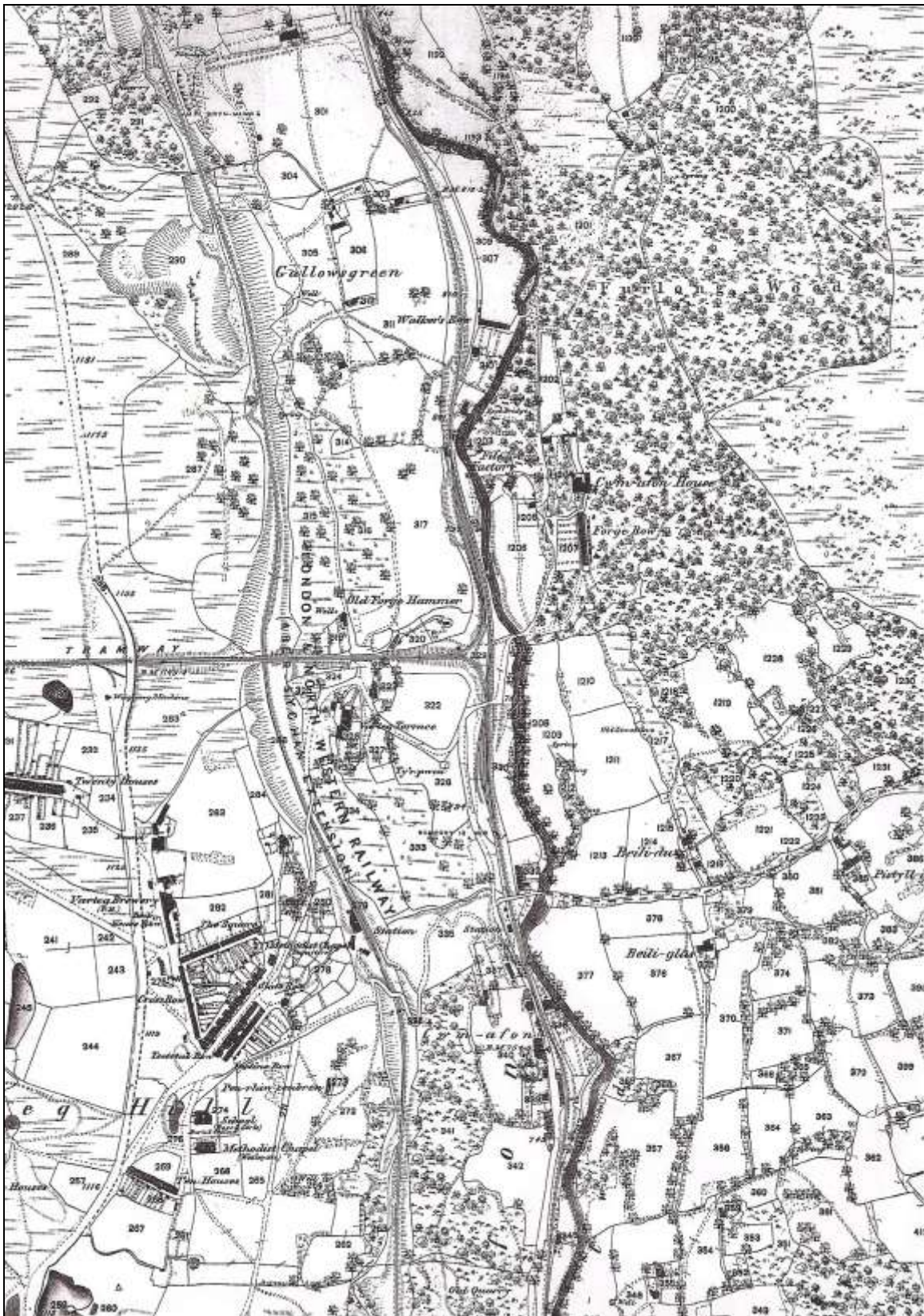
### 3.1.2 Development of the Settlement

The earliest map showing the development of Cwmavon is the **1880 Ordnance Survey**, which is outlined overleaf.

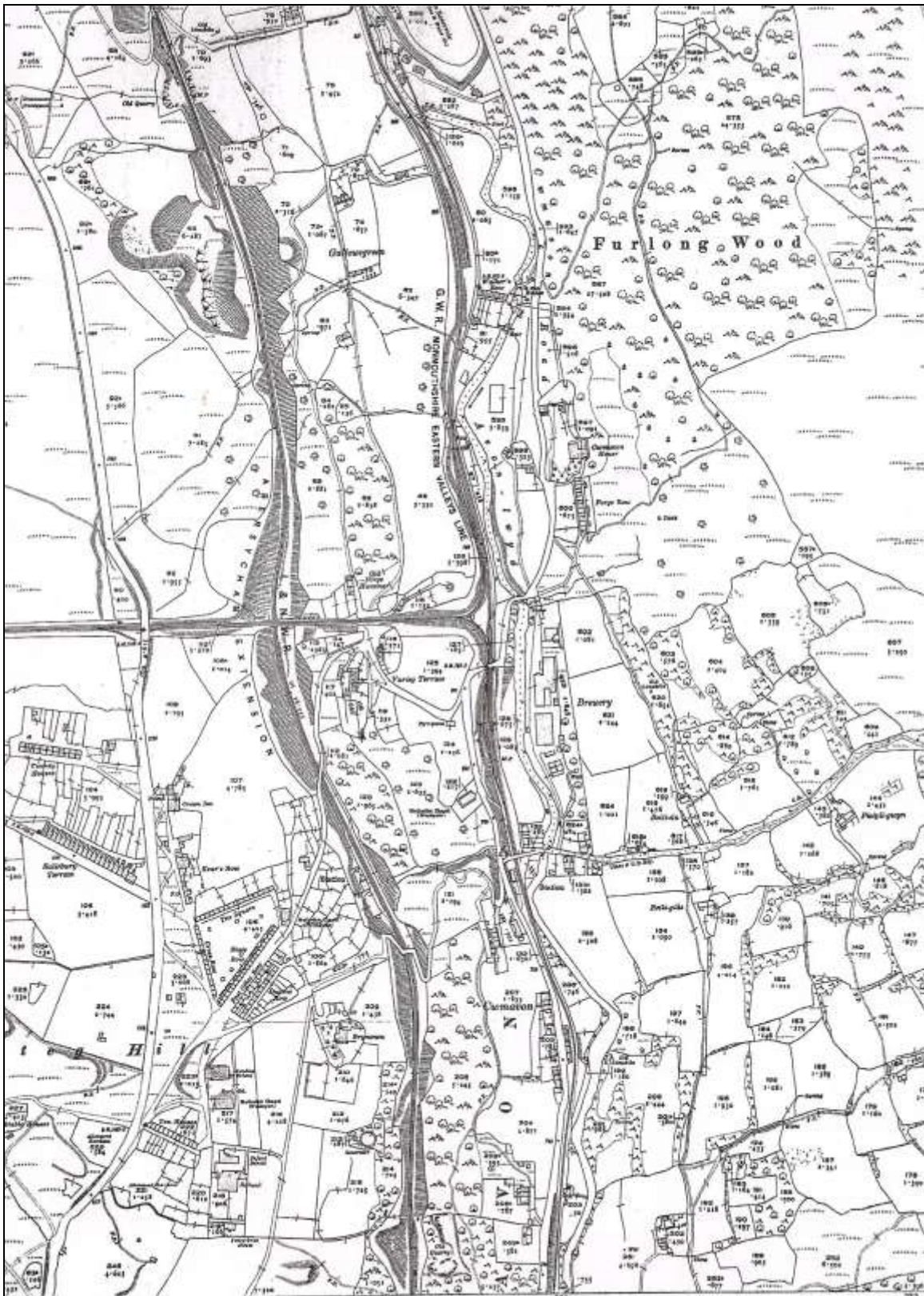
The 1880 map shows the location of the main rail and tramroad infrastructure routes, Cwmavon House and Forge Row. Other than scattered farmsteads the only other notable buildings are the few groups of roadside terrace houses along the Cwmavon

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Road and the location of the Old Forge Hammer. The mixture of open fields predominantly along the valley bottom, and the wooded slopes, presents a similar landscape as can be seen today.







1920 OS Map - Reproduced from Ordnance Survey with Permission of the Controller



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The **1901 Ordnance Survey** map shows that few built changes have occurred within the previous twenty years throughout the Conservation Area.

A small File Factory which had been based in smaller buildings has been built on wooded land next to the Afon Lwyd in the north of the Conservation Area and a Methodist Chapel next to the Cwmavon Road below Varteg. The first indication of development on the Westlake Brewery site is identified with an additional three short terraces of houses built on the Llanover Road.

By the time of the **1920 Ordnance Survey** the most significant mapped change is the development of the Westlake Brewery site.

The Westlake Brewery development including the White House, the range of Works buildings and two brewer's houses created a significant industrial landuse and workplace.

Since 1920, even with the closure of the rail lines and the increased use of the Cwmavon Road as the primary access to Blaenavon, there have been few changes to the built or landscape environment of the Conservation Area. The brewery buildings are now used as a plastics factory, a hall was built alongside the Methodist chapel and both buildings have now been demolished and replaced by a new community centre, and other significant changes have been the clearance of unused properties including the file factory; the station and Station Terrace; Walker's Row (a group of seven terrace houses on the northern boundary of the Conservation Area); and all remaining traces of the Forge.

## 3.2 Archaeological Significance

Torfaen CBC is required to take archaeology into consideration as a material consideration when determining a planning application. Information on all known archaeological sites and finds in and around the Blaenavon World Heritage Site is included in the Gwent Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 4, 2011) identifies the key issues and policies related to Archaeology in Section 6 Conserving the Historic Environment and particularly 6.5 Development Control and the Historic Environment. These policies refer to Welsh Office Circular 60/96 Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology; and Circular 61/96 Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas.

The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in the determination of a planning application. The key concerns are that appropriate management is essential to ensure that archaeological remains survive in good condition. Where nationally important archaeological remains (whether scheduled or not) and their settings, are affected by proposed development, there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation in situ.

Although there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Cwmavon Conservation Area there are a number of potential sites of archaeological interest including the location of the now cleared Cwmavon Forge, the infrastructure links and the sites of demolished farms. However there may be further archaeological interest which could assist the understanding of the pre industrial and industrial life in this area.

Archaeological considerations will inform the determination of planning applications. Where archaeological remains are present on a site, then applications will be considered

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against Policy H6 of the Adopted Local Plan. Developers may be required to undertake field survey or an archaeological site assessment as part of any planning application, to assess the impact of the proposal on archaeological remains.

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## 4. Character and appearance

### 4.1 Identification of Character Areas

Cwmavon is a dispersed settlement, along the sides of the Afon Lwyd valley between Blaenavon and Abersychan. The Conservation Area includes much of the valley bottom, the slopes up towards Varteg in the west and the lower slopes above Cwmavon House. The area includes the key historic buildings specifically Cwmavon House, Forge Row and the Westlake brewery; the routes of the historic transport links in the form of the two rail lines, the tramways and the road and bridges; and some C19 industrial remains.

The definition of the Character Areas is based on their history, the type of development and the landform and landscape.

- **Character Area 1: Cwmavon House and Forge Row**  
the area to the north of the Conservation Area including Cwmavon House and Forge Row to the west of the Cwmavon Road, and the valley bottom to the west;
- **Character Area 2: Westlake Brewery**  
the grounds of the previous Westlake Brewery with its associated outbuildings and the river;
- **Character Area 3: Cwmavon Road**  
the southern area including the properties along the Cwmavon Road on the west side of the Afon Lwyd and the short lengths of Snailcreep Terrace and Llanover Road;
- and **Character Area 4: Shop Road**  
the sloping land to the west of the Cwmavon Road based on Shop Road and including both rail and tramway routes.

The four Character Areas are identified in figure 4.1 overleaf:

The description of each Character Area provides:

- an introduction to the area and a summary diagram of the heritage townscape;
- a review of the historic development of the area and character of the buildings;
- and identifies positive issues and assets that contribute to the heritage townscape with the negative concerns for action.

The definition of Character Areas is to assist the description and analysis of the priority characteristics of the Conservation Area. These boundaries do not suggest a legal designation.

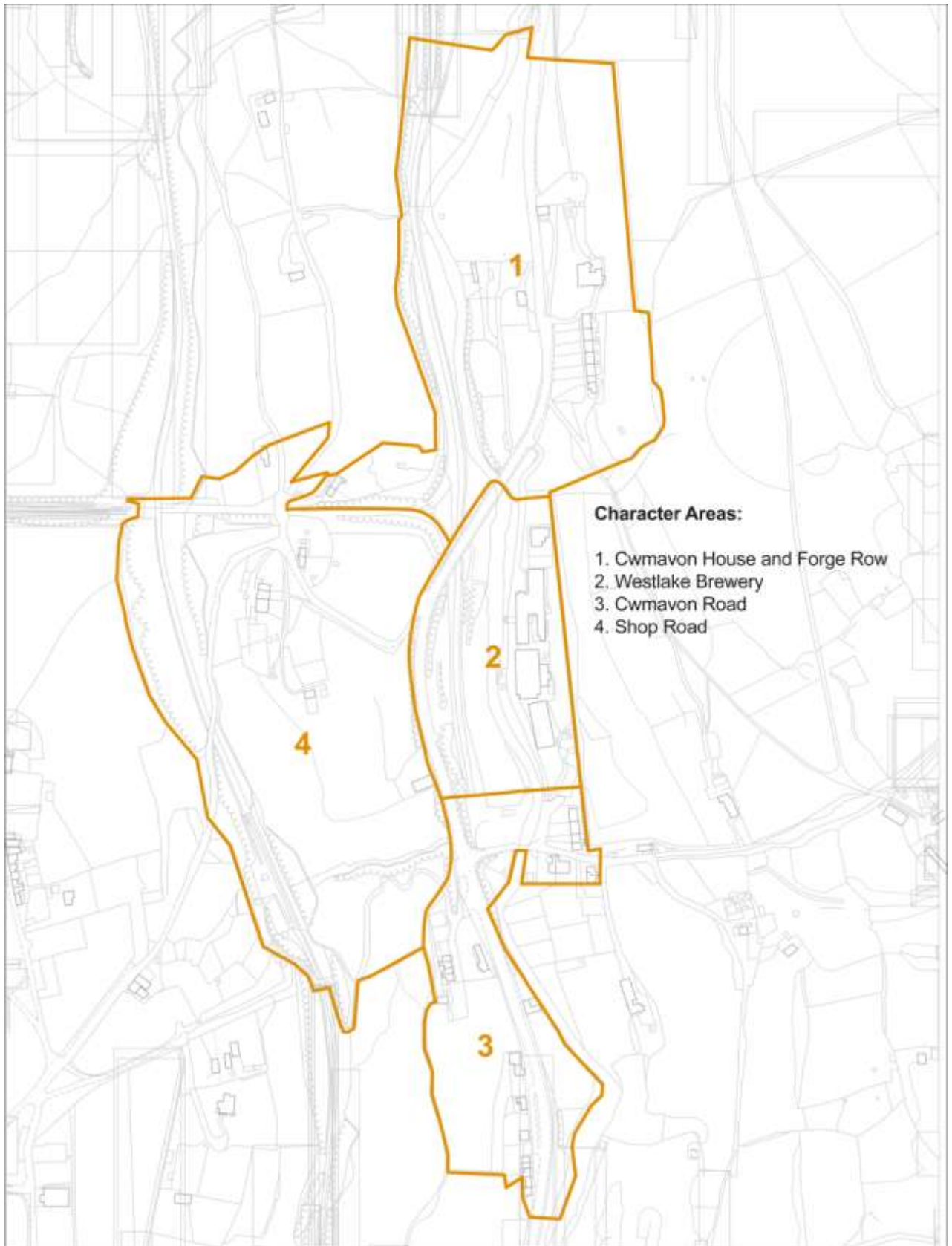


Figure 4.1 Cwmavon CA Character Areas



## 4.2 Character Area

### • Character Area 1: Cwmavon House and Forge Row

The most northern Character Area includes both Cwmavon House and the adjacent cottages at Forge Row which represent the most important historic group of buildings in this Conservation Area. The site of the early C19 Cwmavon Forge, across the road from Forge Row is the most significant indication of the historic industrial processing activity in the area. A number of minor limekilns and quarries also remain in the area.

The boundary of this Character Area is marked in the south by the Cwmavon Road bridge over the Afon Lwyd. To the west of the north / south Cwmavon Road, the land is characterised by the flat meadows on either side of the Afon Lwyd, with the line of the Monmouthshire Railway still visible following the west bank of the river. The only significant building is Forge House, built in the mid C19 and adjacent to the road, which has had extensions and alterations.

Across the road from Forge Row on the level riverside fields is Forge House the remaining building in this Character Area. A cottage has been on this site since the early nineteenth century and though it has had significant renovations and extensions, it remains as a key building in the history of the area.

To the east of the road the land rises steeply with the higher slopes above Cwmavon House being well wooded.

Cwmavon House is a U-plan two storey, fourbay house of late Georgian style. It has a scribed render front, hipped slate roof, roughcast stacks and horned sixteen pane and four pane sash windows. Associated roadside outbuildings are now derelict or unused and detract from the setting of the house.



*Cwmavon House*

The adjacent Forge Row terrace was first built in 1804 to provide housing for local forge workers associated with the Blaenavon works. Then between 1817 and 1832 the Blaenavon Company constructed about 160 single-fronted, three room, two storey terrace dwellings near all their works which have been called Blaenavon Company Standard Houses. The terrace at Cwmavon, probably rebuilt in the 1820's, is the best remaining example of this type of house. The renovations in 1988 have ensured the retention of these important grade II\* Listed buildings.

Forge Row comprises of twelve single fronted terrace houses of rubble stone in reflected pairs with segmental headed openings, boarded doors and twelve pane casement windows which are now converted to six houses. The roofs are mainly of stone tile with some slate replacement, and stone stacks.







Forge Row Terrace, Cwmavon.

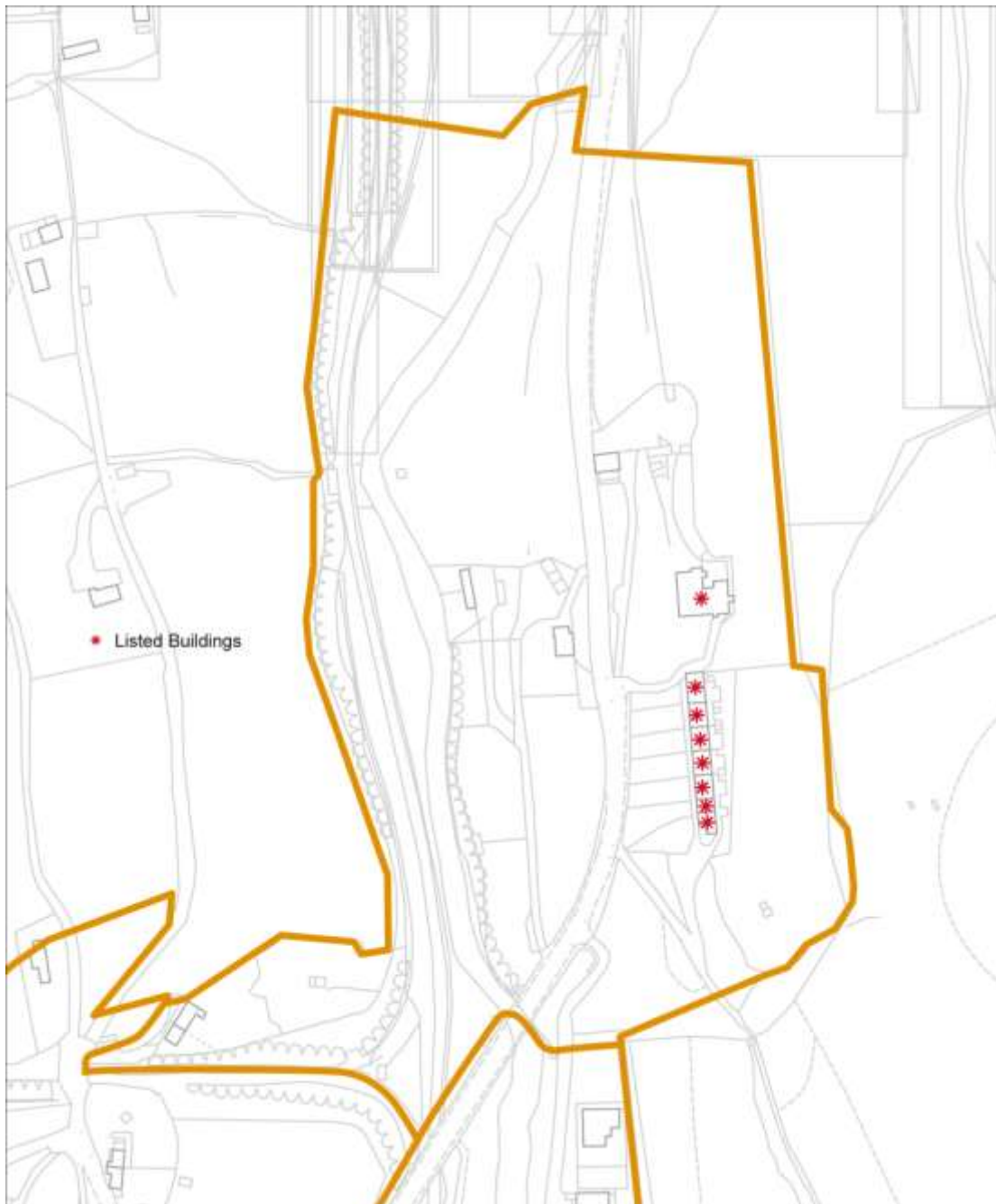


Forge House, Cwmavon



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## Summary diagram of Character Area 1 Heritage Townscape Qualities



**Figure 4.2 Character Area 1: Cwmavon House and Forge Row**

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- **Character Area 2: Westlake Brewery**

The Character Area includes the large riverside site on the east bank of the Afon Lwyd within the ownership of the ex Brewery. The entrance from the Cwmavon Road is next to the bridge over the river. The route continues past the unlisted White House, now used as an office building, to the main industrial complex. The Westlake Brewery building is a striking feature in the landscape. It is a tall, five storey tower brewery flanked by lower offices and ancillary ranges.



*View from the north entrance, the White House on the left with the Listed five storey Brewery building beyond.*

The tower building and lower offices are constructed in local stone with red brick dressings including quoins, band courses and jambs. It has a slate roof with offset hipped clerestory. The third and fourth floors have segmental headed windows with keystones and the top floor has a band of eight square headed windows. The gable ends have similar segmental headed windows. To the north end there is a Diocletian type window created by a central semicircular arch and the south end is rendered. Most of the glazing is of small pane metal frame type. Stepped down at the north end is the hipped roof, two storey office block. This is distinguished from the main brewery by the use of freestone rather than brick dressings.

Old views of the brewery and evidence in the masonry show that the present gabled roof to the porch replaces the original Jacobethan detail with swept up parapet and pedimented doorcase. These views also show that the former chimney to the south end and a smaller and moulded chimney on the north gable have been lost.

To the south of the tower building and linked as part of the heritage group, are stone built industrial sheds with red brick dressings that were built at the same time, probably for storage. These buildings have windows on two storeys, now blocked up, with asbestos sheeting roofs replacing the traditional slate. Lack of maintenance and very poor quality repairs require urgent attention. Further south is a corrugated sheeting warehouse that is an inappropriate addition within the Conservation Area.







*Rear industrial buildings requiring maintenance and appropriate repairs*

*Summary diagram of Character Area 2 Heritage Townscape Qualities:*



*Figure 4.3 Character Area 2: Westlake Brewery*



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### • Character Area 3: Cwmavon Road

The Cwmavon Road Character Area is the southern gateway to the Conservation Area. It is notable for the short terraces of C19 roadside housing fringing the hillside setting. Groups of four and five houses are spaced along the Cwmavon Road and provide the majority of the homes in Cwmavon other than the outlying farms.

The oldest terraces were built in the early to mid C19 and these include the southernmost properties on the west side of the Cwmavon Road. The properties are mainly single fronted, random and coursed stone built terrace houses with slate roofs and brick chimneys, though many have now been rendered. More recent changes have included the loss of chimneys, new porch extensions and replacement windows.



*Cwmavon Road properties*

The later housing developments, built towards the end of the C19, are on either side of the Llanover Road on the east side of the river. These include a terrace and pairs of houses with one pair built in brick.



*Llanover Road properties*

Individual roadside properties include much altered C19 cottages and probably the oldest is a three storey house built between the river and the Cwmavon Road in the early part of the C19.

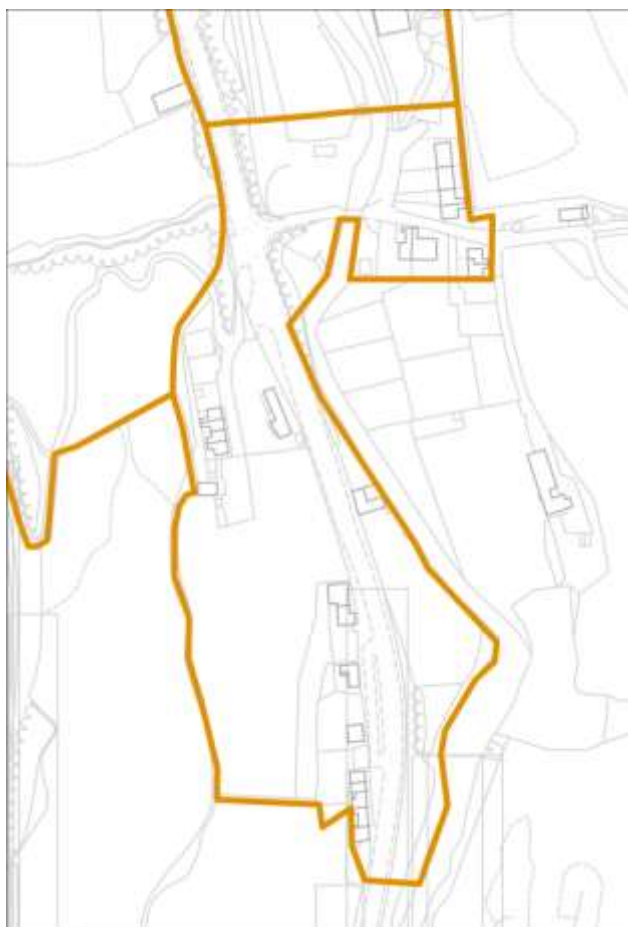






The scattered pattern of development in this Character Area has mainly remained since the end of the C19. The main changes are where the station was demolished and the nearby terrace (Station Terrace) just to the north of the Llanover Road junction and facing the rail line was cleared during the second half of the C20.

*Summary diagram of Character Area 3 Heritage Townscape Qualities:*



*Figure 4.4 Character Area 3: Cwmavon Road*

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## • Character Area 4: Shop Road

The Shop Road Character Area includes the steep wooded slopes of the valley to the west of the Cwmavon Road and is bounded by the top of the cutting for the now disused L & N.W.R. rail line to Blaenavon. It is centred on the steep and twisting route of the narrow Shop Road which was once a more important route for vehicles and workers who travelled between Varteg and Cwmavon. To the south of this route is Snail Creep, a similarly steep and twisting but now virtually disused, track providing a secondary connection between these centres. To the north are the remains of the steep and straight line of the disused tramway route.

Built development is limited to Shop Road Farm and nearby buildings including a pair of cottages and a separate converted and extended cottage on the other side of Shop Road, with views down into the valley. These buildings were shown on early maps and all show the characteristics of early C19 construction.



*View from the top of the old tramway route down into the valley*





*Shop Road farm*



*View up Shop Road*

*Summary diagram of Character Area 4 Heritage Townscape Qualities:*



*Figure 4.5 Character Area 4: Shop Road*

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# CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

## 5.0 Identification of issues

### 5.1 General conditions

Cwmavon Conservation Area includes the area of the Afon Lwyd valley in the south of the World Heritage Site which retains important Listed buildings and relics from its industrial heritage. The protection of both the heritage and landscape with the improvement of its traditional qualities is fundamental to ensure the conservation of this area. Although a significant extent of the historic landscape has been retained, there are a number of concerns for its future that need to be addressed. A Management Plan needs to build on the local strengths of the characteristics of the settlement and its setting to make certain the opportunities for its future are appreciated. The current concerns require action to ensure the potential benefits for residents and visitors are achieved.

The key issues affecting the management of the Conservation Area are:

#### Strengths:

- set in a World Heritage Site industrial landscape of acknowledged Outstanding Universal values;
- the importance of the historic buildings within the World Heritage Site;
- the notable Listed buildings provide focal points of interest;
- the form of the Valley settlement with buildings scattered along the road and up the hillsides;
- it provides the southern arrival area for visitors to the World Heritage Site;
- the setting, with the surrounding valley hillsides creating the sense of enclosure;
- the locational advantages for tourism within the World Heritage Site and its attractions, and being adjacent to the Brecon Beacons National Park;

#### Weaknesses:

- decline in local economy and competition from other locations is reflected in lack of development opportunities;
- low profitability of some businesses discouraging appropriate maintenance;
- poor quality alterations to some roadside buildings;
- lack of appropriate maintenance and care of heritage details on some buildings;
- inappropriate design and materials of some new development;
- impact of fast 'through route' traffic on Cwmavon Road;



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## Opportunities:

- improvement of heritage building maintenance and management;
- additional interpretation and marketing of attractions;
- need for parking to enable passing visitors to stop and appreciate the heritage;
- increase in planning and design controls and guidance for new building;
- Potential educational opportunity to allow the residents to research and understand the development of the area by historical research and archaeological investigations.

## Threats:

- continuing economic difficulties for employment;
- lack of appropriate controls on historic building maintenance and alterations;
- inappropriate designs of new infill buildings, extensions & alterations;
- increasing traffic movement; and
- damage to important visual setting of wooded and farmed valley.

## 5.2 Positive issues and assets

The special heritage characteristics of interest in the Cwmavon Conservation Area that need to be protected and reinforced include:

### 1. **The steep valley setting with the pattern of woodland and pasture;**

Cwmavon is located at the southern end of World Heritage Site, within a Landscape of Outstanding Historical Interest within the steep valley of the Afon Lwyd. The valley sides are heavily wooded and along the flatter valley bottom lie some cleared areas of pasture. This setting can also be appreciated from both the Cwmavon Road and the views from the higher land. See Section 2.2



*Views along the Cwmavon Road and from above the Afon Llwyd valley show the well wooded slopes with areas of pasture creating an attractive setting for the heritage buildings and relicts.*

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## **2. Historic focal incident buildings and spaces:**

The notable focal buildings of historic interest in the Conservation Area are:

- Cwmavon House;
- Forge Row
- and the Westlake Brewery complex.

These can be seen from the road and provide significant points of interest and heritage importance for the Conservation Area.

## **3. Remains of historic infrastructure**

The remains of the historic infrastructure within the Conservation Area include:

- the tramroad which was built in 1796 and is close to the Afon Lwyd, linking the Blaenavon Ironworks with the Monmouthshire & Breconshire canal;
- the 'low level railway' following the same route, which was opened 1854 and closed in 1962;
- the 'high level railway', further up the west side of the valley which was opened in 1868 and closed in 1953;
- the tramroad incline linking Varteg Colliery with Cwmavon station which was replaced in 1878;
- the Cwmavon Road which was established by 1880, following the line of the ancient tramroad; and
- remnants of the water supply to the cleared Cwmavon Forge are intact.
- the site of the Cwmavon Forge.

## **4. The simple built form of the farms and terraces:**

The built form of traditional farms and terraces is two storey, stone built with slate roofs. Many are now rendered and painted. These simple structures provide a consistent element in the historic landscape.



## **5. Forge Row high quality heritage reinstatement & unique historic interest:**



**6. The enclosure of gardens with stone boundary walls:**



*Example of a stone garden wall linking houses with similar materials*

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## 8. Views from within the Conservation Area of the valley and hills:

The surrounding steep valley sides provide an attractive sense of enclosure to the Conservation Area. The wooded slopes and landscapes provide an important element of the historic setting which needs to be protected.



## 5.3 Negative issues and problems

The key negative issues and problems within the Conservation Area are:

### 1. Inappropriate building alterations:

A number of buildings within the Conservation Area display a loss of some of their traditional heritage qualities that are gradually changing the overall historic townscape. The main examples are:

- loss of heritage details and materials including low quality repairs;
- use of render and other non heritage wall finishes to heritage stone buildings;
- use of inappropriate roof materials;
- replacement of front doors with inappropriate designs and finishes;
- replacement of painted wooden sash windows with UPVC frames;
- removal of chimney stacks and pots;
- addition of aerials and satellite dishes.

Examples of damage to the heritage value of properties:





*Change of traditional character with loss of traditional wall finishes, doors, windows, chimney stacks and pots, and inappropriate replacement materials and porches.*

## **2. Inappropriate extensions to heritage buildings**

Extensions & outbuildings of inappropriate design, scale and materials change the traditional character of the buildings and the local landscape.



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### 3. Examples of poor building maintenance and repairs:

Poor maintenance and the introduction of new materials for repair have damaged some heritage buildings and threaten their future retention.



### 4. Economic difficulties leading to empty and derelict farm buildings:

With the end of the traditional industries and the limitations for farming, the population is mainly dependent on travelling to other centres for employment. As a result of the weakening demand and the subsequent lack of maintenance, the low quality repairs and vacancies have had a detrimental effect on the Conservation Area qualities.



*Unused buildings and dereliction on a key roadside site next to Cwmavon House*



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## 5. The removal and replacement of boundary walls;

A concern throughout the Conservation Area is the removal of the traditional stone boundary walls from gardens and their replacement with inappropriate designs and materials. The overall impact of these changes has a significant influence on the local landscapes and detracts from the appearance and setting of the traditional buildings.



*Stone boundary walls are an important element in the townscape and their replacement with varying materials and designs disrupts the visual continuity on Llanover Road.*

## 6. The impact of inappropriate designs of new development on sites within the heritage landscape:

The erosion of the heritage character of the area will continue if insensitive designs that do not respect the traditional forms and materials are permitted. The photographs below show examples of inappropriate designs within the Conservation Area where changes of materials and forms conflict with the traditional local designs.



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## 6.0 Policy guidance and design principles

### 6.1 Conservation Area development policy, design guidance and management

Torfaen County Borough Council will identify the necessary resources to manage the Conservation Area and will, where appropriate and subject to funding, coordinate the implementation of such works within the World Heritage Site. A framework of need can be identified from this Management Plan, including the implementation of policies both to achieve the heritage aims and to ensure the impact of a conservation led approach to economic development and regeneration issues.

Priority management will be required to implement the decision making procedures and policy changes, to ensure effective monitoring and enforcement, to prepare technical guidance and to inform and involve the community. This is outlined below:

- Policy guidance for existing and new development in the Conservation Area
- Specific design guidance for selected sites and issues
- Strategy for management and protection of the public realm
- Coordinated decision making with additional controls
- and Community involvement

### 6.2 Policies for repair & alterations to existing buildings

#### 6.2.1 Approach to repairs and alterations

Design guidance to encourage residents to repair original elements in preference to replacement, and to advise on how repairs and alterations should be carried out is available from the TCBC Conservation and Development Control sections and the following websites:

- [www.ihbc.org.uk/stitch\\_in\\_time/index.htm](http://www.ihbc.org.uk/stitch_in_time/index.htm) and
- [www.maintainyourbuilding.org.uk](http://www.maintainyourbuilding.org.uk)

Currently some minor alterations to unlisted buildings do not require planning permission and the results often compromise their historic interest and architectural integrity with an adverse impact on the historic townscape.

The proliferation of relatively minor building alterations is incrementally eroding the character and appearance of some of the buildings. Many modern alterations adversely affect the subtlety, balance and proportions of building elevations and can also be physically damaging to the fabric of historic buildings. Important original features threatened by such alterations include timber sash windows, doors and door cases, cast iron handrails, railings, rainwater goods, chimney pots and stacks and boundary enclosures.

It is important, therefore, that property owners and occupiers adopt the right approach to repairs and the replacement of features.

In the first instance, regular maintenance should be carried out to prevent, or at least delay, the need for more significant repairs. Repairs should only be undertaken where considered necessary to slow down the process of decay without damaging the



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character of the building. In the vast majority of cases, a traditional approach to repair should be adopted, replacing decayed material on a like for like basis.

In certain circumstances, decay may be so advanced that the fabric is beyond repair and the replacement of the features may be necessary. Care should, however, be taken to avoid the unnecessary loss of historic fabric. For example, the discrete insertion of modern draft seals can greatly enhance the performance of casement and sash windows in respect of heat retention and ease of use.

The following guidelines are intended to advise the residents and owners within the Cwmavon Conservation Area of the general approach to be taken when contemplating external repairs or alterations. A new Design Guide for Development within the World Heritage Site has now been prepared as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Owners and occupiers should, however, always seek the advice of the Council Development Control and Conservation Officers before carrying out works to their buildings.

### **6.2.2 Guidelines for external repair and alteration work:**

The following examples provide some guidance but further advice is available from TCBC Conservation and Development Control officers:

- *Building materials*

An attraction of Cwmavon is the traditional form, design and materials of the farmhouses and roadside terraces. As a result it is particularly important to respect and repeat the use of local stone and occasional brickwork, the smooth render and colours, the type and layout of natural and reconstituted slate roofs, and the design of the painted doors and windows with appropriate reveals.

- *Chimney stacks and pots*

Chimneys requiring repair should be reinstated or rebuilt accurately to the original height and profile, in materials to match the existing, which traditionally is stone or brick, rather than render. Original clay chimney pots should be replaced appropriately or reinstated where necessary, usually terracotta or pale yellow.

- *Roofs*

Pitched roofs are essential to maintain the traditional building forms. Original tiling in earlier buildings may have been stone but as most buildings are mid C19, slate is the predominant material. Welsh slate or similar should be used for properties within the Conservation Area. This applies to both Listed and Unlisted Buildings. Concrete tiles are unacceptable as are roof lights on the front of buildings.

- *Windows and doors*

Original windows and external doors should be retained and carefully repaired wherever possible and it is important to retain and repair early surviving casements. On older buildings, most original windows had timber sliding-sashes, though other designs can be seen. Many now have more modern replacement windows. If replacement is unavoidable, new windows should be accurate replicas of the original design, in both pattern and detail. PVC frames will normally fail to achieve these aims.

Windows and doors should be painted and not stained. The openings should not be altered or replaced and reveals should be retained.

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- *Walls*

Traditionally most terraced properties are of coursed stonework or brick. In some cases, a fine textured and appropriately painted render is an alternative. Spar render and pebble dashing is unacceptable on any elevation.

Bargeboards, fascias and soffits should be plain and constructed of softwood. Painted finishes should complement the nature of the elevation.

- *Ironwork*

Decorative ironwork, such as railings should be retained and carefully repaired or if necessary, reinstated accurately to the original pattern and detail in a similar material, usually wrought or cast iron. Replacements in mild steel often corrode very quickly. Private front gardens are not widespread but should use traditional wrought iron railings and gates to complement stone walls. Ironwork for railings should be painted in historical colours such as black, dark green or a deep purple-bronze.

- *Boundary treatment*

Original stone walls and wooden gates should be repaired to match the existing, or reinstated to the original design wherever possible. This is a particular concern with properties where side or rear walls face the road. The predominant materials are stone which is also widely used for retaining walls. Locally salvaged stone is preferable but other sources should be of similar colour and texture. Any replacement of this material, which is fundamental to the character of the area, could have a significant detrimental impact.

## 6.3 Principles for new development within heritage areas

The Cwmavon Conservation Area has not been under particular pressure for new development sites with most development introduced as extensions to existing buildings. The most notable new building is the Cwmavon Village Hall built on the site of the cleared Methodist Chapel built in the late C19 and its adjacent C20 Hall. Although the location and use replaces previous community buildings, the use of materials and detailing do not respect the local vernacular.

Individual new developments that reflect the taste and design approach of their eras, while respecting the principles of the historic building locations, scale, massing and form, are generally absorbed into the landscape with success. Where new development is proposed it is important that it is guided by sound principles of design, as well as sympathetic detailing in relation to its historic context. Even though there is little pressure for new development it is important that any new development within the Conservation Area should:

- Preserve and reinforce the distinctive pattern of historic development, including locations, landscaping, plot boundaries and boundary treatments.
- Reinforce the distinctive architectural character of the Conservation Area, through an informed understanding of its building forms and styles, features and materials. Pastiche forms of development and the superficial echoing of historic features in new buildings should be avoided.

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- Respect the scale and massing of surrounding buildings. It is essential that new development is not out of scale with existing buildings by way of its height, floor levels, size of windows and doors, overall massing and the roofscape.
  - Have regard for existing building lines and the orientation of existing development.
  - Maintain key views and vistas within, into and out of the Conservation Area.
  - Where possible, minimise the visual impact of parked vehicles and the provision of parking areas on the streetscape and landscape setting of historic buildings.

Where appropriate, all forms of new development should respect the issues listed above, with particular concern to:

- Ensure new development continues the local scale, form and materials in order to reinforce the distinctive architectural character of the Character Area. This is particularly important with roof lines and their height and materials because of their visibility from the sloping land;
- Consider the impact of new development on key views and vistas. Most potential development sites are exposed to views from above, below and from a distance, and therefore will have a significant impact on the landscape setting;
- Ensure that new road layouts and parking arrangements have a limited impact on the qualities of the locality. Sensitive designs and landscaping are required to reduce the areas of tarmac and lines of parked cars;
- Limit rooftop aerials and satellite dishes and ensure that electricity and telephone service links are underground so as to avoid unsightly new wirescapes.

New, high quality designs are not inappropriate in a Conservation Area, but the concern must be to avoid incongruous and low grade development.

## 6.4 Guidance for buildings, key sites and public realm

The following indicative list identifies a number of key projects for implementation within Cwmavon Conservation Area. Additional opportunities will be considered.

The selected site specific projects, whose improvement will require public consultation, and could have a significant impact on achieving the Conservation Area objectives include:

- 1. Tackling prominent dilapidated buildings:** that detract from the heritage landscape in focal locations: those that are derelict, under-used, suffering from neglect or having unsuitable repairs.

Potential buildings include:

- Roadside buildings next to Cwmavon House;
- Traditional industrial buildings as part of Westlake Brewery.

Where unsightly development detracts from the Conservation Area, it will be important to encourage owners to seek assistance to repair the townscape damage and respect traditional forms and materials.

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2. **Retaining the remains of the historic transport networks and investigate site of original forge for potential presentation and interpretation:** to reinforce and promote the historic industrial character of the area and to encourage tourism into the area
  3. **Providing a roadside parking location:** for passing visitors to be able to stop and appreciate the key attractions.
  4. **Maintenance and management of pre and post industrial agricultural landscape and woodland:** including the traditional field boundaries, enclosure patterns and ancient woodlands.





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## 7.0 Management recommendations

### 7.1 Resources needed in the area

Torfaen County Borough Council will identify the necessary resources to manage the Conservation Area and will, where appropriate and funds are available, coordinate such works with the Blaenavon Partnership. A framework of need will be identified from this Management Plan, including the implementation of policies both to achieve the heritage aims and to ensure the impact of a conservation led approach to economic development and regeneration issues.

Priority management will be required to implement the decision making procedures and policy changes, to ensure effective monitoring and enforcement and to prepare technical guidance and to inform the community.

### 7.2 Decision making procedures

All Torfaen County Borough Council departments involved in decisions affecting change within the Conservation Area should understand the significance of both the Conservation Area and World Heritage Site designation and work corporately in a team approach to ensure that development decisions are appropriate for the historic context and will not damage the heritage fabric or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Further procedures to ensure consistent decision making will be identified and supported considering the following recommended policy concerns to maintain the character of the area.

#### 7.2.1 Local listing in the Conservation Area

The purpose of Conservation Area designation is to provide added protection for the many buildings which do not possess the individual characteristics suitable for Statutory Listing. This appraisal provides the opportunity to provide additional recognition for a Local List of heritage structures and buildings having local historic or architectural value, group value, or visual interest as part of the setting of Listed buildings, though not on the Statutory List.

The following potential property is worthy of additional protection by being included on a Local List. This selection will be reviewed during public consultation in the future:



White House, Westlake Brewery site;

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## 7.2.2 Boundary changes

The Cwmavon Conservation Area was designated in 1984. This Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, 2009, has reconsidered the boundaries and suggests that no alterations should be made. The surrounding woodland landscape is particularly important to the setting of the Conservation Area and was considered for inclusion within the Conservation Area but it is protected by its designation as a Special Landscape Area and ancient woodland within the World Heritage Site. Also Conservation Area legislation is specifically intended to protect the built, rather than the natural environment and guidance (Circular 6/96) advises against using the legislation to protect large areas of the natural environment.

## 7.2.3 Article 4 Directions

Article 4 Directions can be imposed by local planning authorities to control certain alterations to dwellings that would otherwise be automatically 'permitted development' under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. This planning control is primarily used where the character of an area of acknowledged importance would be threatened. There are no planning fees involving planning applications relating to removed permitted development rights.

Thus, for example, the replacement of windows, doors, roof coverings etc. can come under planning control, the object being to prevent works that are considered to be damaging or inappropriate to the historic fabric, features of the buildings and historic townscapes.

It is recommended that an Article 4 (2) Direction is imposed throughout the Conservation Area. The aim is to help prevent further deterioration of the heritage details on buildings and the degradation of the historic landscape.

It should be noted that such a Direction only applies to properties in use as dwellings. Some of the built development within the Conservation Area is in commercial use which does not have the same permitted development rights as residential property and is therefore less at risk from inappropriate changes and loss of heritage character. More effective compliance is now required.

The classes of currently permitted development proposed be covered by the Article 4 (2) Direction include:

- Enlargement, improvement or other alteration to the public face of a building;
- Design and materials utilised for walls, windows, doors and rain water goods;
- Addition or material alteration to the shape, volume or materials of the roof;
- Erection, construction, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure;
- Cladding of any part of the exterior with artificial stone, timber, plastic or tiles;
- Rendering or painting of the exterior masonry/brickwork of the building;
- Paint colours for existing painted surfaces to be in accordance with a design guide pallet of colours and
- Installation, alteration or replacement of a satellite antenna, etc.

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The Torfaen Local Plan 2000 identifies the importance of protecting the quality and character of a Conservation Area as stated in Policy H1 (A+B). The implementation of an Article 4(2) provides increased protection especially where there is the threat from small scale unsympathetic works. A public consultation exercise may be undertaken in the future to consider the issue of Article 4 Directions, which will identify the need for additional responsibilities and benefits for owners and occupiers of properties within the Conservation Area. At this current time it is not a proposal of this document.

## 7.3 Compliance strategy

Torfaen County Borough Council Development Control Officers with Conservation Officers and legal advisors, can pursue a programme of appropriate legal action using powers available under Sections 48 and 54 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990 where this may be deemed necessary.

The powers available to Local Authorities, that Torfaen CBC could use, include:

- Taking enforcement action against unauthorised development. This includes planning contravention notices / breach of condition notices / enforcement notices / stop notices / and injunctions;
- Serving Repairs and Urgent Works notices;
- Compulsory Acquisition orders; and
- Building Preservation Notices which extend Listed Building control over unlisted buildings for an interim period.

Buildings and sites, which though outside the Conservation Area but are adjacent to the boundary, must be considered as part of its setting and therefore similar planning considerations need to be applied.

## 7.4 Mechanisms for monitoring change

In addition to a regular review of the Conservation Area to encompass changes and new priorities, key tools to monitor changes could include a new dated photographic survey and further research.

Though few detailed historic drawings, paintings or engravings have survived of the earlier town, there are an impressive number of detailed photographs which are available to inform the accurate restoration of properties constructed after 1850.

Torfaen County Borough Council will be responsible for the collection of information on the changing circumstances within the Conservation Area.

## 7.5 Design and urban design guidance

The future protection of the Conservation Area will require further detailed policy and technical guidance to ensure future change and development is appropriate for the heritage context.

A Design Guide for development within the World Heritage Site has been prepared to provide a basis for appropriate changes to buildings and new development. Though this provides general guidance the future protection of the built heritage, in the Conservation Area will require detailed policy and technical design guidance advice to ensure future



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change and development is appropriate for the heritage context. This Design Guide was approved as SPG to the Adopted Local Plan by Full Council on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

There is a specific need for Technical Guidance Notes to be prepared which set out the principles with good practice examples identified. The following list identifies priority topics for specific guidance which is considered should be prepared to inform development within the Conservation Areas in the County Borough. Potential areas include:

**Terrace extensions and infill:** identifying appropriate scale and forms of development.

**Advertising:** with recommendations on scale and design when used on commercial properties and stand-alone hoardings within a Conservation Area.

**Aerials and dishes:** advice on location and scale of apparatus to be used.

**Streetscape manual:** with Conservation Area specifications for paving, parking arrangements, street lighting and furniture, etc. and,

**Security – shutters, alarms, security lighting, CCTV cameras, etc:** that identifies inappropriate locations and suggests preferred designs and installations for different types of property.

## 7.6 Community involvement

The development of this Conservation Area Appraisal has been informed by a six week public consultation process undertaken between 18<sup>th</sup> November 2009 -30<sup>th</sup> December 2009. The consultation on the Cwmavon CAA was undertaken alongside consultation on the Blaenavon CAA and the Blaenavon World Heritage Site design Guide. The Consultation period was advertised as follows;

- Laminated posters have been displayed on lamp posts around the town;
- Leaflet dropt to 400 properties in Blaenavon and 200 leaflets distributed within newspapers sold in the town;
- Article in the Free Press paper;
- Letters to all properties within the proposed extension to Blaenavon Conservation Area and to those within the proposed conservation areas at Forgeside and Glantorfaen (approximately 320 letters in total);
- Article in Torfaen talks (Aug 09) advising of studies and that consultation would be undertaken in the next few months;
- Exhibition boards in Cwmavon Hall and Blaenavon World Heritage Centre for 4 weeks of the consultation period.

Copies of the documents for consultation were deposited at the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre, Blaenavon Library and the Cwmavon Village Hall for the duration of the consultation period.

Details of the studies, the consultation period and copies of the documents were available on the Council website for the 6 week period.

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A Consultation Day was held in the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009. 24 Local Residents visited the exhibition.

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT), CADW, Blaenavon Town Council and the Blaenavon Traders Association, elected members of Blaenavon and relevant internal consultees were formally consulted regarding the studies.

A Report of Consultation outlining a summary of the formal consultation responses received during the consultation period and the Council's response to these is available to view on request. This CAA was approved by Full Council on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 'Planning and the Historic Environment' (PPG 15) advises that authorities consider setting up Conservation Area Advisory Committees, both to assist in formulating policies for the Conservation Area, and as a continuing source of advice on planning and other applications that could affect an area.

Continuing community review and involvement will be managed by Torfaen County Borough Council with assistance from the Blaenavon Partnership.

It is proposed that a Blaenavon Partnership sub-committee will provide the services of a Conservation Area Advisory Committee for all Conservation Areas in the World Heritage Site with additional representation from Cwmavon to assist the Council with conservation advice and support. This Partnership already has the responsibility to provide the basis for review and pro-active promotion of the conservation aims and any other heritage initiatives within the World Heritage Site.

