

BLAENAVON CONSERVATION AREA

Conservation Plan
July 2003



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Summary

- 1 This document is a Conservation Plan: its purpose is to identify and understand the significance of the Blaenavon Conservation Area, which lies within, and therefore forms part of, the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site; assess the main issues affecting that significance; and develop policies that will help guide its future conservation.
- 2 For ease of reference, the Conservation Plan has been divided into two separate documents: Part 1 outlines the purpose of the Plan and contains general policies developed for guiding future development at Blaenavon. Part 1 is therefore the working document containing essential policies and proposals. Part 2 provides the detailed information collated on the assessment of the Blaenavon Conservation Area and identifies levels of significance and issues of vulnerability for the site. Part 2 is therefore essentially the reference document.
- 3 The Plan generally follows current orthodoxy in Conservation Plan writing, but is also structured on the four Identity Areas within the Conservation Area that were identified in an earlier report: generally, this study tends to confirm the validity of these four areas, as well as that of the Conservation Area boundary itself, although some local boundary revisions to both are suggested.
- 4 The pattern of significance that emerges is of a town where the industry that engendered it in the Eighteenth Century and Nineteenth Century declined relatively early in the Twentieth Century, and was not replaced, leading to a low rate of redevelopment in the Twentieth Century that has left large areas of the historic Nineteenth Century town standing; however, the same low level of economic activity has also contributed to the extensive erosion of historic detail now evident.
- 5 While few, if any, detailed historic drawings, paintings or engravings have survived of the earlier town, an impressive number of detailed historic photographs are available which could inform the accurate restoration of the later parts of the town constructed after 1850: despite the loss of detail noted.
- 6 The Plan discusses how far such a process might go, although the economic and social prospects of such work happening must inevitably be assessed elsewhere. This issue is discussed further in Part 2 of this Plan at Section 4, where the conclusion is reached to use the Plan to prioritise and encourage good example conservation projects with a high chance of success, and at the same time securing and conserving key isolated details of significance. A

longer view will then need to be taken on the prospects for reinstating larger areas on a comprehensive basis. The issue of the encouragement of new construction and contemporary architecture, and its positive integration into our historic environments are also addressed.

- 7 In making future decisions regarding initiatives relating to the historic fabric, it is argued that there should always be awareness of the difference between developments that grow from the addition of facilities needed in the town, and initiatives that are purely generated by the management of the existing heritage. The danger of over-presenting heritage, and destroying the experience visitors may want of discovering it for themselves, must somehow be avoided. The Plan therefore points to a need to identify a balance between the physical restoration of as much fabric as possible, and the development of an understanding of what survives, and what has been lost. Such an approach offers an alternative to a reliance on over-ambitious, wholesale conservation and restoration programmes, which can be vulnerable to economic pressures, and which run the risk through the dilution of resources, of not consistently delivering conservation work of sufficient accuracy and integrity. Such an approach may also help produce a vigorous debate regarding the introduction of a thoroughly contemporary architecture as part of the future growth of Blaenavon's economy, following other historic towns in Europe where modern and historic environments have been successfully combined without resort to 'contextual', 'pastiche' architecture. One route for delivering such intellectual access might be through the digitised archive that is to be housed in the World Heritage Site Centre proposed for St Peter's School.

1. Background Information

1.1. Introduction

- 1.1.1 This document is a Conservation Plan for the Blaenavon Town Conservation Area, which lies within, and therefore forms part of, the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site. It has been commissioned by Torfaen County Borough Council, in conjunction with Cadw. Its purpose is to identify and understand the significance of that Area, its buildings, sites, places and environments: both to guide its future, and as essential preparation for a Delivery Strategy for the implementation of an effective Historic Town Scheme.
- 1.1.2 Since completion of the Blaenavon Conservation Plan it has been subdivided into two working documents for ease of reference: Part 1 outlines the purpose and scope of the Plan, and contains general policies developed for guiding future development at Blaenavon. Part 1 is therefore the working document containing essential, broad based policies and proposals that seek to protect its significance. Part 2 provides the detailed information collated on the assessment of the Blaenavon Conservation Area and identifies levels of significance and vulnerability for the site. Part 2 is therefore essentially the detailed reference document. Together, the Blaenavon Conservation Plan (Part 1 and Part 2) comprise Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for Torfaen County Borough Council.
- 1.1.3 Unitary Development Plans Wales (2001) states that Supplementary Planning Guidance may be prepared to provide more detailed guidance to the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and that such guidance must be issued separately and made publicly available. The Conservation Plan (comprising Part 1 and 2) has been through an extensive period of public consultation and subsequent amendment. It was subsequently approved by Full Council on 22nd July 2003 and forms part of the adopted Torfaen Local Plan (27th July 2000) and the emerging Torfaen Unitary Development Plan. The Torfaen Local Plan (27th July 2000) sets out policies for the protection of the historic built environment and a number of policies relate directly to conservation areas. These are set out in appendix 1:
- 1.1.4 As Supplementary Planning Guidance, the Conservation Plan will be given 'weight' as a material consideration in the Development Control process and in the development of projects and other initiatives in Blaenavon.
- 1.1.5 This document is therefore the over-arching strategic plan for the Blaenavon

Town Centre Conservation Area from which further, more detailed SPG notes will be developed (please refer to Proposal 4,). Topics to be covered by additional SPG notes include: Shop fronts, advertisements and blinds, shop front security, window details, door details, pointing, chimneys, stonework, railings, fencing and gates, boundary walls, pavements and road surfacing, roofs, ironwork.

1.2. Purpose of Conservation Plan

1.2.1 The purpose of the Conservation Plan is to identify and assess the cultural significance of the Blaenavon Conservation Area; identify issues which affect or might affect this significance; and then to recommend policies required to retain that significance including the establishment of a Historic Town Scheme. "Cultural significance" is taken to have the wide definition it was given in the ICOMOS Burra Charter on Conservation (1988): "the cultural significance of a place is embodied in its fabric, its setting and its contents; in the associated documents; in its use; and in people's memory and association with the place".

1.2.2 The Plan is intended to be a central document in the conservation of the significance of the Conservation Area in Blaenavon. Conservation is here defined as:

"... negotiating the transition from past to future in such a way as to secure the transfer of maximum significance" 1

The Conservation Plan aims to:

- provide a broad based assessment of the area
- define its heritage merit
- set the aims and objectives of the Town Scheme
- assess the threats to the area, past present and future
- develop policies to safeguard and improve the character of the area

1.2.3 It is hoped that this Conservation Plan will assist with retaining the areas, buildings and features which are not being safeguarded by existing conservation initiatives such as those at the Ironworks, the St Peter's School, and old Council Offices (now a new Library). These more vulnerable areas include King Street, Broad Street and the residential areas of terraced housing.

1.3 Background information on this site

1.3.1. Background to the Conservation Area: statutory designations and other inscriptions

The site contains elements with the following statutory designations or other official 'inscriptions':

- Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site
- Conservation Area
- Listed Buildings
- Scheduled Ancient Monument

1.3.2. *The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site*

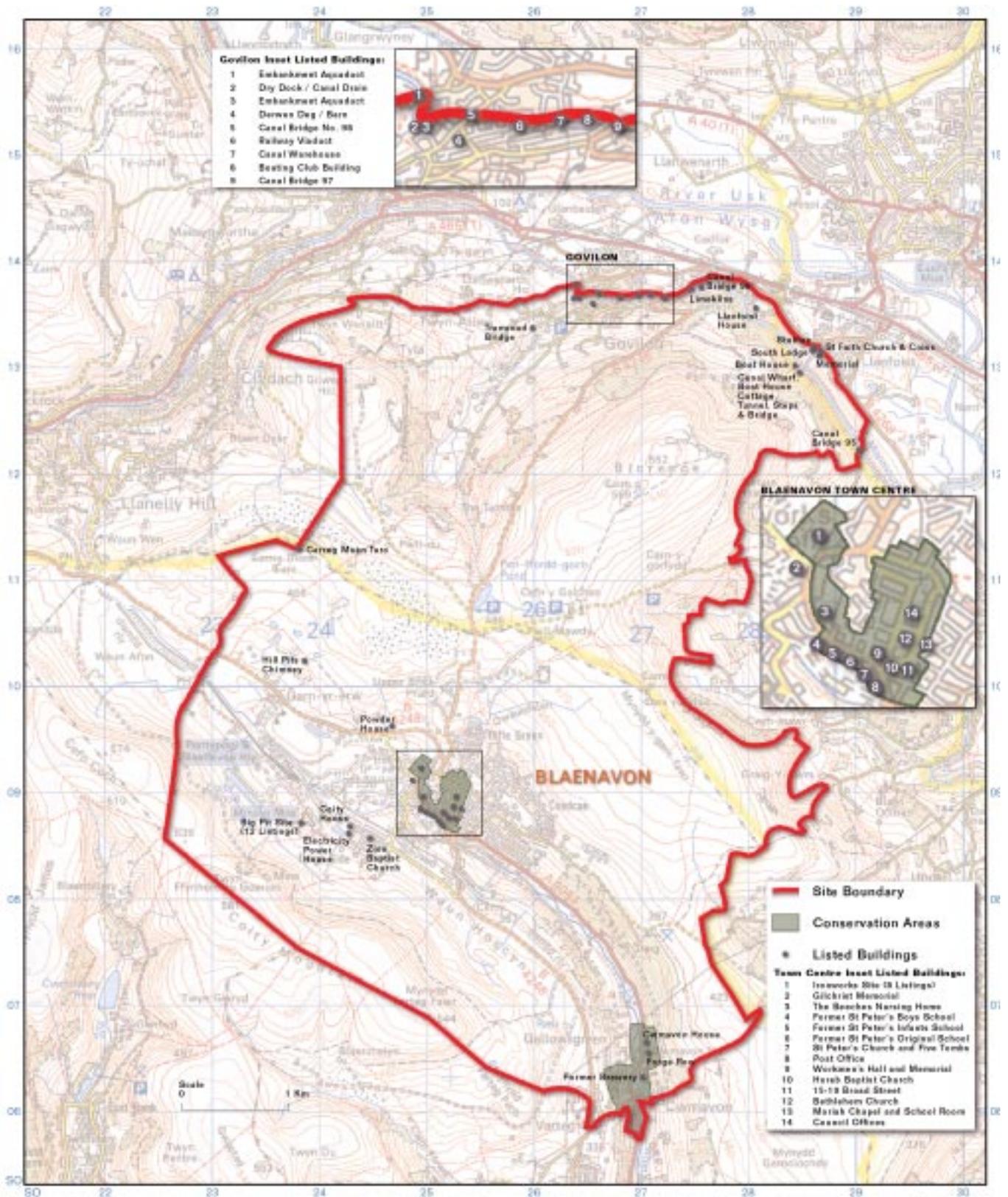
This was “inscribed” on the 30th November 2000 under the terms of the Convention concerning Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972. This requires that the ‘World Heritage Committee’ shall establish a World Heritage List identifying a list of ‘properties’ forming part of the cultural and natural heritage which it considers to have outstanding universal value.

This site was recommended for inclusion on the basis that the Blaenavon landscape constitutes an exceptional illustration, in material form, of the social and economic structure of C19 industry, and that the components of the Blaenavon Industrial landscape together make up an outstanding and remarkably complete example of a C19 industrial landscape.

The Blaenavon World Heritage Site is now managed by a partnership of local authorities, Welsh national agencies, and the National Trust for Wales. The Partnership works with private landowners to conserve the landscape and the cultural heritage within it. It is guided by the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site Management Plan.

1.3.3. *Blaenavon Conservation Area*

This was designated on the 23rd October 1984. The need for a Conservation Area was first identified in “Blaenavon Town Plan: Aspects of Historic Conservation: A Discussion Document” which was written in August 1977. This document identified the importance not just of the then proposed boundary of the Conservation Area, but also the context of its wider area, the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.



Plan of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas taken from Blaenavon World Heritage Site Nomination Document November 2000

2 Policies and Proposals

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The objective of policies and proposals listed below is to safeguard and improve the character, appearance and significance of the area. They will guide the future care, use, development, restoration and alteration of the site. The policies and proposals identified in this Conservation Plan are based on an understanding of the site and assessment of its significance and relate to the issues identified as affecting the vulnerability of this significance.

2.2 Policy goals

2.2.1 These policies are designed to achieve the following aims:

- safeguard and enhance the significance of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site and in particular the Blaenavon Town Conservation Area
- prevent future damage and deterioration of the significance of the Conservation Area
- set priorities for future conservation work
- specify policies for individual parts of the site with special significance
- define a pragmatic approach to repair
- attempt to resolve the problem of the 'conservation deficit' or where the cost of repairing the buildings is greater than the value of the repaired building in an open market.
- improve understanding and dialogue between residents and public bodies
- set broad policies to support the implementation of a Historic Town Scheme
- enhance public appreciation of the site
- control future interventions
- identify opportunities for enhancement
- identify areas where further research is required
- satisfy statutory requirements

The policies and proposals to be adopted are set out below.

2.3 General Policy for the Conservation Area

- 2.3.1 A general policy is required to set an overall objective of conserving the significance of the Conservation Area. In practice, this will be achieved through the sum of the policies and proposals identified: however, for the avoidance of doubt, the following general controlling policy applies:

Policy 1:

The significance of the Blaenavon Conservation Area is to be retained and upheld wherever possible. Where it does not appear possible, reference should first be made to the Conservation Plan and a process of analysis and justification should first be followed before any final decision is taken, involving where appropriate a formal impact assessment of any change that results in the loss of elements of significance.

Objective:

To retain the significance of the site.

Implementation:

To achieve this policy it is essential for all those involved with the Conservation Area, both private and public sector, to understand the significance (and “distinctiveness”) of the area and place the retention of this significance at the centre of all schemes and projects proposed for the area. The Conservation Plan should be the central document in this process. All schemes that require statutory approval, or grant support, must follow this route.

Specific for the Blaenavon Conservation Area

Policy 2:

The Historic Town Scheme will prioritise grant aid to:

- buildings which are most in danger of imminent loss of historic fabric and contribute towards the significance of the Conservation Area
- key buildings within the Conservation Area which have suffered loss of detail but for which photographic or archaeological evidence survives for accurate reinstatement

Objective:

To ensure that there is a direct correlation between Historic Town Scheme spend and retaining the significance of the Conservation Area.

Implementation:

Priorities for expenditure will be identified through the Delivery Strategy but properties at the southern end of Broad Street are an obvious example.

Prioritise properties within the area which have lost significant historical detail but which could act as anchors for regeneration and for establishing a standard for the retention and reinstatement of significant detail for a whole area.

Consolidation of the residential terraces will remain the priority of the Renewal Area to ensure that surviving aspects of their significance are retained in any work initiated for environmental purposes, bringing in Town Scheme grant where applicable to fund any conservation deficit.

Policy 3:

All grant schemes will aim to conserve or contribute towards the significance of the Conservation Area

Objective:

To ensure that different grant schemes operating within the Conservation Area either conserve or contribute towards the retention of significance. It is essential that a high conservation specification is achieved on all projects within the Conservation Area to ensure that a high quality environment is achieved and that materials used ensure that the schemes have a long life. This should also serve to deliver best value to the grant aiding bodies.

Implementation:

This will normally mean following an agreed broad standard of specification whilst retaining flexibility to enable different aspects of significance to be identified on different properties. This may, on occasion, contribute towards the overall cost and complexity of different schemes. This increase in cost should be met by the grant schemes to ensure that the grant is taken up rather than a "least cost option".

It is essential that the administrators of the grant schemes absorb any additional burden by assisting owners with applications, obtaining quotations, dealing with contractors etc. Grant schemes must be simple and accessible to those applying. The Blaenavon Renewal Area would appear to be a good example in this respect.

In practise this Policy can be complicated by the different objectives under which different grant schemes operate. Good dialogue, consultation, proper understanding of what components of a building contribute towards the overall significance of the area and agreement of use of materials, colour schemes etc are essential between the Building Conservation Officers of Torfaen County Borough Council and other departments and organisations.

Additionally it is essential that there is continuous dialogue: standardisation of approach is dangerous as what is significant may vary from property to property. This makes it essential that the operator of the Town Scheme has the necessary experience and understanding to ensure that the individual significance of each property is maintained.

Policy 4:

All proposed public sector projects within the Conservation Area will be subject to full consultation and assessed in the light of their contribution towards, or retention of the significance of the Area.

Objective:

To ensure that a high standard is set for all public sector schemes.

Implementation:

Co-ordination of this consultation process should be undertaken by the proposed Historic Town Scheme Project Officer (Proposal 3 below).

It is essential that this process begins at the inception of the scheme to ensure that from the outset the objectives are agreed prior to applications for funding being made. In reality it is recognised that sometimes moneys become available at short notice and spend must be achieved quickly. It is essential however that this process is not short cut. It is under such pressures, where spend occurs without due consideration, that schemes which should aim to conserve the significance of the area may lead to loss of significance.

Policy 5:

All public open spaces will need to be properly maintained, and, where necessary, redesigned with the highest quality of design advice. The relationship between the open spaces, both in terms of a practical consistency in specification, and their interconnectedness and ability to enhance pedestrian links, will also be taken into account

Objective:

Open spaces give an indicator of the care or neglect which is taken in a particular area as well as contributing towards the significance of the area either in a positive or negative way. The neatly tended gardens in North King Street are a good example of this. A number of neglected areas are unfortunately currently in public ownership. Aside from The Park, and the site on the south side of Lion Street, there appear to be few open spaces with any historic significance or function, many have been created through demolition in order provide parking. Some of these first generation parking spaces may now require improvement and upgrading.

Implementation:

Proper resources should be allocated for the maintenance of all open spaces within the Conservation Area including regular mowing programmes, removal of rubbish etc.. Standard specifications/method statements for this work should take due regard to relevant issues raised in the Conservation Plan.

Redesign and upgrading work should be based on professional landscape advice of the highest calibre. There is probably a good case for consistency in the specification of materials and components (railings, walls etc) if not planting. Guidance is given elsewhere in the Plan on the design parameters for this (avoidance of the use of 'off-the peg' replica Victorian ironwork, etc). These are key opportunities for the local authority to set a fine example by navigating skilfully away from 'pastiche' solutions that only refer superficially to Nineteenth Century Heritage, perhaps towards a confident contemporary style that still respects the scale and heritage of historic Blaenavon.

The planning of pedestrian (and bicycle) routes through the town should be an integral part of this.

Policy 6:

The importance of the upland views from the town is recognised and will be given consideration in assessing any proposals for development under the Local Plan.

Objective:

To protect views of the uplands and relict landscape which is either part of or forms a buffer for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.

Implementation:

Local planning process.

Proposals

Proposal 1:

Torfaen County Borough Council will implement a Historic Town Scheme within the Conservation Area.

Objective:

To conserve and enhance the character, or significance, of the Conservation Area. A Town Scheme can therefore complement the work being undertaken through the Renewal Area and should also act as to better co-ordinate and simplify the allocation of various grants including WDA and WTB schemes within the Conservation Area (Proposal 3 below), as well as assisting with reducing any conservation deficit.

A general grant scheme is required within the Conservation Area who's main priority is to conserve the historic character of the Town to complement the Blaenavon Renewal Area. Conservation work is required to a high standard if the significance of the Conservation Area is to be retained. The Housing Renewal Scheme has contributed to improving the overall appearance of the Conservation Area. However, its priority is not to undertake work to a high conservation standard, but to improve the housing stock.

A successful Town Scheme should operate alongside the Housing Renewal Scheme and grant aid slightly different aspects of repair

Implementation:

See Policy 4 above. It is essential that the work of the two schemes is co-ordinated.

Proposal 2:

Torfaen County Borough Council will invite the WDA and WTB to contribute towards the funding of a Historic Town Scheme.

Objective:

To rationalise the number of grant schemes available, to reduce complexity to the applicant, and to increase the overall budget of the Scheme.

Implementation:

This system has operated successfully in other Conservation Areas within Wales, such as Tenby and St David's. More recently, however, there appears to have been some resistance to this due to the varying conditions attached to the different grant schemes.

It is essential that a Town Scheme is efficiently managed and is straight-forward in design if a good uptake of grants is to be achieved.

Blaenavon's importance as a world heritage site means that this must be achieved here.

Proposal 3:

Torfaen County Borough Council, Cadw, WDA and WTB consider providing the services of a Historic Town Scheme Project Officer for a fixed term to implement and manage the Historic Town Scheme and to evaluate all proposed schemes (both public sector and private sector [ie planning applications]) within the Conservation Area, against this Plan. This post could be part funded by securing contributions from Cadw, WDA, WTB.

Objective:

To ensure that all proposed projects within the Conservation Area are properly evaluated against the Conservation Plan to assess contribution towards the significance of the Conservation Area. This will also help ensure consistent approach in the design and implementation of all proposals.

Implementation:

For this post to be effective it is essential that the Historic Town Scheme Project Officer is fully consulted during the development of schemes within the Conservation Area. Their brief would be lead by the contents of the Conservation Plan.

Proposal 4:

Torfaen County Borough Council will produce effective supplementary planning guidance to inform those making planning applications about the criteria against which their applications will be judged. These guidelines will be drawn from or refer to this Conservation Plan.

Objective:

To ensure that new development conserves and enhances the significance of the area.

Implementation:

Draft guidelines already exist. These should be finalised as a priority and adopted formally by Torfaen County Borough Council.

Proposal 5:

Torfaen County Borough Council will produce a leaflet promoting preferred repairs and development which retain the significance of the Conservation Area but which may not require planning permission, or may not be receiving grant aid.

Objective:

To ensure that local residents, shop keepers etc, understand the objectives of the public bodies. In addition it will enable them to identify and judge work which they are undertaking against the retention of significance of the area and assist their decision making.

Implementation:

Consideration should be given to the publication of 4 leaflets, one for each Identity Area.

Proposal 6:

Torfaen County Borough Council will review and revise the current boundary of the Conservation Area.

Objective:

To ensure that a number of significant listed or unlisted historic buildings and areas, currently outside the Conservation Area, are included and therefore protected and given the opportunity to benefit from grant assistance.

Conservation Areas allow for the implementation of effective grant schemes within them (ie Historic Town Schemes), for their conservation and enhancement as well as providing some protection against demolition of non-listed buildings.

It is essential that some additional areas and individual buildings are given proper protection from demolition and opportunities of grant aid to help promote their conservation.

Implementation:

The review should take the Conservation Plan as its starting point.

Proposal 7:

Torfaen County Borough Council will undertake a review of traffic flows and car parking within the town, and of signage of the town centre, ironworks and car parks. This will be linked to a fresh look at highway engineering and street landscaping design for this area.

Objectives:

To ensure that traffic noise, congestion and fumes do not detract from the significance of the town and to ensure that visitors can easily orientate themselves on arrival in the town. To ensure at the same time that any further interventions in these respects are integrated with a sympathetic and historically based approach to highway engineering and street landscaping in the Conservation Area

Implementation:

A proper Strategy for access and parking is required for a 10 year+ time frame so that effective programmes of works and signage can be initiated. It is important that in developing this strategy the unique needs and opportunities of Blaenavon's Conservation Area are taken into account. It may be appropriate to seek specialist advice with regard to achieving conservation standards with respect to hard and soft landscaping, signage, and street lighting.

Proposal 8:

Torfaen County Borough Council will consult with local residents with regard to the removal of some permitted development rights (implementation of Article 4 Directions) to ensure the architectural and archaeological significance of the area is retained.

Objective:

To stem the flood of small-scale alterations to properties within the Conservation Area which accumulatively will lead to the erosion of significance of the area.

Implementation:

This proposal should be carefully drawn up and subject to a sensitively planned consultation exercise combined with the awareness raising programme detailed in Proposal 9 below.

Proposal 9:

Torfaen County Borough Council will provide a leaflet and hold an exhibition to raise public awareness and involve local suppliers with this, including sponsorship, exhibition of local joiners' work etc

Objective:

To raise awareness of the importance of all areas within the Conservation Area and the contribution they make to the international, regional and local importance of this site, and to assemble sound arguments in favour of better controls and repair works.

Implementation:

This exhibition will be linked to work undertaken under Proposal 4 & Proposal 5 above.

Proposal 10:

Torfaen County Borough Council will implement an Enhancement Scheme for the upper area of King Street, linked with the Ironworks.

Objective:

This area is at present unresolved, offers little to residents, and offers an unsatisfactory link for visitors walking from the ironworks into Blaenavon (or vice versa) via King Street.

Implementation:

Funding should be sought or resources allocated for a detailed appraisal of this area that will include an analysis of historic development and fabric, and lead to the development of proposals that will encourage visitors to walk from the upper area of King Street to the Ironworks (or vice versa). Regard would need to be given to the use of appropriate materials and consistency throughout the Conservation Area. The implementation of this proposal should have regard to the policies identified above, specifically Policy 5 relating to the maintenance and design of public open space.

- 2.3.2 Part 1 has provided an overview of the purpose and scope of this Conservation Plan and has identified policies and proposals that will be used to guide development inside the Blaenavon Conservation Area.
- 2.3.3 Part 2 provides more detailed information and an assessment of the Blaenavon Conservation Area and identifies levels of significance and issues of vulnerability for the site. Part 2 is essentially a reference document.

2.4 Contact Details

- 2.4.1 For further information please contact:

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County Hall,
Cwmbran, NP44 2WN.

Tel: 01633 648029