

Nantyglo and Blaina Town Council Cyngor Tref Nant-y-glo a Blaenau

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Mr V. Maher MA
Inspector
Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan
C/o General Offices
Steelworks Road
Ebbw Vale
NP23 6DN

14th May 2012

Dear Mr Maher

Re: Local Development Plan

Please find below the considered response of Nantyglo and Blaina Town Council.

- Q 2. "Does Policy DM7 provide an appropriate set of controls to manage changes of use within Blaina local town centre?"
- Q 4. Does criterion (b) of Policy DM7 clearly indicate when a change of use of the ground floor premises to housing would be supported.

Whilst the Town Council welcomes the proposal to limit Hot Food Takeaways and Public Houses to three, it is considered that this proposal is too little, too late. There are already seven takeaways open in the High Street many having been allowed to develop in recent years, there are four public houses open in the High Street plus one, the former Conservative Club, being advertised for sale.

The Development Management Policies para 7.54 -7.58 recognises Blaina to be a Local Town yet only makes proposals which are negative to any commercial development. The Town Council considers that a development plan should contain an element of energy and interest for development rather than sanction a reduction of commercial enterprise by permitting a change of use retail to residential.

The Town Council has been advised that an appropriate set of controls would be similar to that of an agricultural occupancy condition. A house with an agricultural condition is limited as to who can live in it (or use it) and how much it can be sold for, as the value of the property is restricted to ensure that it is affordable for an agricultural worker. Retail property landlords in Blaina could make more money and are open to a wider market if they are able to advertise a shop for residential use as opposed to retail. If the retail properties of Blaina were conditional to a set of controls similar to the agricultural occupancy condition, the value of the property would be affordable for continued use as retail premises. To replace the core use of the High Street from a shopping centre to that of a residential street would be to transform Blaina into a suburb of its near neighbours and in so doing the town would soon cease to exist.

The Town Council has always been willing to work with the Development Team towards the regeneration of Blaina and as such have previously submitted a document "Action for Blaina" *enclosed*, which was prepared by the Department of City and Regional Planning, University of Wales, Cardiff. It is the opinion of the Town Council that even-though the plan is eleven years old it does contain options which are still relevant to day.

Yours sincerely

S. Bartlett

S. Bartlett

Town Clerk



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Blaenau Gwent Facts and Figures

Location

Blaenau Gwent is located in south east Wales and was formerly part of the County of Gwent. It is approximately 20 miles south to the city of Newport, 30 miles south west to the city of Cardiff and directly north is the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Geography

Blaenau Gwent is the smallest of all the Welsh local authorities, at about 10,900 hectares. In Blaenau Gwent there are three distinctive valleys supporting the five main towns or settlements of Abergillery, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo and Blaina, and Tredegar.



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Population

Blaenau Gwent has witnessed steady population loss over recent years. The most recent figures suggest that there are 69,300 people living in the area (Mid Year Estimate 2006). This compares to 70,084 in 2001, and 72,254 in 1991 (Censuses).

[Population Statistics \(external link\)](#)

[Census Statistics \(external link\)](#)

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Culture and Ethnicity

92% of people that live in Blaenau Gwent were born in Wales, the highest proportion of any local authority in Wales. Less than 1% of people living in the local area were born outside the United Kingdom or Republic of Ireland (Census 2001).

[Culture Statistics \(external link\)](#)

The ethnic population in Blaenau Gwent is comparably small, making up less than 1% of the overall population (Wales 2%). The largest ethnic group in Blaenau Gwent is Asian or Asian British group (Census 2001).

[Ethnicity Statistics \(external link\)](#)

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Welsh Identity and Language

12% of people living in Blaenau Gwent chose to identify themselves as Welsh, rather than British. This is below the Welsh level that stood at 14% (Census 2001).

[Welsh Identity Statistics \(external link\)](#)

The use of the Welsh language in Blaenau Gwent is relatively low, when compared to Wales as a whole and other individual local authorities. 13% of people stated they had a skill or skills in the language. Further analysis by the Welsh Language Board suggests that 9% of people in Blaenau Gwent are able to speak Welsh (Census 2001).

Related Pages

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Action for Blaina

Building a Future on Heritage



Nicholas Ford
Rokos Frangos
Adam Sheppard
Mark Worringham

Department of City and Regional Planning
University of Wales Cardiff
June 2001

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A special thank you to the following people who kindly agreed to be interviewed and who provided us with additional information essential to the writing of this report: D. Morris (Blaina Heritage Action Group); R. Murray (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council); and A. Williams (Ebbw Fach Development Trust); Reverend R. Hewett.

Chartist Centre Concept Sketches by Nicholas Ford
Front Cover Sketch by Mark Worringham

1. Context

1.1 Introduction

The original programme of study which was set out for this report involved an examination of the current situation of the town of Blaina, in terms, particularly, of what the planning context of the area was. Specifically this meant to examine the relevant development plan, and to find out what environmental improvements have recently been carried out, what kinds of improvements have been proposed, and what the current situation is as far as planning applications are concerned. In addition, interviews were to be carried out with key members of the community (town council, planning officers and local history society). Following this, a physical survey of the town's high street was to be conducted to identify land uses and public facilities. There was also to be a questionnaire survey of members of the community to bring them into the debate about how the town should develop in the future, and also to find out the extent of the local knowledge about the Chartist movement and its connections with the town and its surrounding area. Various buildings were also to be assessed in view of their suitability to house a possible visitor centre dedicated to the Chartist movement.

However, during the course of undertaking this research, it became clear that the remit of the work would have to widen somewhat, if it was to be of genuine help to Blaina's cause. Thus, consideration has also been given to future ideas for improvements and developments for the regeneration of the town, possibly to complement the core idea of a Chartist centre, or perhaps to act as alternative ideas for the future. In addition, there is discussion in this report of possible funding arrangements, as well as the best way to mobilise human resources for the good of the town. This report should not be seen as a complete solution to the problems of the town but rather as a starting point for the process of revitalisation to begin.

The context for this study is the decline in the major employers of the South Wales valleys. Industrial sectors such as mining and manufacturing have been in decline in these areas for many decades, and, in some cases, for over a century. Whilst in many other parts of the UK this has been offset by an equivalent rise in the service sector, this growth has not been sufficient to act as a replacement for the traditional industries in South Wales. Blaina, for instance, was in the past one of the foremost iron producing towns in the world, but the loss of its ironworks during the last century has been part of a history of industrial decline. Many towns in South Wales have begun to see the rise in tourism expenditure as a solution to the economic problems that are being experienced, encouraged by success stories from former industrial sites that now serve a heritage purpose. Examples of such sites include Big Pit at Blaenavon (a short distance from Blaina) or heritage parks in areas such as the Rhondda valley.

This is the starting point for this report, which encapsulates the question of whether tourism can be a panacea for such towns, in the form of the proposal for a Chartist visitor centre for Blaina. In many ways, this is a relevant

example for all Welsh towns looking to draw on their heritage as a strategy for the future, yet in many ways the situation of Blaina is not entirely similar to that of other towns, and comparisons, or uses of other towns as models should be treated with a degree of caution.

1.2 Quality of Life

The Economic Situation of Blaina

Blaina and the surrounding towns have suffered similar problems to all other former industrial and mining towns in the valleys of South Wales. Closures of collieries and metal works have left a legacy of high unemployment and low incomes. In the case of Blaina, the iron works, which had formerly made Blaina the second largest iron-producing town in the world, closed down towards the end of the nineteenth century. Many major employers have closed or shed jobs since that time, the most recent being the well-publicised redundancies at the Corus works in Ebbw Vale and Newport. The former, in particular, poses a major threat to the economic well being of the town. Figures taken from the 1991 Census bear out what everybody knows in any case: that Blaina, and its neighbours, are significantly more deprived than the UK average. The census, for the purposes of its statistical analysis treats Nantyglo and Blaina as part of Brynmawr, so figures therefore include all three towns.

The percentage of households in Brynmawr with no car, a much used indicator of poverty, is 43.32 %, higher than the three other major statistical units in Blaenau Gwent (Ebbw Vale has 43.01%, Abertillery has 42.80% and Tredegar has 42.33%), and notably higher than the UK average of 33.35% (see Figure 1.1). Whilst the male unemployment rate for the UK was 11.33% in 1991, the figure for Brynmawr was 17.09%, with 17.15% in Tredegar, 16.34% in Abertillery, and 16.32% in Ebbw Vale (see Figure 1.2.). Female unemployment is highest in Brynmawr (9.47%), eclipsing rates in Abertillery of 8.78%, 6.87% in Tredegar, and 6.81% in Ebbw Vale. The latter two actually fall below the UK average of 6.98%.

Long-term illness is another useful measure of deprivation, and this is 21.03% for all ages in Brynmawr, 23.24% in Tredegar, 21.55% in Abertillery, and 19.66% in Ebbw Vale. The national average is 12.35%. Finally, although the percentage of residents over 18 with higher qualifications in Brynmawr is higher than its three neighbours at 6.88% (Ebbw Vale has 6.84%, Tredegar has 5.59% and Abertillery has 4.03%; nearby Llanhilleth has 1.27%, the lowest rate in Wales), it still falls well short of the UK average of 13.45%.

If the situation is examined from a more general perspective, both Blaina and Nantyglo can generally be described as deprived areas. Indeed, both towns fall within the top 100 on the index of deprived communities in Wales. We are thus faced with a further problem: even if greater trade from the local area were to be attracted back to Blaina, there is not necessarily the level of spending power to support, particularly, an increase in comparison and luxury retail floorspace, or an increase in such leisure facilities as cinemas or restaurants.

Figure 1.1
Percentage of households with no car

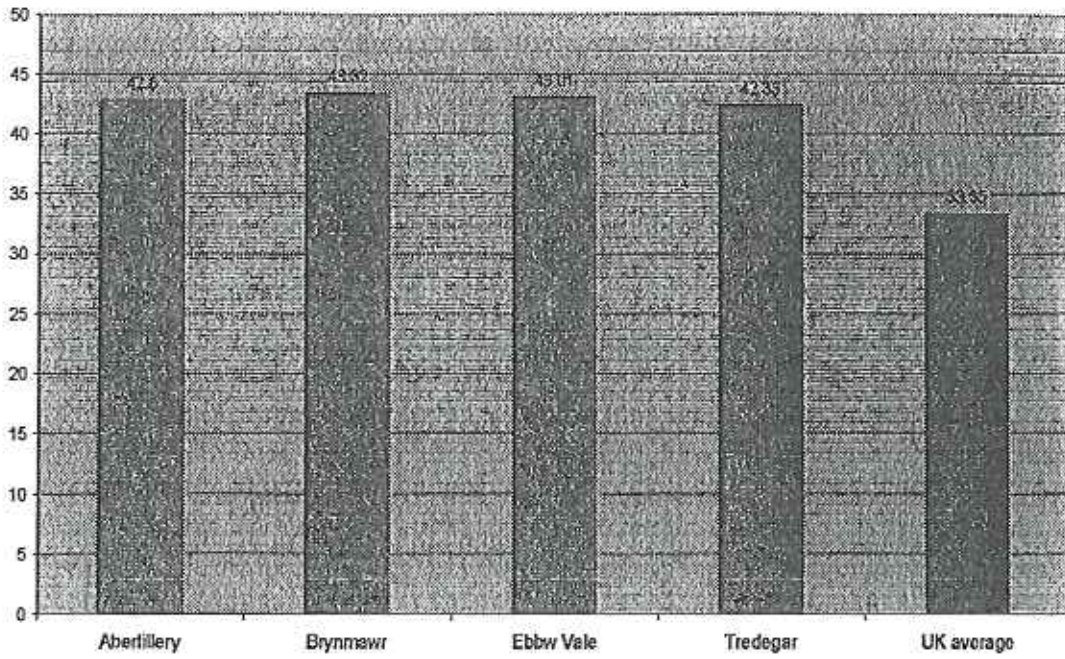
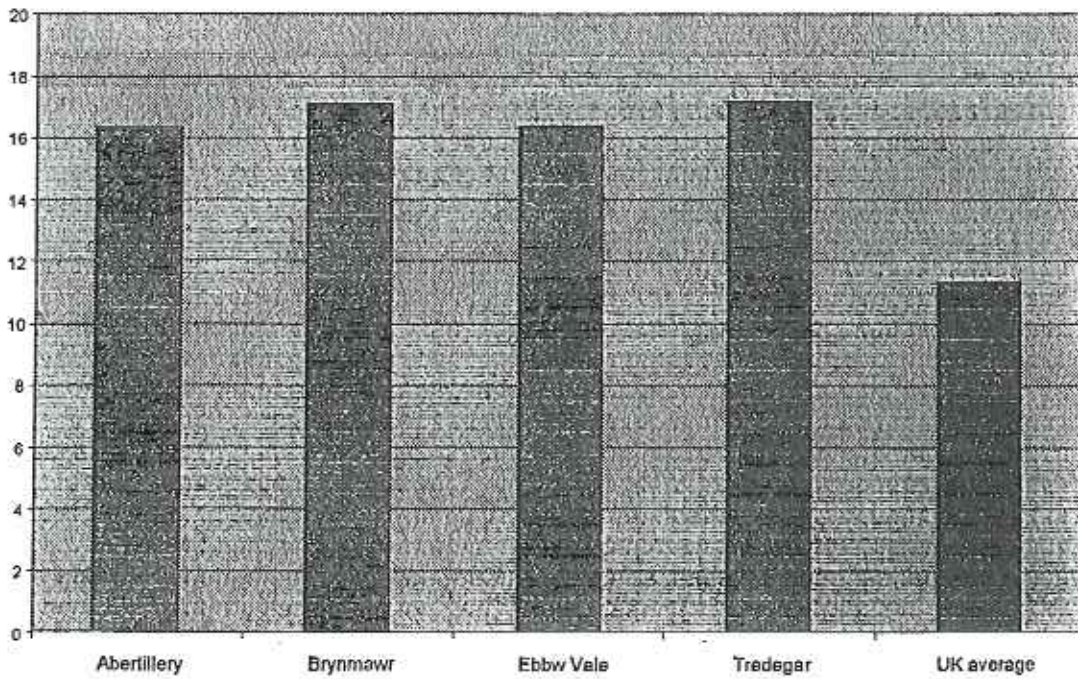


Figure 1.2.
Percentage of males unemployed



Physical Facilities

The land use survey which will be outlined in full later, deals with specifics of the facilities of Blaina. It is intended here to highlight the key facilities which Blaina possesses or lacks which impact upon the quality of life within the town. The bank is perhaps indicative of the state of the town. The Lloyds TSB on the high street is the only bank present, and yet it is only open for two and a half days per week. On other days, customers must go elsewhere. If this is viewed in the context of the centralisation of services, meaning that remote branches such as Blaina offer a very limited range of transaction possibilities, this represents a problem. Blaina also entirely lacks a wide range of leisure-based facilities such as sports centres or cinemas.

However, the town does possess a number of facilities which add to the diversity of the centre. There is, for instance, a public library situated at the southern end of the High Street. The doctor's surgery adjacent to the car park is also a beneficial facility, and draws people into the town for health visits. The free car park to the north of the town is of a good condition and is convenient, and the public conveniences are well maintained and centrally located. The landscape in the area is also a benefit, as well as a potential opportunity. It is surrounded by an impressive backdrop of hills, and is also in close proximity to the popular tourist destination of the Brecon Beacons. There is therefore potential for walkers to be attracted to the area.

Transport Facilities

Overall, Blaina has some aspects of good transport accessibility, and some deficiencies in transport. Into the former category falls the free car park at the northern end of the town, which is in a good state of repair and is in close proximity to key facilities such as the council offices, doctors' surgery and town centre shops. This is also easily accessed from the main road from Brynmawr to Newport. However, this main road does present some problems for the town due to the fact that it completely bypasses it. Given that roads in the South Wales valleys are often continuously accompanied by built up areas, it is often virtually impossible to tell where there are town centres from the road. In the case of Blaina, there is one small signpost from the road, and it is quite possible to drive past the town without realising it exists. This is obviously a problem from the perspective of the vitality and viability of the centre.

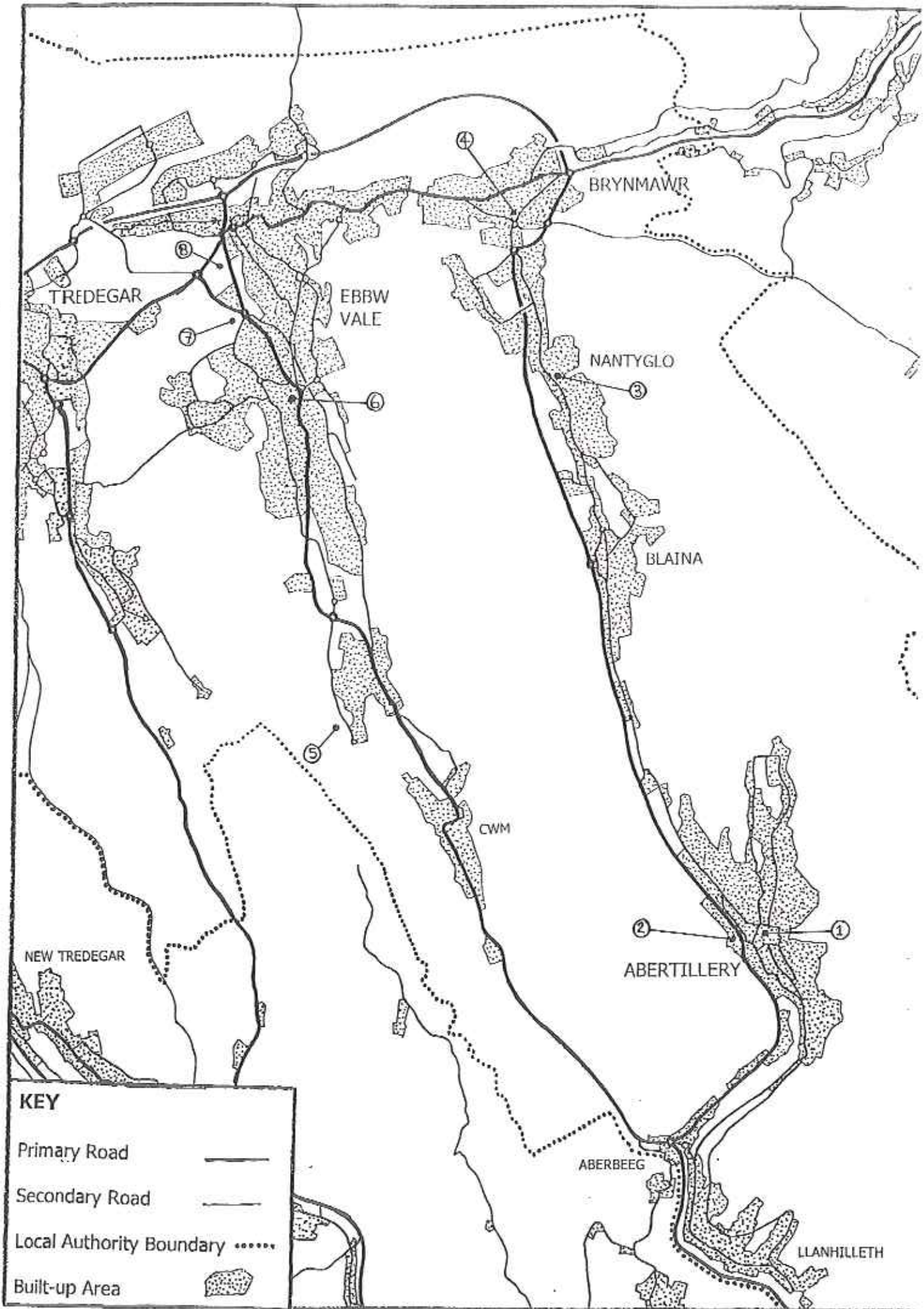
As far as public transport facilities are concerned, there are also difficulties facing Blaina. There is currently no rail link from Blaina to anywhere else. The last train from Brynmawr to Newport, which would have passed through Blaina *en route* left in 1972, so this has been the case for some time. What is more, whilst the free buses which exist to carry passengers to the various out-of-centre supermarkets (for instance the Tesco at Ebbw Vale) significantly benefit the residents of the town in the short term, they can only undermine the shopping facilities in Blaina town centre in the longer term. However, to abolish these services would remove consumer choice, and may cause

financial pressures within an already deprived population, so there is therefore a difficult balancing act to be struck.

Community Capital

Strategies for Blaina must take account of what community capital exists within the town, since this has the potential to significantly help or hinder progress on strategy design and implementation. Initially it seems that the town is in possession of a good sense of community, where everybody should be able to pull together towards a common cause. An example of this community is the memorial on the high street, which was put up by Blaina Heritage Action Group, but was designed by children in the local comprehensive school. There is therefore potential for the regeneration of Blaina to be a project common to the aspirations of all parties in the town.

However, a deeper look at attitudes in the area seems to reveal rifts which are not evident on the surface. One such problem is the rivalry between communities in the wider area, such as between Blaina and Nantyglo, which hampers an overall strategy for regeneration on the valley as a whole. Likewise within the town there is an element of mistrust between various key actors in the community, both in the public and those acting in an official capacity. It is not necessary to give details on the histories of such divisions, which in some cases date back a long way, but they will be obstacles to overcome. A later chapter of this report will give some suggestions on how such obstacles might be dealt with.



1.3 Threats to Blaina (see previous map)

The following chapter will look at the neighbouring shopping facilities to Blaina, and assess what sort of threat they pose to the centre.

Competition from Other Centres

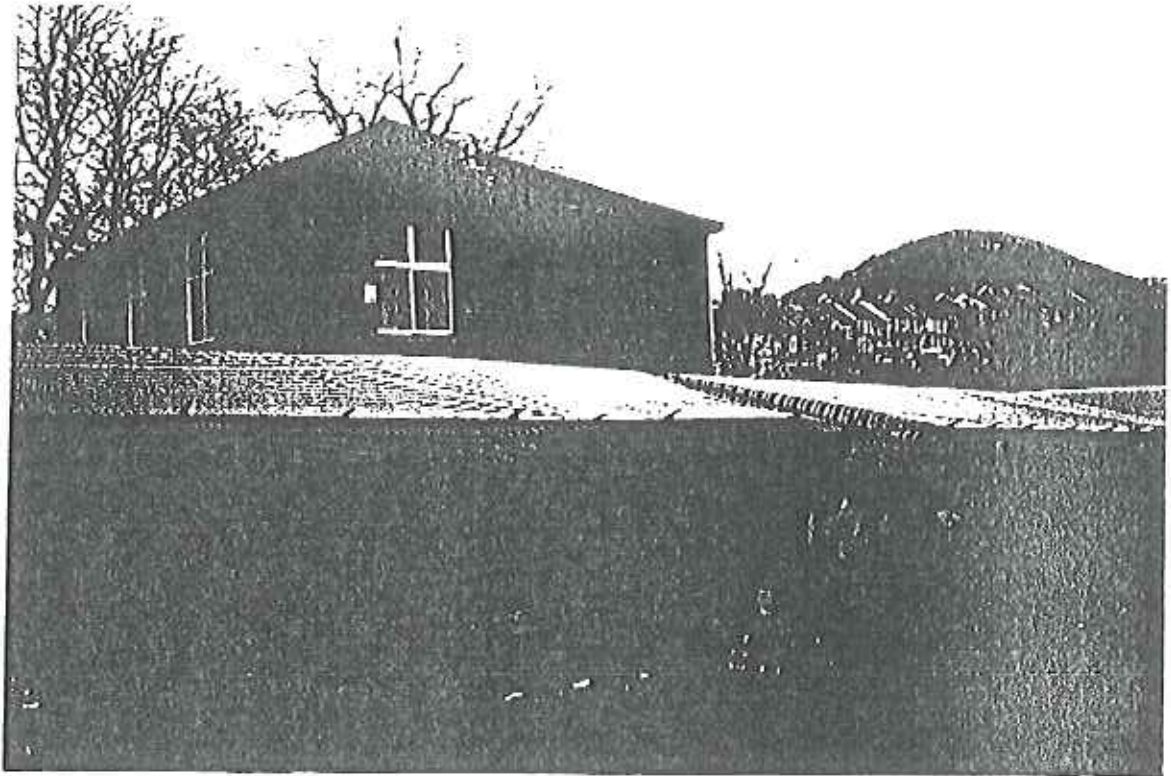
- (1) ABERTILLERY TOWN CENTRE**
- Range of multiple retailers including New Look, Woolworths, Boots and Savers
 - Four high street banks
 - Town centre supermarkets: Somerfield and Kwik Save
 - Small indoor arcade
 - Outdoor market (Tuesdays)
 - Free multi-storey car park

Abertillery is the closest of the three main town centres to Blaina, and therefore may well be responsible for drawing away much of the town's trade. The centre seems to be busy, although there are vacant units present around the town centre. Photographs overleaf show the bustling outdoor market in the town centre, which takes place on a Tuesday as well as the small indoor arcade, which adds to the feeling of variety in the town, and the main shopping street in the town centre.

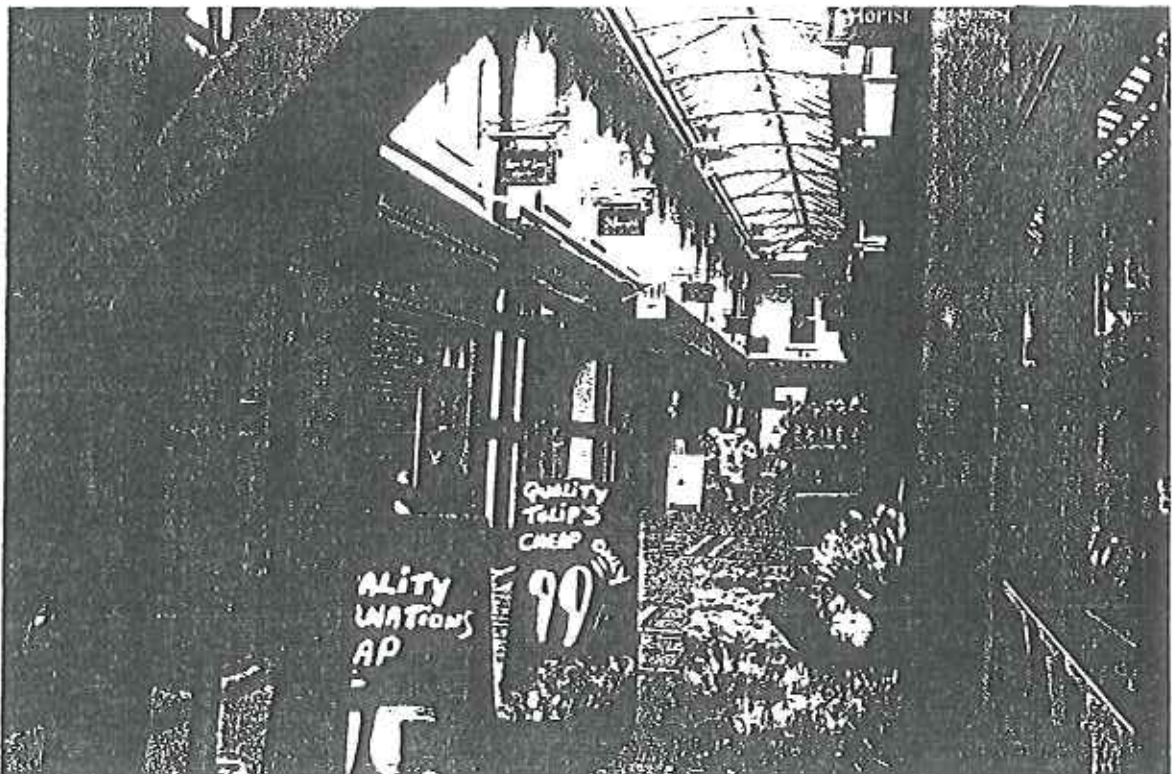
- (2) TESCO (ABERTILLERY)**
- Permitted by sequential test as edge-of-centre
 - Functions as an out-of-centre store
 - (a) Situated on main road
 - (b) No obvious route to town centre
 - (c) Route to centre dissected by main road
 - (d) Not visibly part of centre

The Tesco superstore at Abertillery is theoretically classed as an edge-of-centre development, although it seems to function more as an out-of-centre store. It is dependent on the car, situated as it is on the main road, with significant car parking. Although pedestrian routes to the superstore from Abertillery town centre exist, they are neither obvious nor convenient, and therefore linked trips seem less likely to occur than would be the case if it were in a genuine edge-of-centre location. Free bus trips from Blaina to the store impact upon the vitality and viability its town centre.

Abertillery Town Market



Abertillery Indoor Arcade

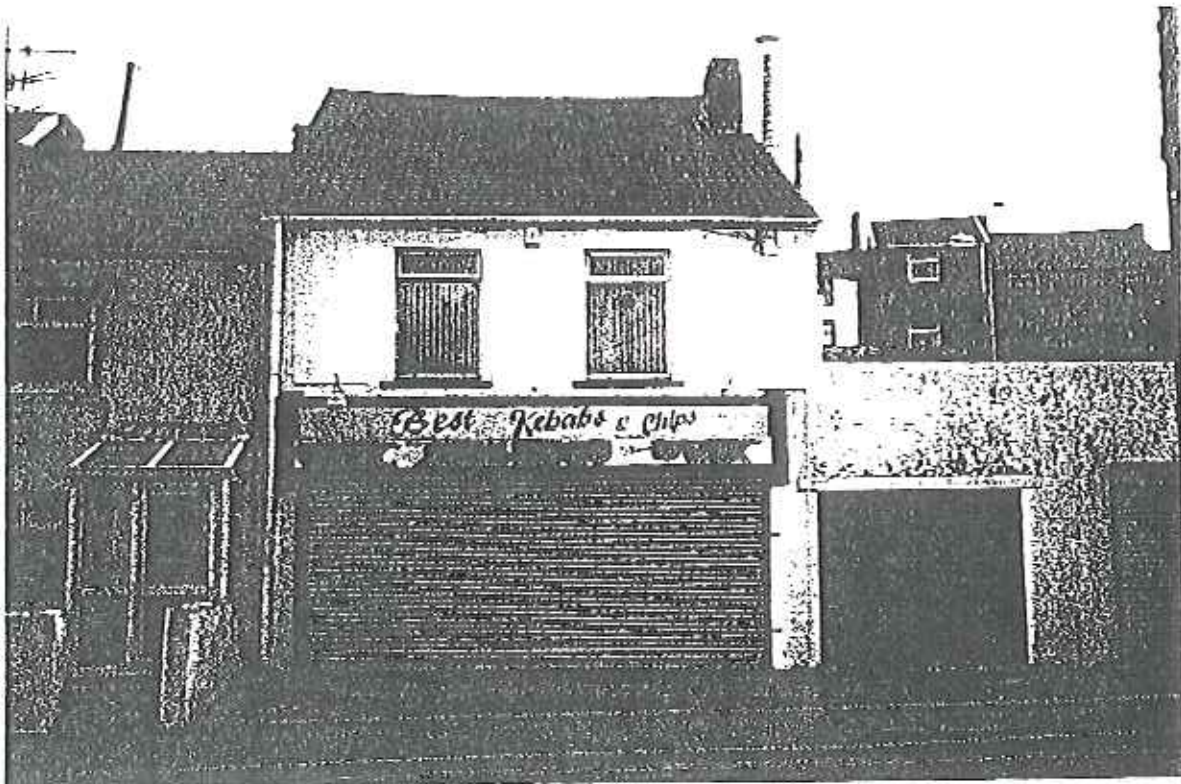


(3) NANTYGLO

- Few shops of only local significance
- Some vacant premises
- Evidence that shop units have been converted to housing
- No town centre in existence any more

Nantyglo poses no threat to Blaina town centre, since no notable shopping opportunities exist currently in Nantyglo. It formerly had shopping units which have been converted into housing, with all but a few exceptions, as shown in a later section. Other units are vacant, and are likely to have a similar fate (see photograph below). The next section will deal with Nantyglo in more detail.

Vacant Shop Unit in Nantyglo

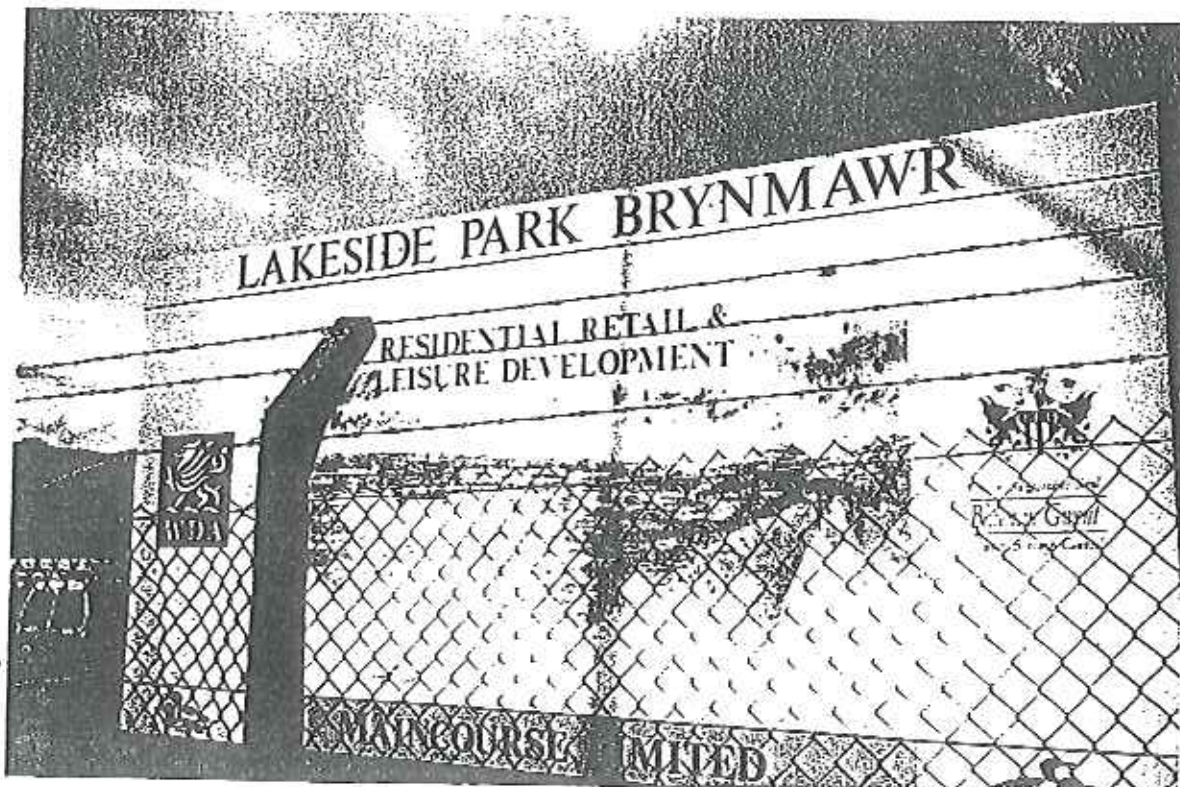


(4) BRYNMAWR TOWN CENTRE

- Very few multiples including New Look
- Three high street banks
- Town centre supermarkets: Somerfield and Kwik Save
- Town centre cinema
- New leisure/retail/residential waterside development adjacent to town centre on Nantyglo side

Although multiple retailers are few and far between in Brynmawr, the town centre seems to be thriving. The vacancy level seems lower than the other centres in this study, and the town centre is attractive and in a good state of repair. The town itself is small, therefore one must assume that much of the trade comes from elsewhere. It is situated on a natural crossroads, and may also have taken the majority of the Nantyglo catchment, since the towns are almost walking distance apart. The major new retail, office and residential development (see photograph below), which is under construction on the site of the old Dunlop Semtex factory (in actual fact within the boundary of Nantyglo), threatens to totally eclipse a smaller town centre such as Blaina. It will cost some £35 million to build, and will open in approximately seven years. The key, perhaps, is to ensure that Blaina is robust enough as a town centre to be in a position to survive this new threat to its existence.

Dunlop Semtex Development



(5) FESTIVAL PARK

- Partially covered shopping development
- Out-of-town location
- Large amounts of car parking and bus services
- Over 40 comparison retail outlets
- Multiple retailers include Designer Room, Claire's Accessories, Edinburgh Woollen Mill and Birthdays
- Restaurant and garden centre

Festival Park, near Ebbw Vale, is well known, both as a shopping centre and an attraction in itself. Its situation is attractive, and, although it is the furthest of the centres in this study from Blaina, its many advantages mean that it may well be a contributing factor to the problems being experienced by the town. It has free car parking and is served regularly by buses. The emphasis is on shopping as a leisure activity, hence the existence of a restaurant, and visitor attractions include 70 acres of parkland and a train ride.

(6) EBBW VALE TOWN CENTRE

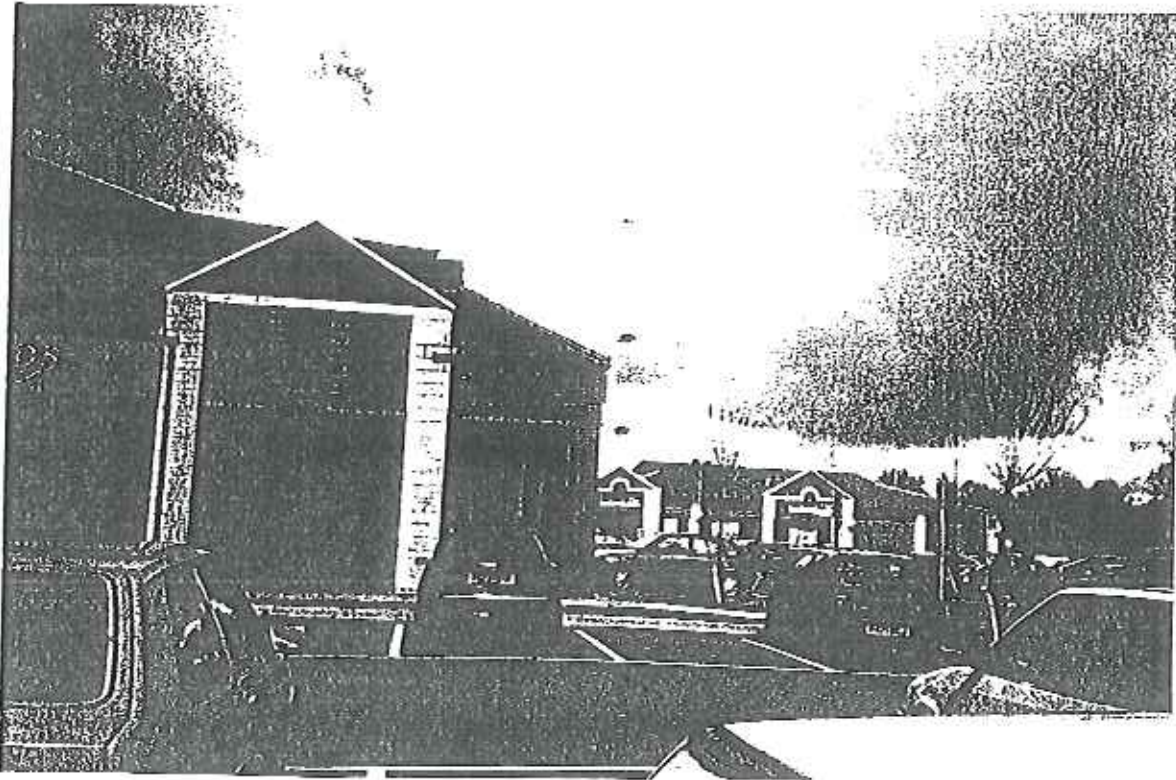
- Large range of multiple retailers includes Argos, New Look, B-Wise, Shoefayre and Poundstretcher
- Four high street banks
- Town centre supermarkets: Kwik Save, Iceland and Aldi
- Town centre McDonalds
- Indoor market
- Multi-storey car park

Ebbw Vale is the largest of the towns in Blaenau Gwent, and as such has the most extensive town centre, with a wide range of multiple retailers. Arguably it impacts less on Blaina than Brynmawr and Abertillery, yet it has facilities that these towns do not. An example is the McDonalds restaurant in the town centre: people can travel significant distances to visit a McDonalds. In addition, there is a modern shopping complex with associated car parking in the town centre, which includes Iceland and Argos (see photograph overleaf) and a discount Aldi foodstore. However, there is some vacancy in the older parts of the town centre, and the general impression is of a town which is surviving, rather than thriving.

Ebbw Vale Town Centre



New Retail Development – Ebbw Vale Town Centre



(7) TESCO (EBBW VALE)

- Out-of-centre location
- Easy access from main road
- Large amount of car parking

The Tesco superstore in Ebbw Vale is more obviously out-of-centre than that in Abertillery, with easy and convenient access from the main road. Whether this superstore impacts heavily upon Blaina is unclear: it is likely that the Abertillery store is a greater threat.

(8) OUT-OF-TOWN RETAIL UNITS

- Multiples are Focus Do-It-All and Petsworld
- Co-operative supermarket
- Adequate car parking
- Easy access from main road

The two retail warehouse units to the north of Ebbw Vale provide a range of goods which are not catered for in Blaina town centre, and therefore are unlikely to compete heavily. Again, the superstore (Co-operative) is perceived as less of a threat than the Abertillery Tesco.

The Spectre of Nantyglo

The threats which have been considered previously are already having a significant impact on Blaina town centre. An examination of Nantyglo town centre offers a salutary lesson of the dangers of no action being taken in Blaina. Currently, what can be classed as the high street of Nantyglo contains only general stores selling a small range of convenience goods, along with a post office. These are services which befit much less populous villages than Nantyglo (a town with a population of between 4 and 5 000), and one suspects that this has been down to the strength, particularly, of Brynmawr as a retail centre. However, this has not always been the case, as the photograph shows. Many of the houses on the high street have obviously been converted from commercial premises, as the large front windows and the space for signs above the doors indicate. Nantyglo is a town centre which has become a suburb. Exactly the same process is occurring in Blaina, albeit at a much less advanced stage, with some vacant shops being converted to residential. If no action is taken, it seems that Blaina, in all probability, will suffer the same fate. Therefore it is imperative to halt this trend as soon as possible.

Nantyglo Residential Units – Previously Retail Units



1.4 Planning Context

Unitary Development Plan Policies

The following section outlines policies from the County Borough Council of Blaenau Gwent Unitary Development Plan, which runs from 2000 to 2011, insofar as these are applicable to the possibility of a Chartist Visitor Centre being established, or illustrate threats which is posed to the town of Blaina by the plan.

Town Centres

BACKGROUND

Over 10,000 sq metres of retail and commercial uses are planned for the towns posing an immediate threat to Blaina (Abertillery, Ebbw Vale and Brynmawr), of which the 1,299 sq m planned for the former Dunlop Semtex factory are deemed to most pertinent. 'The high vacancy rates within the towns are not unsurprising [sic] given the problems facing the area... Despite the works undertaken to the town centres, there is a risk that these areas could continue to decline in the face of competition from nearby retail centres... the impact upon existing centres could be continued decline leaving less mobile people with less choice. Therefore future provision will place great emphasis on strengthening and enhancing the role and attractiveness of the town centres.'

S2: TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT

The improvement of the viability, vitality, quality and environment of the five central shopping areas of Abertillery, Blaina, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar.

S3: TOWN CENTRE USES

Within the defined central shopping areas defined on the proposals map for Abertillery, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar, the following uses will be permitted, subject to the effect on local amenity and highway safety: retail; professional and financial services; entertainment and leisure. Proposals for the change of use of the ground floor of premises to residential use within central shopping area will not be permitted. [Note the absence of Blaina from this clause: deliberate or accidental? Either way, it does not deal sufficiently with the threat of the suburbanisation of the centre]

S13: NON-CONFORMING USES

Proposals to develop, extend or intensify unsympathetic non-conforming commercial uses within or in close proximity to existing or proposed residential areas will not be permitted. With regard to establishing non-conforming uses, any further deterioration in the situation, arising out of the introduction of even less compatible uses, will not be permitted. *Proposals which would improve the situation will be permitted.*

Environment

EN7: LISTED BUILDINGS

Development which preserves and, where possible, enhances the internal and external structure and settings of listed buildings will be permitted.

Recreation, Leisure and Tourism

R2: LEISURE, RECREATIONAL AND TOURISM FACILITIES WITHIN THE DEFINED URBAN AREA

Proposals for the development of new or existing leisure, recreational or tourism facilities within the urban area as defined on the proposals map will be permitted provided that the scale, intensity, and extent would not result in an unacceptable detrimental impact upon the character or appearance of the locality.

From the UDP Draft Proposals Map (March 1999)

The map shows that:

- the eastern side of the Blaina 'urban area' is occupied by two large housing sites, one committed, one proposed
- new housing development is committed for the northern end of the High Street
- new housing development is committed for the eastern boundary of the Blaina 'urban area', with a larger housing proposal adjacent
- there are two proposals for industrial use and one commitment, between Blaina and Nantyglo
- apart from this new housing and industrial land, there are no other proposals of land use apart from one site designated as play area provision

Recent Developments

The most evident recent developments within the town have been directed towards environmental improvements on the high street. New paving is being laid (replacing paving which was only laid six years ago), and there are new bins and pedestrian signposts. This is all in addition to the new free car park, which has already been mentioned on several occasions. Some public consultation has been behind these environmental improvements, but this has been of a limited scale. Funding for these improvements has been secured through the European Union's Structural Funds (under Objective 2).

What is most striking about such environmental improvements (with the exception of the car park) is that, whilst a pleasant shopping atmosphere has been created, there is absolutely no influence on the viability of businesses located in the town centre. Funding has been provided in completely the wrong direction, where what is needed is a scheme to help provide the facilities in the town centre which are needed to bring back trade.

Environmental improvements should be supplementary to, not a replacement for, these types of strategy.

Recent and Current Planning Applications

Unsurprisingly, given the situation outlined here, applications for new commercial premises in the town centre are rare. The only current development is the provision of a cafe and restaurant facility on the high street, expanding from an existing takeaway use, which is under construction. Other applications relating to the high street are mostly to convert premises which are currently commercial units or vacant former commercial units into dwellings. The danger of this taking place is evident from the example of Nantyglo, and for this reason such applications tend to be opposed by the Town Council.

Other applications relevant to the high street involve introducing town centre retail uses into the industrial estate, which is away from the town centre. This would have the result of drawing trade from the centre, unless it was able to claw back trade which currently shops in other towns. In any case, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council believes that such developments have insufficient access for the general public.

1.5 The Chartists

'On the morning of November 4th 1839, soldiers of the 45th regiment killed more than twenty Chartists and wounded many more at and in the area around the Westgate Hotel, Newport' (Wybron, 1989: 3). This was the tragedy which has become most associated with the movement of Chartism within the South Wales region, and was the result of a march by Chartists from the valleys of Monmouthshire, intended merely as a demonstration. This section will briefly outline the context of this event as far as Chartism is concerned, and will emphasise the link to Blaina and Nantyglo in Chartist history.

Chartism was not merely confined to Wales, rather it was a movement which encompassed most of Great Britain. The National Charter Association was formed in May 1838 by groups such as the London Working Men's Association and the Birmingham Political Union, and demanded six reforms:

- (1) Manhood suffrage
- (2) Equal electoral districts
- (3) Annual parliaments
- (4) Vote by ballot
- (5) Abolition of the property qualification for election to parliament
- (6) Payment to members of parliament (Wybron, 1989)

Its petition, handed in to parliament in July 1839, was rejected (*ibid.*), and this led to a depth of ill feeling amongst Chartist members. Although there was some Chartist violence elsewhere after that in Newport, the Chartism movement effectively ended in 1858 (Jones, 1975).

Chartism struck a chord in the Welsh valleys, where overcrowding was rife and there was a history of political unrest and proactive political action. There had, for instance, been a strike in Nantyglo in 1822 over a proposal to reduce wages, and there had also been the Merthyr Riots in 1831 (Williams, 1959). A Chartist lodge, amongst the first in the area, was established at Blaina around Christmas of 1838 (Jones, 1999). After this time, it was almost impossible for Blaina's miners to work without having signed the petition (*ibid.*). Much of Blaina and Nantyglo's part in the Chartist movement centres around the character of Zepheniah Williams, and his public house, the Royal Oak at Nantyglo. He had come to Nantyglo from Sirhowy, and eventually came to be recognised as the Chartist leader within the valleys (Wybron, 1989). The Royal Oak held a number of meetings with wider significance for the area as a whole. Indeed, 'most people seemed agreed that the Blaina assembly on 3 October, and the secret meeting immediately afterwards in the Royal Oak, were the most significant of the period. After them revolution was probable rather than possible' (Jones, 1999: 100). Other Chartist leaders at the time were John Frost, the former mayor of Newport, Henry Vincent, the representative from the national association, and the Pontypool leader, William Jones.

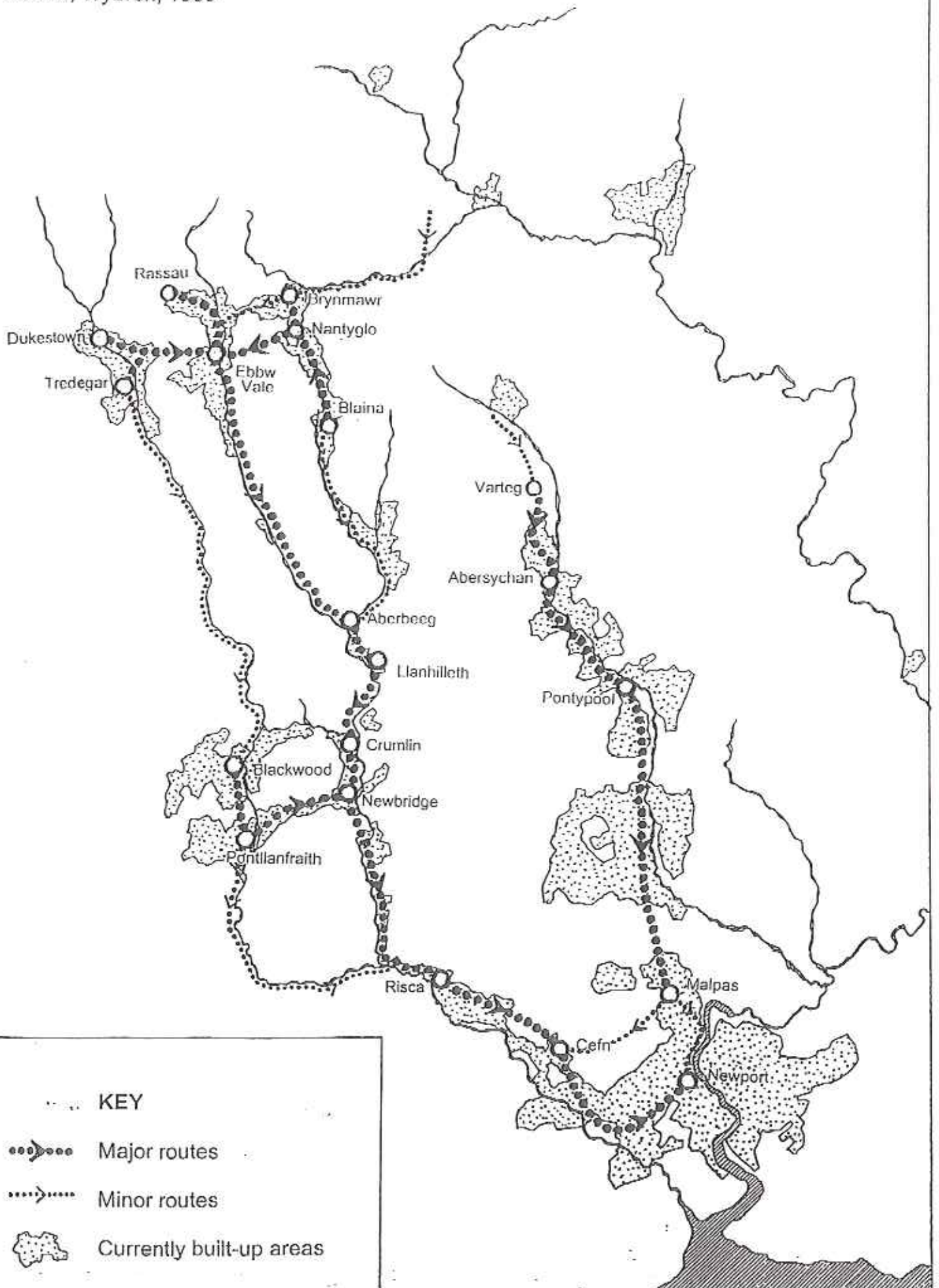
The route of the march on Newport is shown in the map. The contingent from Nantyglo and Blaina left from the Royal Oak at 6 pm. The 200-strong group

were to meet two miles away at Mynydd Carn-y-Cefn (Wybron, 1989). Led by Williams, this contingent have been described as 'particularly riotous' at this stage (Williams, 1959: 237). The Chartists arrived at the Westgate Hotel at 9.30 am, and the conflict lasted 25 minutes. In it, at least ten Blaenau Gwent men were killed, including Abraham Thomas of Nantyglo and John the Roller of Nantyglo and Blaina (Wybron, 1989).

The result was that the three leaders (Williams, Jones and Frost) were transported to Australia (*ibid.*). Blaina also played a role in the aftermath, it being one of the locations for the examinations of the rank and file Chartists (Jones, 1999). It is therefore clear that Blaina and Nantyglo, albeit alongside many other towns in the locality, have a genuine claim on the history of the Chartists, and would be entirely justified in commemorating their legacy.

Chartist routes in Gwent, November 1839

Source; Wybron, 1989



2. Surveys

2.1 Land-use Survey

Methodology

The purpose of undertaking a land use survey of the high street of Blaina is to assess the diversity of uses which exist in the town, analyse the distribution of facilities within the town centre, and identify any dangers posed by identifiable trends. In addition, it allows the amount of vacancy to be assessed, and will inform the potential location of the Chartist visitor centre. The survey of the upper floors has not been undertaken by a thorough investigation of ownership and use, rather has been a result of a walk through the high street, attempting to identify uses externally. For this reason, the upper floor surveys are open to some mistakes. This should not undermine the general findings of the survey

Results

Blaina town centre has all of the basic facilities which exist in a centre of local significance: a post office, pharmacy, hairdresser, bookmaker, butcher and newsagent. In addition to this, there is a handful of comparison retail outlets, meaning clothes shops, shoe shops etc. Such comparison retailing, however, by its very nature, can only thrive where a selection of such shops exists, necessitating a larger town centre. Here, there is no overlap in the range of goods supplied between the comparison outlets, and therefore shopping for such goods in Blaina is undermined.

The vacancy rate in Blaina high street is phenomenal: the number of vacant premises almost equals the total occupied retail outlets, and this is not including those vacant units which have since been converted to housing in the high street. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that vacancy seems to have clustered at the Southern end of the centre, with a particular concentration on the Eastern side of the street. Thus, visitors to the town from this end are likely to gain a negative first impression of the town. This also has the effect that the spatial boundaries of the town centre are contracting, isolating vital town centre facilities such as the library and hotel at the Southern end of the street.

The problem is yet more noticeable when one considers the quantity of dwelling houses which exist on the High Street, often in key commercial locations, which are the result of vacant premises being converted into housing. Although most examples of this are on the edge of the High Street, there are some such units which are in the very heart of the town centre. Many towns do encourage housing into the town centre as part of a larger regeneration strategy, since this aids a greater diversity of uses and means that there is life in a town centre after shops close, but these are usually above commercial premises. Housing in a town centre must not be allowed to replace the core uses of a town centre. The Town Council recognises this, and therefore objects to planning applications to turn vacant units into

housing, but this cannot stem the tide indefinitely, and this is one of the key trends which must be reversed by the strategy for Blaina.

First floor and second floor uses are mostly used for residential purposes (although some of these apparently residential premises may in actual fact be unoccupied). Echoing the pattern of the ground floor map, the majority of vacant upper floors again fall at the Southern end of the High Street. In addition, a handful of the retailers use upper floors as a store for their goods, and there seems to be a single office in one unit.

Therefore, on the basis of evidence provided by the land use survey, there are two worrying trends which characterise the High Street of Blaina. Firstly, there is the retraction of the town centre from the South with the vacancy of a vast majority of commercial units at this end. This makes for a dead part of the centre, increasingly detached from facilities such as the library and hotel. Secondly, the centre is becoming less concentrated and is losing its retail character through the emergence of houses in vacant units.

2.2 Questionnaire Survey

Methodology

Research by questionnaire survey was undertaken during the town's main shopping day, Tuesday, between the hours of 9:30 and 13:30. All shopkeepers along the High Street were interviewed; half the members of the general public were questioned outside the Co-op, with the other half were questioned at other varying points of the High Street. Most respondents were keen to talk, but low morale was pervasive amongst respondents; many shopkeepers were on the verge of tears as they were questioned.

Copies of both questionnaires, those to town centre users, and those to shopkeepers and businesses, are included as an appendix to this report. The questionnaires were designed to gauge the general perception of the town's health amongst people who lived and worked there. The main focus of the questionnaires were to discover what the town knew of its Chartist history, and whether there would be support for either a change in opening hours, or for a visitor attraction. In addition, the questions were designed to draw out any ideas for future strategies, as well as finding out what the positives and negatives of Blaina and its town centre are.

A Chartist Centre

- Awareness of the Chartists is disappointingly low, with only 54% of all respondents admitting knowledge of the movement.
- Twice as many members of the general public had heard of the Chartists as had not, but among shopkeepers, a majority had not heard of them.
- Support for a tourist attraction amongst the general public ranged from 53% positive, both qualified and unqualified, to 47% negative, both qualified and unqualified. Amongst shopkeepers, the figures are the same.

Shopping

- There was no evidence that anyone from outside Blaina and Nantyglo shops there.
- Most shopping done in the town consists of meeting basic needs at the Co-op, the newsagent and the Post Office.
- Four times as many respondents would use the shopping facilities if they improved than would not.
- Over half the shopkeepers interviewed had been open for over 10 years, and some for over 20 years.
- A third of shopkeepers are happy with the state of their business, a third are not, while for the remaining third, business 'varies' or is 'so-so.'
- A third of shopkeepers see no future for their business in Blaina; the remaining two thirds do, but with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

What everyone wants

- Morale is as downbeat as the atmosphere in the town: when members of the public were asked what they liked about the town, almost twice as many people said "nothing" as other factors (eg friendliness) put together; and many respondents thought that Blaina had no potential for the future.
- Shopkeepers were even more negative here: of all 15 shopkeepers questioned, 14 declared that the town had no potential, while 1 stated that things were improving.
- Everyone in the town was united when asked what town needed: nearly all respondents, shopkeepers and members of the public alike, mentioned the need for a leisure centre or "something for youngsters", to keep them occupied and try and reduce the oft-mentioned culture of crime, vandalism and yobbism in the town. This was the overwhelming verdict of shopkeepers, for whom other less frequently expressed concerns included the lack of incentives for traders and the poor general appearance of the town. But some expressed concern that whatever was built would be vandalised immediately.
- Only the need for a better range of shopping and services was given greater priority by members of the public, who also mentioned parking and traffic management in the town as a problem.

3. The Proposed Chartist Centre

3.1 Chartist Centre Building Options

The development of a Chartist centre in Blaina is seen by the Local Authority as being core to the regeneration of Blaina as a whole. The brief involved the identification of a suitable building for locating a Chartist centre.

While the only requirement is that the building is suitable for a Chartist centre it would be advantageous if the building was flexible so as to permit a multi-use building. A multi-purpose building would allow the heritage centre to be located in the same building. It would also allow for additional possibilities such as the inclusion of a coffee shop, tourist information centre, walkers information centre or such like. Allowing for a coffee shop would also be of benefit for the long term security of the centre. The coffee shop would be run by an outside operator who would pay rent. This would help finance the centre in the longer term.

The Local Authority presented six main building options and a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis was carried out on each building. The group recommendations were then based on the SWOT analysis findings.

The results of the SWOT analysis and the group recommendations are shown below:

Option 1: The Kings Head

The building was previously used as a public house, known as the Kings Head. This building is located to the north of the main shopping street and is currently vacant. A number of key issues exist in relation to the location of the Kings Head. The site is the most northerly of all the options presented, this offers great potential for the building as a northerly 'gateway'. It would be the first building seen when the town is entered from the north and as such would be in a position to offer a positive first impression of the town. In addition to this the location to the north of the town makes access to the car park good. The building is of such a size that it would be suitable as a multi-use building with space available for a heritage centre and coffee shop.

The Kings Head does, however, have disadvantages. The structural condition of the building is questionable and as such the cost of refurbishment would have to consider this fact. The cost of acquiring this property may also be a disadvantage. The owner of this particular building is a prospective buyer and intends to maximise his profit on the sale price. These two issues combined lead to the conclusion that the Kings Head would probably be the most expensive to acquire and refurbish. Additional problems are associated with the location of the building. While its location to the north of the town

does offer potential, as mentioned above, it is far from ideal from the perspective of the rest of the town. The car park is close to the Kings Head so potential visitors could easily enter the town from the north, park their cars, visit the centre, then leave without ever seeing any other part of the town. The result of this is that locating the centre in this building would have the least benefits for the remainder of the town with local businesses gaining no passing trade from the new visitors to the town. Linked to the location of the building is the fact that not only would the location of the building have limited benefits on the shops in the town, the possibility also exists that it could actually have a negative impact on the south of the town. The South of the town is already the weakest and the combination of the existing anchor tenant, the Co-op, to the north, with the new centre could result in an even greater focus on the north of the town by shop keepers, shoppers and visitors alike. Businesses may locate or relocate to the north of the town to take advantage of what would be seen as the core of Blaina.

SWOT Analysis of the Kings Head

Strengths	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prominent Building - Large premises - Strong corner position - Close to parking facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ownership issues - Quiet end of town - On periphery, away from centre - Poor aesthetic appearance - Outside town boundary - Low footfall - Distance from main shopping area – limited pedestrian flow - Structural condition of building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Gateway' building - Strengthen area that is becoming increasingly residential - Availability of space for heritage centre, coffee shop etc - Objective 2 commercial improvement grant possibility - Objective 1 funding – community regeneration for inclusive facility - Communities First funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would further weaken South of town

Option 2: Nicklins

Nicklins is located to the south of the main street. It is the most southerly site of those studies and it is currently available on the market for a substantially reduced price. The site is located in a highly visual position and is ideally located to act as a southerly 'gateway' building. Connected to this is bus route which currently enters the town to the south and in this circumstance further enhances the role as a southerly 'gateway' building. With the south of the of the main shopping street being weaker end of town, Nicklins is in an ideal position to strengthen the southerly end. In addition to this the building is currently bordered by the memorial garden and this provides great potential

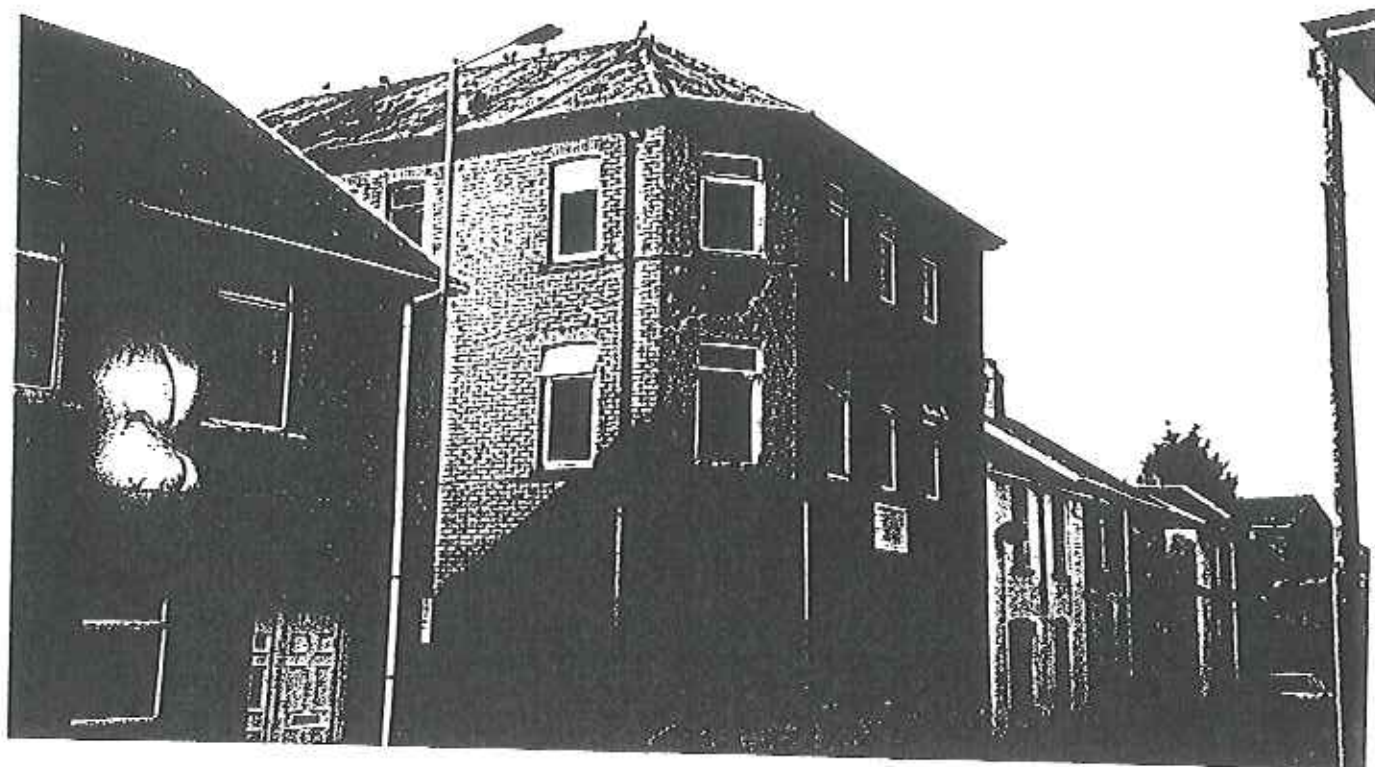
for the strengthening of the public realm in this area. Connected to the location is the potential for this building to act as an anchor for a leisure core for Blaina. The building is located close to a new hotel and bar development and also close to the library/drop in centre: if these existing facilities are considered with the potential Chartist/Heritage/Tourist/Walkers/Youth centre then the possibility clearly exists for a leisure core for the town. The final location advantage is that it is the opposite end of town to the car park. While this may seem to be a disadvantage it actually offers the potential for the new development to be of benefit to the existing traders in the town. Visitors will either be required to enter the town from the north, park in the north and walk south, or enter to the south, drive to the north, park, then retrace their steps. Both these possibilities require the visitor to walk down the main shopping street, offering the possibility for local traders to attract passing trade from the visitors.

The building itself is of considerable size and this would provide opportunity for a mixed use development that could include a coffee shop, heritage centre and tourist information/walkers information centre. The building is laid out in such a way as to allow the building to be highly flexible providing the opportunity for office space and storage capacity. Additional potential relating to the size of this building exists in the potential for the warehouse to be used as a location for the proposed youth centre which is discussed in greater depth later. The building offers considerable strengths including the large display windows available, the existing provision of central heating, and the existing driveway which adds to the flexibility of this particular building. One final strength remains and it is a significant one. The building is currently available at a significantly reduced price making this building good value. Connected to this is the fact that this building is available as a freehold. These facts combine mean that this building offers long term stability and potential for Blaina.

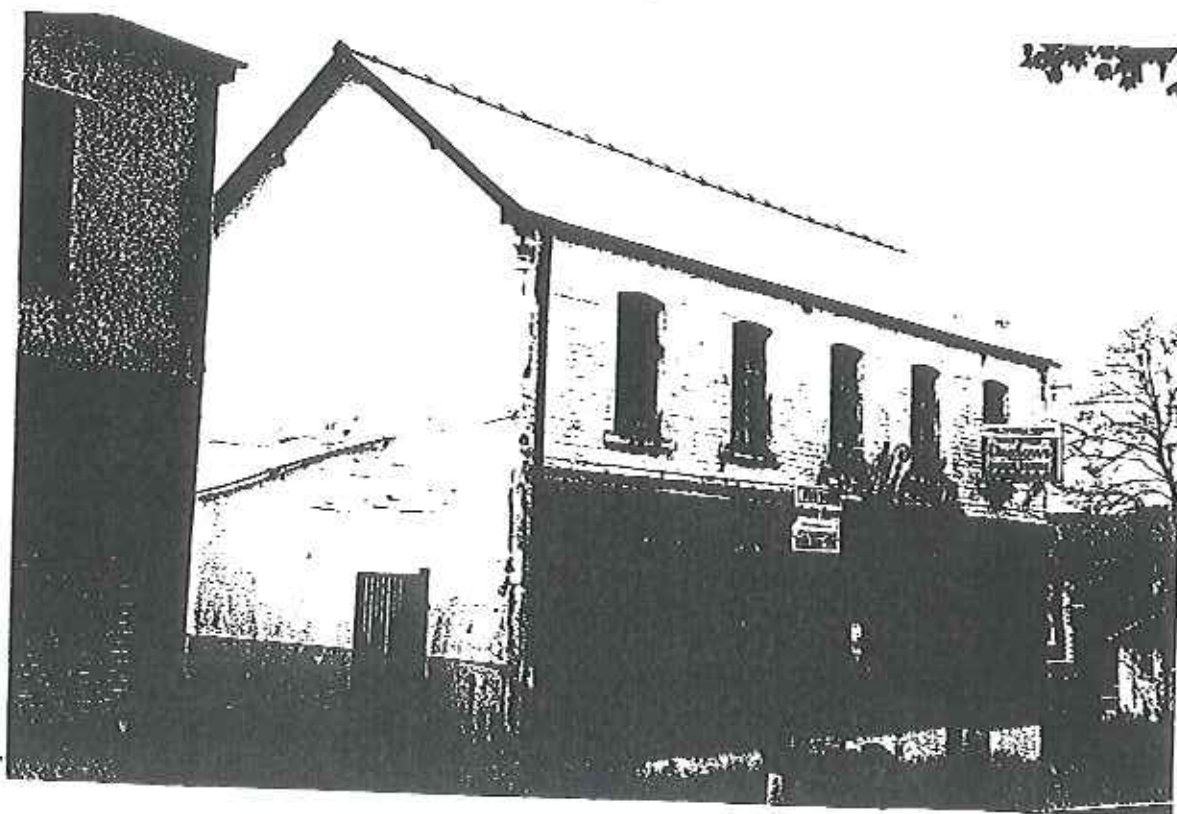
However, this is not to say that this building is problem free. The building is currently in a questionable condition. Some areas appear to be in good condition but other parts of the building are clearly in need of major investment and renovation. Addition costs may exist if the need exists to alter the internal layout, which is currently based around a number of smaller rooms. While this does offer potential for great flexibility it may be restrictive for large displays and some internal modifications may be required. Both these costs must be considered in addition to the purchase cost, leading to a potentially higher cost being associated with this building.

Threats also exist to the potential of this building. While the proximity to a public house has tourist and leisure advantages, issues relating to late night disorder must be considered. In addition to this the southerly location may not be as ideal as it appear as the vacant shops further up the main street have the potential to act as a barrier to entry, preventing people walking down to the centre. Finally a significant problem exists with the illegal tenants currently residing in the warehouse to the rear. This offers a threat to process of the acquiring of this building.

Kings Head



Nicklins



SWOT Analysis of Nicklins

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing bus route into town, stimulates view - Greatest floor space – would allow multiple uses - Proximity to hotel and public house – leisure core - Strategic view of valley - Property reduced in value - Large display potential - Availability of driveway - Central heating - Property freehold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal/External renovation costs - Possible internal wall removal cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to Strengthen south of town - Southern 'gateway' building - Parallel to memorial garden, enhances public realm - Creation of strategic view from Station Road/ St Peters Church - Proximity to existing shops – Would enhance vitality - Development of existing amenities - Use of warehouse as youth centre - Space for coffee shop - 1st floor use as offices - Space for heritage centre - Objective 2 commercial improvement grant possibility - Objective 1 funding – community regeneration for inclusive facility - Communities First funding - Car park location forces pedestrian flow through town centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proximity to public house – late night disorder? - Vacant shops acting as barrier to access - Current illegal tenants - Services not tested

Option 3: Salem Baptist Chapel

The Salem Baptist Chapel is the most central centrally located building. It is a Grade II listed structure and is currently still being used for worship. The location of this building offers many advantages. Being in the centre of the town offers the town the opportunity to focus its activities around the Chapel and create a real core to the town. The Chapel is in a relatively strong shopping area in the town and the development of the building offers the potential to further strengthen this area. Opposite the Chapel a new café/bar is opening and this offers the potential to provide a solid base for a tourist core with a 'holding' potential. The building itself is in excellent condition and would require minimal investment to ensure structural suitability for its new task. In addition to this the Chapel has a high aesthetic value that could be built upon. The Chapel has the potential to offer an attractive visitor attraction in the heart of Blaina.

The Chapel, however, has considerable weaknesses and threats to its potential as a visitor and information attraction. The most significant problem associated with the Chapel is that it has a current use. The Chapel remains in use as a place of worship and therefore the building would be required to retain its ability to act in such a role. This would place severe restrictions on the ability of the building to carry out either task effectively. The requirement to retain an area of worship could be worked around but such a situation would be far from ideal. The Chapel, while not small, is also not the largest property available and thus it would be limited in its ability to act as a multi-purpose building. It would not be as versatile as other buildings available and thus the potential that a new visitor attraction offers Blaina would be reduced. The shared ownership would also restrict opening hours of the centre and would also pose the risk of ownership conflict. Other issues relating to its use as a Chapel exist, such as the location of the Baptism pool. The display potential of the Chapel is also restricted both through a limited availability of display windows but also due to the conflicts of ownership.

The costs of the Salem Chapel should also not be underestimated. The insertion of a first floor would not be cheap. In addition the listed status and ownership by the church would restrict the redevelopment potential. The ownership of the building poses risks to the future certainty and availability of the centre while the conflicts of interest pose real risks.

A final weakness is associated with its location. Being in the core area the Chapel would be good for strengthening the north and centre of the town but would not help the south of the town. The south is already weak and the Chapel could actually act as a barrier with visitor not passing beyond it. This could, therefore, result in an adverse effect on the southerly end of the town.

If the Chapel was available in its entirety it would offer potential. It would be large enough to house a Chartist/heritage use and could house a coffee shop. In addition its location offers the potential to strengthen the core area of Blaina. However, the ownership and conflict of use offer significant restrictions to this building's potential and its listed status will restrict its redevelopment potential.

SWOT Analysis of the Salem Baptist Chapel

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most central location - In good condition - High aesthetic quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ownership/ shared usage issues - Cost of insertion of first floor - Limited space - Availability issues - Baptism pool location - Poor display potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close to new café/bar - Strengthen core area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listed status – could prevent some modifications - Future ownership disputes - Conflicts of interest - Consecrated land – restrict development + public opinion?

Option 4: St Peters Church

St Peters Church is located to the south west of the main shopping area of Blaina. It is currently in use as a Methodist church. The Church has great potential as a visitor attraction as it is a modern building in a good state of repair. It has its own grounds which offer pleasant surroundings and strong views of the valleys to the West of Blaina. The building itself is large enough to offer space for a Chartist/Heritage centre, possibly with enough room to provide a coffee shop. The Church would require minimal internal modifications and the overall cost of conversion to a visitor attraction would be low. The location of the Church also offers advantages. Like Nicklins, the Church has the ability to act as a 'gateway' building to the south of the town. This has the associated advantages of being on the bus route, forcing visitors to walk through the town from the car park, being close to the memorial garden, and being close to the new hotel/bar and library.

St Peters, however, is not problem free. Like the Salem Chapel there are ownership issues. While it is proposed that the visitor centre would share with the Church in the Salem Chapel, a different situation exists with St Peters. Here it is proposed that St Peters merges with another Church in the town and that the congregation vacates St Peters and move elsewhere. The problem with this is that this situation is far from guaranteed and as such the availability of this building is brought into serious doubt. While this is a key problem it is not the only problem.

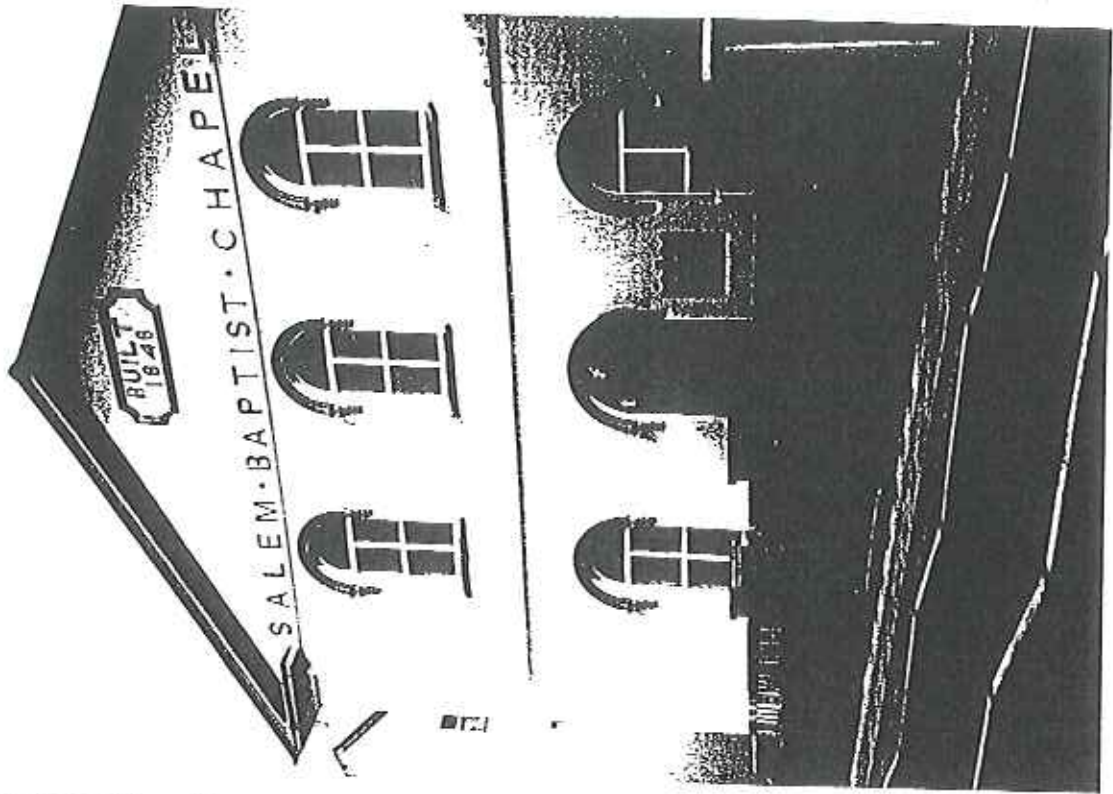
The location of St Peters is positive through being in the south but its location is far from ideal. It has low visibility from the main shopping street and poor accessibility. It is isolated and has limited scope for adaptability due to the land type. The building also has poor display potential and this is heightened by the building's isolation.

The key issue however, when considering St Peters, are the ownership issues. Ownership conflicts abound but the fundamental fact is that the very availability of this building is questionable.

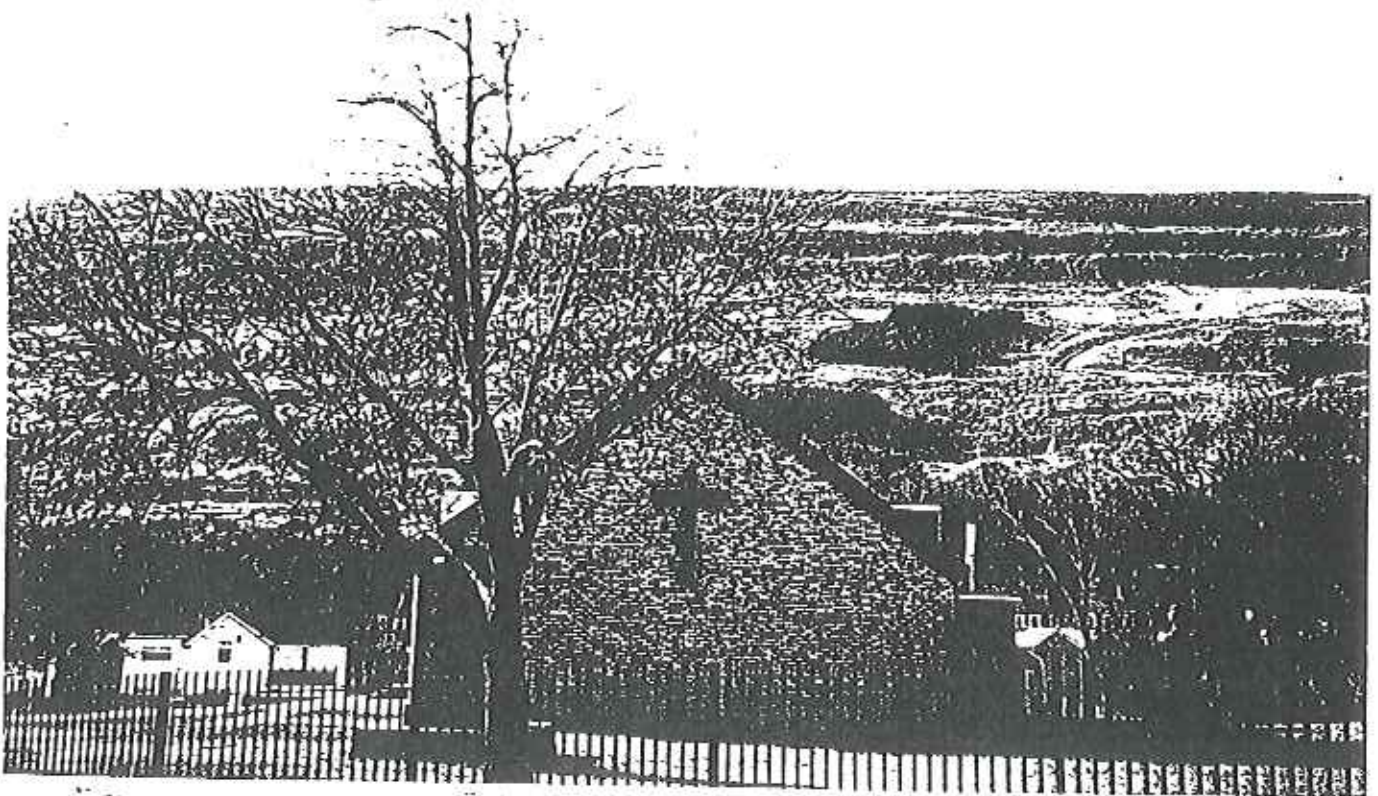
SWOT Analysis of St Peters Church

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good state of repair - Pleasant surrounding + views - Low cost of adaptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Isolated location - Poor accessibility - Limited space/ limited adaptability potential - Poor visibility from main shopping street - Poor display potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen south of town - Car park location forces pedestrian flow through town centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflicts of interest - Uncertain availability – dependant on church congregation merging - Consecrated land – restrict development + public opinion?

Salem Baptist Chapel



St Peters Church



Option 5: PVC Windows workshop

The PVC window shop is located in the centre of Blaina, slightly to the north of the geographical core. The building is currently in use as a PVC window workshop. The main advantage of the workshop is its central location. This offers the potential to strengthen the main shopping area of Blaina. In addition the workshop appears to be of good size and as such offers the potential to offer a multi-use capacity. However, this building has major disadvantages associated with it.

The building is aesthetically very poor and is of questionable condition. The redevelopment of this building would undoubtedly have major costs associated with it and has poor access. The building appears to be generally unsuitable for conversion with poor display potential and a generally unattractive and difficult to redevelop exterior. The building also poses a threat to the south of the town in the same way as the Salem Baptist Chapel does.

The major issue relating to this building, however, is the ownership of it. This building currently has a valid use and its availability is seriously questionable. The building does not appear particularly suitable for redevelopment and any redevelopment potential it does have would undoubtedly be costly.

SWOT Analysis of the PVC Workshop

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Central location- Of a good size	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Poor aesthetics- Cost of redevelopment- Has existing use- General unfeasibility- Poor access- Poor display potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strengthen central area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Availability- Threat to South of Town

Option 6: Council Building

The final building that has been considered for development into a visitor attraction is the Council building. This building is located to the north of the town and is currently used by the Council, although it does contain the Heritage centre for the town.

The building is in excellent condition and the proposal for this building would involve the redevelopment of the Council chamber into a Chartist centre. The Council building has its own parking available and is also close to the town car park. The building has good access, security and is well serviced. The Heritage centre is in situ and this offers the potential for an effective tie-in with

a new Chartist centre. The key opportunity for this building is that it has the potential to strengthen an area that is becoming increasingly residential.

However, there are problems associated with the development of this building into a Chartist centre. The building itself currently has a use and as such conflicts of interest are a very real threat to the suitability of this building. Its availability is questionable even when the low usage of the chamber is considered and the possibility of the centre impinging on Council duties should not be overlooked. The building is located to the north of the town and has an edge of town site, this location would be of little benefit to the remainder of the town as the centre could be visited without the town being seen. In addition its northerly location has the same potential as the old Kings Head to further weaken the already suffering southerly end of the town. The building also has poor aesthetics and has a stigma attached to it due to its main use as a council building.

Perhaps the main disadvantage of the Council building is the space available. The chamber room is not small but it would only have space for a Chartist centre. Considering the potential for the town of a visitor attraction the space restrictions would limit the centres potential benefits for the town.

SWOT Analysis of Council building

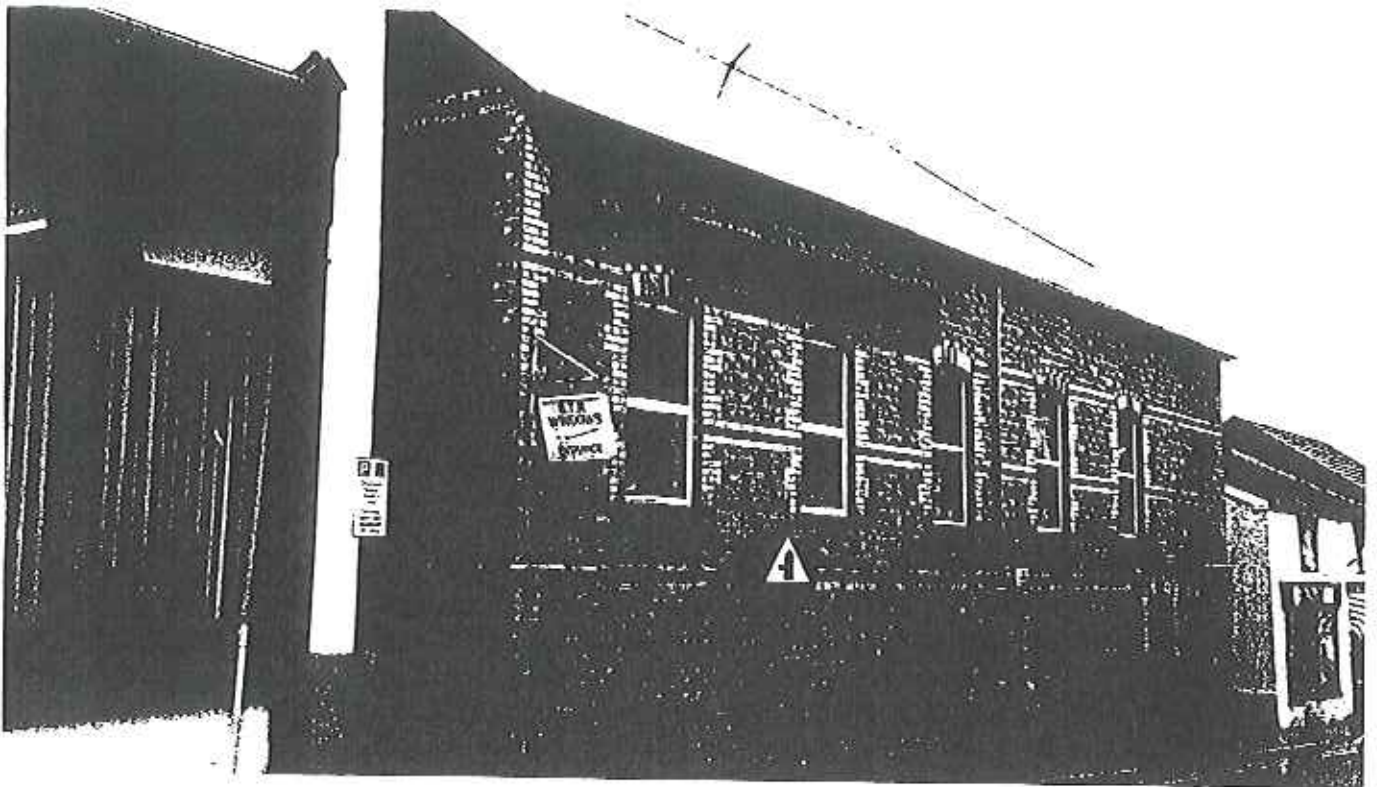
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standard of building - Servicing - Closeness to car park - Security - Has on site parking - Good access - Heritage centre in situ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Edge of town location - Space - Poor aesthetics - Has existing use - Stigma - Limited scope for adaptability/ diversification of use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen area that is becoming increasingly residential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further weaken south end of high street - Availability - Conflicts of interest - Conflicts of uses - Impingement on Council duties

Group Recommendations

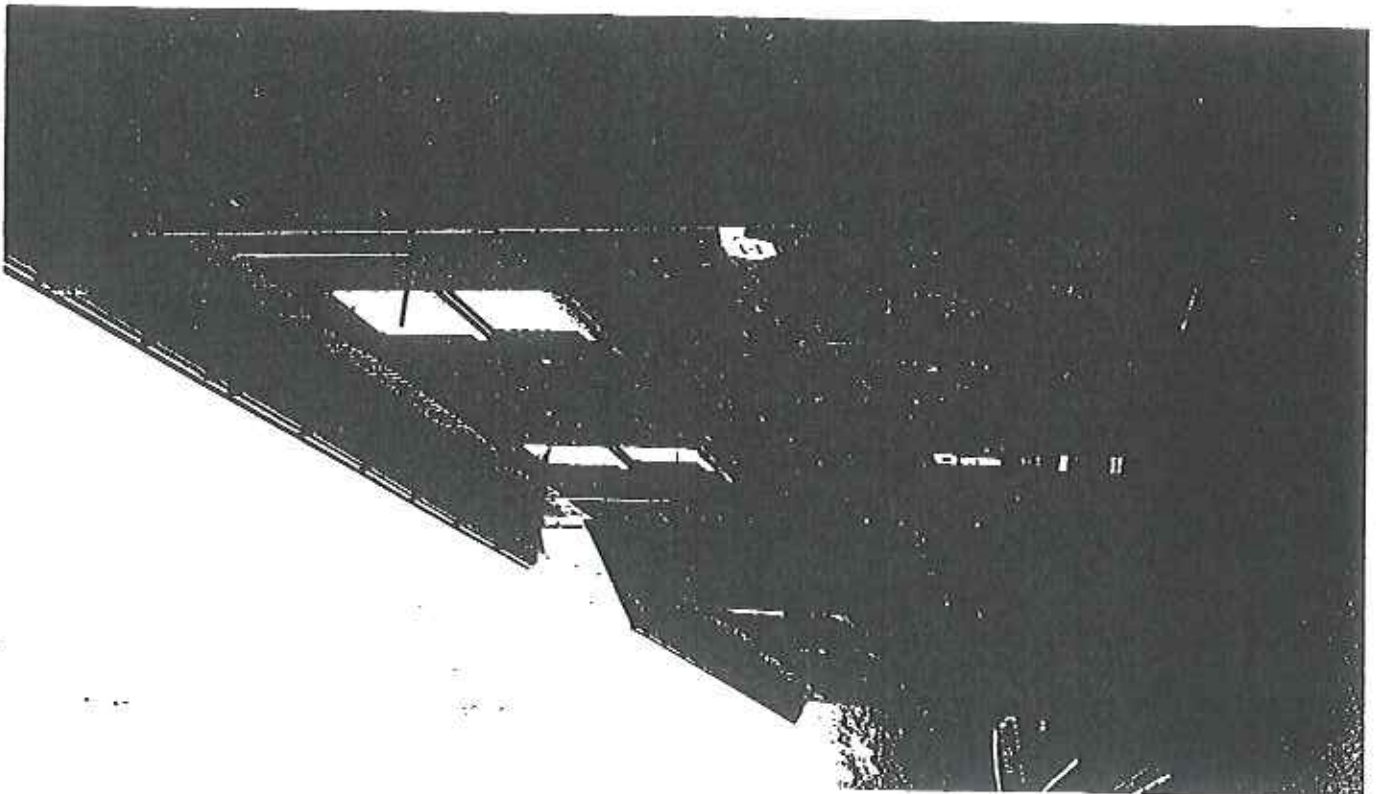
All the buildings discussed above have the potential to prove space for a new visitor attraction for Blaina. However, some clearly have greater scope than others.

The Salem Baptist Chapel has strengths such as its aesthetic value and central location, however, its ownership issues, development restrictions, and effect on the south prevent this building from being the group's recommendation. St Peters Church has strengths in being in the south of the town and being a building in good condition and requiring minimal modification make it suitable for use as a visitor centre, however, it has major questions relating to its availability and it is isolated and restricted in space. The PVC workshop has a central location and this has advantages, however,

PVC Windows Workshop



Council Building



this building has major disadvantages such as its availability, redevelopment potential, and general suitability for the task. The Council building has strengths in its current state of repair, parking facilities and access, however, this building also has ownership issues relating to it, it has the problem of being located in the north of the town with the associated impact on the south, and has major restrictions in the space available. The fundamental fact, however, when considering all the above buildings is that they all have current uses. Blaina is not short of vacant premises and it is surely foolhardy to use a building for a visitor attraction when it already has a valid use. The abundance of vacant and available buildings must mean that the centre should be located in a building that does not currently have a use. In that way the centre will only be adding to the town, not bringing benefits with an associated loss. Where a valid use exists it should remain. The greatest potential for Blaina must lie in the redevelopment of a building that is currently vacant. This leaves two main options. The old Kings Head public house and Nicklins.

The old Kings Head public house does offer real potential due to its space and northerly 'gateway' potential. However, the ownership issues, structural condition and threat to the south of the town make this a difficult option to recommend.

Nicklins does have issues that make it far from ideal such as the illegal tenants and the cost of redevelopment, however, its location is excellent and it is, unlike the majority of the other options, readily available. It is currently available at a much reduced cost and has sufficient space to accommodate all the uses that would make the ideal visitor attraction for Blaina. The building could include a coffee shop that would help finance the centre in the longer term and would also have sufficient space to allow for the heritage centre. This building has the potential to strengthen the south of the town and also act as both as southern 'gateway' and a southern anchor. Nicklins has the potential to create a strong southerly end to Blaina that can be linked to the currently central and northerly dominated shopping area. The site can be linked to the attractive memorial gardens and the end result could be an attractive and economically strong development area.

If funding becomes a major issue then Nicklins, whilst being the best building in the groups opinion, may not be available. In such a situation then the groups recommendations would be that the Council building be considered. In addition the Council building would be a possible option for the interim if funding is not available in the short term. The Council building would not require money for purchasing and would have minimal costs required for the alteration of the Council Chambers into a Chartist Centre. Clearly the Chambers are far from ideal being too small and having conflicts of interest associated with it. However, if funding is not available then it should be considered as an alternative.

4. Future Prospects for Blaina

4.1 The Future

Whilst the Chartist visitor centre was the initial idea that resulted in the production of this study, it is worth pointing out that it is not advisable to pin all hopes on one single solution. It may turn out that funding is not readily available enough for such a project, or that buildings are not available or suitable. Even if the idea comes to fruition, it will not be enough to regenerate Blaina entirely. Therefore, there need to be other ideas and strategies to act either as alternatives or as complements to the main Chartist centre idea. This next section outlines a number of options that have been considered to be applicable to Blaina. These are not intended to make for a comprehensive strategy: rather, design of strategy should be the subject of discussion of the group. However, these ideas should form a starting point and a topic of discussion. In addition, the next section contains an examination of funding mechanisms for the future, a section on how visitor centres are faring in other towns, and finally a section on how to draw out contribution from all corners of the community.

4.2 Future Options

Loyalty Card

It is recommended that Blaina's shopkeepers and other traders seriously consider the possibility of introducing a loyalty card in order to retain those who live in Blaina but shop elsewhere, and to halt decline. It should be noted that the notion of a loyalty scheme has already been discussed as an option for the town, but nothing has been implemented. However, as URBED (1998) notes '...though it can be difficult to generate enthusiasm among depressed retailers, there is no doubt that more is to be gained through collaboration than competition' (p12). A loyalty scheme could be part of a wider emphasis upon Blaina as a centre with a sense of community, which could be used against the new development at the Dunlop Semtex factory, for example.

It is widely believed that the first such town centre loyalty card was introduced in Leominster in March of 1996 (although in actual fact, earlier examples existed in, among other towns, Wilmslow and Havant), with an initial group of 30 retailers. This rose to a peak of 101 of the 120 town centre retailers becoming involved (Hallsworth and Worthington, 2000). Support was galvanised by the efforts of one man in particular, Graham Hurley, a butcher, who was charismatic enough, and had a good enough relationship with the local press, to enable the scheme to have some success (*ibid.*). There would, without a doubt, need to be someone in Blaina taking a strong lead on this issue. However, despite this there were still those who did not get involved in the Leominster scheme. In Blaina, due to the small amount of potential

participants, all retailers would need to be on board, otherwise the scheme would be seriously undermined and could not be effective.

Hallsworth and Worthington (*ibid.*) advise against grasping the loyalty card idea as a single solution to the problems of a town, stating that 'the greatest single pitfall is to assume that a single innovation such as a loyalty card can revive an ailing town' (p209) and that 'our view is that the best that can probably be expected for a town as a whole is that decline can be stabilised' (p211). However, stabilisation of decline is almost certainly the first step to improvements in Blaina, and combined with other regeneration initiatives, a loyalty card could provide a formidable tool for change. URBED (1998) notes that there has, in general, been an increase in turnover for retailers in towns which have experimented with loyalty cards, particularly where the rewards are most innovative. In Leominster, annualised footfall in the town centre increased by 10% (the average previously had been 2%), indicating a certain level of success (Hallsworth and Worthington, 2000).

There is a wide range of possible rewards which can be offered to subscribers to a loyalty scheme, apart from the obvious discounts on purchases. These may include offering entry in a free prize draw, reductions in bus fares into Blaina, or offers of building up points to get discounts on further purchases. There is plenty of scope for innovation. The scheme could be accompanied by a sticker or poster campaign with a memorable slogan, and the local media should be involved in order to promote interest in the local area. The loyalty card need not be particularly technologically advanced, particularly since there are not the resources in Blaina to manage a complex computerised system, but can simply be a piece of card. However, it may be worthwhile devising a method of retaining information about cardholders for future marketing purposes (*ibid.*), as is the case with supermarket loyalty cards.

Chartist Trail

The basis of this idea is the supposition made by URBED (1998) that, in order for a town to successfully establish itself as a tourist destination, it would need enough attractions to entertain tourists for at least half a day. It is unlikely that a Chartist visitor centre would be extensive enough for this to be the case, and no other attractions exist in Blaina town centre. In this case, the town will need to be part of a greater tourist route to succeed. This will also require the co-operation of a number of neighbouring towns. Thematically it would be logical to continue the concentration on the Chartists for the purposes of this, although it could also involve other aspects of Blaina's heritage.

A model for such a trail is the German example of the *Romantische Strasse* in Bavaria, which links several towns. Few people attempt to walk it, instead they visit the towns on the trail by car. This could also be the case in Blaina and surrounding towns. Towns name themselves after the trail, adding the subtitle 'Town on the *Romantische Strasse*', which gives the town something to grasp onto in attracting tourists. As in this case, promotion of the trail would be vital, and there needs to either be education about who the Chartists were

across the country, or the name of the trail needs to take some liberties with history in order for people to be interested, for instance 'The Freedom Fighters Trail'.

The idea is to base the Chartist trail on the route of the marchers of 1839, with its starting point at the visitor centre in Blaina, encouraging tourists to feel that they are also partaking in the march. Signs and information boards at various significant points on the march could give pieces of historical information. However, historical accuracy need not be entirely followed, if the route taken by the Chartists is not currently available, as long as the general direction is the same, and the information is accurate. This could also serve the purpose of linking the Brecon Beacons to Newport, joining up with the Cordell Country trail of Blaenavon and Nantyglo (see section 4.4), or the Blaenavon heritage trail. It would also take advantage of the quality of the landscape in the region.

There could be other methods of promoting the theme of the Chartists in Blaina, such as encouraging a local dramatic society to put on a Chartist play at the time of the opening of the visitor centre, or holding an event in Blaina on November 4th in order to commemorate the march.

Local Produce Shop

A concept that would have dual benefit is the idea of a local shop selling local produce. A vacant shop could be developed into a shop that is run and managed by local residents, selling local produce. The shop would obviously need to be purchased but beyond that the shop but bring many positives to the town. It would result in job creation, a vacant shop being filled, and would also create an internal loop with money flowing around Blaina without leakage. The local produce could range from locally grown food to locally produced items such as arts and crafts. Connected to this a link could be created with local schools so that school produced arts and crafts can be sold to local residents.

The shop such as this would be a very positive addition to Blaina. A local produce shop would help to create community spirit with the stock being produced locally and sold to local residents. It would also benefit from loyalty with the residents knowing the benefits to the producer, the store managers and assistants, and the shopper. Finally such a shop would be a good attraction for visitors to the town who would appreciate the novelty of purchasing produce that is unique.

Integrated Buses

One of the methods of making the best and most efficient use of public transport facilities is to carry out an analysis of where people need to travel to, and at what times (URBED, 1998). In this case, this could encompass schoolchildren, visitors to the doctors' surgery, people visiting the Council offices for housing reasons, and people using community facilities. If the timing of buses is co-ordinated to coincide with the times these facilities are available, people should see Blaina as somewhere that is responding to their

needs, and may use it more frequently. Critical to this is the quality and timing of public transport from Nantyglo, if the competition from Brynmawr in this area is to be countered. If Blaina were able to take a significant segment of the Nantyglo catchment, the problems it faces would be diminished.

Signs

As has been stated, the signs from the main A467 Brynmawr to Newport road into Blaina are not sufficient. This needs to be remedied quickly, in co-operation with the highways authority. If the Chartist Centre idea is implemented, a brown tourist destination sign would be necessary, but in any case, the signage from the main road should be improved in quantity and in size. In addition to this, there could possibly be some sort of 'gateway' to the town, at either end, to emphasise the distinct identity of the town. As has been outlined, the Chartist Centre, if housed in the Nicklins building could perform this task at one end, whilst something such as a floral display could complement this at the other end, as well as helping to restore some civic pride to the town.

Shopkeepers Council

A shopkeepers council is a scheme to give the local shop keepers a real voice in the operation of the town centre. Such a council would require all the local shopkeepers to sign up and agree to attend monthly or bi-monthly meetings. The meetings should be held in a local meeting point and should be of an informal nature so as to encourage participation. A possible option would be to hold such meeting in a local public house. The meetings would be attended by a representative of the Local Authority and the local shopkeepers would be given the opportunity to discuss with the representative issues that they believe to be important.

Participation and attendance in meeting is a well-known problem but it is important that the voice of the local shop keeper be heard. An informal meeting would be a good way of breaking the barriers and providing the shop keepers with a point of contact with a Local Authority that is relaxed and comfortable but still constructive.

Elderly Community Participation

The elderly can play an important role in creating an attractive environment around town. The main example of this would be small environmental improvements such as flower baskets on the main shopping street. Putting flower baskets on the main shopping street has been tried but through the local shop keepers rather than the elderly. The elderly are far more likely to be willing to care and maintain flowers and the benefit will be visible to all. The management of such a scheme would best be undertaken through a local group such as a local church group or community group. The result of such a scheme would be a visibly more attractive shopping area which will improve the shopping experience of local residents and also the general appearance of the town to visitors.

Youth Centre

A key issue that was brought to the fore was that the youth of Blaina do not have adequate facilities. While a youth centre does exist it is not the sole user of the building and it is not available throughout the week. This situation is not acceptable and a permanent youth centre that is available all through the week would be of great benefit.

The youth centre should be a centre that does not have any of the stigma or barriers associated with a stereotypical youth centre run by the local vicar. While such centre have a valuable role to play the best results will be achieved if the centre is operated by someone that the youth can identify with.

The youth centre should include facilities that will encourage the youth to visit. Possibilities include pool tables, a TV projector so events such as football or rugby matches can be screened, a playstation games console, and internet terminals. Such a centre could actually help to pay for itself with use of the computer terminals, use of the playstation, and use of the pool table, all having charges associated with them. The internet could be available for 50p per half hour etc. In this way the centre would also have the potential to be self-sufficient. In addition sales of soft drinks etc would help to support the centre.

The location of such a centre is obviously a key issue and while this is beyond the remit of this report one suggestion is that the youth centre is associated with the Chartist centre. If Nicklins was available then it has a warehouse to the rear which would be ideal for the housing of a youth centre. The warehouse is connected but separate and as such would not interfere with the operation of the Chartist centre and including a youth centre in the proposal for funding would actually increase the likelihood of attaining funding.

The provision of a youth centre would be of major benefit to Blaina and would greatly assist the regeneration process. It would help tackle social problems, fill a vacant building, and would be an excellent facility that would be of real benefit to the youth of Blaina and the community as a whole.

Shopfront Awards

Establishing an annual shopfront award can encourage good windows and shop fronts, and this can be designed to include advice on how to achieve this. Shopfronts were one of the factors mentioned in the questionnaire survey as being inadequate. Prizes need not be expensive, and can take the form of something such as free advertising in Council literature. Mail order could be used for small shops in isolated areas to widen the market base.

Opening Hours Change

If all work together, changes in opening hours can win trade. Traders will inevitably initially oppose such a move. Continental town shops close in the afternoons and open in the evenings when people with money to spend are

around. This sort of change should be considered to suit the customer. In addition, Sunday openings could also be considered, especially with the establishment of a Chartist centre, which would mean weekends would become busier, whereas at present Sundays mean the town centre is effectively closed. For these types of strategies, all shopkeepers would need to be brought on board if there is to be any chance of success, otherwise this would disadvantage certain shopkeepers. Opening hours should be related to the availability of public transport, therefore discussions would need to be entered into with public transport operators.

Temporary Displays in Shop Windows

Empty shop windows used for temporary displays can create life as well as a sense of community. Frome in Somerset has shown how it is possible to reverse the decline through promoting new uses and financial incentives, and ensuring that upper floor uses provide some kind of ground level display if the lower floor is vacant. Stroud has used temporary displays in shop windows by voluntary organisations and local artists. This helps the street seem friendlier and less of a disaster area. One method is to keep a vacant unit as a project base for the regeneration initiative. This makes sure that information on progress is visible and accessible to all members of the community, promotes an interest and sense of anticipation about the future, and also improves the environmental quality of vacant units (URBED, 1998).

Old Folks Activity Day

A specially programmed day for the older population could be linked to the dial-a-bus to draw the public from Nantyglo and Blaina and surrounding areas at concession rates. Special activities could be incorporated into the centre such as bingo and a discounted coffee morning. Discounts at selected shops, which could also be linked to the loyalty card scheme, could anchor the concept more firmly.

Architectural Competition

This could be of the kind held in France, where all buildings of any significance are held to competition. This is decided by a jury comprised of the mayor, a representative of the users, members of the local community, technical experts and architects. Small competitions of this size could be geared towards encouraging young talent. The feasibility of outsourcing the project to students of the Welsh School of Architecture as a competition in the same way as the initial planning roles have been carried out should be considered as a very real possibility

Café/Coffee Shop

Many successful streets in neighbourhoods, towns and cities are 'anchored' not by a particular retail outlet but by a popular café or coffee shop that people are willing to make a journey to and spend time in. While Blaina does have one or two coffee shops, one has to question whether these existing establishments successfully fulfil that role. A coffee shop allied to a tourist

attraction can be a considerable magnet for visitors, and there are plenty of examples where this approach has worked. For example, the Norwegian Church Coffee Shop in Cardiff Bay: neither architecturally fascinating nor historically compelling, and located on a promontory away from the Bay's main bars and shops, the Coffee Shop there is, nonetheless, consistently busy despite inconsistent food. Attracting a mix of tourists and regulars from the city itself, the Coffee Shop's success can be attributed to the fact that the venue's fusion of a coffee shop, arts centre and a fine view to Penarth make the former church a 'destination building' that people are prepared to go a little out of their way to. There's no immediate reason why a café in the former Nicklins building, with its attractive view out onto the Valley cannot achieve a similar status, especially if incorporated into a Chartist centre. Not only would it be a successful way of keeping visitors to the town in the town, it would help raise revenue to maintain the collection – and above all act as a by-day focal point for Blaina.

Compactify Town Centre

It is widely recognised that Blaina's retail centre is on the wane, and that the number of retail units on the High Street is unlikely to increase. Existing retail units are strung out along the High Street with a number of vacant units or residential conversions interspersed amongst them, resulting in the High Street's much-diminished sense of retail character and lack of vitality. Most of the vacant units are at the southern tip of the High Street – the most attractive part of the town due to its topography. Consideration should be given to a policy of encouraging the compactification of the High Street's facilities into one uninterrupted core. While this can only happen in an organic way over time, the result would be a more clearly defined town centre with a clearer set of attractions. Although the town is contracting from the southern end, the Co-op at the opposite end does not seem to be pulling the High Street in that direction. It may be worth arguing for a concerted programme of residential conversion where this is likely to happen anyway in time, in order to encourage some of the more 'marooned' shops to relocate more closely within the vicinity of the town's principal establishments.

Outdoor Market and Similar Events

Outdoor markets and flea markets are tried and tested ways of attracting people to a street. Not only are they good for a town, village or neighbourhood's economy, they bring communities together – and often lure visitors from further afield as well. As URBED points out, 'the most successful small towns seem to be the ones where the market still forms a colourful and lively attraction, by offering the combination of good value and friendly service' (1998: 8). An alternative to this could be an annual Chartist event, which could commemorate the Chartist march on Newport. There is scope for considerable innovation in this field.

4.3 Options for Sources of Funding

European Structural Funds



Structural funds are the European Union's main instruments for supporting social and economic restructuring across the Union. Implementation of the Structural Funds is devolved to the National Assembly for Wales. Applications for funds should be made direct to the appropriate office. See www.dti.gov.uk/europe/structural.html.

Funding contribution depends on the type of project and where it takes place. In the UK Objective 1 projects can receive up to 50% funding from Structural Funds. This may be lower if the project results in commercial activity and profit. The applicant will normally be charged with acquiring the remaining funding, including public funding to match Structural Fund contribution. However, the National Assembly for Wales can help potential applicants find match funding.

Applications can be made from public, private and voluntary sector bodies. Funds can be used to support schemes for small businesses and fund training and employment schemes for individuals.

Projects must tie in with the Single Programming Document of each region, setting out aims of achievement in parallel with the economic and social cohesion goals of the European Union. Projects are required to deliver a direct, measurable and positive impact on the economy of the area.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

ERDF funds are available for infrastructure projects to equip the community with assets (such as buildings and workspace) or the knowledge to contribute to the regeneration process. Relevant examples of how this funding has contributed to community regeneration can be found at www.urbaneastend.dial.pipex.com, this includes:

- *Broadway market, Hackney*
Capacity building program to provide better management, community ownership, setting up of members and training.
- *Community Enterprise Workspace, Brick Lane, Spitalfields, Hackney*
Project to refurbish 164/166 Brick lane to provide managed workspace and a community café; workspaces particularly for women provide a sustainable location for small business.

URBAN 2 (Community Initiatives)

Funds schemes in small and medium sized towns suffering from significant economic and social conversion difficulties. The Urban Community Initiative is designed to find solutions to the serious socio-economic problems experienced by many urban areas by supporting schemes for economic and social revitalisation and environmental improvement. It is expected that 50 urban projects, designed to demonstrate how living and working conditions can be improved will be financed

See www.dti.gov.uk/europe/structural.html

See www.nics.gov.uk

Support could be focused upon the following areas:

- Support for new economic activities
- Training, work experience, related schemes for local people
- Facilities in the health and safety fields
- Infrastructure and environmental improvement measures

Examples of expressions of interest for Urban 2 and proposals for capacity building/economic activities/local employment can be found at www.bristolurban.org.uk.

It should be noted that Objective 1 areas (Wales and Valleys) would receive the majority of funding allocated to the Urban budget.

The Welsh European Funding office (www.wefo.wales.gov.uk) states that applications should be submitted to local authorities by mid-June.

Contact:

Francis Cairns
European Affairs Division
National Assembly for Wales
Cathays Park
Cardiff CF10 3NQ

TEL: 029 2082 3517

Email: european@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Local Regeneration Fund

Allocations are reserved for community/voluntary sectors with an economic focus.

See www.wefowales.gov.uk. Applications for revenue funding can be made in the next autumn round. Each local authority will submit a number of LRF funds by mid/end September for decision by end November/early December.

Contact (South East Wales):

Lynda Attwell
Cathays Park Office

TEL: 029 2082 6150

Email: Lynda.attwell@wales.qsi.uk

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust

Welsh coalfield communities are included in the Great Britain wide Coalfields Regeneration Trust. Priorities are to promote, encourage and assist the regeneration, development and use of the coalfield areas. See www.coalfields-regen.org.uk. It is independent from the government and its aims are:

- *Resourced and Empowered Communities*
Improve community facilities, welfare and opportunities. Empower local communities to take a more active part in the regeneration of their areas.
- *Enterprising Communities*
Encourage range, diversity and accessibility of local community businesses and start up opportunities.
- *Lifelong Learning Communities*
Support and assist local communities to access the education, skills and associated support to achieve their full potential.
- *Attractive Communities*
Improve the natural and built environments of coalfield communities.
- *Working Communities*
Improve employment and access to employment. Assist with the effective delivery of welfare to work initiatives, contributing to social inclusion.
- *Promoting Good Practice*
Identify excellent projects, good ideas, activities that 'make a difference' and spread knowledge throughout the coalfields in partnership with other agencies.

Contact:

Ms Maggie Dawson
Regional Development Officer-Wales
Comtec House
Merthyr Tydfil
1 Church Street
Merthyr Tydfil CF47 0BA

TEL: 01685 354 558

FAX: 01685 354 557



The Prince's Foundation

Promotes human values in architecture, building arts, urban design and regeneration. Links ideas with practical action, playing a key role in many urban regeneration and heritage projects throughout Britain. Includes a wide network of professionals, individuals and communities.

Works closely with project partners to secure living examples of principles as underlined. Assists with many community based projects and engages with public, private and voluntary organisations to promote more liveable and architecturally diverse environments.

'Regeneration Through Heritage' is an initiative within the Prince's Foundation that promotes the re-usage of heritage industrial buildings for contemporary economic, cultural and social purposes. Primarily through assisting community-based partnerships to develop proposals for the sustainable re-use of particular buildings.

English Heritage and the private sector support 'Regeneration Through Heritage'. At present it supports projects in England and Northern Ireland. It is now seeking to identify further potential projects in all parts of the United Kingdom.

'Regeneration Through Heritage' provides support to partnerships that enables them to understand the characteristics of their building, develop appropriate proposals for its conversion and re-use and undertake the technical work necessary for business and funding application purposes.

See www.princes-foundation.org/foundation/regen.html

Contact:

The Prince's Foundation
19-22 Charlotte Road
London EC2A 3SG

TEL: 020 7613 8500

FAX: 020 7613 8599

Email: enquiry@princes-foundation.org

National Lottery Charities Board

Set up by the National Lottery to support charitable, benevolent and philanthropic organisations throughout the UK. The Charities Board's main aim is to help meet the needs of those at greatest disadvantage in society and to improve the quality of life in the community. It aims to achieve this through grants to charities, voluntary and community groups.

Applications are invited from organizations that must be:

- Independently established for charitable, benevolent or philanthropic purposes.
- Constructed with a constitution or set of rules, defining aims, objectives and operational procedures.
- Having a bank or building society account that requires at least two signatures on each cheque.
- Able to provide a copy of its most recent approved and signed accounts.

Groups do not have to be registered or recognised as charities to be eligible for a grant.

Contact:

The National Lottery Charities Board
St Vincent House
16 Suffolk Street
London SW1Y 4NL

TEL: 020 7747 5299

TEXTPHONE: 020 7747 5347

Email: enquiries@nlcb.org.uk

Web: www.nlcb.org.uk

The Heritage Lottery Fund

Aims to safeguard and enhance the heritage of the United Kingdom. Encompasses buildings, objects and the environment, whether man-made or natural, which have been important in the formation of the character and identity of the United Kingdom and which will be a vital part in its future. Aims fundamentally to support projects that will provide lasting improvements to the quality of life for everyone in the United Kingdom.



Contact:

Communications Team
Heritage Lottery Fund
7 Holbein Place
London SW1W 8NR

TEL: 020 7591 6041/2/3

Web: www.national-lottery.co.uk/causes/heritage.html



New Opportunities Fund

A lottery Distribution body responsible for distributing grants for health, education and environment initiatives determined by the government through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The fund intends to support projects which will:

- Improve the quality of life for people and communities across the UK.
- Address the needs of those who are most disadvantaged in society.
- Encourage community participation and ownership.
- Complement relevant government strategies and programs.

Communities First Fund

Monitoring of this fund should occur following the general election. Lottery money is to be made especially available to disadvantaged areas to give a fairer distribution of money. Barnsley formed the pilot scheme for this project in 1999. 56% of Barnsley's applications were successful after lottery providers

worked closely with local agencies to secure good quality applications. The new fund aims to dispel concern regarding bureaucracy and give local areas greater influence. The new funding will be on top of current government funding.

The Phoenix Fund

The government has created this new fund which will encourage entrepreneurship in disadvantaged communities and amongst disadvantaged groups. It includes resources to put more resources into Community Finance Initiatives in order that these local organisations can in turn give more help to new and growing business. A shortage of jobs, local services and enterprise are all part of the environment defining disadvantaged areas, these aspects need to be addressed. Therefore the DTI through the national Phoenix Fund aim to help more communities help themselves.

Community Finance Initiatives have until 1st September to bid for resources. Please note that the fund will channel its money through the CFI's if in existence, rather than direct to business.

This also includes a development fund to help test out innovative approaches to enterprise support. The closing date for the first round of bidding for the development fund is 31st October.

The new fund will also provide help for other innovative ways of supporting enterprise in deprived areas, such as business incubator units and loan guarantee support.

See: www.objective2.co.uk.

See: www.fmb.org.uk.

Contact:

Department of Trade and Industry
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET

TEL: 020 7215 5000

FAX: 020 7215 0105

WEB: www.dti.gov.uk.

The Wales Small Loan Fund and The Community Loan Fund for Wales

Funds are designed to improve access to capital for Welsh business and community projects to encourage entrepreneurial development.

- *The Wales Small Loan Fund*
Aims to provide 'gap' funding through the provision of loans to indigenous Welsh SMEs, who have the ability and potential to expand but lack the necessary investment.
- *The Community Loan Fund for Wales*
Aims to bridge the gap in financial support through the provision of loan finance for a growing number of economically viable, voluntary sector and community organisations, which have been unable to raise sufficient capital from traditional sources.

See www.walesloanfund.co.uk.

4. 4 Visitor Centre Exemplars

The Vale of Glamorgan Railway and Heritage Centre

The centre includes a heritage centre, shop, café, and lecture workshop. It is linked to Barry Island steam railway with ticket purchase available on site for tourists. The majority of funding was initially made available through land acquisition payments by the Welsh Development Agency as a requirement of relocation due to the regeneration of Cardiff Bay. However, ERDF funding made to the centre for an associated skills unit. The Centre may provide an opportunity to learn funding skills, management techniques, consensus building, successful integration of community facilities, pooling of resources and operating techniques.

Problems have been highlighted with the use of volunteers in running the centre. Steam enthusiasts are mainly concerned with the steam railway as a hobby and not the day to day running of a heritage centre. The centre has also found it necessary to link to CADW but has found difficulties in achieving this. In terms of funding, the centre has deemed it necessary to achieve charitable status in order to acquire heritage lottery funding.

Contract:

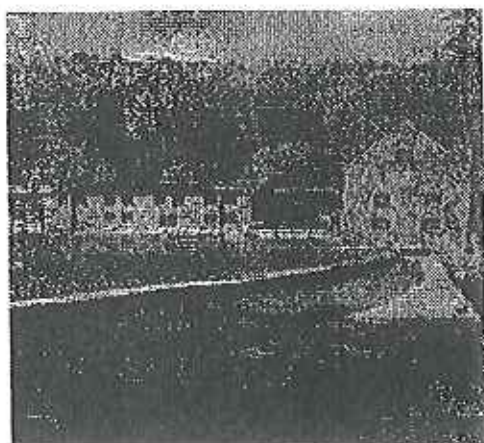
The Vale of Glamorgan Railway and Heritage Centre
Barry Island Station
Barry Island
Vale of Glamorgan CF62 5TH

TEL: 01446 748816

FAX: 01446 749018

For an informal discussion a personal contact telephone number is available from the authors.

Dean Heritage Centre



Four galleries tell the story of the origins of the Forest of Dean, its people and the important part it played as an iron producing area, laying the foundations for the industrial revolution. Displays include a working beam engine, the Voyce collection of locally made eighteenth century clocks and the artifacts that reflect the social and environmental changes that have shaped the landscape.

Crafts include charcoal burning and woodturning. The charcoal is sold in the shop so that you can cook on the banks of a woodland stream. Exhibitions and events include mining art, Art Society Summer Exhibition, National Apple Day Celebrations, photography, community issues and local history topics. Traditional herbs and vegetables are grown while an adventure playground encourages children.

Attractions:

- *Café,*
Dean Heritage Kitchen, offers home cooked food and local produce. Parties catered for by prior arrangement.
- *Museum Shop,*
Sells books, maps and postcards relating to the Forest of Dean, as well as high quality gifts and souvenirs.
- *Craft Shop,*
Forest Crafts offers a range of hand crafted items.
- *Blacksmith,*
A Heritage Smithy produces wrought iron sculpture and ironmongery.
- *Potter,*
A variety of hand-thrown terracotta.
- *Glazier,*
Traditional skills produce and restore stained glass windows in a stained glass workshop.
- *Woodland Walks,*
Dean Heritage Centre provides a beautiful setting for the start of woodland walks and trails, includes Soudley Ponds, a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The trail passes through mixed woodland shaded by Douglas Firs.

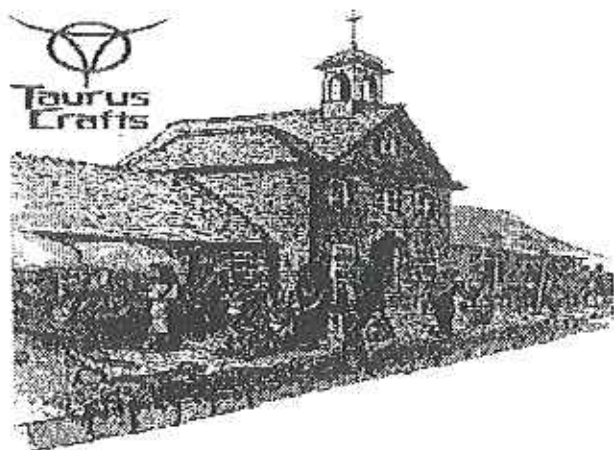
The Dean Heritage Museum Trust is a charity active in safeguarding the heritage and culture of the Forest of Dean for the enjoyment and education of the community. It is supported by the Forest of Dean District Council, South West Museums and the RDA.

Contact:

Dean Heritage Centre
Soudley
Cinderford
Forest of Dean
Gloucestershire GL14 2UB

TEL: 01594 822170

Taurus Crafts



Taurus Crafts aims to be a successful community enterprise, Work is not for profit but to generate the funds needed to support the social objectives of the centre. It seeks to integrate people whose needs are not well met through mainstream education and training. Work experience and skills training is offered to enable confidence building and greater independence. As part of the Camphill Village Trust there is an aim to make a contribution to the economic, social and cultural fabric of the Forest of Dean.

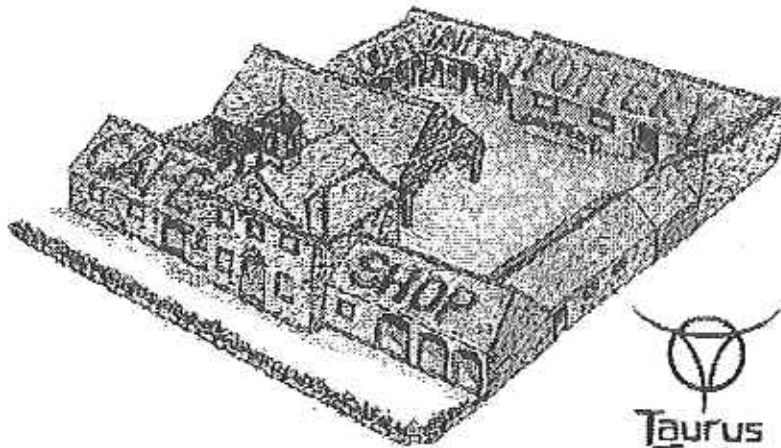
Creative living is celebrated through fine arts, handmade crafts and wholesome food in an imaginative setting.

A café serves light refreshments throughout the day. Food is prepared in their own kitchen with produce deriving from local suppliers and vegetables in the center's own organic garden. Lunchtime dishes are provided with a traditional roast available on Sundays. Success has led to the opening of a dedicated organic food store. This includes homegrown vegetables, local and organic produce, speciality food and drinks, organic wines and coffee, handmade sweets and chocolate.

The craft centre offers something of interest for all ages. Stained glass is produced and pottery made on site. Open to the public for involvement in traditional techniques. Courses and workshops are run as well as demonstrations.

The gift shop and craft gallery holds a treasure trove of local talent, for British crafts and contemporary design. Fine art by local artists and young talent adorns the walls of the café and restaurant in frequently changing exhibitions where all work is for sale. Visitors are able to purchase art and goods directly from the workshop.

Parties, functions, receptions and business meetings are all available to book in a separate function room.



Contact:

The Old Park
Lydney Park Estate
Lydney
Gloucestershire GL15 6BU

TEL: 01594 844841

EMAIL: enquire@tauruscrafts.co.uk

WEB: www.tauruscrafts.co.uk

Cordell Country

A car journey leaflet produced for an informal tourist trail taking in the rich industrial heritage that inspired Alexander Cordell's 'Rape of the Fair Country' and 'This Proud and Savage Land'. Places of interest along the route include the Valley Inheritance Museum, Forge Row, St. Peter's Church and School, Blaenafon Workingmen's Hall, Blaenafon Ironworks, keeper's pond, Gilwern Wharf, Clydach Ironworks, Coalbrookvale, Nantyglo, Roundhouse Farm and Brynmawr.

Blaina is mentioned along the route for 'Rape of the Fair Country' where Mari Dirion kept house for one of the agents of the Nantyglo works. The town centre is also noted for the Blaina Heritage Action Group for its displays.

A Chartist Centre could be included along this route and incorporated as a place of interest such as the Big Pit ironworks at Blaenafon and Sirhowy Ironworks, Tredegar.

The National Waterways Museum at Gloucester

Three floors of hands on displays tell the two hundred-year story of Britain's Canals through the National Collection.

Includes indoor interactive displays, floating historic boats, traditional forge, education with resource packs available. holiday activities, special weekend events, joint museum/boat trip tickets.

Contact:

Llanthony Warehouse
Gloucester Docks
Gloucester GL1 2EH

TEL: 01452 318054

FAX: 01452 318066

EMAIL: info@nwm.demon.co.uk

WEB: www.nwm.org.uk

4.5 Making the Most of the Community

This section is meant to be directed towards the problems which have been experienced in previous attempts to resuscitate Blaina, as far as overcoming distrust and mobilising involvement is concerned. The importance of getting all of the actors involved in the process of regeneration should never be underestimated. Edwards et al (2001) give the example of the town of Penrhydeudraeth in Mid Wales. The initial bid for funding through the Market Towns Initiative was prepared by the Town Council, and was rejected. On the second bid, a great deal more individuals and groups became involved in the process, and this higher quality bid was successful. Partnerships have increasingly become a prerequisite for funding. There are five particular areas to concentrate on in involving the community:

- Delivering benefits to the local population
- Facilitating the participation of local people in the community sector
- Improving the cohesion and effectiveness of the community sector
- Fostering and improving the representation of the community sector in the regeneration scheme
- Improving the orientation of authorities and professional agencies towards community involvement (EC, 1997: 58)

In each of these, however, there are barriers to overcome.

The use of the local media is something that has been overlooked elsewhere as a means of encouraging involvement, yet it has been shown to be one of the most important means of informing the public about the activities of the local council (Wilson, 2000). If potential partners see that action is taking place without them on board, then there may be a desire to raise their own profile and standing by joining in. There is, however, the danger that this will mean starting without key partners, which may damage the success of the group.

The Civic Trust (1999) identifies a number of areas where involvement can be encouraged in a general sense. Whilst some of these are unachievable in this case due to a lack of resources or powers by the Town Council, there are four which are relevant. The first of these is in sharing knowledge and information: here, everyone is aware of the objectives, and subscribes to them, and nobody must conceal a hidden agenda. This should also mean that meetings should not divert from what is to be discussed. Secondly, technical assistance can be provided, particularly if the County Borough Council becomes involved, who should be able to offer advice in a technical sense. Thirdly, moral support is necessary, making sure that everyone is able to contribute and assuring them that their views will be taken into account. Finally, practical support is essential, meaning such things as making sure everyone has transport to meetings, or providing creche facilities.

More specifically, networking is a useful method of getting everybody involved. This simply involves meeting key individuals and groups in an informal way, and depends upon building up trust between people. Public meetings have a number of fatal flaws attached to them (Civic Trust, 1999), so networking offers a real alternative. Trust is built up by talking to people

face-to-face, and people are more likely to involve themselves if invited to by someone they know personally (Pieda, 1995). It can be a way of getting to people who do not usually attend formal meetings, especially if individuals are contacted in surroundings in which they feel comfortable, for instance their own premises. Contacting such people is the job of 'gatekeepers', meaning people who come into contact with large numbers of people through their day-to-day duties, for instance shopkeepers, community centre representatives or the clergy (*ibid.*). It is also advisable to allow members of the community to discuss what they want in this context: setting the agenda for them will only discourage their involvement (*ibid.*).

In this case, the stigma attached to the Town Council by certain groups needs to be prevented from affecting involvement. To this end, meetings should be held in a different venue from the Council Chamber, which can give the impression of Council domination. Equally, there needs to be some thought given to chairing the meetings, which, if chaired by a Council official, will give the same impression. In a partnership in Glendale, Northumberland, the chair of the group was a respected local businessman, elected by the group (Pieda, 1995). In this case, perhaps the vicar, or someone known and trusted by all, could chair the meeting, or, alternatively, the chair could be rotated from meeting to meeting. This should help to overcome the sense that official procedures will stand in the way of progress, and will reassure the participants that their voices will be heard (*ibid.*).

Once the necessary groups have been involved, then the LGMB (1993) suggests three requirements to develop the formal partnership: to agree a brief statement about the nature of the relationship; to develop a constitution and terms of reference; and to clarify roles and responsibilities. This can help to redefine those relationships that already exist and build capacity for future action.

The key to the whole process is to ensure that every actor is involved. Histories of mistrust and antagonism must be overcome for the good of the town, and it is in the interests of everyone that this is the case. This must be made crystal clear to potential partners, as must the consequences of taking no action. The chances of strategies being implemented without certain key actors on board are very slim, and the success of funding bids depends on the formation of partnerships. With determination these problems will be overcome.

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APPENDIX 1