

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Heritage Strategy II

2008 – 2013

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1. Introduction

The Leisure Services Division is committed to addressing the priorities of the Blaenau Gwent *Community Plan* and to developing strong and clear strategies for all its services. The Heritage Strategy stands alongside the strategies for Sport, Play, Tourism, Arts and Culture to complete the Leisure portfolio.

The detailed *Heritage Strategy* for Blaenau Gwent was drawn up in 2002 following the appointment of a Heritage Officer funded by the WEFO and CyMAL. The strategy provided a structured programme of work designed to develop and enhance museum provision, the built heritage and archaeology, lifelong learning and outreach and community heritage groups and project and national and regional representation for the County Borough.

The first Heritage Strategy provided a strategic vision, direction and action plan for the development of heritage in Blaenau Gwent. Success against the actions is summarised in section 2 below (“Past Successes”). These successes demonstrate Blaenau Gwent’s growing commitment to heritage and the considerable progress made over the past six years.

In view of the changing strategic landscape and the need to reassess priorities at a local level, a new *Heritage Strategy* has been developed for Blaenau Gwent, aligned to national agenda and future funding streams. As a result, the strategy’s future priorities will be determined against the general themes of:

- **Learning**
- **Visiting**
- **Protecting**
- **Development**

Detailed proposals to address these themes are set out in sections 4-7 below.

2. Past Successes

The first *Heritage Strategy* was developed around the themes of:

- Museum Support and Development
- Built Heritage and Archaeology
- Lifelong Learning and Outreach
- Community Heritage Projects

The following review of past successes is also structured around these themes.

2.1 Museum Support and Development

Giving practical assistance, advice and support to local museums in gaining accreditation has been the main thrust in the County Borough’s museum support strategy.

Abertillery and District Museum

The Heritage Officer has acted as the museum's curatorial advisor since 2002 and assisted with obtaining a £13,000 Project Planning Grant from HLF. A further HLF bid for £306,000 to carry out the full refurbishment programme was successful and work began in September 2006. The refurbished museum opened in July 2007 and obtained full registration. The museum will now be well placed to meet the standards for full accreditation when required to do so by CyMAL in 2009.

Brynmawr and District Museum Society

The Brynmawr Museum Society was founded in September 2002. The Heritage Officer acts as the society's curatorial advisor. The official opening of the museum took place in June 2003. In June 2004, the museum won a National Building Society *Community Achievement Award*. In November 2005, the museum took over the whole of the Carnegie Library – doubling the gallery space and providing space for meetings, coffee mornings, talks and other activities. The museum adopted an Accreditation Action Plan in 2005 and will make an application for accreditation in 2009.

Blaina Heritage Action Group Museum

The Heritage Officer has acted as the Museum's curatorial advisor since July 2003. The museum moved to larger premises in the Blaina Institute in January 2007. In order to facilitate this refurbishment, works totalling £26,000 were funded and managed by the County Borough. In 2008, the museum will adopt an accreditation action plan and begin working towards application for accreditation in 2010.

Ebbw Vale Works Archival Trust Museum

The Heritage Officer has acted as the Archive's curatorial adviser since May 2003. In February 2004, Corus gave the Archive notice to vacate its premises in Ebbw Vale House. In order to secure the collection's future the Heritage Section identified alternative temporary accommodation, secured funding from Corus and project managed the refurbishment of the premises to the necessary standard. The Trust has drawn down grant-aid from Communities First and CyMaL for publicity material and conservation work on the collections totalling over £15,000. The Trust adopted its Accreditation Action Plan in 2005 and will submit an application for accreditation in 2009.

2.2 Built Heritage and Archaeology

Bedwellty House and Park

The Heritage Officer has worked closely with the Sports and Facilities Manager in preparing a £3.8 million HLF bid for the restoration of the Bedwellty House and Park. The bid was given a Stage I pass in June 2007 and the Stage II bid to secure release of these funds is currently in the development stage. This will be submitted to HLF in June 2008. If successful, recruitment will take place in December 2008 and capital works will commence early 2009. Match-funding of £1m has already been secured from the Welsh Assembly Government's "Heads of the Valleys Initiative" together with £280k from the authority's capital programme – signalling the council's on-going commitment to the project.

2.3 Lifelong Learning and Outreach

Blaenau Gwent Access to Heritage Project

The Access to Heritage Project aims to make heritage accessible to as wide a range of local people and visitors as possible. It is hoped to fulfil this potential by creating a learning-centred, educational partnership between community organisations and the County Borough. In April 2006, the Heritage Section commissioned the Blaenau Gwent Access to Heritage Report to identify the best means of delivering these outcomes. The report was completed in December 2006 and made several far reaching recommendations. It also set out a clear, two year action plan to deliver the project outcomes. The Access to Heritage Project represented the most important element in the County Borough's second *Heritage Strategy* (see section 4.1 below).

Tourism

It is estimated that tourism now contributes some £24m per annum to the local economy. The Heritage Section now works extremely closely with the Tourism Section on many projects and activities and is currently involved in a European Union Interreg IIB project entitled "Green Mines". Working with partners in Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Flintshire, the project aims to encourage cultural tourism to former mining areas across the Atlantic Zone of Western Europe.

Adult Education Courses

Since 2005, the Heritage Section has prepared and delivered adult education courses on heritage and archaeology subjects. These courses have proved very popular and have enjoyed great success.

2.4 Community Heritage Projects

Community Archive Scheme

Since May 2002, the Heritage Section has initiated and facilitated the establishment of Community Archive in Brynmawr, Blaina, Tredegar, Ebbw Vale and Cwm. This is one of the largest and most successful Community Archive networks in the UK and is now regarded as a model of best practise in this field.

Other Community Groups

The Heritage Officer acts as the main contact and liaison points with the Nantyglo and Blaina Charter Group, Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum, Friends of St. Illtyd's Church and other local community groups.

Nantyglo Roundhouses

The first *Heritage Strategy* identified the site as having huge potential as a heritage centre and educational resource for local people and an attraction for visitors from further afield. The Heritage Section secured funding totalling £97,000 to commission a conservation plan, condition survey, access plan, audience development plan and business plan to inform any

further HLF bid. Unfortunately, difficulties over the ownership of the site have precluded any further development to date.

3. The New Strategy

As outlined in section 1 above, the new *heritage Strategy* for Blaenau Gwent has been developed against the general themes of:

- **Learning**
- **Visiting**
- **Protecting**
- **Development**

Detailed proposals to address these themes are set below. It is envisaged that all action points will be delivered within the lifetime of the Strategy.

4. Learning

4.1 Access to Heritage Project

Blaenau Gwent enjoys a wealth of collections of artefacts, photographs, publications and data and most importantly a pool of dedicated volunteer effort and expertise. These have great potential as a means of offering improved access to heritage and learning opportunities.

The aim of the Blaenau Gwent Access to Heritage Project is to make all these local heritage resources physically and intellectually accessible to as wide a range of users as possible and to deliver the following outcomes for Blaenau Gwent's independent heritage organisations, their staff and volunteers:

- A broader range of people using the museums, archives and libraries of Blaenau Gwent
- The creation of new learning opportunities for the people of the area
- Staff and volunteers becoming effective advocates for learning
- Staff and volunteers continuously learning and developing their practise

In addition, the project aims to enable the people and communities of Blaenau Gwent to:

- Use museums, archives and libraries to develop knowledge and understanding
- Enjoy themselves and become enriched and inspired by the experience
- Develop skills as a result of using museums, archives and libraries
- Become more self-confident, questioning, motivated and open to others' perspectives
- Decide to do something different in their lives
- Feel welcomed, respected and supported in their learning
- Have access to the learning opportunities they want

Access to Heritage Report

In April 2006, the Heritage Section commissioned the Blaenau Gwent Access to Heritage Report to identify the best means of delivering these outcomes. The report was completed in December 2006 and made the following recommendations:

- Appointment of “Access to Heritage” Officer – full time, 2 year contract to establish the project programme, establish effective partnerships, deliver the 2-Year Action Plan, develop and deliver Access to Heritage Project outcomes.
- Appointment of Documentation Officer – half-time, 2-year contract to document local voluntary museum collections, document the Blaenau Gwent Local Studies Collection, support and advise local groups re: documentation and cataloguing, enable local collections to be accessible via the web.
- Formal adoption and delivery of a two-year “Access to Heritage” Action Plan
- Establishment of a dedicated “Access to Heritage” Website
- Production of a quarterly Heritage Newsletter
- Taking fuller advantage of the Commanet Community Archive website

Access to Heritage Action Plan

The report also set out a clear, two-year action plan to deliver these outcomes by developing:

- Learning partnerships with the five voluntary museums,
- On-going training sessions for museums and archives
- Improved accessibility to the Blaenau Gwent Local Studies Collection
- A dedicated “Access to Heritage” website
- Improved schools resources
- Schools visits format
- Closer relationships with schools
- On-line teachers’ packs
- Improved FE and HE resources
- Improved promotion of Community Archive Group
- Outreach workshops and open days for adults

Action

In order to deliver the Blaenau Gwent Access to Heritage Project, we will submit a grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in April 2008. We aim to carry out the recommendations of the Access to Heritage Report and to deliver the projects outlined in the Access to heritage Action Plan by 2011.

4.2 Community Archive Groups

Blaenau Gwent has one of the largest and most successful Community Archive networks in the UK and is now regarded as a model of best practise in this field. There are currently six Community Archive Groups within the County Borough:

- Abertillery and District Community Archive Group
- Nantyglo and Blaina Community Archive Group
- Brynmawr and District Community Archive Group
- Tredegar Community Archive Group
- Ebbw Vale Community Archive Group
- Cwm and Waunlwyd Community Archive Group

Action

We will facilitate the establishment of the Trefil Community Archive group early in 2008.

In line with the Access to Heritage Project, we will seek to ensure that all local Community Archives are posted to the Commanet website by December 2008 and will contribute to the improved promotion of community Archive Groups.

4.3 Blaenau Gwent Libraries Local Studies Collection

The Blaenau Gwent Libraries Local Studies Collection is an important archive of documents, publications, slides and photos that reflect the history, archaeology and culture of the County Borough and represents an invaluable educational resource. However, the current catalogue is insufficiently detailed to allow the collection to fulfil its potential.

Action

As part of the Access to Heritage Project, we will ensure that the collection is made physically and intellectually accessible to as wide range of users as possible by 2011.

4.4 Publications and Outreach

The “Discover Blaenau Gwent” heritage trails were written in the early 1990s and are badly out of date and stands in urgent need of revision. In 2005, the Heritage and Tourism Sections commissioned the research of a series of eight industrial archaeology trails. It is hoped that the Green Mines Project (see section 5.4 below) will allow this material to be published via the web and in paper form.

Since 2005, the Heritage Section has also prepared and delivered adult education courses on heritage and archaeology subjects. These courses have proved very popular and have enjoyed great success.

Action

Over and above the Access to heritage Project, we will:

- Publish the “Blaenau Gwent Industrial Archaeology Trails” in 2008
- Revise and republish the “Discover Blaenau Gwent” series by 2009
- Prepare and deliver an on-going programme of talks, lectures and courses on suitable heritage topics

Visiting

5.1 Bedwellty House and Park

Bedwellty House is a grade II listed building and the surrounding park is a grade II registered historic garden and designated conservation area. Largely dating from the period from 1800 and 1825, the site probably the finest surviving Ironmaster's residence in Gwent. Properly conserved and restored, the House and Park have huge potential as a social and educational resource for local people and as an attraction for visitors.

Action

We will fulfil this potential by:

- Securing a £3.8m HLF grant in September 2008
- Facilitating the conservation and restoration of the site for interpretation and public access by 2011
- Providing an appropriate long-term management structure for the house and park
- Supporting the long-term management and sustainability of the site for the benefit of local communities and visitors

5.2 Local Museums

Blaenau Gwent has five independent, community-based museums:

- Abertillery and District Museum
- Brynmawr and District Museum
- Blaina Heritage Action Group Heritage Centre
- Ebbw Vale Works Archival Trust Museum
- Tredegar and District Museum

These collections represent a valuable resource for the interpretation and presentation of the history of Blaenau Gwent to local communities.

CyMAL (the Welsh Assembly Government division is responsible for Museums, Archives and Libraries) offers grant-aid to museums to support core activities and museum development. However, access to this funding depends on museums reaching a standard of good practice and achieving accreditation under the Museums, Archives and Libraries Council *Museum Accreditation Scheme*.

Action

We will ensure good practice across the museum sector by enabling all local museums to meet the necessary standards and gain accreditation. Abertillery and District, Ebbw Vale Archival Trust Museum and Brynmawr Museum will apply for accreditation in 2009. Blaina Heritage Action group will be encouraged and assisted to do so in 2010.

5.3 Heritage Sites

The Heritage Section will manage and maintain Sirhowy Ironworks and St. Illtyd's church as monuments open to the public for the benefit of local communities and visitors.

5.4 Tourism

The tourism provision within the County Borough draws its primary strength from heritage and cultural attractions. The Heritage Section now works extremely closely with the Tourism Section on many projects and activities and is currently involved in a European Union Interreg IIIB project entitled "Green Mines". Working with partners in Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Flintshire, the project aims to encourage cultural tourism to former mining areas across the Atlantic zone of Western Europe. In addition, HERIAN promotes the industrial heritage of South Wales and is having a major impact on heritage activity across the region.

Action

We will:

- Deliver the outcomes associated with the Interreg IIB "Green Mines" project by July 2008
- Maintain a close working relationship with the Tourism Section
- Maintain a mutually beneficial partnership HERIAN

Protecting

6.1 Blaenau Gwent Heritage Audit Database

Since 2002, the Heritage Section has carried out an audit of sites of historic and archaeological interest and importance within Blaenau Gwent and has established the *Blaenau Gwent Heritage Database* to collate and manage the information collected. Since 2005, work on this aspect of the strategy has been overshadowed by other projects with more obvious public impact and greater appeal to external funders. However, a thorough knowledge of the heritage assets of Blaenau Gwent is vital to the protection and development of heritage in the County Borough.

Action

We will revitalize the Heritage Audit by:

- Establishing a three-year Heritage Audit Action Plan in 2008
- Investigating the possibilities of securing external funding for the further development of the Heritage Audit
- Seeking to make the Heritage Audit and Database accessible to as wide a range of users as possible as part of the Access to heritage Project

6.2 Planning

Blaenau Gwent's historic environment is a non-renewable, finite resource. The management of change requires a rigorous planning process based on knowledge of heritage and archaeology assets, planning guidance and statutory protection.

Action

We will:

- Offer advice to the Development Control Division on the possible implications of proposed development on sites of historic or archaeological importance and interest
- Specify and monitor archaeological evaluations, watching briefs, excavations and standing building surveys to be financed by developers as part of the planning process.

6.3 The Historic Environment

The County Borough has only ten scheduled ancient monuments, one Conservation Area, fifty-two listed buildings and one registered historic park and garden. This lack of national recognition and statutory protection of the County Borough's built heritage also needs to be addressed.

Action

We will do this by:

- Making recommendations to Cadw with regard to sites or buildings that may deserve statutory protection and recognition
- Ensuring the proper conservation and management of the scheduled monuments, historic buildings and other heritage assets owned by the County Borough Council
- Working closely with the owners of scheduled monuments, historic buildings and other heritage assets to ensure that they are managed appropriately.

7. Development

7.1 The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council recognises the vital contribution that the Heritage Lottery Fund makes to the development of heritage projects within the County Borough. HLF funding has enabled local groups to undertake a variety of projects that would not otherwise have come to fruition. There is an obvious synergy between the strategic aims of the authority and those of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

In line with a direct request from the Heritage Lottery Fund, major projects likely to require HLF funding have been prioritised and are ranked as follows:

1. Steelworks General Offices, Ebbw Vale
2. Blaenau Gwent Access to Heritage Project
3. Sirhowy Valley Landscape Partnership, Tredegar
4. Round House Farm, Nantyglo

Action

We will work in close partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund to ensure the success and sustainability of local projects and to assist the Fund in addressing its strategic aims priorities and the delivery of its new five-year *Strategic Plan*.

7.2 Community Heritage Projects

Participation and involvement in heritage activities increases social cohesion and engenders a strong sense of self-worth within local communities.

Action

We will:

- Advocate heritage and ensure its inclusion in the development of the new *Blaenau Gwent Community Plan*
- Seek to engage the interest and commitment of local people and communities to the protection and promotion of the heritage of Blaenau Gwent
- Provide assistance, advice and support to local people and organisations engaged in heritage related activities
- Seek to secure funding for five heritage related community projects by 2013

7.3 Nantyglo Roundhouses

The Nantyglo Roundhouses and agricultural range are grade II* listed buildings built in about 1822 by Joseph and Crawshay Bailey, the ironmasters of the Nantyglo Ironworks, as a defended refuge against armed revolt by their workforce.

Properly conserved and consolidated, the complex has great potential as a heritage attraction and educational resource for local people and visitors. The Nantyglo Roundhouses have been identified as one of the Authority's priority projects for Heritage Lottery Fund applications (see 7.1 above).

Action

We will seek to fulfil this potential by:

- Actively seeking to establishing a partnership that will work towards the conservation and consolidation of the Nantyglo Roundhouses for interpretation and public access.

7.4 Sirhowy Valley Landscape Partnership

In partnership with the authority's Regeneration Division and Caerphilly County Borough Council, the Heritage Section contributed to the formulation of a project plan and Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the establishment of a Sirhowy Valley Landscape Partnership. This aimed to establish a wide-ranging partnership to carry out a range of projects to fulfil the heritage, tourism, and economic development potential of this unique historic landscape.

Action

We will work in partnership with colleagues from the Regeneration Divisions and Caerphilly County Borough Council to secure funding for the Sirhowy Valley Landscape Partnership and its projects.

7.5 Green Mines Interreg IIIb Project

The Green Mines Project is funded by the European Union to establish an effective trans-national partnership to promote sustainable development of areas affected by mining activities. The partners in this project are:

- Blaenau Gwent (Wales) – coalmines, iron mines and limestone extraction
- Halkyn Mountain, Flintshire (Wales) – lead mines
- Huelva (Spain) – zinc and other metal mines
- Alentejo (Portugal) – copper mines
- Tipperary (Eire) – silver mines

The project enabled the authority to:

- Commission a detailed feasibility study – *Making the Most of the Industrial Heritage of Blaenau Gwent* – that has informed the formulation of this strategy
- Create an effective international partnership for the exchange of best practice on sustainable tourism in former mining areas and the development of community heritage
- Carrying out three pilot projects
- Developing and supporting the Green Badge Guide scheme to create quality jobs in the heritage tourism sector

It is hoped that embarking on the proposed Green Mines II Project will underpin and assist in achieving the aims of this Heritage Strategy and will form the central element in a new Tourism Strategy for the Blaenau Gwent.

Action

In partnership with colleagues in the Tourism Section, we will seek to secure European Union funding to ensure the continuance of the Green Mines project and to deliver the outcomes identified in *Making the Most of the Industrial Heritage of Blaenau Gwent*.

7.4 External Heritage Bodies

A range of statutory and non-statutory organisations play an active role in the development of the heritage sector within Wales. Good working relations with a range of these bodies is vital for the development of heritage in Blaenau Gwent.

Action

To further the interest of Blaenau Gwent and raise the profile of the County Borough within the wider heritage community, we will:

- Establish and strengthen working relations with a range of external heritage organisations
- Seek to maximize the opportunities offered by the Heads of the Valleys Initiative
- Seek to maximize the opportunities offered by the *Making the Connections Report* through increased co-operation with neighbouring authorities such as Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly and Rhondda-Cynon-Taff.

7.7 Blaenavon World Heritage Site

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is a member of the partnership that manages the Blaenavon World Heritage Site (WHS) and the Heritage Officer sits on the WHS Project Board and Historic Environment Working Group.

Action

We will:

- Maintain and develop our active partnership with the Blaenavon World heritage Site

Frank Olding
27/06/2008