

Torfaen County Borough Council Area Report

Torfaen County Borough Council (UK) lies in the Eastern Valley of the former South Wales coal fields, covering an area of 12,546 hectares and supported by a population of over 91,000. Rural settlements mix with a range of urban conurbations, including former mining communities such as Blaenavon (Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site), the market town of Pontypool, and the New Town of Cwmbran.

Torfaen falls within the Objective 1 Area of the European Union. It has embarked on a substantial programme of regeneration: seeking potential large scale development opportunities, founded on previously used land, in order to improve the socio-economic prosperity of the area. Torfaen has identified an important need to collate information on all brownfield sites in order to assess the opportunities to regenerate these areas for commercial, recreational or housing use.

Brownfield Sites Asset Register

Prior to the REVIT project, no detailed work had been undertaken to map, collate and analyse information regarding the extent of brownfield sites in the area, and their related issues or opportunities. The REVIT project has supported the development of a GIS tool, together with staff training to operate it. This now contains information on all issues related to existing brownfield sites in the area ("Brownfield Sites Asset Register"). The asset register has substantially assisted with developing proposals and development/regeneration decisions and now provides well-founded information to those applying for funds or attracting potential investors to the sites.

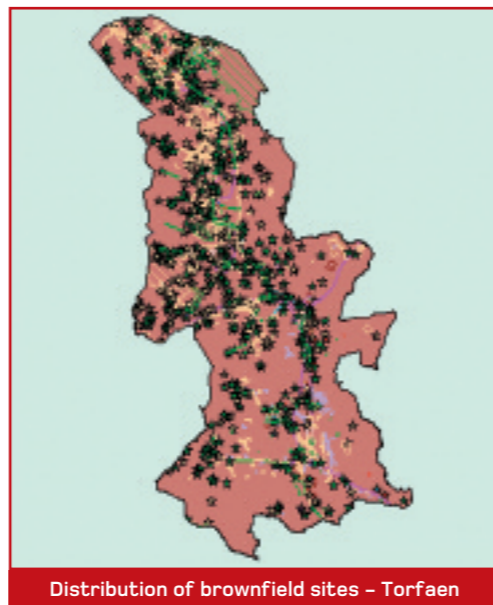
Torfaen staff from both the GIS unit and Environmental Protection visited Medway Council and the City of Stuttgart in the early stages of the project to view their brownfield GIS systems and incorporate good practice into the development of the Torfaen system. A full-time GIS officer has been employed by the project to record information on all the brownfield sites in Torfaen: now numbering over 1,800.

The datasets that have contributed to the mapping of brownfield sites include historical maps, habitat surveys and information on land ownership and contamination.

Working in partnership with Torfaen's Contaminated Land Officer has helped to verify the data recorded and to add further information in relation to key sites on issues such as the extent of contamination, likely receptors etc. Work is also continuing to record datasets on registered common land that may have had previous industrial uses, of which 50 have been fully verified and mapped.



"Brownfield Sites Asset Register" GIS - Torfaen



Distribution of brownfield sites - Torfaen

A new GIS layer has been developed for REVIT showing all the brownfield sites using "MapInfo" software, which is an industry standard GIS system. Tests of this system were undertaken on a large brownfield site in Torfaen, known as "The British". This test shows various epochs of development on the site, set in layers, so that it is possible to map its history. This will assist with future development proposals for the site.

Key sites are being investigated in detail and additional information is being compiled on an on-going basis. This information is being used to inform the development of the new planning policy framework for Torfaen, known as the Local Development Plan, which will provide a strategic policy planning framework for the next fifteen years.

Torfaen is now the leading authority in Wales in respect of having detailed all its brownfield sites and collated the information on its GIS system.

In order for this information to be made more widely available to staff, the REVIT Project has purchased "GDC Planweb" software to hold and display the data collated. This has been made accessible to sections that will directly benefit from being able to view the emerging brownfield register and technical information contained within the register. The sections include Torfaen's Planning Section (responsible for the formulation of the statutory Local Development Plan), Countryside and Ecology Section and Environmental Health Team. The Urban Regeneration Team, who have responsibility for developing and marketing key brownfield sites within the Borough for regeneration, are also able to access the software. The GIS officer has delivered one-to-one training to all officers with access to "GDC Planweb".

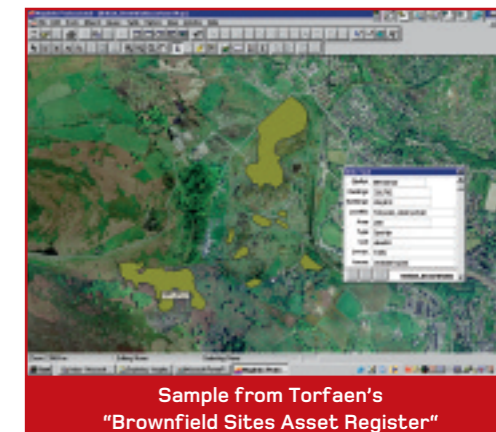
"Clarence Corner" - A site ready for development

The additional call for funding provided Torfaen with the opportunity to test the development and application of the REVIT methods on a brownfield redevelopment site that is part of a degraded sector of Pontypool Town Centre. Part of the area is on a disused gas depot where methods will have to be sought to remediate potential contamination. In the early stages of the development of the REVIT Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit, the "Clarence Corner" project provided a "live" project to test and consequently refine it during the first phase of stakeholder involvement. In addition, lessons learned from the Heritage Workshop have been integrated into the approach to preserving and promoting the local heritage. More substantially, REVIT has funded wildlife surveys on the site, including a bat, otter and fresh-water crayfish study, detailing the mitigation and other issues that will need to be addressed to protect these species when new development takes place.

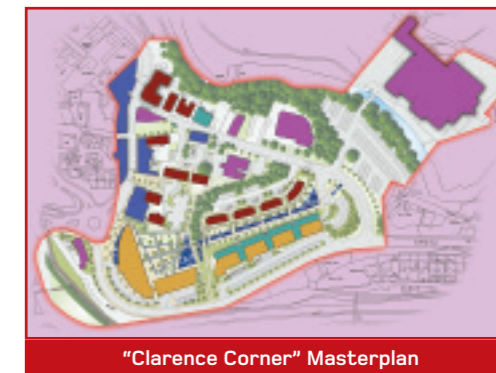
This project is a partnership between the private and public sectors. The private sector took an active part in participating in the REVIT-developed gaming tool, "Speculate". This tool gives participants training and information on the wide range of issues that have to be tackled when developing these complex partnerships. It was crucial to have representatives from the private sector actively participate in order to make the exercise "real".



"The British"



Sample from Torfaen's "Brownfield Sites Asset Register"



"Clarence Corner" Masterplan

A masterplan for the site has consequently been developed, together with a promotional audiovisual aid to market the site; and a full report has been completed, citing both good and poor practice in relation to the stakeholder engagement that has taken place to date.

St Peter's School – Promoting Torfaen's Industrial Heritage

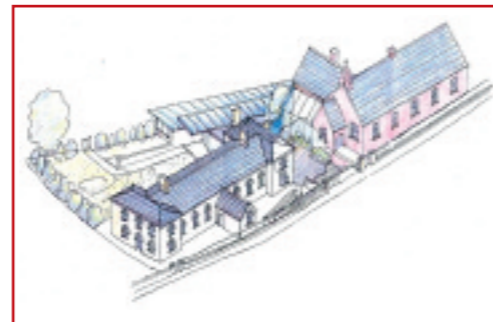
St Peter's School, a previously derelict building in the heart of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site, is being restored to become the "Blaenavon World Heritage Centre". The new centre will become the focal point of reference for the World Heritage Site, helping to orientate people both physically and intellectually. Interpretation at the World Heritage Centre will utilise technology to the full in explaining the background to the designation of Blaenavon as a World Heritage Site.

This project has been used as an exemplar project within the context of the REVIT project to show how redundant buildings can be revitalised, as well as showing how to promote the industrial heritage of a region and work in concert with the European Route of Industrial Heritage [ERIH] (Interreg) Project.

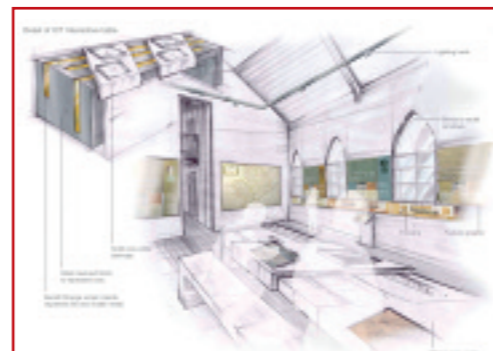
The centre will follow the broad theme of showing the significance of other World Heritage Sites in Britain, Europe and around the World, and the contribution that South Wales made to the industrial revolution. Various methods of interpretation and depths of information will be available for the different types of visitors who come to the site. Although there will be significant use of high quality traditional interpretation, e.g. display panels and printed information sheets, the interpretation at the centre will incorporate a high level of information technology. Multi-media presentations and interactive programmes will be used to maximise the opportunity to communicate the breadth and depth of available information about this unique and important World Heritage Site. The World Heritage Centre will offer a new and exciting education and life-long learning facility. It will also provide a range of learning opportunities related to the National Curriculum to formal education groups.

The use of practical hands-on sessions with educational groups will increase understanding and provide a "fun" element which also facilitates the learning process. It is anticipated that the Centre will inspire interest in the heritage and environment of the area among a wide section of the community, through promoting the centre's facilities and encouraging its use for a variety of cultural activities such as art exhibitions and re-enactments.

One of the key ecological issues encountered in the refurbishment of St Peter's School has been to accommodate local wildlife. After initial inspection by a bat ecologist, early signs of bat activity were confirmed. On closer investigation, signs of the Leisler's bat were found, in addition to three other species. This is the first record of this species in Wales (apart from a single record of a storm-blown Irish animal on Holyhead) and is therefore of considerable significance. A full bat survey was completed on the site and necessary mitigation measures have been put in place to accommodate two varieties of bat species that are known to roost there.



St Peter's School, Blaenavon



Blaenavon World Heritage Centre

"The British" – Testing Stakeholder Engagement Tools

"The British" is one of the largest brownfield sites in South Wales, occupying over 500 hectares of land near Talywain, north of Pontypool. It has been subject to over 200 years of despoliation by heavy industry including several collieries, an ironworks and landfill operations. The site also comprises a significant "rural" hinterland made up of semi-natural vegetation, including some important habitats.

In 2006, Harmoni Development Ltd. (the developer), Torfaen County Borough Council (as the regeneration agency) and the Welsh Development Agency (as the reclamation agency) worked in partnership to secure the reclamation and redevelopment of the site. The Council wanted to ensure committed and meaningful engagement with the local community and other key stakeholders. To this end the engagement strategy followed the newly developed REVIT framework to build on best practice in terms of stakeholder engagement, information dissemination and a flexible approach to stakeholder engagement.

The briefing events involved a three stage process:

- A series of briefing workshops with stakeholders (landowners, local community representatives and statutory authorities)
- A co-ordinated series of workshops with the same groups to highlight the options for the reclamation and redevelopment of the site and their impacts and benefits
- A public exhibition and presentations to the general public illustrating the preferred development strategy

An Engagement Strategy and event plan were produced prior to the events. These documents were prepared through an iterative process. This documented approach was presented to the developer and the lead consultant early in the planning stages. The Engagement Strategy was made available for information to the parties involved in delivering the first stage engagement events. Personnel involved in the events discussed the purpose, scope and context of the events at meetings and a briefing workshop beforehand. They were clearly understood by the personnel leading and facilitating the events.

The events comprised three separate briefing workshops at different venues over a two-day period, at which key audience groups were presented with information and were asked for their feedback. This method was chosen to enable informed discussions to take place at venues convenient for each audience and provide opportunity for feedback in manageable-sized groups. The lead consultant acted as facilitator, supported by a mixed team of staff. An introductory presentation was given by the lead consultant with support from a senior representative Council officer. Discussions took place in break-out groups of 5-8, with each group supported by a facilitator to stimulate topics and record issues. Issues arising were then fed back to the lead facilitator, collated and briefly summarised back to the audience. Appraisal of the feedback forms suggests that this method was effective.

Appraisal of the stakeholder engagement feedback questionnaire forms indicates that a very large majority of the stakeholders either understood, or mostly understood, the information that was presented and discussed.

