

Date: 20 March 2003
Time: 9.00 - 12.30
Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay
Title: SOUTH WALES HERITAGE INITIATIVE (SWHI)

Overview

SWHI will implement an agreed 5 year Action Plan through a Strategic Partnership of local authorities, national public bodies, voluntary organisations and the private sector. The aim of the plan is to achieve a co-ordinated, balanced and sustainable approach to interpretation of South Wales' rich and unique cultural heritage for the benefit of both visitors and local people alike and acting as an umbrella under which to:-

- develop crosscutting links with education, regeneration and development, environmental improvement, heritage and social inclusion
- create a strategic framework to prioritise current and future industrial heritage proposals
- develop the experience at existing industrial heritage sites for the benefit of all
- create a strong new product and proud national image for the living history of industrial heritage
- develop a marketing and promotional strategy that will contribute to marketing of Wales
- co-ordinate education and life long learning opportunities
- ensure added value tourism, community infrastructure and environmental enhancements
- foster enterprise and business development
- link industry of the past with the present and future

The plan allows for an incremental approach that will inevitably evolve and develop over time. It also provides opportunities for developing the tourism infrastructure in terms of accommodation provision, customer care and further development of complementary activity products such as cycling, walking and riding.

Seizing the Opportunity

A series of events and factors have combined to create the right moment in time to enable South Wales to seize the opportunity to utilise its industrial heritage to help take it forward into the future.

In 2001 Blaenavon was designated a World Heritage Site which means that the landscape, town and various sites in an around Blaenavon were declared by an International Committee of the United National (UNESCO) to be of such important that they have been placed upon a register alongside such places as the Taj Mahal, Great Wall of China and the Pyramids.

The importance of this designation cannot be understated and it has ensured that Blaenavon and South Wales will form part of the EU sponsored European Route of Industrial Heritage.

A £2m Visitor Centre is being developed to tell the story of the Blaenavon area and provide a gateway to the industrial heritage of the whole of South Wales. At Big Pit, NMGW are investing £6.6m in further development of what is to become the National Mining Museum for Wales.

In Swansea NMGW, in partnership with the City & County of Swansea, are developing a £30m 'state of the art' flagship National Waterfront Museum to tell the story of the socio-economic change in Wales during and since the Industrial Revolution. The museum will utilise interactive computer technology for interpretation and will have a significant education, lifelong learning and community outreach role.

The South Wales Industrial Heritage Project intends to utilise and build upon the key investments in the east and west and ensure the opportunity to celebrate the 'big picture' and generate community pride in Wales' past achievement is maximised across South Wales as a whole.

The Project supports the policies and objectives of both the European Union and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The European Union sees a key role for culture in promoting sustainable regional economic development. It creates jobs directly and indirectly, it contributes to the image and attractiveness of a region in terms of tourism and inward investment and it can play a positive role in promoting social integration and thus contributing to social cohesion.

The Welsh Assembly Government has charged itself with the task of firing a mature democracy with renewed self confidence and moulding a future built on past strengths and achievements.

Background

In November 2000, with the active encouragement of the Welsh Assembly Government, the Chairs of WTB and WDA called a meeting of South Wales local authorities and other Assembly sponsored bodies such as the Museums & Galleries of Wales and Cadw to discuss the role tourism could potentially play in revitalising the South Wales Valleys.

The impetus for the meeting were the opportunities presented by EU Objective 1 status and the likelihood that Blaenavon would achieve World Heritage Site designation. The organisations represented at the meeting agreed to commission L&R Management Consultants to explore and make recommendations on how the tourism and therefore economic potential of South Wales' unique heritage could be realised. Because the heritage of the Valleys is inextricably linked with that of the towns and cities along the coastal plain, the study was extended to cover the whole of South Wales. Whilst tourism was the starting point, the consultants and the commissioning organisations recognised at an early stage that success would only be achieved in tourism if concerted, co-ordinated and interrelated actions across a broad front were to be implemented. These actions included community capacity building and lifelong learning opportunities; environmental improvement; tourism development and economic regeneration generally.

In their report, L&R were critical of the existing industrial heritage product offering suggesting it was not being co-ordinated or presented in its wider context. They maintained there was fragmentation and duplication of the existing product in terms of stories, themes and visitor experiences. This 'blurring' of the 'bigger picture' as they saw it resulted in a poor understanding by the majority of visitors and local people of the world significance of the industrial heritage of South Wales.

Another weakness identified by L&R was the multi-agency responsibility for industrial heritage and a tendency to look at issues from the perspective of the individual organisation or local authority boundary. L&R stated that many towns in the South Wales Valleys presented a poor first impression to visitors and suggested the need for townscape improvements and maintenance at, in particular, key existing and potential visitor locations noting that such enhancements would also benefit local people and help foster civic pride.

L&R cautioned that industrial heritage tourism in its 'purest' form is a very specialised niche market and current interpretation of 'industrial heritage' in South Wales tended to focus, though not exclusively, on the technical aspects and on physical remains. This emphasis they maintained overlooked "... *the wider story of people, life and work bound together by a landscape and powerful culture that has arisen from it.*" They thought that 'industrial heritage' could have a key thematic role to play in adding value and distinctiveness to activity tourism products such as cycling and walking where South Wales has a potential comparative advantage over competing destinations.

L&R concluded that while many areas in the UK can boast attractive countryside, South Wales' industrial past and particularly the interaction of people, industry and the landscape, gave the area a special distinctiveness in tourism terms that should be capitalised on.

The L&R Action Plan

The aims of the action plan prepared by L&R Consultants and agreed by the Partnership was to:-

- "• add value to the current heritage offer so that it fully celebrates the scale and uniqueness of South Wales' product, landscape and people – the final tourism offer must engender civic pride and enable both local people and visitors to appreciate and understand the uniqueness of what they are experiencing;
- use tourism as a catalyst to move forward linked objectives – tourism should add value to regeneration and liveability, community enablement, heritage conservation and educational initiatives;
- create a more cohesive context for the heritage of South Wales and better product, marketing and physical links between sites and landscapes;
- link industrial heritage (essentially about the past) to industry in Wales today and in the future, recognising that today is the heritage of tomorrow."

The L&R Action Plan covered the first 5 years of what they envisaged as a 10 year initiative and included actions in the 3 broad and overlapping areas of:-

- Development and Interpretation
- Education and Community Involvement
- Marketing and Communications

The L&R Action Plan focussed only on industrial heritage tourism, it was not intended to provide a comprehensive plan for all related industrial heritage and tourism issues. It was acknowledged however that the existence of the plan presented the Partnership with a key advocacy role in highlighting the potential of related opportunities which if implemented would help realise the full potential of the Action Plan.

The following are examples of projects planned to be brought forward under the Action Plan:-

- production of an Interpretive Action Plan, supported by Interpretive Tool Kits and an Interpretive Advisory Service

- significant investment in quality interpretation at key and supporting sites across the region
- introduction of a customised 'Welcome Host' customer care training programme
- creation of a South Wales Industrial Heritage Web-site
- implementation of a floodlighting initiative linked to the South Wales section of the European Route of Industrial Heritage
- development of and improvements to physical linkages (cycle, walking trails etc) with enhanced signposting and interpretation linked to a Sculpture and Public Arts Programme
- production of an Education and Lifelong Learning Action Plan to encourage better understanding of South Wales' industrial heritage by both young people and adults
- introduction of a Costumed Interpretative Company performing a programme of 'plays' at key sites across the region for the benefit of visitors and locals alike

A Strategic Partnership

Underpinning the Action Plan was the need to forge a strong and strategic Partnership of key organisations and at all levels within these organisations. L&R suggested that the creation of a strong Strategic Partnership with shared objectives and agreed priorities would not only improve the chances of successful funding applications directly related to providing enhanced heritage interpretation but would also provide opportunities to access funding to improve the urban environment for the benefit of local communities and visitors alike.

L&R emphasised the need for better co-ordination and presentation of the heritage tourism offer and initial priorities for the Partnership was to be the "*... prioritising, enhancing, developing and co-ordinating*" to create a more balanced market orientated product that would be sustainable in the longer term.

L&R's recommendations and their outline 5 year action plan were accepted by the commissioning Partners who agreed to form a Management Board supported by a small Project Co-ordinating Team to give strategic direction and oversee the implementation of the Action Plan. In September 2002 the Partnership Management Board acted on a key L&R

recommendation and commissioned an Interpretive Strategy and Action Plan for the industrial heritage of South Wales, which will provide a sustainable and integrated approach to its development and appreciation.

An Interpretive Strategy and Action Plan

This is an important piece of work for the SWHI because an achievable, inspiring and sustainable Interpretive Plan for the industrial heritage of South Wales will bring together the many threads that have formed the rich tapestry of life and work in South Wales. The plan is designed to support and underwrite the objectives the SWHI as follows:-

- encourage and enable cross-sectoral and cross boundary partnerships that work together with local communities to encourage appreciation, participation, conservation and enhancement of cultural assets in South Wales
- use historic achievements to inspire actions for the present and aspirations for the future, engendering a sense of pride in residents of South Wales
- enhance local, regional and nationally significant assets in a sustainable manner, adding value to their enjoyment and contributing to the overall quality of the South Wales environment
- ensure that enhancements and developments are appropriate, sustainable and complementary to existing range of assets and add diversity and distinctiveness to the interpretation of the cultural landscape of South Wales
- optimise physical linkages between sites by utilising historic routes as footpaths, cycle and bridleways and restoring or maintaining canals and rail routes to provide a comprehensive and attractive transport infrastructure within South Wales
- ensure Partner organisations and individual businesses develop viable and sustainable 'products' that promote and interpret the distinctive aspects of South Wales, utilising activities that can help present a holistic experience of its cultural heritage and landscape

One of the longer term objectives of the Interpretive Plan is to grow the visitor market to South Wales and to minimise the displacement of visitors from other existing attractions in the region. Displacement and duplication of resources was identified by L&R as one of the biggest issues affecting the visitor market for industrial heritage. The Interpretive Plan will provide a framework for focused enhancement and development of the product over the next 10 years.

New and enhanced interpretive provision has several benefits. Firstly it can contribute towards ensuring that local people develop pride in their community and its roots. Secondly good

interpretation can help visitors to appreciate, understand and enjoy more fully the many cultural and natural sites in the area. Ideally this will also encourage them to stay longer and spend more money, thereby bringing economic benefits. Furthermore it should encourage these visitors to visit undiscovered places and explore on foot, cycle or take a boat trip, thus spreading the economic benefits of heritage tourism more widely and potentially opening up new small business opportunities.

Finally the Interpretive Plan will also enable the communities of South Wales to develop and celebrate the aspects of their cultural and landscape heritage that are unique and special to them. The Interpretive Plan will provide a flexible framework into which strategic and local initiatives can be placed giving the initiatives direction within being prescriptive.

This complex project has involved an extensive audit of key sites and facilities and the report's recommendations include provision for dedicated costumed interpretation troupes to provide animation and a variety of stories, at a range of museums and restored archaeological sites. An interpretation toolkit and training work-shops are also proposed, to provide skills within communities to research and develop their own interpretive plans, that celebrate local distinctiveness.

In summary, the plan's overall aims are to provide strategic framework for an integrated, partnership approach to cultural heritage interpretation and an emphasis on enhancement of existing assets, rather than the continuing development of new resources and facilities that will not be sustainable in the future. It recommends a move away from marketing 'industrial heritage' per se, towards promotion of appealing, family centred activities; such as exploring the countryside and communities on foot or by bicycle, taking a canal boat ride, participating in events and arts activities and so on, where the industrial heritage forms a rich backdrop that is the essence of South Wales.

Partnership Management Board

Paul Loveluck CBE	Chair
Peter Cole	Capital Regional Tourism
Iwan Davies	City & County of Swansea
	Representing South West Wales Local Authorities
Richard Dommett	British Waterways Board
Gwyn Griffiths	Welsh Development Agency
Rob Halford	Engineers Employers Federation - Wales
Peter Hands	Wales Tourist Board
Ron Inglis	Newport City Council
	Representing Local Authority Education Directorates
Geoff Irlam	Groundwork Wales
Peter Mitchell	Industrial Trust

John Rodger
Ruth Taylor-Davies

Eurwyn Williams
Dr Ruth Williams

Blaenavon World Heritage Site
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Representing South East Wales Local Authorities
National Museums & Galleries of Wales
National Trust - Wales

Role of the Project Co-ordinating Team

The role of the SWHI Team can be summarised as follows:-

- oversee the preparation of an agreed industrial heritage interpretative strategy for South Wales
- facilitate a co-ordinated approach for funds to implement the interpretative strategy
- co-ordinate implementation of the interpretative strategy, monitor and advise on individual projects
- oversee the production and implementation of an education and lifelong learning action plan
- ensure community participation and involvement of the business community
- oversee the production and implementation of a Marketing and Communication Plan
- work closely with the Industrial Trust in it's 'Open Industry' educational visits programme
- undertake as necessary small scale mainly 'revenue' projects

Subject to funding availability the Project Co-ordinating Team will include a Project Director with administrative support, plus specialists in Interpretation & Community Action, Education & Lifelong Learning and Marketing & Events.

The SWHI will not be directly involved in the implementation of capital investment infrastructure projects. Such investment will be worked up and undertaken by individual Partner organisations guided by the overall framework and priorities of the Interpretive Action Plan.

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