



Town Centre Action Plan

NEWBRIDGE

NOVEMBER 2010

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg, ac mewn ieithoedd a fformatau eraill ar gais.
This document is available in Welsh, and in other languages and formats on request.



PREFACE

This Plan is intended to provide a context for an intense period of regeneration of the town centre over the next 5 years.

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1. THE NEED FOR AN ACTION PLAN

For many years Newbridge has been recognised as a strategically important town in the 'Mid Valleys/A472 Corridor' and in the Mid Ebbw Valley in particular. Newbridge has been recognised as a District centre in the 2003 UDP¹ and as a 'Key Settlement' in the Deposit LDP². The re-opening of a passenger railway service in 2008 with a station at Newbridge has enhanced Newbridge's importance as a transport hub.

Over the past decade a number of plans and strategies have been produced concerning the regeneration of the town: -

- A draft Newbridge Town Centre Action Plan (CCBC) 1998
- The Newbridge Riverside Action Plan (Newbridge Partnership) 2001
- Newbridge Master Plan (Atkins) 2006
- Newbridge Memo/Institute Business Plan July 2009
- Newbridge Regeneration Programme Business Plan (Convergence funding bid) 2009

None of the above plans have been formally adopted by Caerphilly County Borough Council as supplementary planning guidance and they each deal with only certain aspects of the town's overall regeneration needs.

Therefore there is a need to draw the proposals in the various plans and strategies for the town into one comprehensive plan of action, endorsed by the county borough council as its adopted strategy for the regeneration of Newbridge.

The Plan will also provide a firm context for the implementation of a grant of £3.8 million from the European Union Convergence Fund awarded in June 2009, part of which has gone towards the cost of the central footbridge (Pont Calzaghe), with the remainder to be spent on further public realm works in the town centre.

THE PURPOSE OF THE ACTION PLAN

This Action plan has four main purposes:

- 1 To provide a comprehensive framework for the regeneration of Newbridge town centre.
- 2 To provide support and a context for bids for grant aid for the regeneration process.
- 3 As supplementary planning guidance to the approved Unitary Development Plan and the emerging Local Development Plan.
- 4 To promote Newbridge town centre as an investment opportunity for the private sector.

1 *Caerphilly county borough council Unitary Development Plan 2003*

2 *Caerphilly county borough council Deposit Local Development Plan October 2008*

2. MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM

For nearly 100 years the prosperity of Newbridge depended on the local collieries, namely Celynen North, Celynen South and Graig Fawr, which employed thousands of workers in their heyday. Following the closure of the last colliery in 1985, Newbridge suffered from a steady decline. Substantial steps have taken place to reverse this trend and lay the foundations for a prosperous future for the town and the surrounding communities that depend on Newbridge for shops and services. The developments listed below have helped lay the foundations for the long term, sustainable regeneration of the town.

- 1992 – 1994 construction of a new by-pass linking Maesycwmmmer to Newbridge, improving communication links to the western parts of the county borough.
- Commercial Improvement Grants to shop fronts in the town centre. Between 1995 and 2000, 10 improvement grants totalling £113,110 were implemented.
- Opening of Newbridge Leisure Centre in 1996, the most recent leisure centre and swimming pool in the whole of Caerphilly county borough.
- 2003/2004 -Establishment of the 'Friends of the Memo' – an independent trust dedicated to developing one of Newbridge's most important and attractive buildings into a focal point for community activities and entertainment.
- Newbridge Gateway Site. In 2005 the Council marketed this site for development. Seen as an important gateway site to Newbridge itself, the site has since seen the development of a 4-storey office scheme and a family pub/restaurant. Not only does this provide a fitting gateway to the town but also the capital receipts from the sale of the land have been ring-fenced for the community partnership to utilise to aid regeneration throughout the town centre.
- Atkins consultants supported by Lambert Smith Hampton and Cywaith Cymru Artworks Wales were

appointed in 2005 by Caerphilly County Borough Council in partnership with the former Welsh Development Agency to prepare a 'Master Plan' for the regeneration of Newbridge. The resultant Newbridge 'Master Plan' contains proposals to develop the town's economic potential and establish a frame work of public realm improvements.

- In December 2008, the Ebbw Valley Railway re-opened for passenger services for the first time in over forty years, linking Ebbw Vale to Cardiff. The conversion of the former freight railway line to provide an hourly passenger service has had significant regeneration benefits and provides an environmentally sustainable alternative to the car.
- Calzaghe Bridge, opened in 2009, spans both the railway line and the River Ebbw and thereby connects key parts of the town centre together – the comprehensive school and leisure facilities on the east bank of the river, the town centre shops and services on the western bank and the railway station and park and ride facility in between. This was a fundamentally important contribution towards making Newbridge a unified and accessible town centre. Seen as a cornerstone of the Atkins Masterplan, the opening of the bridge will act as a catalyst for further regeneration activities.



As outlined above a number of plans and strategies have been developed for Newbridge. Extensive consultation has already been undertaken with the local community in developing these plans.

Similarly, in order to engage the local population and hone the town centre action plan's contents it has been necessary to conduct consultation with key stakeholders and the wider community.

Public Consultation on the Newbridge Riverside Action Plan 2001

The Action Plan was prepared by the Newbridge Partnership, which includes representatives from Caerphilly County Borough Council, Newbridge Rugby Club, Newbridge Comprehensive School as well as other local sports organisations/clubs and educational establishments. Extensive consultation was carried out in the form of a manned exhibition at venues including Newbridge Rugby Club and Newbridge Leisure Centre. Comment forms were completed and then assessed enabling the document to be amended where necessary. The plan focuses on projects that can be developed through the Newbridge Community Partnership and Environmental Sub Group.

Public Consultation on the Atkins Master Plan

In order to ensure that the Master Plan for Newbridge received the support of local stakeholders and community members consultation took a variety of forms and has included: council officers walkabout of the town and landowner consultations for a number of key sites and buildings in order to fully establish the views and opinions regarding the Master Plan. The study team also attended a number of meetings (the Executive Committee and full Partnership) to present initial concept ideas and to discuss options for the Master Plan. A wider exhibition was initially held within Newbridge

Institute & Memorial Hall (March 2006) and was well attended by the local community. And in July 2007, further and more detailed consultation took place with the wider community in the form of an exhibition held in Treowen Community Centre, St. Peter's Church Pant-side and the Newbridge Memo. Approximately, 200 people visited the exhibition, and a number of comment sheets were returned which highlighted many valid points so that the Master Plan document could be amended accordingly. The final Masterplan document was presented at the Newbridge Partnership meeting and the group agreed to adopt the document as their community action plan.

Public Consultation on the Newbridge Memo/Institute Business Plan July 2009

No formal consultation took place in relation to the Business Plan document. Previous to the document being established however, a consultation exercise was carried out based upon the proposals for the Memo and Institute and its potential uses. The Memo and Institute management committee, the trustees 'Friends of Memo' as well as the building's user groups were all consulted.

The Newbridge Community Partnership

The Newbridge Community Partnership is a community based partnership of local stakeholder organisations, which was established in 2002. The Partnership provides a grassroots momentum, in developing its own strategy to shape the future of the village through collaborative working with all statutory and voluntary organisations. The Newbridge Community Partnership meet bi-monthly. The group have two budgets: the Partnership account and Area Forum budget, both of which are ring fenced for town centre works and used to implement particular projects from the Masterplan.

More recently, in October 2009, an Environmental sub group was set up, consisting of members from the Partnership, who meet bi-monthly to implement environmental based projects within Newbridge town centre.

3. WHY NEWBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE IS SO IMPORTANT

- Newbridge is a focus for shops and services for a large area of the Mid Ebbw Valley. This is why it has been recognised as a 'Key Settlement' in the emerging Local Development Plan for Caerphilly county borough.
- Newbridge is strategically located at the cross roads of the A472 and A467. Together with the recently re-opened passenger railway line to Cardiff, and new pedestrian bridge linking the rail and bus services, these links make Newbridge an important transport hub. It now plays a crucial role in the accessibility of services to the catchment population.
- In an area in where enterprise and business development is poorly developed, the centre contains over 60 independent, locally owned businesses.
- The town accommodates a number of light industries and the Axiom factory. It has the potential to provide further employment for the district it serves.
- With its modern leisure centre, rugby ground and historic Workmen's Hall and Institute, the town has the potential to develop as a leisure and cultural centre serving a wide area of the Mid Valleys.
- Finally, with its excellent communication links, its concentration of retail and service enterprises and its employment potential the town centre is a focus of opportunity in an area in an area that is partially deprived.

The above factors are responsible for the increased recognition in local and sub-regional planning and regeneration strategies of the importance and potential of Newbridge.

4. THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Unitary Development Plan

The Council's current land use policy document is the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which was approved by the Council in 2003. Policy R1 of that plan identifies Newbridge as a district town centre.

THIS ACTION PLAN IS PREPARED UNDER POLICY DC4 OF THE UDP, WHICH PROVIDES FOR SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE TO COMPLEMENT THE UDP³.

Paragraph 5.18 of the UDP states;

Town Centre Action Plans

In order to implement the strategy objectives, Town Centre Action Plans are being prepared for five of the largest retail centres to ensure that their viability and vitality are improved for the benefit of the County Borough's residents. These action plans will complement the retail policy framework by promoting pro-active improvements by both the public and private sectors. They will seek to integrate new and older shopping developments with an improved transportation infrastructure and major improvements to the physical environment.

The Local Development Plan

The Council is currently developing its Local Development Plan (LDP) that will eventually replace the UDP as the land use policy document for the county borough. A Preferred Strategy for the LDP was published for public consultation in April 2007 and The Deposit Plan was published for consultation on October 15th, 2008.

THIS TOWN CENTRE ACTION PLAN IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE UNDER POLICY CW26 OF THE LDP WHEN THAT PLAN SUPERSEDES THE UDP.

Under the LDP Strategy Newbridge is identified as a 'Key Settlement'³. Key Settlements are secondary centres compared to the five 'Principal Town' in the LDP such as Blackwood and Risca. They supplement the Principal Towns by providing basic services to a local district. Newbridge is identified in the LDP for a number of important uses including new community facilities, housing, development and transport improvements.

Paragraph 3.90 and 3.91 of the LDP states:

Newbridge is situated at a strategic location at the crossroads of the A472 and the A467. The opening of the Ebbw Valley Railway and the new rail halt in Newbridge connects the town with the Southern Connections Corridor and with the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area in the north. The improvements to the public transport infrastructure, which includes a significant park and ride facility, will offer opportunities for economic diversification and improve the prospects of attracting new investment into the town.

The town centre currently offers a wide range of small independent shops and services to serve not only the Newbridge area but also the surrounding area. The emphasis in Newbridge over the plan period will be to build on its existing strengths as an excellent local shopping centre and continue to improve the retail offer of the town, whilst diversifying the town centre through the redevelopment of key Brownfield sites to provide appropriate opportunities for new economic activity, cultural facilities at the Memorial Hall and Institute, housing, public open space and car parking.

This Town Centre Action Plan will provide a context in particular for the following LDP proposals:

³ *Caerphilly county borough Unitary Development Plan p.34*

- CM 4.5** Office development site - Gateway Site
- EM 2.11** Primary Site for Employment Site Protection - North Celyn
- CF 1.18** Community Facilities - Newbridge Memorial Hall and Institute - New library
- TR 5.2** A467 Newbridge to Crumlin improvements
- TR 5.4** Transport improvement - Newbridge Interchange
- TR 1.10 & 1.15** Newbridge/Crumlin to Crosskeys and Sirhowy Valley/Pontllanfraith cycle links

...and will have regard to the following constraints;

- SI 1.14** Newbridge/Abercarn green wedge
- LE 1.13 & 1.14** Protection of formal open spaces - Caetwmpyn Park and Newbridge Rugby Ground
- LE 5.11** Protection of informal open spaces - Land south of Leisure Centre
- NH 3.12 & 136** River Ebbw and remains of the Monmouth and Brecon canal, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)

The Convergence Framework for South East Wales

The new European Structural funds programme, termed the 'Convergence Fund' spans the period 2007-2013/15 and presents a major opportunity for town centre regeneration. The whole of Caerphilly county borough is included in the Convergence area but the Framework document, which provides guidance for the "Physical Regeneration" Priority, including town centres, prioritises the "most deprived areas" which are

also “areas of opportunity”. Newbridge fits this profile and is included in a list of 44 settlements in Wales that will together receive at least 80% of the funding for the ‘Physical Regeneration’ priority of the Convergence Programme.

In 2009 funding was obtained from this source for the Calzaghe Bridge and for improvements to the town centre. A further bid for funds is to be made for the Miners’ Institute and Memorial Hall project.

The Wales Spatial Plan

Identified in the Connection Corridor within the ‘South East Wales – Capital Network’ Spatial Plan Area Strategy, Newbridge has much to offer. This area strategy vision is as follow:

“An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life – international yet distinctively Welsh. It will compete internationally by increasing its global visibility through stronger links between the Valleys and the coast and with the UK and the rest of Europe, helping to spread prosperity within the area and benefiting other parts of Wales.⁴”

Three sub areas of the Capital Region have been identified – Newbridge lies within the Connection Corridor – this connection strip between coastal city growth and the restructuring area of the HoV is generally increasing in prosperity and priorities in the Spatial Plan centre around ensuring this growth continues. At the heart of the vision is a network of strong sustainable communities with settlements having a better range of local services and a variety of retail and leisure facilities. Each town needs to foster it’s own distinct sense of identity, building on it’s heritage and culture, a key component in building confidence and helping to market a regional offer for inward investment.

⁴ *People, Places, Futures: The Wales Spatial Plan 2008 Update*

⁵ *Caerphilly county borough community plan 2004 p.7*

Caerphilly County Borough Community Plan

One of the main Regeneration objectives of the Caerphilly county borough Community Plan is to “support town and village centres and other area based regeneration and develop sustainable tourism opportunities⁵. “The Newbridge Town Centre Action Plan is specifically mentioned as part of the community plan’s town and village centre ‘beacon’ project.

Caerphilly County Borough Improvement Plan 2009/2012 – Building Better Communities

The Council’s Improvement Plan 2009/12 - Building Better Communities identifies the following priorities:

- To improve the look and feel of our streets
- To increase the viability & vitality of our town centres

Newbridge is specifically referred to in one of the action points: “To progress plans to improve the town centre.”

Caerphilly County Borough Regeneration Framework

The Council's Regeneration Framework focuses on a number of key priorities, comprising eight 'activity areas' within which all regeneration activity must take place. The proposals and aspirations set out in this plan contribute directly to five of the eight priorities identified within the strategy including: Regenerating Communities and Raising Aspirations, Increasing Economic Activity and Addressing Worklessness, Protecting and Developing the Economy, Strengthening Town Centres and Connecting People and Places

Caerphilly County Borough Council Sustainability Strategy

The proposals in this Action Plan will make a significant contribution to the county borough council's sustainability aspirations by;

- Regenerating the town centre and the local economy
- Providing services locally for the residents of Newbridge
- Improving public transport infrastructure and pedestrian environments
- Encouraging healthy lifestyles by providing pedestrian and cycle links between the town and local country parks

Detailed information on the current situation in Newbridge can be found in the Background Reports to this plan (listed on page 30). This section of the plan contains a brief summary of the principal findings of the Background Reports.



Newbridge Station Platform

Figure 1 - LDP Spatial Strategy

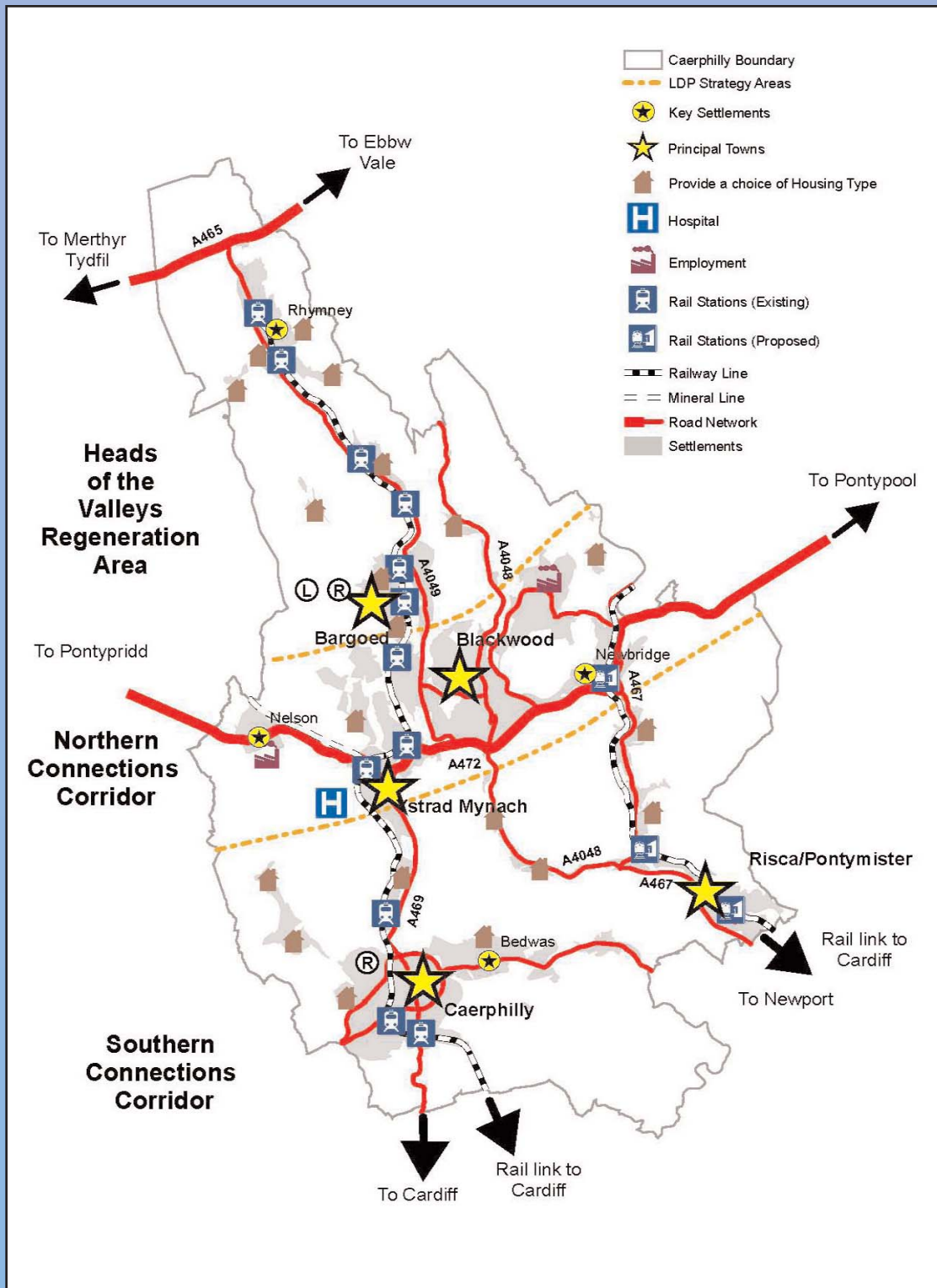
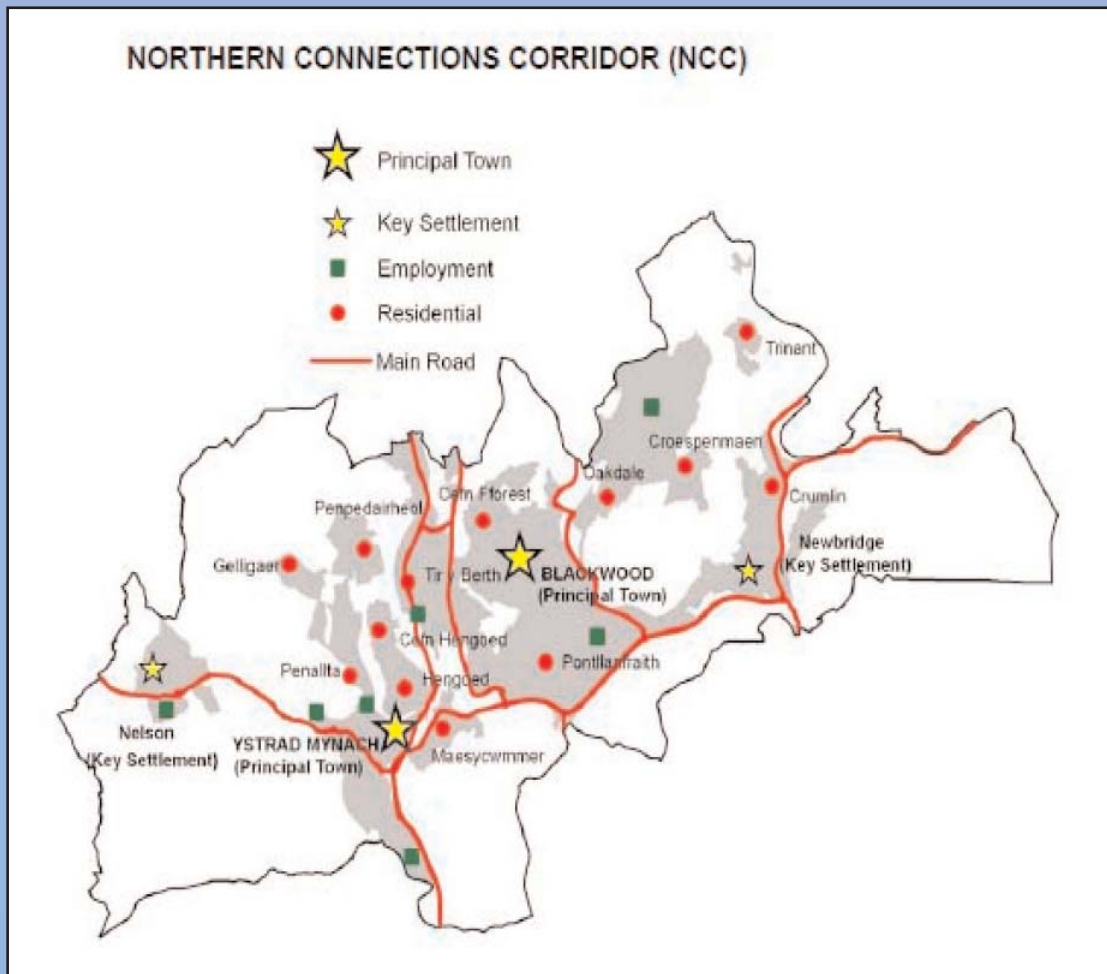


Figure 2 - Northern Connections Corridor Settlement Roles



5. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Economic Development

Newbridge sprang into existence towards the end of the industrial revolution following the opening of local collieries in the late 19th century. The Newbridge area was formerly a sparsely populated farming community. Like many towns in the area, it experienced a population explosion and major socio-economic and environmental changes with the arrival of coal mining. These collieries formed the foundation of the economic base of the town for nearly a hundred years, until the last colliery closed in 1985.

The North Celyn site remained derelict for over ten years following the closure of the colliery in the 1980s. In 1996, the land was redeveloped for manufacturing and the site became home to a Japanese company Aiwa. Some years later, the site was taken over by Axiom Manufacturing Services Ltd, which now operates a world-renowned manufacturing factory from the 300,000sq ft unit. General Dynamics also occupy a large proportion of the site. The company have expanded over the last few years and now occupy a substantial amount of floorspace and employ around 200-300 people.

In 2001 the largest employment sector for Newbridge residents was manufacturing (35%) but retailing (14.1%) was also important. The adjacent ward of Crumlin had a higher percentage in manufacturing (37.7%) with the neighbouring wards of Pontllanfraith and Penmaen having slightly higher percentages in retail, both at 14.4%.

In 2001, 3.28% of the ward population were unemployed with 41% of people being economically inactive, some 2% higher than the Welsh average.

28.2% of people in Newbridge have limiting long-term illnesses, which includes some 12.7% from the working age population. These figures are slightly higher than the Welsh average with the number of people in Wales with long-term illnesses at 23.3%.

Socio-economic Analysis

In 2005 a new classification of deprivation was calculated, based on 'Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) which are smaller units than wards. There are 4 LSOAs in Newbridge ward. In 2008, one of these, comprising mainly the Panside estate, was amongst the 10% most deprived areas in Wales. Panside was included in the Communities First programme under the recent inclusion of LSOA's in 2008

Car ownership in Newbridge was slightly lower than the Welsh average in 2001. 29.8% of households in Newbridge did not have access to a car compared to 26% in Wales.

Consequently public transport provision is particularly important in this area. Levels of home ownership were around the Welsh average at 72.2%.

The percentage of those without qualifications is significantly higher in Newbridge (43.87%) than the Welsh average of 33.02%.

Retail Analysis

Newbridge is one of six town centres in Caerphilly county borough that are regularly surveyed and monitored. A survey of town centre properties in Newbridge in 2009 identified 77 commercial properties of which 42 were A1 (shops), 12 were A2 (services) and 11 were A3 (cafes & pubs); 4 were vacant and there were 8 'other uses' such as churches and clubs. The units are generally very small – the net floor space in the town centre totalled only 4,469 square metres (2007). There are very few modern commercial premises in the town and hardly any with rear servicing.

Vacancy Rates:

Year	Vacancy rate %
2004	4.4%
2005	6.7%
2006	6.7 %
2007	17.3 %
2008	7 %
2009	5 %

In 2007, there was a dramatic increase in the number of vacant properties compared to the previous and following years. In 2007, 9 retail premises had closed with 3 units remaining closed from the previous year. The town had lost 8 A1 units and 1 B1 unit. The A1 classed businesses that closed in 2007 varied in service and included convenience food stores, clothes shops, a tanning salon, mobile phone shop and café. In 2008, the year in which the recession started, actually saw a revival in the town where 7 of the vacant premises were re-let.

From 2004 to 2009, there has been a slight increase in the number of A2 and A3 units operating in the town. This suggests that with six extra A2/A3 units in 2009, the town is now becoming a centre for services rather than primary retail.

The county borough carries out triennial health checks on all six centres, involving extensive telephone and on street surveys and pedestrian flow counts. The latest survey was carried out in 2009. The surveys show that: -

- There has been a continual decline in the proportion of the catchment population shopping in Newbridge. The proportion of households buying their weekly convenience goods (food shopping) in Newbridge has fallen consistently from 28.6% in 1994 to only 6% in 2009, with the majority of the local population now travelling to Blackwood for their main food shopping. Blackwood is only a ten-minute drive time from Newbridge.
- The percentage of people using Newbridge for top-up food shopping however has increased significantly from 68% in 2006 to 82.9% in 2009.
- Newbridge is also a low priority location for non-food shopping, with an average percentage over the last ten years at 2.8%. The proportion of people purchasing their non-food items in the town has dropped from 5.6% in 2006 to 1.6% in 2009 with local people using Blackwood town centre, or alternatively Cwmbran, Newport or Cardiff as their preferred shopping destination.

- The proportion of residents regarding the town centre "favourably" has declined steadily from 73.5% in 1994 to 53.4% in 2009.
- In 2009, 27.1% of persons interviewed in the town centre had arrived by bus/coach; this figure is down some 10% from 2006. The proportion arriving by car or van was 32.3%, lower compared to other centres and has significantly dropped since 2003 when the percentage was 47%. 39.4% had arrived by foot, an increase of over 10% since 2006. Only 0.6% of respondents travelled to Newbridge by train. This figure is surprising given the train station has been open for a year. Newbridge has had the highest number of public transport (bus) users of the six town centres over two consecutive surveys 2003 and 2006.

The town centre shops are in competition with larger neighbouring retail centres, and existing 'out of centre' retail developments but there is not sufficient land available for Newbridge to become a major sub-regional shopping centre like Blackwood. Newbridge does have the potential, however, to develop as a friendly 'traditional' shopping centre with an emphasis on small, locally owned independent shops set in a pleasant environment including a number of fine historical buildings. The town centre action plan seeks to develop these strengths to help Newbridge develop a viable 'niche' market for the future.

Leisure Facilities

Newbridge Leisure Centre is one of the most modern equipped of the Council's leisure centres and is host to a swimming/leisure pool, gym and sports hall as well as outdoor sports courts. The leisure centre has approximately 230,000 users per year, which demonstrates its function in providing the community with an opportunity to have a healthy lifestyle. Adjacent to the Leisure Centre is a well-established first division Rugby Club, and a Cricket Club, both of which provides facilities for both junior and senior teams.



Newbridge Leisure Centre

Caetwmpyn Park is located to the north of the town. Although immediately adjacent to the commercial centre, the park is not well integrated into the town and is extremely steep, limiting the activities it can support. It does have the advantage of panoramic views from the upper slopes.

Generally, commercial leisure facilities in the town centre are limited with no cinema, theatre, nightclub, or bowling facility, though there are eight cafes, restaurants and pubs. The Newbridge Memorial Hall and Institute is the main centre providing leisure activities for the community with classes and events held on a regular basis throughout the year. The Newbridge Memorial Hall and Institute benefits from an extremely wide catchment area and this will be a key basis for the centre once fully restored.

Public Facilities

Newbridge Library currently lies in a constricted and inconvenient back street location near the town centre. Due to the poor conditions of this building, it has been proposed that it be transferred to the Newbridge Memorial Hall, as identified in the LDP policy CF 1.18 and also as part of the Council's ten year Library Strategy. Such a move would help to secure the long-term viability of the Memorial Hall. The town also bene-

fits from public toilets, located next to the Newbridge Hotel. The toilets are relatively small but functional. They lack prominence within the town and would benefit from an external enhancement.

The improvements to the public transport infrastructure, which includes a significant park and ride facility, will offer opportunities for economic diversification and improve the prospects of attracting new investment into the town.

Catchment Population

The drive time isochrones indicate that 29,979 people live within 10 minutes' drive time of the town, with 144,962 and 405,556 people living within 20 and 30 minutes' drive time respectively. Although Newbridge has a relatively small local catchment, its catchment population within 20 and 30 minutes drive time is far greater than Blackwood and Bargoed. Together with the recently provided accessibility by rail, this indicates considerable potential for Newbridge to develop a wider role as a leisure and cultural centre.

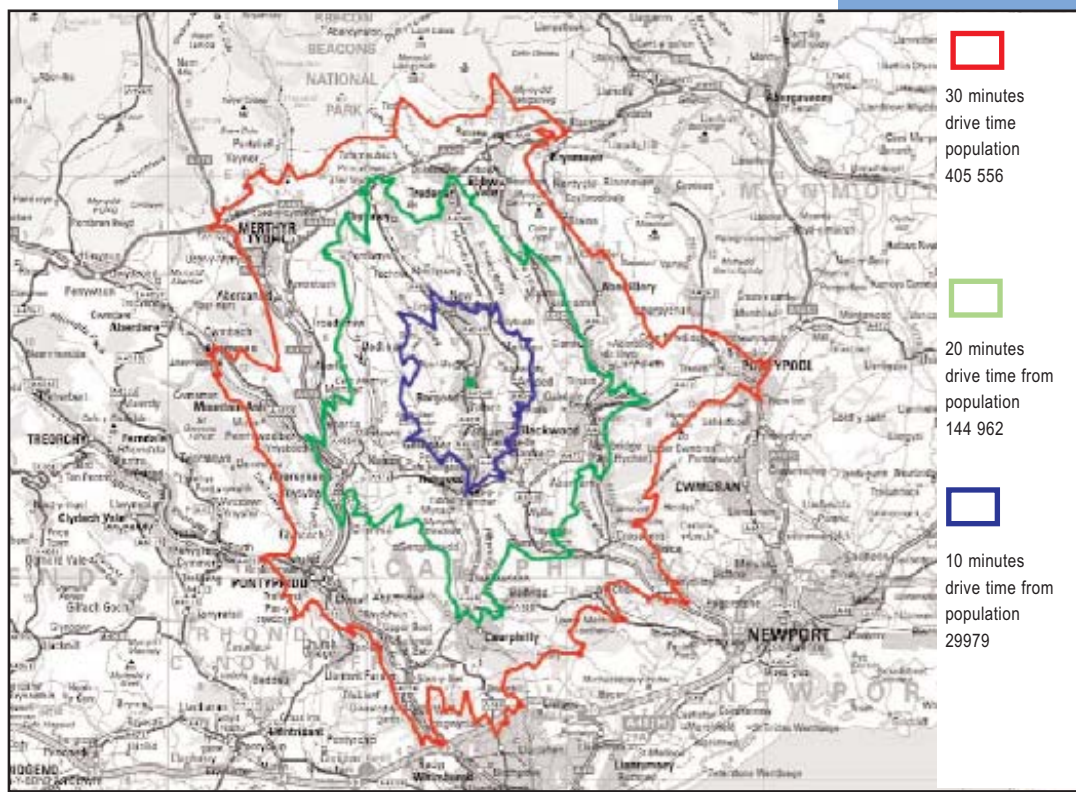


Figure 3 Drivetime Isochrones

6. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Wide range of independent shops and services with local character
- Built heritage – conservation area including the listed Memorial Hall and Institute
- Hourly train service to Cardiff and good bus links
- Good walk-in trade from adjacent residential areas
- Active Community Partnership Group
- Strategic location, situated at the cross roads on A472 and A467
- High levels of CCTV coverage which deters criminal activity - resulting in low levels of crime
- Low vacancy rates
- Potentially attractive town centre
- Diverse range of sporting and community facilities including school/rugby club playing fields and the county borough's most modern leisure centre
- Park and Ride facility
- 'Pont Calzaghe' footbridge linking the town centre with neighbouring communities as well as educational and leisure services. It also presents a strong iconic symbol of regeneration activity, which will help to generate confidence in the town's future.
- Priority area for EU funding and recently awarded Convergence funding of over £2.4 million for public realm regeneration in the town centre
- Nationally respected Miners Institute and memorial Hall, which is used extensively by the local community and is the focus of a programme of extensive improvement.

Weaknesses

- Most town centre businesses are in small, old premises
- Lack of larger units to accommodate national retailers
- Lack of national multiple retailers
- Shortage of suitable land for expansion due to its restrictions by the river and railway
- Large areas of open space constrained by topography and accessibility i.e. Caetwmpyn Park
- Few re-development opportunities within the town centre
- Small local catchment area
- The shopping streets are dominated by through traffic with shoppers confined to narrow pavements
- Low demand for industrial and office sites
- Lack of amenity space in the town centre
- No bus station resulting in safety issues at existing bus stops
- Public car parking is some distance from shops
- No town centre manager and nobody responsible for 'marketing' the town
- Not in a prioritised Welsh Assembly Government 'Strategic Regeneration Area' – as such, it is difficult to secure external funding over and above EU funding.
- Local concerns of illegal parking on residential streets

Opportunities

- Opportunity to develop Brownfield sites in or near the town centre for housing and employment
- Proposals to increase accessibility from the rest of the Ebbw Valley through increased frequency of rail services and capacity of trains
- Finance approval to create a high quality public

realm to enhance Newbridge's attractiveness to visitors and investors

- Potentially attractive riverside corridor
- Commercial opportunity - vacant plot at the 'Gateway' site
- Funding bids to enhance community facilities/ opportunities at Newbridge Memorial Hall and Institute
- Potential of area beneath the viaduct for informal recreation
- Links to valleys-wide cycle path network
- Potential for Public Art in the town centre
- Space in the Miners' Institute for a town library
- Increase the prominence of the town's public conveniences by enhancing the façade and the public space to the front of the building.

Threats

- Competition from larger retail and leisure centres, at e.g. Newport and Blackwood and the new super store at Pontllanfraith.
- Internet shopping
- Economic recession
- Flood Risk
- Traffic dominance of the town centre streets



Victoria Terrace, Newbridge

Conclusion

Newbridge has some powerful strengths including its strategic position on the road and rail networks and its good urban and natural environments. Although the shopping facilities are limited, the town does have a good selection of retailers, primarily independants, and can therefore trade on its character and sense of individuality. It has a core of leisure and cultural facilities that could be the basis for a new role for the town. It has priority for European though not Welsh Assembly Government funding. The new and spectacular foot-bridge has effectively joined the disparate parts of the town centre together, creating the potential for shoppers, commuters and leisure visitors to easily access all of the town centre's facilities.

Newbridge has a weak shopping offer compared to larger competing centres and much of the town centre's public space is tired and unattractive and dominated by traffic. The town centre park is steep and not very accessible. There has been little investment by the private sector in recent years. There is no town centre manager responsible for co-ordinating maintenance and marketing the town.

Encouraging opportunities are opening up for Newbridge, thanks to investment in basic infrastructure over the last few years, together with a successful bid to the European Regional Development Fund for monies to enhance the public realm within the town centre. Sufficient land and buildings exist in the area of the town centre to accommodate private and public sector investment.

Like most small towns, the retail provision is threatened by competition from large modern shopping facilities and Internet shopping. Flood risk is also an issue along the riverbank. Steadily increasing road traffic could dominate the town centre if unchecked.

7. VISION AND OBJECTIVES

Vision

Newbridge can become an attractive and sought after town, trading on its accessibility and traditional character. Maintenance of the local shopping offer and a growth in its leisure and employment roles can lead to an economically strong and vibrant town centre providing a focus for shopping, entertainment and public services for the Mid Ebbw Valley in a spectacular and sustainable high quality environment.

Objectives

1. To strengthen Newbridge's local economy, business linkages and position as a Key Settlement
2. To support shops and services in the town centre.
3. To begin to establish Newbridge as a centre for leisure & recreation.
4. To reduce the impact of traffic and create a pedestrian dominated town centre.
5. To facilitate pedestrian movement within the town centre and particularly between existing shops and car parking areas.
6. To encourage retail, leisure and employment investment in the town centre.
7. To provide improved public services in the town centre.
8. To protect and enhance the town's built heritage.
9. To improve the built environment and enhance areas of public open space in the town centre and the approaches to it.
10. To protect key areas from theft and vandalism.
11. To improve public transport facilities and accessibility to them.

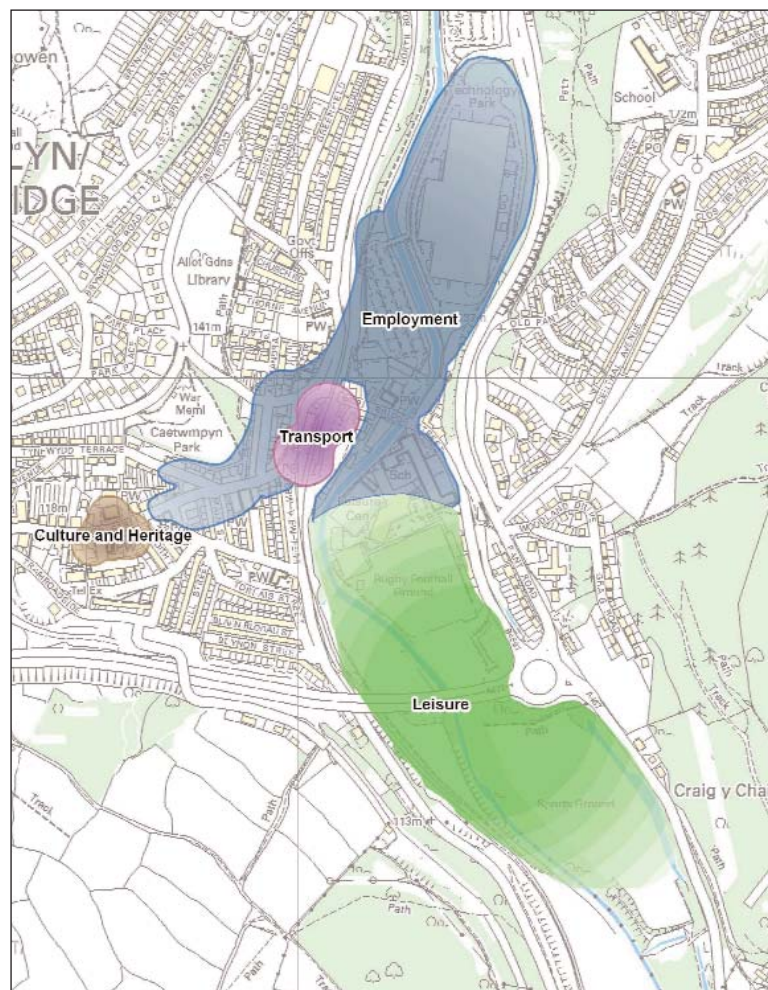
12. To secure a 'balanced' town centre, both in terms of the mix of shops and facilities offered by the centre and in terms of the location of new developments and improvements.
13. To ensure that any new development is of high design quality and meets the Council's sustainability criteria and principles.
14. To monitor the economic health and vitality of the town centre.
15. Protect and enhance cultural and recreational resources.
16. Create a strong sense of identity and differentiate the town from other shopping centres.

8. TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

It is important to plan regeneration or investment for all areas of the town centre. Anchored by the heritage and cultural potential of the Memo and Institute located at the western edge of the town and the rugby club and leisure centre in the East, the primary retail zone sits in the core of the town centre while the transport hub (rail and bus and footbridge) links all three areas together.

New residential areas are allocated in the LDP to the west and south of Newbridge and employment land is provided to the north. If investment can be attracted to these sites then Newbridge is set fair over the next decade for modest and sustainable growth into an attractive little market town.

Fig. 4 Themed Areas in Newbridge Town Centre



9. PROPOSALS

9a DEVELOPMENT

D1

Gateway site – The undeveloped area at the front of this site received planning consent for an A3 drive through takeaway but this has not been taken up. There is scope for the development of an office block at this location, which would present a more attractive entrance to the town and provide employment opportunities for the people of Newbridge. (1,7,13)

D2

Further development of the North Celyn Site (Axiom) for industrial and business development. (1,7,13)

D3

The Newbridge Institute will be refurbished to house the town's library. (8,9,16,17)

D4

The Newbridge Memorial Hall and Institute will be sympathetically refurbished and made fully accessible to all sectors of the community. The possibilities for better car parking to serve the facility will be investigated. (4,7,9,16,17)

D5

The carpentry workshop site and adjacent land provides an opportunity for enhancement of its existing employment use for further office/commercial development. Alternatively it could be used to develop an additional car park and provide a vehicular link to the Axiom site subject to flood risk assessment. (1,7)

9b MOVEMENT

M1

Create a riverside walkway/cycle path from the town centre to the nearby housing estate at Abercarn. This will open up the river corridor as a linear recreation route. (4,5,10,16)

M2

Enhance linkages between the town centre and its car parks to promote and encourage the public to use the existing car parks" (5,6)

M3

Measures to enhance the current bus/rail interchange will be investigated to improve passenger transport and provide better infrastructure for bus operators and passengers, as identified in the Deposit LDP (TR 5.4)(1,5,8,12)

M4

The feasibility of road and traffic management improvements in the area will be investigated. (5)

M5

A Parking strategy will be drawn up for the town centre. (5)

M6

Links between the town centre and Panside will be improved (5)

M7

The route between the town centre and the new foot-bridge will be enhanced through hard landscaping. (6,10)

M8

Introduction of a cycle link from Newbridge town centre to the Crumlin to Crosskeys & Sirhowy Valley/ Pontllanfraith cycle paths, as identified in the LDP (TR1.10). This would enhance the existing Safe Routes to School scheme at Newbridge and improve community access, further developing the local cycle network. (4,5)

9c PUBLIC REALM

PR1

High Street will be comprehensively improved through pavement widening, restrictions on traffic and parking, enhanced paving and street furniture to provide an attractive, pedestrian friendly environment and create amenity space. This will be undertaken in 3 distinct phases (5,6,7,10,17)

PR2

A Public Arts Strategy will be developed which will concentrate on incorporating Artwork into key spaces, buildings and street furniture in the town centre. (10,17)

PR3

Riverside Park – A former spoil heap from the coal-mining era has been removed and a level area formed beneath the A472 flyover at the southern end of

Newbridge. Subject to the outcome of the Examination into the LDP, an opportunity exists to create an attractive informal green area with walks and seating alongside the river Ebbw (LDP proposal LE 5.11), opening up the riverside for informal recreational use. In addition the area under the viaduct could become a teenage 'chill out' zone (4,13,16)

PR4

Caetwmpyn Park – Although immediately adjacent to the commercial centre, the park is not well integrated into the town due to its badly defined entrance and problems of accessibility. An enhancement scheme for the park is planned, exploiting the spectacular views from this hillside park. (4,13,16)

9d GENERAL PROPOSALS applying throughout the town centre

G1

Measures will be taken to minimise crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre, primarily through the introduction of CCTV cameras (11)

G2

The vitality and viability of the town centre will be monitored through regular surveys. (15)

G3

All development approved in the town centre will have to comply with the Council's and the Welsh Assembly Government's sustainability policies. (14)

G4

Development of children's play facilities to the north of the town centre (16)

G5

Enhance the approach into the Rugby Club, School and Leisure Centre (8,10,16)

G6

Develop a Biodiversity Action Plan to improve the ecology of the river corridor. (3,16)

G7

Subject to the agreement of the relevant owners and occupiers, retail units in the town could be enhanced through a scheme funded by CCBC to introduce projecting shop signage. (3)

10. IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of this Town Centre Action Plan will be co-ordinated by the Urban Renewal team in Caerphilly county borough council's Planning Division. The Council and Welsh Assembly Government have already invested considerable resources in Newbridge in order to create the conditions for successful regeneration of the town and are determined to see the town centre re-invigorated.

It is envisaged that the private sector will play a prominent role in implementing key proposals of this action plan, through investment in existing and new premises in the town.

Other partners include the European Regional Development Fund, which is providing the bulk of the funding for public realm improvements in the town over the next four years.

The nearby village of Panside, a Communities First area, is currently drafting a Local Action Plan. As Panside forms part of the Newbridge Partnership, the Welsh Assembly Government have agreed that the Newbridge Partnership is eligible to submit a CF outcome bid for funding towards projects that can evidence the benefits to residents of Panside which could however be located within the town centre.

Funding

£3.8M has been secured from European Regional Development Fund for improvement work throughout the town centre. Further grant aid is being sought from the same source and also from the Heritage Lottery, WAG and Cadw to undertake the improvement works at the Miners Institute and Memorial Hall. Mainstream funding will be provided from Caerphilly Council's Urban Renewal budget.

Phasing

Implementation of the Action Plan's many proposals will be dependent on funding decisions but the intention is to complete many of the proposals in the period 2009 to 2014 (in line with ERDF Convergence funding timeframes). The economic recession that began in 2008 is of unknown duration but is likely to affect the speed of private sector investment in the town centre.

To aid the implementation, the proposed public realm enhancements have been divided into three distinct phases and works are due to start in the 2010/11 financial year. Phases 1 and 2 are the priority phases. Phase 3 will be implemented should enough funds remain.

Phase 1 From rail bridge along the High Street as far west as Victoria Terrace.

Phase 2 High Street west of Victoria Terrace to Newbridge Memorial Hall and Institute.

Phase 3 Eastern corridor incorporating Bridge Street to Newbridge Leisure Centre/Comprehensive School

The remaining proposals will be implemented when and as the funding and the opportunity arises.



Illustration of Newbridge Square

APPENDIX - BACKGROUND REPORTS

1. Newbridge Shopper Attitude Survey 2009
2. Newbridge Masterplan 2007
3. Newbridge Riverside Action Plan
4. Newbridge Business Plan 2009

