

# *Archaeology Wales*

## **Pump Track on land north of Rifle St, Blaenavon**

Archaeological Assessment of Impact



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Report No. 1077

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## **Summary**

*In August 2012, Archaeology Wales was commissioned to carry out an impact assessment for a proposed BMX track in Blaenavon. The site is located within and area of historic spoil tips and close to several scheduled monuments and the aim of the study was to determine the impact the development would have on the setting of these heritage assets. The study found that despite the proximity of the proposed development to several features of historic significance, it would have little to no impact on their settings or that of the wider historic landscape.*

## **1. Introduction**

In August 2012, Archaeology Wales was commissioned by Torfaen County Borough Council to carry out an assessment of the impact a proposed BMX ‘Pump’ Track would have on the setting of the surrounding heritage resource. The proposed development is located on roughly vegetated waste ground to the north of Rifle Street, Blaenavon (NGR: SO 2528 0963; Fig. 1). The local planning authority is Torfaen County Borough Council and the planning application number is 11/P/00667.

The proposed development involves the construction of an undulating roughly W-shaped cycle track on an area of level ground towards the centre of the site. The construction will use materials sourced from within the development area, deriving from the spoil tips, to build the ground level up and create an undulating track. The construction materials will be extracted from a section of spoil tip to the south of the track location.

The proposed development site is located within the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site, and lies within a landscape containing several Scheduled Ancient Monuments and a large number of recorded archaeological and heritage sites. As a result, Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT), in their capacity as advisors to the local council, requested that an assessment was carried out to determine the impact of the proposed development on the setting of significant historic sites and the wider historic landscape. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was submitted by Archaeology Wales and approved by GGAT on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

The work was carried out by Dr Amelia Pannett in September 2012.

## **2. Site Description**

The proposed development site is located in an area of vegetated spoil tips associated with the industrial use of the local landscape. To the north of the proposed development site is a playing field, beyond which are spoil tips on ground that rises to the summit of the Bloreng Mountain. To the south and east is the town of Blaenavon, while to the west is the B4246 Abergavenny Road. The site lies within a slight hollow, with the rise of the tips blocking views to the north, north-east and west. To the south-east and south the views are more extensive, across the twentieth century housing along Rifle Street and towards the Coity and Bloreng Mountains.

The site is currently roughly vegetated, with informal paths and trackways. The main path runs from adjacent to the Abergavenny Road eastwards across the site, turning to the south towards the back of the houses on Rifle Street. This path is badly eroded in

parts, revealing the underlying mining waste. The surrounding spoil tips have also suffered from erosion, evidently through their use as informal cycle tracks.

### **3. Historic Background**

The proposed development site lies on land originally leased from Lord Abergavenny between 1787 and 1789 (Wakelin 2006). It lies north-northeast of the ironworks, and just east of the brickyard which is thought to date to the 1790s (GGAT 2012). Deakin's map of 1819 (fig. 2) depicts the site as part of the land holdings of the Blaenavon Company. This map also shows a mineral outcrop running along the western edge of the site. Deakin does not illustrate any tramways on the site, although this was a general theme of his map, which only shows the tramroad from the ironworks to the Pwll Ddu tunnel. The 1821 Survey of the Barony of Abergavenny (fig. 3) depicts 'Railways' running through the site, with some smaller lines emerging from the brickworks and elsewhere in the landscape. By 1882, at the time of the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS map (fig. 4), there is a well-developed network of tramways running through and around the site that appear to have been used for both importing materials to the brickworks and removing waste for deposition on the expanding area of spoil tips. The proposed development site lies on the nineteenth century spoil tips probably created through the deposition of waste from the brickworks.

There are a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the vicinity of the proposed development site, including the Blaenavon Ironworks (SAM: MM200), the Upper Brickyard (SAM: MM296), an area of iron and coal patching at Pen-Ffordd-goch (SAM: MM227) and the Pwll Ddu tramroad and northern tunnel approach (SAM: MM224). The site also lies within a landscape containing other remnants of the industrial past, including Ball's Pond reservoir, large numbers of spoil tips and the remnants of several tramroads. Blaenavon town contains a number of listed buildings, industrial, religious, and domestic, associated with the eighteenth and nineteenth expansion of the town.

### **4. Impact Assessment**

The impact of the proposed development on the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments, other heritage assets and the wider Blaenavon historic landscape as a whole will be considered.

The definition of *setting* follows English Heritage guidelines and Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment, which defines it as "the surroundings in which the asset is experienced". This is generally expressed in visual terms, ie. the views to and from the heritage asset.

#### **4.1 Brickworks**

The remains of the Brickworks are located on land immediately to the west of the B4246 Abergavenny Road, 400m north of the Ironworks. Little of the brickworks survives, and the site is largely overgrown. Undulations show the location of clay extraction pits, and there is a small amount of rough walling remaining on the site.

The brickworks were one of many industrial features within the Blaenavon landscape and would have been constructed for purely functional purposes. The site would have

been accessed by tramroads and surrounded by spoil tips containing the waste of mining and processing activities. The location of the brickworks would have been dictated by the availability of resources, proximity to the ironworks and connections to the wider landscape, and the visual aesthetics of the setting would not have been taken into consideration. The setting of the site as it exists now bears little relation to the setting as the nineteenth century worker at the brickworks would have known it. As such the modern setting of the site can be considered as only a minor contributing factor to its significance.

The brickworks lie on a south-west facing slope, with extensive views to the south across Blaenavon towards the Coity Mountain and east towards the Bloreng Mountain. There is, however, no intervisibility with the proposed development site, which lies within a hollow immediately to the east of the brickworks site (fig. 5). Consequently, there will be **No Change** to the setting of the brickworks site.

#### **4.2 Blaenavon Ironworks**

The remains of the Ironworks are located on the western side of Blaenavon. The site is well-preserved and a major visitor attraction for the town. As with the brickworks, the location of the site was dictated by its proximity to mineral resources, and the aesthetics of the setting would not have been considered. As such, the setting of the site can be considered only a minor contributing factor to its significance.

The Ironworks are located in an elevated position above the town, however views into and out of the site are restricted by topography and vegetation. There is no intervisibility with the proposed development site and consequently there will be **No Change** to the setting of the Ironworks.

#### **4.3 Pwll Ddu Tunnel and tramroad**

Pwll Ddu tunnel and tramroad are located to the west of the brickworks and have recently been excavated and restored. Pwll Ddu tunnel was originally a mine level that was extended in the early nineteenth century to cut through the mountain and link the ironworks with the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. Again, the location of the site was dictated by the proximity to minerals and as such the setting can be considered as a minor contributing factor to its significance.

The Pwll Ddu tunnel and tramroad lie in a gully surrounded by spoil tips with no views into or out of the site. Neither the tunnel nor the tramroad are intervisible with the proposed development site and consequently there will be **No Change** to the setting of the monuments.

#### **4.4 Iron and coal patching at Pen-Ffordd-goch**

The area of iron and coal patching is located to the north of the proposed development site and extends across much of the summit of the Bloreng Mountain. The site survives as a series of undulations and tips around Keepers (or Pen-Ffordd goch) Pond. Again the site was chosen for the ease with which the mineral resources could be exploited, with the aesthetics of the location not considered. As such, the setting can be considered a minor contributing factor to the significance of the site.

The site lies on the upper slopes of the mountain, extending across both the north and south-facing ground. There are extensive views across Blaenavon from the south-facing part of the site, however there is no intervisibility with the proposed development site (fig. 6). Consequently there will be **No Change** to the setting of the site.

#### 4.5 The wider Blaenavon Landscape

The historic Blaenavon landscape covers much of the land between the Coity and Bloreng Mountain, and contains a number of heritage sites associated with the industrial past of the town. Three sites were visited for this study, to assess the impact of the proposed development on the historic landscape: Ball's Pond, Big Pit and Forgeside.

Ball's Pond lies immediately to the east of the proposed development site. It is a reservoir dated to the nineteenth century and would have formed part of the water management system for the Ironworks. Its location would have been dictated by the local topography and its proximity to the Ironworks and consequently its setting is a minor contributing factor to its significance. The pond is separated from the proposed development site by a steep sided spoil tip, which blocks views westwards (fig. 7). Consequently there is no intervisibility between the two sites and there will be **No Change** to the setting of the pond.

Big Pit is located on the southern side of the valley from Blaenavon, 1.6km south-west of the proposed development site, on the north-facing slopes of Coity Mountain. This nineteenth century coal mine was located for its proximity to the coal seams and consequently its setting is only a minor contributing factor to its significance. From the tourist car park at Big Pit there are extensive views across Blaenavon and towards the Bloreng Mountain. The Ironworks and the site of the Brickworks can be seen, but there is no intervisibility with the proposed development site (fig. 8). There will, consequently, be **No Change** to the setting of Big Pit.

Forgeside is located on the north-facing lower slopes of the Coity Mountain, across the valley from Blaenavon and 1.2km south of the proposed development site. It is a late nineteenth century settlement that built up around the forge and blast furnaces. From the road above the settlement there are extensive views across Blaenavon and towards the Bloreng Mountain. The proposed development site can be seen in the distance, with the flat platform on which the track is to be built visible surrounded by spoil tips (fig. 9). The distance between Forgeside and the proposed development site, the constructional methods proposed and the relatively small scale of the track means that it will have a **Negligible** impact on the setting of the Forgeside settlement.

The proposed development will be visible from several areas on the north-facing slopes of the Coity Mountain, albeit at a distance of between 1km and 5km. The distance between the Coity Mountain and the proposed development site means that the impact on the setting of these historically significant landscapes will be **Negligible**.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The impact assessment combined limited cartographic and documentary research with a site visit to determine both the importance of setting to a number of significant historic sites within the Blaenavon landscape, and the impact the proposed development would have on this setting. The research has demonstrated that all the significant heritage assets located close to the proposed development site date from the industrial expansion of Blaenavon and would therefore have been located in response to issues such as resource procurement, proximity to transportation, proximity to other industrial sites in the landscape and the layout of the local topography. Setting, in terms of the visual aesthetics of a site and the views to and from it, is unlikely to have been a consideration to the builders of these industrial structures and therefore contributes little to their historic significance.

The proposed development site lies in a hollow within an area of spoil tips and as such is not visible from much of the area immediately surrounding it. Views from the neighbouring brickworks and Ball's Pond are blocked by spoil tips, and it is only from a distance that the site is actually visible. The site can be seen from Forgeside and the north-facing slopes of Coity Mountain, however the distance from these landscapes and the small scale of the proposed development means that it will only have a negligible impact on the setting of this part of the historic landscape.

In conclusion, it is considered that the proposed Pump Track development will have a **Negligible** impact on the setting of the Blaenavon historic landscape.

## 6. Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Blaenavon Forgotten Landscapes Partnership for their assistance during the project.

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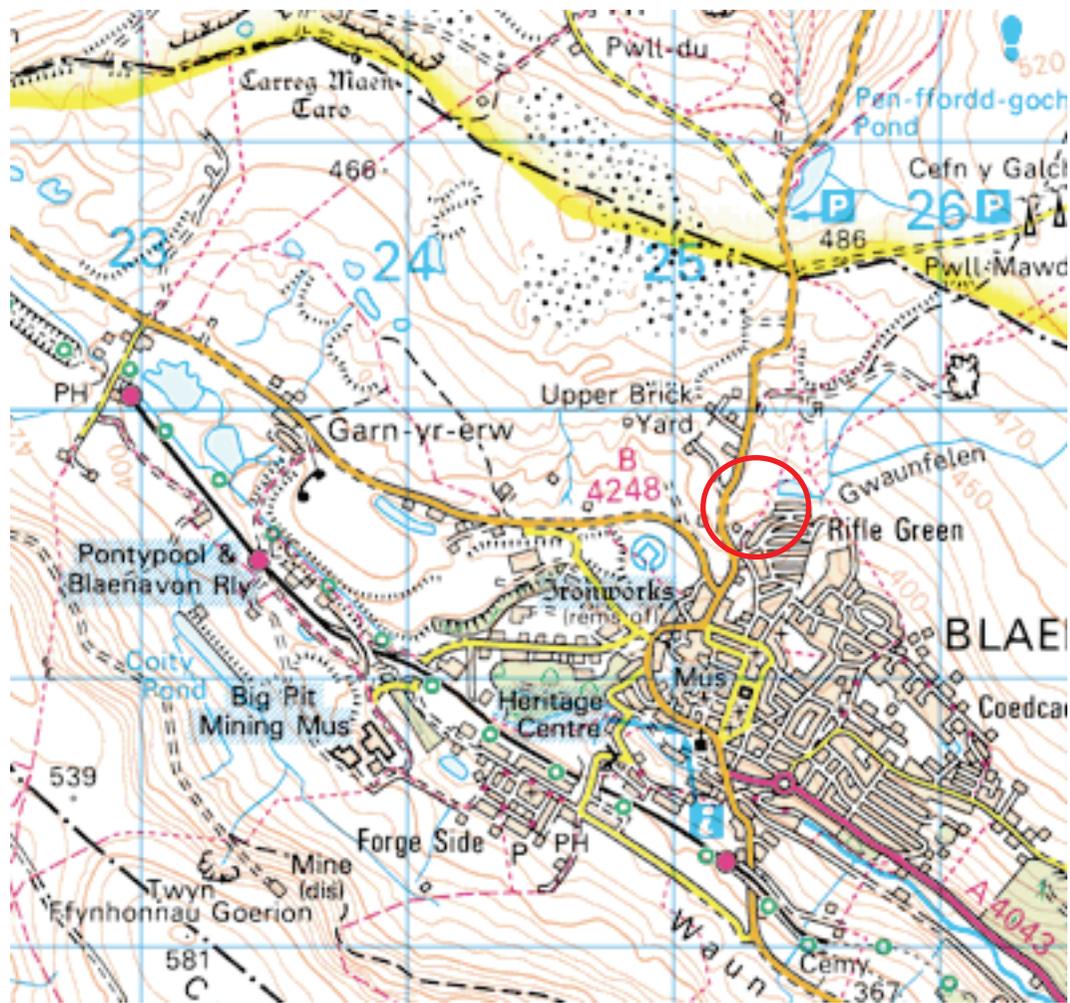


Fig. 1  
Location of  
site



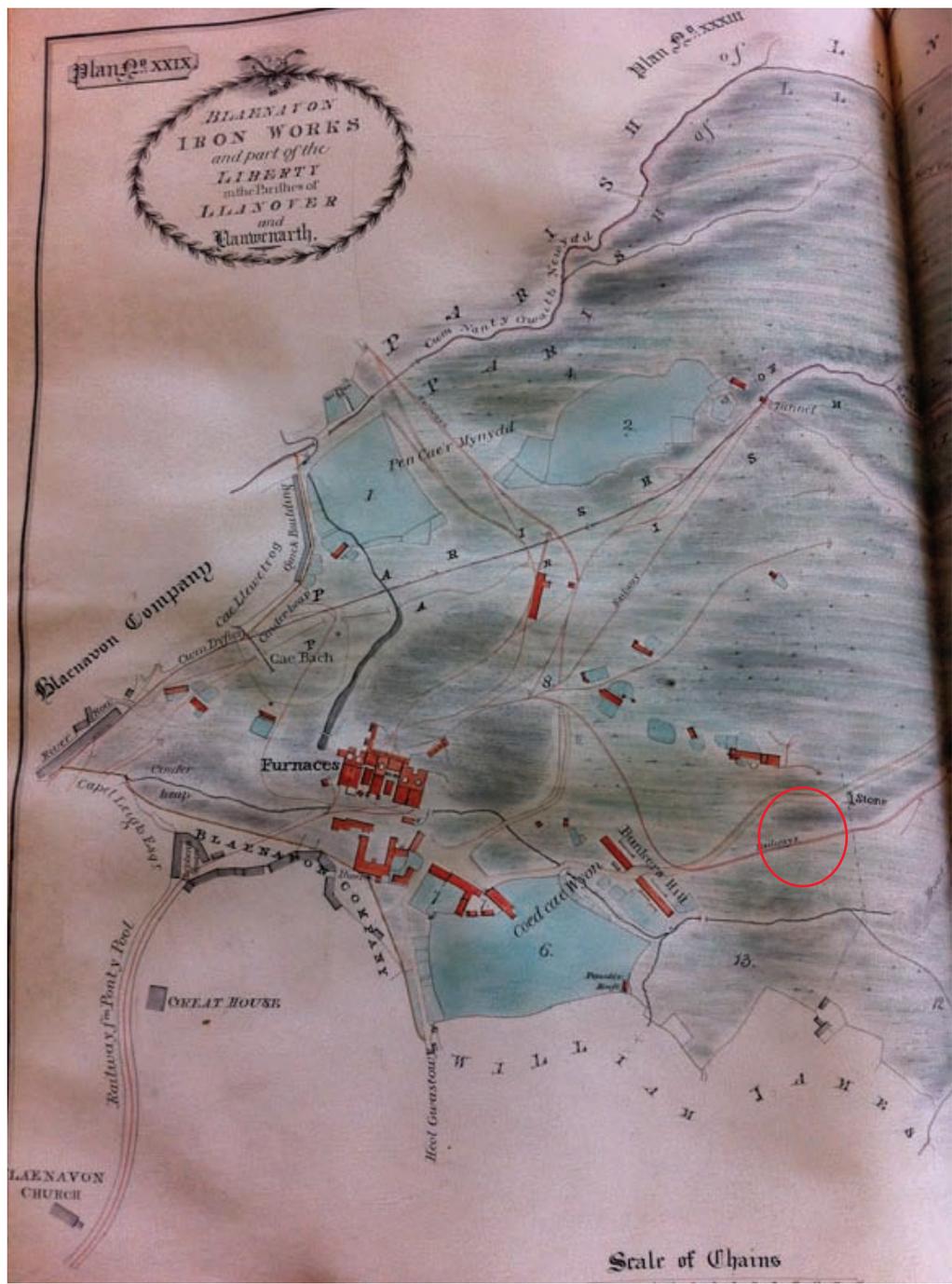


Fig. 3  
 The 1821 Survey of the Barony of Abergavenny showing the location of the proposed development site



Fig. 4  
1882 1st Edition OS  
map showing the  
location  
of the proposed  
development site

Location of proposed development  
(immediately below grass verge)



Fig. 5  
View eastwards from  
the edge of the  
Brickworks site

Location of proposed development  
(600m to south, beyond the playing field)



Fig. 6  
View South from  
the Pen-Ffordd-goch  
patchings

Location of proposed development  
(immediately behind spoil tip)



Fig. 7  
View west from  
Ball's Pond

Location of proposed development  
(1.6km to north-east)



Fig. 8  
View north-east  
from Big Pit

Location of proposed development  
(1.2km to north-east)



Fig. 9  
View north from  
Forgeside

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