

Big Pit Biodiversity Management Plan

Consultation draft

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INTRODUCTION

The existing development plan for Big Pit envisages several new buildings as well schemes seeking to make more of our land accessible to visitors.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 requires that land in public ownership is managed to maintain and enhance biodiversity.

The **Management proposals** outlined below have been drawn up with both the development plan and our new statutory responsibility in mind and sets out how both can be achieved. The proposals will be modified in light of detailed biological surveys in 2009, and further development proposals at Big Pit.

The land owned by the Museum at Big Pit has been divided up into management units as shown in Figure 1.

The proposals should also be seen in the context of similar proposals being drawn up for management of the Blaenafon World Heritage site, of which Big Pit is an integral part.



Figure 1 Management Units

1. COITY PITS

Description

This is the site of a former iron mine and includes one of the earliest tips on the site. Currently re-vegetated with areas of heath and semi-natural grassland and is of moderate interest for nature conservation. The land is currently unmanaged and becoming rank with minor scrub invasion.

Museum context

This is a historically important area with remnants of the earliest mining activity on the site. The objective for this area is to restore and interpret many of the derelict historic features, develop interpretation of the biological interest and to make the area accessible to the public.

Constraints:

- The external security fence must be maintained.
- No public access currently.
- It is a relatively small area for grazing.

Proposed Management

To restore the former feeder pond and maintain the open heath context of the land and enhance biodiversity. This will be achieved by grazing the land lightly in summer with cattle and/or sheep to open the rank vegetation yet maintain heather, mosses and lichens.

2. COITY TIPS AND POND

Description

This is a large area of former tip and moorland with 3 main landscape types:

1. Small area of scrubby birch/willow woodland, one of few areas of woodland on the site but probably of relatively low value.
2. Main tip with grassland and heath, reasonably diverse biologically with birch/gorse/bramble encroachment on lower eastern edge.
3. Pond – currently the only one on site.

Overall these areas are of moderate interest for nature conservation. They are currently unmanaged with occasional uncontrolled sheep grazing.

Museum context

Historically important area and the tip is a major landscape feature within Blaenafon. It needs to be maintained in open landscape context as seen from museum. Part of the tip previously removed for use as hardcore is currently being restored to its former profile whilst operational. The area currently has open access and the site of a popular nature trail.

Constraints:

- High public access, including dog walking.
- Existing nature trail.
- No major security issues.

Proposed Management

Those areas previously damaged by motorbikes need to be restored. To maintain the open context and enhance biodiversity the area needs to be lightly grazed with cattle and/or sheep during the summer. This may result in loss of scrub in the long run, depending on intensity of grazing.

3. MAIN SITE

Description

This is a large area consisting of buildings, re-graded tip, made ground, park vegetation, railway sidings, and regularly disturbed grassland. The area is generally of low interest for nature conservation, though some areas of open ground may be good for invertebrates. Other than occasional weeding of paved areas the land is currently unmanaged and ungrazed except by a few rabbits.

Museum context

Maintain, develop and enhance industrial appearance and context as part of the museum. We need to prevent further development of scrub and rank vegetation in order to maintain the industrial appearance. Further construction will be allowed where appropriate.

Constraints:

- Unable to have grazing in this area due to animal mess.
- High public access and visibility.
- Security boundary must be maintained.

Management proposals

Railway sidings – these can be maintained as scruffy/weedy open ground for biodiversity, similar in appearance to railway lines throughout the country. The area will be managed by strimming every 3 years, perhaps with restoration of open ground using disturbance by tracked vehicle.

Large areas of grassland – these areas can be managed as short grassland by strimming/cutting back every 2-3 years. Cuttings should be removed in areas of rank grass to deplete nutrients. Eroded areas should be restored.

Paved areas around buildings – these areas should be maintained in a tidy appearance by weeding and/or use of herbicides.

Consider control of rabbits which are currently damaging bank of tip adjacent to the conservation store.

4. CAR PARKS AND ROADSIDES

Description

Coach and car parks and road verges with short, mown grass of very low biological interest.

Museum context

Car parks.

Management proposals

Strim every year to maintain neat appearance and vehicle sight lines.

5. PONY Paddock

Description

Small paddock on restored tip with improved grassland. Currently rented out for grazing by ponies.

Museum context

A reminder of presence of ponies in the pits, but not currently an area accessed by visitors, nor are there any current plans for future developments.

Management proposals

Maintain as pony paddock.

6. COACH PARK AREA

Description

Rank grassland on landscaped former tip, of low nature conservation interest. Below and adjacent is woodland of grey alder on restored tip bank.

Museum context

Unused grassland areas adjacent to coach park, currently unsightly.

Constraints:

- Maintain line of sight to coach park.
- Soils need to be assessed for suitability for beech or oak woodland.

Management proposals

Possible options to enhance biodiversity are to develop as woodland demonstrating restoration of tips, or as woodland similar to adjacent grey alder woodland or to try to recreate woodland similar to original forest cover (mainly beech and oak).

COSTS

The main costs are likely to be:

1. additional stock fencing and gates (areas 1 and 2)
2. stock water troughs (areas 1 and 2)
3. annual strimming (areas 3 and 4)
4. removal of cuttings in some strimmed areas (area 3)
5. planting woodlands (area 6)
6. restoration of feeder pond (area 1)
7. restoration of damaged tip areas (areas 2 and 3)
8. hire of tracked vehicle for 'restoration' of open ground (area 3)

Advice is needed on practicality of summer grazing of areas 1 and 2.