

# Reviving Wales' Coal Tips: a safer, smarter, and sustainable approach

***The Welsh Government have introduced methods to manage disused coal tips.  
But there may be an even better way to safeguard, and even enrich, these sites***

Late last year, the government of Wales passed new legislation to oversee the safety of defunct coal mines and tips. **The Disused Mine and Quarry Tips (Wales) Bill** is the most robust iteration yet to assess and manage such sites, coming in almost immediately after November 2024's Storm Burt precipitated a landslide at the disused tip in Cwmtillery.

The incident at Cwmtillery is far from isolated. Particularly as the climate crisis generates ever more frequent storms, major landslides such as the one at **Tylorstown** in 2020 are increasingly becoming a regular occurrence.

The catastrophe at Aberfan is forever etched in the national memory, so events such as the landslide at Cwmtillery inevitably **spark memories of that tragedy**. For many, then, the solution is simple: clear them up, fill them in, find a way to **get rid of them once and for all**. After all, it's an extinct industry that poses a potential threat to communities.

## **Local problem, local pride**

But the issue isn't so clear-cut – there is much opposition from heritage-minded residents to the wholesale removal of coal-mining infrastructure and the emptying of the land around it. Many Welsh people are fiercely proud of the country's mining history and remain passionate about keeping mining infrastructure exactly where it is.

The unfortunate reality that there are two strong, valid voices on either side of the debate means the solution to the issue is far from straightforward. The new legislation evidently seeks to strike a path down the middle: to keep sites safe without removing them.

However, there's a strong chance the framework set out by the Bill will cost a lot of public money. There are 2,573 coal tips across Wales, and 360 of them are considered **especially high risk**. Realistically, this means authorities across the country will exhaust untold amounts of resources to prop up their safety for an indeterminate amount of time: a Plaid Cymru debate in May 2024 described "the long-term financial responsibility" required for maintenance of post-industrial Welsh areas.



The optimum way around these opposing viewpoints, without overspending public money, is one that walks the fine line between the obvious need for safety and the necessary protection of heritage. Better yet, a method that protects communities while revitalising them, and even contributing modestly to local economies.

## Opportunity – for everyone

Some ways east of Wales lies Pleasley, a village on the border between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Pleasley's rich history with coal mining stretches back to 1873, and over more than 100 years flourished and evolved until the pit's closure in 1983.

Like virtually all towns and villages of its ilk across the UK, the mine provided both work and a sense of community for the people of Pleasley. Upon its closing, only silent buildings and leftover spoil heaps remained. The remaining structures were scheduled for demolition soon after in 1986, which threatened to wipe clean any trace of a once-thriving industrial space about which many residents remained passionately proud.

Local people were quickly moved to action, leading to a grand revitalisation project to protect the site and maintain its surrounding area. As the years went on, iconic buildings were restored and beautiful greenery crept back into the surrounding landscape.

Nowadays, the **Pleasley Pit Trust** oversees a popular museum and nature reserve, both of which consistently attract visitors, volunteers, and school trips. Of course, museums and galleries, cafes, gift shops, and any other mainstays of tourist spots require people to run them – which means these reinvigorated spaces become significant sources of local employment for local people.



## Why not Wales?

The story of Pleasley demonstrates a successful regeneration project that transformed a defunct industrial scape into an attractive site for visitors both local and national. With care and attention, the site is kept both safe and relevant, a place for families that's abundant with nature and local history.

This kind of initiative isn't about removing local history – quite the opposite. It's about actively promoting heritage, about maintaining proud industrial pasts, and it has been done elsewhere on small and large scales. In fact, regeneration of this type is an option for virtually any community with a now-defunct industry infrastructure.

It was certainly the case in Wakefield, Yorkshire, where the National Coal Mining Museum now stands atop the once-functional Caphouse Colliery. It promotes the area's (and the country's) **rich mining history** while contributing to the local economy with underground tours, a café, and a gift shop.

And where some areas may endeavour for a modest heritage site, others could look to use the space for more ambitious means.

Such was the case at Clipstone Colliery in Nottinghamshire, where plans over the years have included maintenance of the headstocks along with activities spaces for **climbing walls, parkour, and indoor skydiving**. The admittedly long road to regeneration continues: plans continue under the current owner to transform it into a visitor attraction, with **unique musical concerts** foreshadowing a hopefully bright future.

Our thinking is, if it's viable for England, it can work in Wales.

Indeed, it's been done in spectacular fashion already over in Torfaen: the **Big Pit National Coal Museum** hosts galleries, an underground mine tour, research collections, and more (along with – naturally – coffee and gift shops!). This isn't to say a local authority or community's plans need to be this grand... but it is possible.

## The matter of money

Of course, as has already been implied, money is the salient obstacle. Plans at Clipstone hinged (and continue to hinge) on grants from very specific sources such as the Lottery Fund. That's because, so says the *Caerphilly Observer*, the funding set aside by the current Chancellor is very welcome, but **not nearly enough**.

But the truth is, an abundance of national & local government, arts, culture, and trusts funding available exists for exactly these kinds of revitalisation schemes. Pleasley were able to secure, for example, the **Biffa Award Grant** to refurbish iconic structures and further digitise the space to enhance visitor engagement.



Bear in mind, too, that the revitalisation of green spaces upon which most ex-mining infrastructures are positioned represents a localised reflection of the **current government's wider environmental strategy**.

Given that we're talking about ways to increase employment and employability (often in areas of entrenched unemployment), to construct community spaces and generate beauty spots, and to potentially build sports complexes and playing fields – this widens the scope for possible funding sources, depending on local authorities' and communities' wants and needs.

Locating funding can be challenging and securing them even more so. In a landscape that so often feels more like a maze than a route towards opportunity, services like **GrantFinder** can serve as a crucial map to help navigate the way forward.

And we believe it is absolutely worth doing. Diverse funding sources can power overhauling projects, eliminating the need for government to spend vast amounts of money for years on end to instead promote heritage and revitalise communities.

**Call us now on 0333 011 1200 or email [marketing@idoxgroup.com](mailto:marketing@idoxgroup.com) for more information about Idox's funding services.**

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**Idox Software Ltd**  
Unit 5, Woking 8  
Forsyth Road, Woking  
Surrey GU21 5SB

T: +44 (0) 333 011 1200  
E: [marketing@idoxgroup.com](mailto:marketing@idoxgroup.com)

[www.idoxgroup.com](http://www.idoxgroup.com)

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