

Ministry of Supply Valley, Rhydymwyn, Flintshire

Proposal to accept the offer of an administrative transfer of the ownership / management of the former Ministry of Supply Valley Site from DEFRA

Background

DEFRA has offered Cadw the opportunity to acquire the former Ministry of Supply Valley Site, Rhydymwyn, by either an admin transfer of the asset or a transfer of management control (with budget).

Richard Baker, Head of Estates for Welsh Government is in the process of organising a meeting to discuss this proposal. Marilyn and I will attend an initial meeting with Richard Baker and John Richards in late November or early December (tbc when Marilyn returns from annual leave).

Site history

The M.S. Factory, Valley was a Second World War military-industrial complex established at Rhydymwyn, Flintshire in 1939. It was used primarily for the storage and production of mustard gas. A surplus building (P6) is associated with the pioneering early stages of Britain's nuclear weapon development programme, known as the 'Tube Alloys' project. The building was adapted for the testing of apparatus for uranium isotope separation (known as gaseous diffusion) in 1942 before this was moved to America (developing later into the Manhattan Project), although experimentation continued in the building until 1945.

In 1940-1959, the site was involved in the manufacturing, assembly or storage of chemical weapons, or mustard gas in bulk containers. During 1947-1959 the tunnel complex held the majority of the country's stock of mustard gas. Britain subsequently relinquished its chemical weapons capability and the site was turned to other uses.

During the early 1960s the tunnels were earmarked as the nominal home for two NATO wartime agencies – the eastern branches of the NATO Oil Executive Board and the Defence Shipping Executive Board which would be located in Britain. From the mid-1960s the site was used by various governmental departments, its major function being a buffer storage depot to supply emergency rations and foodstuffs, and associated facilities such as mobile bakeries and canteens.

In the 1980s the effluent disposal pit was filled in, the pipeline to the Dee Estuary was either removed or filled with concrete-based slurry and a number of buildings were made safe or demolished. In 1994 the site was closed, and a programme of demolition was undertaken. This involved the dropping of some of the buildings onto their footprints, and the rubble being mounded over with topsoil.

In 2003 major remediation work took place when a large number of buildings were demolished, the toxic drains were filled in and any suspect areas were covered with membranes and a large number of monitoring points were installed. Several major

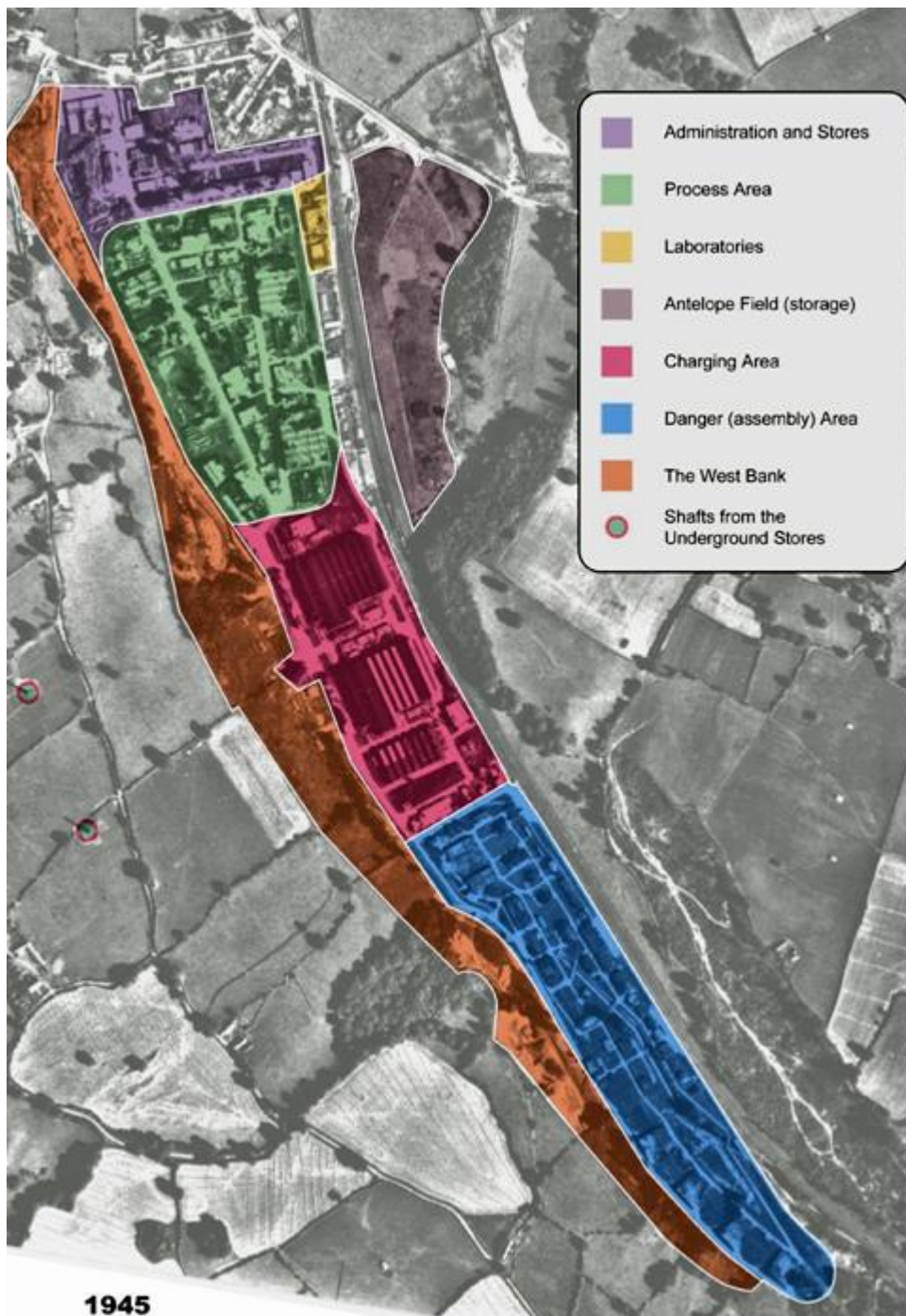
structures, and many ancillary buildings, still survive across the site. As part of this package a Visitor Centre was built on the site of the old gatehouse.

The site has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve and is actively managed by North East Wales Wildlife, who maintains an office on site. There is an active Rhydymwyn Valley History Society, members of which are undertaking pioneering research into Britain's Cold War era.

Site description

The site occupies around 86 acres within the U-shaped Alyn Valley. Over 100 specialised buildings were constructed across the site, linked by an extensive rail network. A complex of interlinked subterranean, rock-cut tunnels and caverns was also constructed cut into the steep valley side. The site is enclosed by a seven mile perimeter fence.





Designations

In 2008, the surviving Runcol and three Pyro production houses were listed at Grade II. The surviving 21 buildings within the substantial Danger Area and the subterranean tunnel complex were also scheduled as monuments of national importance.

There are also as yet to be determined natural environment designations on site.

Importance

- The factory is of international significance in terms of being representative as the British development site involved with arguably the most important historical and technological development during the twentieth century - the design, creation and use of an atomic weapon. MoS Valley is the outstanding Welsh example of the Cold War era and the insidious effect the Cold War had in defining the lives of subsequent generations.
- MoS Valley is emblematic of the British post war Government belief that the UK must possess a nuclear weapon capability in order to be able to sit at the top table and maintain credibility as a major world power, following the decline of Empire.
- MoS Valley is the most complete and best preserved chemical weapons production, storage and assembly site surviving within the UK, where there is a very limited survival of evidence overall. The surviving production buildings are unique survivals.
- Together the structures form a readily understandable group and possess important group value.
- The Danger Area buildings were built to designs adapted for chemical weapons work and are a unique survival in the UK. The survival of the plan form and layout of the storage caverns and buildings demonstrates the industrial processes at the site.

Opportunities

Acquisition of the site would present opportunities to:

- secure the management, conservation and presentation of the most important C20 military site in Wales
- add a very different site type to Cadw's portfolio, one which has a modern emphasis with massive public interest
- present a very different type of history and an extensive range of stories to the visiting public, including concepts of Britain's sense of national identity during the C20, the willingness of Government to commit significant resources in the interest of a perceived threat to national security, the development of the arms race, and technological and scientific development. Often known as 'hot' or 'contested' heritage the site offers new narratives not currently available to Cadw
- develop a site with a developing visitor profile and an existing visitor centre and car parking facilities
- obtain a site with significant amounts of covered space
- showcase harmonious management of the historic and natural environments
- present a historic site with proper tunnels!



Initial recommendations

- 1) To meet with DEFRA and explore further the opportunities and risks presented by acquiring the site
- 2) To undertake a site visit to fully appreciate the scale of the opportunity

Links

<https://www.rhydymwynvalleyhistory.co.uk/>

Jon Berry

12 November 2013