



THE COALFIELDS RESEARCH PROGRAMME:

DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 4

REBUILDING THE COALFIELDS

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1 Introduction

This paper aims to explore the relationship between past present and future within the four coalfield areas studied. In particular there is the focus on the way the legacy of place is reinterpreted for future economic development. The paper opens with a general discussion of industrial redevelopment in the wake of the recent closures in the four areas studied and focuses particularly on the level of dependency on the coal industry and suggests that redevelopment strategies adopted imply a critique of this previous dependency on coal. Within such a move the former industry is characterised as being inherently old fashioned and low skilled while much is made of iconic new clean industries attracted to the areas. The paper then moves on to discuss the way in which there is an increasing tendency on the part of those working to redevelop the former coalfields to repackaging them in line with the perceived needs and demands of business. Subsequent sections deal with the rise of new industries in each of the areas focusing on the growth of call centres and the new emphasis placed on heritage and tourism. It is suggested that heritage and the related rural images feed into the repackaging of place discussed above. The final section is an exploration of some of the problems that have emerged from the industrial redevelopment undertaken. It will explore the obvious tension between the need for jobs almost at any price and the problems in long term sustainability if such a course is embarked upon.

2 Industrial Redevelopment

Since the early 1980s as we have seen the coal industry in the UK has undergone massive restructuring. This paper charts the attempts to rebuild former coalfield communities that were previously highly dependent on coal for high levels of employment. Evidence presented here emerges from fieldwork carried out in four former coal mining areas of England and Wales; St. Helens in the former Lancashire area, Mansfield in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, Easington in the Durham coalfield and finally Cynon Valley in South Wales. These areas were chosen in order to compare and contrast the effects of closure on the social and economic infrastructure. In the first two areas there had been a diversity of economic activity whereas in the latter two there had been much greater levels of dependency on the extraction, processing and transportation of coal. In St. Helens for example the percentage of jobs in the energy sector fell from nearly 8% to 4.5% between the censuses of 1981 and 1991 whereas in Easington the proportion of the workforce dependent on the same sector was in 1981 43% falling dramatically to 17% ten years later. Of all four places considered here it is St. Helens that stands out as less reliant on coal with a large manufacturing base in 1981 of nearly 45%.

The scale of an area's dependency on the one industry is highlighted in a quote from a member of East Durham Development Agency (EDDA):

In 1947 this district had a population of about 110,000, 30,000 miners were employed in the district, not all living here. Without mining there would be no Easington district, just a few agricultural villages. To go suddenly with 30,000, and even 15 years ago there was 12,000 people in the mining industry, to nothing, there is a huge readjustment.

An official from the Government Office for the North East, whose patch included the same area, commented:

The problem with Durham was it relied totally on mining, nothing else. I am sure you have seen all the historical data, 13,000 jobs lost in 4/5 years. To an area the size of East Durham, that is catastrophic. There was nothing else for them to do. Whereas Tyneside had big conurbation, there is always going to be other things. Primarily, that is why it hit East Durham harder.

In South Wales there was a similar dependency:

The County Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taff was formally dominated by the coal mining industry. In 1947, when the industry was nationalised 35 pits were operating in the area employing just over 27,000 people. Since this time the industry has declined considerably employing just under 5,000 in 1985 and has continued to contract leaving only 1 pit remaining in the South Wales coalfield (Rhondda Cynon Taff *Insight 2*).

In the Mansfield area the coal industry has lost over 15,000 jobs since 1984 in the travel to work are out of a total population of 160,000 (Mansfield District Council *Business Guide 2.2* 1998). North West mining employment fell from 8,216 in 1984 to 4,440 at the point of closure of the last remaining collieries in the early 1990s (Government Office North West Coalfield Taskforce submission 1997).

In each of the areas this domination by single large industry was felt in similar ways. In the case of St. Helens the local economy has historically been dependent on several large paternalistic companies like the glass maker Pilkingtons and the drug manufacturers Smith Kline Beechams, in addition to the coal industry. The general consensus was that a mono-industrial structure was one that bred dependency within both the workforce and the wider working population. There was then a sense in all four places that this structural dependency created in turn a social dependency that with the collapse of coal employment was unsustainable. As the report of the Coal Field Task Force notes:

There is nowhere else like the coalfields. Their long history as the engine of the nation's industrialisation meant they developed a cohesion, a reliance on a single industry and an independent existence with few parallels. *This was their greatest strength when the mines were producing and now it is their greatest weakness* (DETR, 1998) (emphasis added).

In the case of coal the paternalism was seen to be a particularly marked, as a member of EDDA remarked with regard to Easington:

...in the past relied upon a paternal National Coal Board to look after them. They lived in Coal Board houses, working the pit, going to miners' institutes for social evenings, playing football in the ground which the miners had provided. Everything was done by themselves or by NCB.

Again the Coal Field Task Force mentions this issue 'The coal industry promoted a culture of paternalism and a wide range of social and recreational facilities were focused around the pit' (DETR, 1998). But this legacy it was believed has a negative side once coal mine employment is removed. In particular there is a sense in which a personal and collective dependence was manifest in the attitudes and assumptions of

the local population who had grown use to employment opportunities on their door steps, and were now unwilling to move:

They are in a colliery, a row of houses, they live there, they got up, walked to the end of the street and they were into their employment...There is this attitude/mentally thing, with coal mining communities, to a large degree. Their father and father before that, had all worked there at the pit and didn't have to move elsewhere, and that still exists, to some degree (Government Office North East).

The terminal decline of the coal industry then, while representing a disaster economically and socially, may also offer a chance for a fresh start in both fields. In each of the areas a similar framework is deployed in order to make some sense of the future and the past, with the key phrase here being the need now for *diversity*. This issue is addressed in the Coalfield Task Force report:

The focus must now be on the creation of a new economic base which integrates communities into the wider regional economy...Particular consideration will need to be given to diversification of the economic base and the potential for exploiting new technologies (DETR, 1998,13).

In this explanation the previous dependence, or over dependence, on coal as a source of employment was always one that was vulnerable both to eventual exhaustion, or to the capricious whim of impersonal market forces. While the employment and economic boost the industry gave to the community is missed its passing is interpreted as an opportunity. Thus the challenge in each of the areas is to rebuild the economy in a diversified way with a mixture of manufacturing and service sector jobs. An interesting point here is the way in which the industries that appear more often in the literature designed to promote inward investment are those representing the *modern*, or being at the *cutting edge*. Often the *technological*, and therefore *sophisticated*, aspects of employment are stressed, with the implicit implication that the coal industry by contrast was irredeemably low tech. As publicity material from the East Durham Development Agency (EDDA) puts it:

Yesterday it was coal. Today it's computer chips and microtechnology. Heavy industry out. High tech manufacturing and service industries in (East Durham Development Agency undated p.2).

The District makes the link between Easington and its proximity to other successful examples of high tech foreign investment such as Nissan, Siemens and Samsung. Within the area much is made of the advance nature of businesses that have already settled such as NSK and TRW and their ability to supply 'tomorrows jobs'. In St. Helens economic development literature similarly makes use of companies like Siemens, Hoogovens Aluminium and NGF Europe with literature from the Business Development Centre produced from the 'Technology Campus' in the town.

In South Wales the proximity to the M4 corridor has utility. In John Redwood's foreword to a Welsh Office inward investment brochure produced at the end of 1994 he talked of South Wales having 'attracted the best of world industry: Sony, Aiwa, British Airways, Bosch, and Ford' (Welsh Office 1994 1). And Rhondda Cynon Taff council make much of their own share of technologically advanced companies such as in the pharmaceuticals sector Rocielle Medical or in the engineering sector companies

such as Total Engine Support and Prematec, both involved in the aerospace industry. And this theme is taken up in other examples from the Council, one stating:

...Rhondda Cynon Taff to attract one of the highest concentrations of high-tech firms in the country, with companies such as Hitachi, British Airways Avionic Engineering, General Electric (EMMS), Pirelli, the Showa Corporation, Fram Europe and the Royal Mint heading the list (RCT A Vision for Business Success undated).

Publicity material from the same organisation contains glossy pictures of high-tech set pieces including the inspection of an aircraft cockpit, the assembly of several computer boards and a tableau of two young scientists carrying out an experiment. All of these events are staged within high-tech settings, dimly lit with modish colour. The council itself derives considerable pride from its newly opened 'Valleys Innovation Centre' with publicity material for the development stating 'It has been specifically designed to attract companies developing new technology or innovative products' (Insight RCT summer 1997). And in another Council publication the role of the same building is again emphasised. Under the heading 'New Technology' the Authority states its strategy as being:

To continue to build upon the unit's strengths of attracting new technology through developments such as the Valleys Innovation Centre and develop further strategic initiatives to establish it as the Authority's flagship for innovation and investment (RCT Economic Development statement 1997/98 7).

In a special supplement of the *Western Mail*, produced for the Council, successive pages have headlines on them such as 'Attracting high-tech jobs' and 'At the cutting edge of high-tech engineering' (Western Mail 12/3/97).

The East Midlands the sophistication of the textiles and automotive supply industries is employed, and a district council publication speaks of:

Much of the investment is in leading edge technologies and innovations, which means that a new and sound economic base for the future is already forming (Mansfield District *Agenda for Change* 11).

There is a sense in which each of the districts attempts to associate itself with the *new* and the *modern* in the hope that some of the perceived benefits will 'rub off' on the area, that other businesses will be impressed by its claim to modernity and will choose to invest in an area. In each of the area existing employers, particularly inward investors are used in publicity to attract other firms. As material from RCT notes 'Some of the world's leading multi-national companies have already discovered how Rhondda Cynon Taff has the vision to help make their business a success' and later 'yet more reasons for choosing Rhondda Cynon Taff as your ideal business location – *you'll be in exceptional company* when you do (RCT A Vision for Business Success undated) (emphasis added).

In addition to the new types of jobs that are heralded, there is also a sense in which the type of employment brought in to compensate for those lost in the coal industry itself demands something innovative from the workforce. Again the low tech/high-tech dualism is deployed but there is a reworking of the expectation as to the nature of these jobs. This is employment that will challenge the worker in a variety of ways. Flexibility, adaptability and problem solving are juxtaposed to previous forms of

employment where these sorts of attributes were either not required or positively discouraged. As a report from the joint North East TECs puts it, 'Many jobs are in flatter organisations requiring flexibility, project management and team work skills' (NE TEC 1998). Thus the redevelopment of the coalfield areas is interpreted at least partly as a positive chance to affect change and to bring the areas in to the late 20th century.

3 Packaging the Area

This concern with being seen as associated with the 'high-tech' can be thought of as part of a wider sense in which places are increasingly being packaged for external, and arguably internal, consumption. This packaging can be conceived of as the way in which the perceived elements of what makes a place or area attractive are defined and then marshalled together by the local state, and in turn offered up to potential inward investors. Similar processes within this general trend are observable within the former coalfield area. In all of the publicity produced for the areas their position is sold as central with excellent communications to the outside world. In Easington for example it is boasted that the area is at 'the epicentre of business activity in north east England - the UK's most dynamic investment arena' (Place to be 1996 1). The district constructs itself as lying, slightly off centre, in a triangle formed of the high-tech sites of inward investment at Siemens and Nissan to the north, Samsung to the south and finally Fujitsu to the south-east. Publicity for Mansfield district makes much of its central location with the area pinpointed on a larger map of the British Isles. More detailed maps show the area as lying between the motorway networks of the M1 and A1. St. Helens likewise makes much of its centrality with regard to other places between Liverpool and Manchester and equidistant between London and Edinburgh. In Rhondda Cynon Taff's publicity there are similar echoes:

Imagine an area right in the centre of South Wales's expanding business centre, fed by excellent road, rail, sea and air services and within two and a half hours driving time from London. As the ideal business location, Rhondda Cynon Taff is easily and quickly reached from all parts of the UK, Europe and beyond (RCT A Vision for business success undated).

At a more detailed level the rebuilding process involves the necessity to offer to would be investors a bundle of incentives and attractive features. A member of East Durham Taskforce explained the process:

...you would make sure that the product looks right, is right, you know, we've, we've given the right messages out...first of all we're in competition within the sub-region and the region to, you know to other very similar areas. So what we say is location, you know, road communications, and good labour force, resilience of staff (John Smith East Durham Task Force 1998 p19).

The same person went on to explain:

Well, I think, yes, you would sell the whole thing as the product. You'd sell it as a package. And we would say 'look we have a we have a mechanism here', you know, Erm, so we would try to, sort of, sell it as best we can, but you, you know, you are in competition with the rest of the area. Offering incentives packages, you know, various incentive packages, erm, and really try to sell yourselves as well as the product itself, you know. Most companies will not locate, unless there is premises available to them, you know, they tend not to go on to, I won't say brown field sites,

but they tend not to go on to sites and say well, 'oh, we will build a factory there for you in such an' such. They usually like either the infrastructure to be there or alternatively they like the unit to be built, so we've tried to build a range of units.

At the local level Easington's economic development unit describes the contents of the package it offers:

Besides the unrivalled location, the District of Easington offers excellent business sites, a large pool of enterprising people and a raft of extra assistance ready to energise commercial development (Place to be, 1996, 1, 1).

An earlier publication from the same agency stressed the superior level of support available in the area:

This is "One-Stop Shopping", providing every support service you need, from marketing and market research, through Quality Assurance to Enterprise Training...With its help, you can ensure that your company gets everything from the maximum grants and incentives available, to the ideal workforce and the most convenient business premises (EDDA undated).

Of all the four areas studied here perhaps Durham had the most coherent of all the presentations with the different agencies involved in regeneration meshing, superficially at least, with each other. This was most marked in the way in which a number of interviews at county and district level opened or closed with us being offered the same County produced glossy brochure. County Durham also promotes the wider area in a similar fashion on its web site:

County Durham has an extremely wide choice of modern industrial estates, served by excellent communications. What is more, the county has a combination of low rentals and land prices, a loyal and adaptable workforce and good labour relations. All of this provides the conditions for the continued development of the County's industrial base which includes major international companies as well as a thriving small firms sector (County Durham Website 1998).

In Mansfield a representative from the economic development unit talks of his area in particular terms:

I think, I suppose, at the end of the day businesses are obviously are commercially minded, sort of thing and they'll look at, sort of, set up costs, what financial incentives are available, what packages are available, how much is it going to cost to employ people etc. So they look at all those different factors, and we've got quite an attractive, probably one of the best financial packages in the country that we can offer, so that is a big incentive for a potential business in Mansfield. We'd also say communications are pretty good, in terms of road links to motorways, sort of thing, so generally speaking, it's quite an attractive package that we can offer, really, and the area also has Objective Two status, so again, it qualifies for DTI grants, etc. So it's really all those things, as well as having an Enterprise Zone, that enables us to be able to pull investors in really.

As part of its *Marketing Mansfield* initiative the area is described to potential investors as:

Proud and defiant, Mansfield has emerged from the dark days of mine closures and recession as a town fit to face the future - lean and hungry, and already providing a dynamic environment in which modern business can prosper...This central location is within two hours' drive of over half of England's population, made readily accessible

by major rail and road links...the town can offer a number of prime cost-competitive development sites with a wide range of units suitable for varied commercial activities, from manufacturing to service industries and administration (Mansfield District Council business guide 1.1).

Note the way here the place becomes a package of overlapping attributes, which are in place waiting to be exploited by incoming business. The publicity produced by economic development agencies could be thought of as occupying a space somewhere between a catalogue and a holiday brochure. In the case of South Wales this concern is also matched and is coupled more explicitly with a concern to be seen as being accommodative to business. In Rhondda Cynon Taff publication the Chair of the council's Economic Development section is quoted as saying:

The county borough offers excellent availability of quality industrial and commercial floorspace and a wide range of sites for developers in key locations...Our aim is to be as efficient and effective as possible. We realise that people in business today need quick, clear answers and our aim is to provide them (RCT Insight Summer 1997 1).

It would seem that just as the workforce is encouraged to take on an increasingly entrepreneurial aspect so must the councils and other public bodies that represent them. Du Gay and Salaman (1992) discuss the way the language of the market has ceased to be solely the argot of commercial sector but has systematically found its way into the public sector (see also du Gay, 1996). Just as the areas seem to want to move from an older images of themselves those involved in the rebuilding of the coalfields embrace an entrepreneurial image, one where they are seen as moving away from the moribund image of council administration of the past. As part of this retreat from bureaucratic approaches to development or redevelopment and would seem to be increasingly reliant on strong individuals who can push through change and quickly adapt to fast moving market situations. The interviewee from EDDA in the North east was representative of this move:

If we haven't got the right factory we can't compete. If we haven't got the right piece of land, we can't compete. At the moment we have got nothing available, over 5,000-sq. ft... I am pleased to say with the Enterprise Zone sites, in the course of the next few months, there is going to be a considerable amount of speculative development, meaning companies who are looking for large factories I can again compete, I can't compete if there isn't a large factory at the moment, but I can compete again, because the lead in time for inward investment time is 4 months. We met one company last week, wanting 30,000 sq. ft. I said 'we haven't got one now, but there will be one ready in October'.

Note the frequency with which this actor talks in the first persons. This process of redevelopment seems to be an individual rather than collective enterprise. The success of the area is dependent on the ability of this officer to meet the needs of *his* customers. Again this could be seen as part of a trend which sees public sector organisations and actors as behaving like their equivalents in the private sector. Over the past decade and a half there has been an increasing stress placed on leadership skills in the corporate world which arguably could be seen to stem from the work of Peters and Waterman (1982) and the publication of their influential *In Search of Excellence*. In this book and those that followed it (for example, Peters 1992) stress was placed on the need for organisations to move away from bureaucratic forms of managerial control and instead celebrate a new breed of charismatic leaders who had entrepreneurial attributes and qualities. In many ways this development marks the re-

emergence of older forms of organisational governance with stress now placed on the informal and substantively rational aspects of leadership. Modern, bureaucratic, formally rational approaches are seen as no longer of use. The same person talked in similar terms about the poor educational skills in the area, again note the way educational achievement and the needs of business are closely related:

I look at the quality of the product coming out of the comprehensive schools at 16, it is very poor, in East Durham

Here we witness the way workers are viewed as part of the package that is offered to would be investors and is something that will be expanded on in later Discussion Papers. This attitude is replicated in other areas, in St. Helens the interviewee was particularly frustrated about the lack of available useable land that he could provide for developers:

I have been at this situation in St Helens, where we are actually running out of sites and property...I need that land like 3 or 4 months ago...I spend most of my working week, telling people they can't have what they are asking me for, which is a damn shame (St. Helens Economic Development).

One gets a sense of an entrepreneur being blocked at every turn by the dead hand of bureaucracy and tradition. This particular actor obviously put great store by the personal networks he had built up in the area:

I know a lot of people, I have been in this business 20 odd years. I know most of the agents, I know most of the facilitators,

This personalisation is reflected at other moments in the process of redevelopment, most notably in the grey literature produced by a number of the bodies involved in regeneration. In the North East for example Easington's literature features stylish grainy black and white pictures of both the head of EDDA and Economic development at the District council. In an early version of EDDA publicity material Roland Stevenson of BCE is quoted as saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know" (EDDA undated). In several of the interviews the informal aspects of economic redevelopment were alluded to. In South Wales a council employee told of how Japanese inward investment had been won not by the package offered by RCT but by the personal contacts built with the investors rounded off by the opportunity of tea with Prince Charles at his Gloucestershire home just over the Seven Bridge! In the case of Easington more prosaically personal contact was built up over a pint in a local pub. Again one way of understanding these developments is to see them as evidence of the greater reliance on substantively rational approaches, informality and tacit knowledge to business rather than a formal rationality. Business, in the newly globalised economy, is based increasingly on tacit skill and knowledge. Image, presentation, packaging and personal skills come to the fore in the scramble to attract new business.

4 Call Centres

One of the important sources of new job creation in the former coalfields examined here were call centres. Their value would seem to lie both as a potential source of

employment and as an iconic affirmation of the attraction to an area of 'modern jobs'. Such employment is symbolically modern in the sense that tele-working is service sector work, not heavy industry, and that there is a perception that these are futuristic jobs. In the report of the Coalfield Task Force call centres were highlighted as a possible viable source of jobs, 'Call centres may offer opportunities even in more isolated areas...' (DETR, 1998, 13). A recent article in the *Independent* about the sector carried the sub-title 'Call centres employ more people than coal mines...' (*Independent* 2/6/98) while another in the *Guardian* began with the line 'More people now work in call centres than in car factories or coal mines' (*Guardian* 9/11/98). Again there is iconic appeal in the juxtaposition of 'old coal' with this new form of work. Employment in the coal industry is deployed in such articles because of its ability to summon up multiple identities and images, a quality explored later.

This type of work represents the fastest growing form of employment in the UK with some 7000 centres employing over 200,000 people in Britain. This figure represents 1.1% of the workforce and is expected to double by 2001 (Ferne 1998 7). This growth has seen the majority of centres established outside London and the south-east. Of the regions examined here 20% of these jobs are located in the north-west, 6% in the north-east, 6% in Wales and 4% in the East Midlands (Financial Times 23/4/98). The older industrial areas of the UK are seen as important for the development of this industry because of their ability to supply the labour combined with more favourable training and other incentives packages. In the four areas studied this type of development has grown in importance. In the Easington area a 500 seat development for *Orange* was announced recently (*Independent* 12/12/98). And a member of the East Durham Task Force spoke of recent experience that his area had had with this type of industry, note the way he talks of the need to supply an attractive package to would be investors:

...we've done this fairly recently with the call centre, in Peterlee, and we brought the education and training people in and said, 'look, we will put customise training on for you' and we have also, from this group, we've identified funding to provide public transport to your call centre, because it's in a very isolated area. One would assume that they are going to be working the three shift system and you're going to have women workers etc etc in a there, you know. So from a community safety, we've looked at things as well, putting CCTV in (John Smith East Durham Task Force).

In Wales call centres have a major role in regeneration strategies but seem to be confined to the larger centres of population such as Cardiff and Swansea (see *Call Centre Western Mail* spring 1998). The highest profile for this type of employment was found in the North West. Merseyside Partnership for instance produced an entire leaflet for inward investor devoted to this subject:

The most important ingredient in any Call Centre operation is the people. The people of Merseyside are its greatest asset, with a proven track record of reliability, enthusiasm and excellence, particularly in the rapidly developing tele-business environment (Merseyside call centre undated).

An interviewee from St. Helens Economic Development section noted the regional impact of the location of this sort of work:

...when Knowsley got the big call centre, QVC, lots of people from St Helens got jobs there. Similarly, when BT opened the 1,000 seater down at Warrington,

something like 4 nearly 500 people from this area, St Helens, Newton-le-Willows, Billinge, between 5 or 6 miles away, it's local, went to work there.

And the same interviewee spoke of the Borough's own success with this form of employment:

It's the growth thing of the '90's isn't it? We landed one last year, which we won't actually open until December, simply because the company who are contract, a very very big contract, a Government Dept I am not even allowed to mention, had empty buildings all around the country, well, half empty buildings", (whispered) "Telecom Exchanges. We had one here. All I had to do was convince a team from BT, that St Helens was a good town centre, for people to get into, particularly women, that would provide women, in lunch breaks with a good range of shopping and also that our local TEC would do everything it could to encourage returners to work and to provide a decent level of assistance for training and retraining. I said 'yes' to all of that and hey presto! we have got that. One hundred and twenty new jobs starting in December. Call centre! It's phenomenal.

This quote usefully illustrates the way the 'package' comes together with the council able to offer the sites, buildings, workers and attractive places for them to shop to keep the workforce happy! The same interviewee went on to discuss the smaller centres that had been attracted to the area:

We have got a large call centre, up the road inside the complex, which is run by an American company called Owens Corning and he is the, the ones you don't see. You only hear about the BIG ones! This thing's got about 40 people. [And we have] Greenalls Tavern wholesaling. Fifty operators selling bottle beer around the country. That kind of employment would be very successful.

But the growth of such employment is not without its critics, one respondent from English Partnerships North West acknowledged that the growth in this sector was based on the attractiveness of depressed areas for investors and in the speed and the amount of job that were quickly created for local area:

QVC have gone into Knowsley. Which, I am only guessing but there were a couple of hundred jobs created...that type of QVC type of thing, I know we are talking to potential call centres at the moment. Yeah [it is seen as getting jobs cheaply], I mean personally speaking I am a bit sceptical of some of these companies. There's jobs and there's jobs. You work for a call centre for what, I don't know £1 an hour, I don't know it's not the greatest job in the world is it? It's not like working for Fords. I don't know a job's a job isn't it? I must admit personally I am a little bit sceptical whether they are the type of jobs that we should be encouraging.

This concern with such jobs would seem to hinge on two criticisms. Firstly there is the issue of the quality of the jobs themselves. While some have welcomed tele working as an example of post-modern or post-industrial jobs a recent, and growing literature of such work increasingly points to the pressure and insecurity that is endemic in much of the sector. Criticism includes issues of 'bell to bell' working, un-social hours and heightened levels of surveillance and control as well as the issue of low pay. The question of pay level is a particularly important one for investment decisions are clearly heavily influenced by prospective rates. In material from Merseyside a virtue is made of the area enjoying the lowest rates in the sector of any of the regions in the UK. The basic cost of an operator in Merseyside being just £7,500 per annum as against £8,500 in Cardiff or £10,000 in Manchester (*Merseyside*

call centre undated). The second substantive area of criticism, and one more directly related to the coalfield communities is the question mark over the long term sustainability on these types of jobs. One of the main attractions in the setting up of call centres is that they provide quick and relatively cheap jobs in areas of high unemployment. But it is possible to argue that this kind of market logic will eventually see the flight of these jobs to even more distressed areas or ones with greater grants on offer. Call centre employment would also seem to be squeezed by the advance of new technology. While call centres may be cheap, the advent of internet sales and marketing may well see significant cuts in the numbers required and even within the current level of technology savings on labour can be made using touch key phone technology. While traditionally companies would suffer some loss in moving operations in even the lowest scale of skilled work the labour market in some sectors of tele-working is predicated on a turn over of staff based on a burn out rate at 18 month or less. The coalfield districts would also seem to be vulnerable to the limits on the absolute size of their work force. A report in the Financial Times (23 April, 1998) on call centres pointed out the problem of size of workplace, and the fact that rural areas lack of ability to service it over the medium and long term:

The very big 1,000-and-over sector would just never work in rural areas. We do not have the density of population to sustain that types of operation (Enid Rowlands, chair WDA call centre strategy group).

One delegate to a focus group run as part of this project spoke of the way these type of jobs were themselves seen as only a temporary fix until more sustainable forms of work arrived.

5 Preserving the Past

A common theme in all four places is the development of the 'past' as part of a diversified new economic strategy. Post-industrial place becomes a post-industrial industry in its own right. This tendency towards using the past can be seen as being divided in to two separate but related strands. On the one hand is the overt celebration of an industrial past, and especially for our purposes the coal industry. On the other hand we can also see redevelopment of former coal regions in terms of their reversion to rural idylls. Importantly these two strands are usually co-present, forming an important part of the redevelopment 'package'. In this sense the *past* becomes an important part of *present* image in that heritage can be packaged along with the 'good communications' and 'excellent sites', contributing to the area's quality of life. The Coalfield Task force makes explicit mention of this form of strategy:

The impact of the built environment should not be overlooked. Local schemes to improve the street environment, civic and industrial buildings and housing can help to improve the confidence of communities and investors alike. *Conservation of coal mining heritage and other historic buildings can act as a focus in promoting tourism* (DETR, 1998, 29) (emphasis added).

In three of the four areas there is an overt celebration of the legacy of coal mining as part of an emerging heritage industry. In South Wales there are several mining themes parks that have taken over redundant collieries such as Rhondda Heritage Park and Crynant. The publicity for the former attraction stating 'when coal was king Rhondda reigned supreme...A proud past preserved for the future' where the visitor will '...soon realise that you've been transported back in time to the Lewis Merthyr Colliery of the 1950s' representing 'A shift in time...a thrilling underground experience!'. At Cefn Coed the attractions on offer are somewhat more prosaic with the chance to learn of 'the story of the men and machines involved at the site'. But there is also the opportunity to visit the well-stocked souvenir and gift shop which boasts '...one of the best selections of genuine and reproduction miners' lamps in South Wales'. Robert Hewison (1987) was one of the earliest critics of the so-called heritage turn in British society. In his book *The Heritage Industry* he charts the rise of a backward looking, and he believes inherently conservative view of the past present and future. Hewison draws on the rise of heritage associated with the coal industry and examines the then infant Big Pit project at Lewis Merthyr, pointing out the irony whereby 'ex-miners will re-enact their redundant roles in a newly built mining village that will produce coal only for tourists' (Hewison 1987 p.97). And he goes on to quote a local authority official as explaining:

Unless we have a heritage concept now in five year's time we won't be able to link the Rhondda with its illustrious past (Ibid.).

In the North East Beamish celebrates a industrial past with its focus on 'Northern culture' including several aspects of the coal industry including a drift mine, pit head machinery and a row of miners' cottages lovingly rebuilt on what was formally a green field site. Again Hewison points out the irony in the creation and rise of this open air museum at a time when northern life and culture was itself being systematically broken up. Beamish Hall, around which the museum was built was formally owned by the NCB and while it did have a drift mine on the site there was no other industry present before the development. Elsewhere in the region its coal industrial past is celebrated in a mining Museum in Northumberland and locally in the numerous pit head wheels that mark the entrances to former mining settlements Blackhall, Easington, Hordon and Shotton being examples. Sunderland AFC have recently unveiled an enlarged replica safety lamp designed and built by a local artist, himself a former shipyard plumber. The monument now stands on a traffic island outside the newly constructed 'Stadium of Light', the new home for the team, built on the former pithead of Monkwearmouth colliery. The publicity generated by the unavailing has led to the artist being approached by several parish councils in County Durham who wish to erect similar monuments to their industrial past in their own communities. This kind of industrial heritage work is paralleled elsewhere most notably in Rees and Thomas' discussion of the post-coal work trajectories of redundant miners. One 37 year old former face worker was 'trying to set up his own business to produce - ironically enough - commemorative plaques of collieries, an activity he had recently taken up as a hobby' (Rees and Thomas 1991 71).

St. Helens, likewise, makes a great deal of its own mining heritage, taking up a sizeable proportion of the borough's municipal museum. While the town may lack its own pit attraction it can claim to be near the Wigan Pier theme park where the legacy of the coal industry is central. Hewison, alongside of the critics of the heritage turn

(see for example Lowenthal 1997; Wright 1985, 1993), view these developments with unease. The heritage industry is interpreted as being at best overly nostalgic for a supposed glorious past and at worse acting as a conservative break on creativity, industrial or otherwise. He believes it represents the 'imaginative death of the country...a country obsessed with its past, and unable to face its future', and he goes on to argue that 'Instead of manufacturing goods, we are manufacturing heritage, a commodity which nobody seems able to define, but which everybody is eager to sell...' (Hewison 1987 p.9). But perhaps Hewison points to a basic if no more reassuring explanation for the rise in the commodification of the past, as he puts it in his discussion of Wigan:

Wigan, backed by Greater Manchester Council, decided to do something with its past. The past, after all, was virtually all it had left (Hewison 1987 p.19).

But a future based on the past is deeply problematic in several ways. Firstly, the types of jobs that are attracted by this kind of development are usually low in skill and even lower in number. Secondly, there is grave doubt as to whether a sustainable future can be built on an industry that is stagnant in terms of number of visits while the number of museums, heritage parts and other attractions continues to rise. This was graphically illustrated in one interview in South Wales from the Wales Co-operative Centre where the interviewee had been involved in research into tourism in the area:

...but the negative side to that is Big Pit Mining Museum, which is over in Glenavern, which is in eastern valleys....mid 1980 I think...their visitor figures have dropped so it tends to show that there's no new people or new visitors here...so these schools have swapped to a different visitor attraction you know ...the Wales Tourist Board didn't want any new attractions because there are four mining attractions in South Wales Valleys...you've got the Heritage Park, which is the biggest in terms of money spent on it probably from Europe and from the local authorities...putting money into a sort of flagship sort of attraction...you've got Big Pit Mining museum, Cefn Coed Colliery Museum over in the Neath Valleys, it's a much smaller scale one, and you've got Afonargoyd Mining Museum...over in the Afon Valley...which is over the mountain from here and that's part of a country park...but I mean they're four specific museum heritage projects that are based around the mines.

In the Mansfield area the council is also keen to draw on the potential that the interest in industrial history represents, while coal mining is not something that is so readily drawn on here - and it would be interesting to speculate as to why this is - the promotion of attractions based on other relics of a bygone era were being actively considered as a resource:

Developing key attractions such as an Industrial Heritage Centre and Sculpture Park, which will boost Mansfield's attractiveness... Developing new themes and attractions which reflect a changing Mansfield a Mansfield with new prosperity and new hopes (*Agenda for Change*, Mansfield District p18).

Heritage therefore plays several roles in the former coalfield economies. It can be seen as a new industry in itself attracting visitors to the region. But it also plays a symbolic role in marking these places out as former industrial places. Places where industry was first given birth to. A place where the entrepreneurial spirit was first kindled.

The second aspect of the attempted restructuring of place by tourism is exemplified in the more conventional use of the landscape. All four of our areas make use of their natural attributes with varying degrees of success. Indeed the Coalfield Taskforce makes a specific suggestion on the subject of tourism ‘...tourism may have potential in some locations such as the Meden Valley’ (DETR, 1998, 13). The legacy of the coal industry is deployed here in a variety of ways. On the one hand the decimation wrought on the countryside by the industry is ignored while at others positive publicity is derived from the reclamation of the *rural* from the *industrial*. Click on to the County Durham web site and the individual pages are boarded by tasteful 18th century lithographs of the City of Durham and its environs:

The County has a history dating back over two thousand years and this has provided a rich tapestry of historic buildings and towns. These are not only attractive in themselves, but they are set in beautiful countryside. The western half of the County is nationally recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (*DCC Website*).

While on the east coast the chance to distance the region from its industrial past is grasped with the ‘Turning the Tide’ initiative which:

...seeks to restore the East Durham coastline to its former beauty by the Millennium. As a sign of confidence, English Nature has proposed the designation of the coast as a Nature Reserve, with the potential to qualify as a Heritage Coast (*East Durham Programme for Action 1997*, 32).

Another way in which tourism is constructing place is in terms of the tag lines to place. Thus while Durham as a county is given the title ‘Land of the Prince Bishops’, and this choice is made explicit in the County Council’s economic development strategy:

Branding is used in tourism to identify the County from its competitors. The ‘Land of the Prince Bishops’ branding has been successfully used to market these and other attractions in the County (Durham County Council Economic Development Strategy 1995-2001 38).

And this type of branding replicated in other parts of the region. Durham is bordered by south Tyneside ‘Catherine Cookson Country’, North Yorkshire ‘Heartbeat Country’ and to the west by ‘England’s last Wilderness’. In the case of Mansfield little seems to be made of coal as a tourist attraction. Here much is made of the link with Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest, but an industrial past is just visible. Mansfield itself claims to be:

‘...a bustling, historic market town, which forms the heart of Robin Hood country. Walking round, you will be surprised to see a fascinating heritage on view. Stand back and admire highlights such as the dominating 19th century, 15 arch viaduct which straddles the town centre; a beautiful church dating back to Saxon times; a superb Victorian factory still very much in use, and the old market square (Mansfield Town Centre walk).

North Nottingham has developed the Robin Hood theme beyond the simple branding of place, one of the nearby attractions in the Mansfield area is the ‘World of Robin Hood’ where the would be visitor can enjoy:

The World's Ultimate Medieval Experience. Join the character from the legend as they guide you using their own personal knowledge through the greatest adventure of your life. The breathtaking world of ROBIN HOOD (Ollerton Tourism leaflet).

In South Wales, itself a sub-region of the '*Land of Inspiration*', there is again the mixing of rural and industrial imagery with, as we saw above at least four mine museums and attractions. But nearby the Cynon Valley can also now enjoy a green future based on a much older heritage which it is hoped will attract tourists:

The South Wales coal seam rises close to the surface in Dare Valley where nineteen pits and drift mines once tore open the land. The countryside was black. Following the coal industry's decline, the valley from which so much had been taken was restored, and a Country Park was born...The River Dare tumbles and meanders from the mountains in the north west of Cynon Valley through a valley of oak, birch and alder. It was here, in 1972, that the first country park in England and Wales was created from land ravaged by industry (Rhondda Cynon Taff Dare Valley leaflet 1997).

In the Council's Economic Development statement the language used is slightly less poetic with the mixing of environmental and business discourse:

The Council has also agreed to form part of the Greening the Valleys consortium, a major new 'quality initiative' aimed at enhancing economic and environmental regeneration in the South Wales valleys (RCT Economic Development statement 1997/8: 16).

In the case of St. Helens this theme is repeated with parts of the area being promoted as returning to a state of nature.

We have got further development at Haydock Park, just trying to pull this tourism thing together, there is lots more tourism things going on here, than meets the eye, looks a bit unusual. We have also got extensive Mersey forresting, going on of course, including two of the former pits. We have got a local scheme inside Mersey forest called 'Wasteland to Woodland'. We planted 320,000 trees a year. Think of that nature going in, which is going to upgrade the environment, significantly in say, ten years time. Much greener, much more attractive. (St. Helens BC Economic Development 1998).

In St. Helens case there is tension over the inclusion of brownfield potential development sites within designated green belt areas:

I believe we will be taking a couple of more chunks out of the green belt around, I don't know how far you are going to put this, but I will tell you around Junction 23, this is all a bit hush hush at the moment - don't broadcast it around, there is active buying of land there, by and large, from companies (St. Helens BC Economic Development).

This frustration is seen elsewhere in the same interview:

What we are frustrated about that site, because the Government is now, through the UDP process, has simply told us that it will remain in the greenbelt and you cannot take it out. What we did was, we passed a resolution, Development committee, saying that we would take out 37 Hectares out of the existing, how big are they? Quite large! We made that into a policy statement and Government at the UDP review, crossed it out, and say it would remain in the greenbelt. So we have got this

Huge area, If you ever drive up and down the M6, you'll see it. It is quite obviously not greenbelt...(St. Helens BC Economic Development, 1998).

And the English Partnerships spokesman for the north west told us of the way in which nature impinged on development:

One thing that we have to bare in mind is that the Mersey forest. Part of this site is designated for the Mersey forest. So I think there has got to be a belt of trees here part of the land we can't really develop. There is only 15 developable acres really. The trees aren't there now its been designated so when we do develop the site the trees have got to go in as part of the Mersey Forest initiative which sort of impinges on our development layout so obviously we are trying to shape our development around where the trees are going to go as well as the contamination.

This last set of quotes illustrates some of the problems and tensions surrounding the rebuilding of the coalfields. On the one hand the areas are predominantly isolated and rural, the development of industry there only occurred because of chance geological circumstance. In there redevelopment former coalfield communities have to sell themselves as having all the attributes and advantages of other industrial urban areas while at the same time put a positive spin on their relative isolation. One of the main ways in which this is done is to sell place as offering a better quality of life than its urban competitors. Thus in much of the material produced for potential inward investors there is a juxtaposition of the high tech and cutting edge industry along side the essentially rural imagery. The recognition of the contribution the aesthetic can make to economic redevelopment is recognised in material from Durham County Council:

Potential inward investors and tourists are the principal target groups for image development initiatives...Investors are attracted by the county's high quality of life, which offers pleasant surroundings, a range of affordable housing and short commuting times to major employment centres (Durham County Council's economic development strategy 1995-2001 38).

The multiple uses of the natural environment and tourism is also seen in material from Rhondda, Cynon Taff:

The County Borough Council recognises that tourism is of significant and increasing importance, providing both economic and environmental benefits. Principally these include the provision of employment, the creation of local income, recreational and leisure opportunities *and as a means of influencing perceptions of Rhondda Cynon Taff* (Rhondda Cynon Taff Economic Development statement 1997/8: 19) (emphasis added).

And this is put in to practice in material produced for potential inward investors:

To complete your vision, imagine living and working in an area surrounded by some of the most breathtaking scenery in the country. A region a stone's throw away from the mountainous Brecon Beacons as well as the beautiful bays and beaches of the south and west Wales coastline (Rhondda Cynon Taff *A vision for business success* Undated).

In east Durham too there is a mixing of business opportunity with the issue of quality of life:

Not only will you find all the ingredients necessary for a successful and profitable business, but also a land steeped in history and boasting some of the most striking and unspoilt scenery in England (EDDA undated).

The importance of the aesthetic in redevelopment should not be underestimated, Spellman gives a number of illustrations where investment opportunities were lost in the Yorkshire and Humberside area because of the way a particular site or community looked. She quotes a Business Development Officer in Wakefield 'If they can see power stations, winding gear and pit heaps from their sites, they're not interested' (Spellman 1991 126). And the same author tell of a strategy adopted by one body involved in the inward investment sector where potential investors would be taken on particular route around area to include certain attractive areas and exclude the less favourably endowed. In the case of Easington great steps have been taken to clear up the coast as we saw above, but this was more than simply about attracting tourism to the area as a member of EDDA explained:

Reclamation is important for psychological reasons. You can bet every time a local TV station came to do a programme on Easington, they would do one of two things or both things. First they take a shot over Easington colliery, standing on a site that over looks the village, and do the shot of terraced houses, and horrible houses, and the next one used going on to the beach, and take the shot of the colliery waste that was being dumped on the beach. It became a cliché. Psychologically it became dreadful for the image of the area. That restoration of the beach and re-establishment of a fine feature was very important to us, 'cos we'd get rid of that old image. Collieries are marvellous things and they are culturally, socially, mining villages were unique. *You should never forget the heritage, one which is moving onto another era, we're not a mining district anymore. We want to lose that image. Not forget about it, people gave their lives for it. But we are moving into something completely different* (emphasis added).

Thus the past is recruited into a strategy of redevelopment in a verity of ways with at time an industrial history harnessed to provide jobs in the nascent tourist sector. But heritage here does more than simply act as a magnet for tourists it is used in the selling of a region and can, and is, deployed in a verity of ways. Likewise the use of rural imagery and the reclaiming of brown field sites is also inextricably linked to this process of redevelopment. Here the rural becomes part of the package to attract inward investors with the supposed qualities that reside in the countryside rather than the urban area. In the former coal mining areas their rural nature is something that is built on in the process of selling place to would be investors.

6 The Problem with Regeneration?

We have already seen a variety of criticism made about some of the strategies adopted as part of the regeneration strategy, this section looks more closely at some of these. One of the biggest issues facing all the areas is the type and quality of the jobs that are attracted to the areas. The problem centres around the desire on the part of those involved in regeneration to get as many new jobs into the area as quickly as possible. But the danger here is that these jobs may not be the right ones for the areas in the medium and long terms. As we saw call centres were seen as having almost an iconic status in some of the areas, and this prestige is perhaps derived from their nominally white collar status coupled with their association with modern high tech employment. Again there is a sense in which this type of industry is used as an element in the re-branding of place in the move from what is characterised as the low tech and dirty

past of the coal industry to a modern and clean future. As we saw above the danger with the call centre growth would seem to lie in the fact that these jobs may not be long term ones themselves given greater application of technology. Secondly, there would seem to be an issue over the quality of these jobs themselves in terms of their use of much temporary and part time labour and the level of control exercised at times over the workforce (see Taylor 1997). There is another danger in the embracing uncritically of the hi tech and that is that these are effectively branch plants of large multi-national companies with little in the way of R & D carried out on site. Thus it may well be the case that areas have swapped one form of dependency for another, but one that is far more unstable than the coal industry. This issue was particularly pertinent for an interviewee from Cynon Valley who was involved in an unemployed workers' centre in Aberdare:

...it's the old story, if you were a large corporation there with branches out all over the place. If the main company is going through a difficult period where is the first place you start pruning the tree? At its furthest points, at the ends of the branches. So there was always a very dicey economic base to these industries and they were not basic industries

At present in South Wales there are threats to further investment on the M4 corridor and Hoovers at Merthyr Tydfil where redundancies have recently been announced. In the East Midland there are question marks hanging over the 'high tech' textiles industry with the onset of recession, the strong pound and greater competition from other countries, in particular in the Tiger economies. There has also recently been pressure applied by Marks and Spencer on its suppliers to source greater amounts of stock from outside the UK (see 'Courtaulds to sack 1,200' *Guardian* 2/12/98). This variability was discussed in an interview at Mansfield unemployed workers' centre:

I don't know if you have seen it locally this week, I mean Monday in the *Evening Post*, there was a big head line, another Japanese firm is coming to Mansfield, this time creating 70 jobs. I come in here Tuesday morning, take my first call, second call an employee of the local textile firm Etam's, 70 jobs going. *So one step forward, back you go again. Do not pass go. Do not collect any additional jobs. It's now that we need the jobs creating* (emphasis added).

It is perhaps the North East that has suffered the greatest problems with its high tech future with the recent announcements of the closure of the plants by Siemens on North Tyneside and Fujitsu in South West Durham (see for example 'North feels the freeze' *Guardian* 5/10/98).

This concern with the quality of jobs being attracted to the former coalfields manifests itself in a number of ways. One of the major issues that arose in interviews was the nature of work being offered, the situation in North Nottingham was often commented on:

There are new firms coming in. There's the Manton Enterprise Zone which we are told there's going to be an announcement this week of a big name firm coming in, not just another sandwich factory or something. A sandwich factory and then there is Bachelors foods. The kind of new jobs that have come since the '60s Joe Ashton (local MP) would describe as jobs for miners' wives and I think that is how they were seen originally. But those are the jobs, service sector, low paid. Jobs that are not seen as compensation for the old skilled full time male manual work. I think there are new jobs coming in and its changing the environment and the culture. You could say that the miners' wives and daughters have come out of it better, because the future

more belongs to them rather than the traditional male bread winner. There has been nothing to replace the older fairly well paid jobs. There has been a massive loss of income in the community (John Shepherd).

And this view was replicated in other interviews in the East Midlands area:

The other thing that really shook a lot of them [former miners] was the wage levels. Because this is a low wage area and that was always masked in the past by mining earnings. By, it might be earnings that people had from the pit. The moment you took the pits out of it, we suddenly went from being middle table for average earning, in the UK, right down to one of the worst/lowest pay in the UK. A lot of them found that really difficult and a lot of them that we have spoken to, a lot that I know, who have said to me, 'you know, we took a low paid job, thinking, 'well, I'll just take this and I have got some of my redundancy money left, so I'll use that redundancy money to top up my low wage, until I can get something with a better wage'', and what they have found is that there aren't the jobs there, with better wages either. Not what they would call a good wage. So you see people having to cut back this life style, the quality of the life being very much a cut back by this (MUWC).

In South Wales there was evidence that even if redundant miners were willing to accept the low waged jobs on offer they would not be recruited because of their age:

Greater part of the miners didn't find jobs, and we used to say over the last ten years if you were over 30 years of age you went for a job in this valley, no employer would admit it publicly, and no one of managerial position in the Benefit Agency would admit it publicly, and I don't blame them. But it was understood in this community that if you were over 40 you were just going through the bloody motions applying for a job, that was the score. But then you have also got the position that where you have jobs, it's like everywhere else they are part time jobs (Aberdare unemployed workers' centre interview 1998)

The problem in the Mansfield area was that the local economy was creating some jobs but these were predominantly low skilled and low value added with companies attracted to the area because of its reputation for low wages and quiescence in industrial relations terms. A member of the Economic development unit at Mansfield Council acknowledge that low wages were an attraction for would be investors:

Yeah, I mean the average, sort of, wage rates, is probably, if you look at the actual average earnings, for the district, it's again, below the national and County average. Quite well below the national and County average. So yeah, you could draw a conclusion of comparatively the wage rates are lower here in Mansfield than they are elsewhere. Which can sometimes act as a kind of attraction for some, obviously for, well, inward investors really

But far from being an element that is tacitly admitted in private the Council (like many others) actively markets the area as a low wage economy, the District Council's business guide trumpets:

Wage costs are significantly below the national average and therefore very competitive. The average gross weekly earnings of employee in Mansfield (across all occupations) is £268.50 compared with £306.80 for Nottinghamshire as a whole and of £351.70 nationally (Mansfield District Council Business guide 1998 3.3).

But the tactic of attracting employers using low wages as a carrot had implications for the nature of employment that resulted from investment in the area, as a member of North Nottinghamshire TEC explained:

You just get more of the same, and its frightening, because you can't break the cycle, I don't know what would break that cycle now. We have four Enterprise Zones and I can't think of anything on any of them yet that is out of the current level of skill demands. More of the same, in fact if anything it looks as if it might get worse. There's an understanding, its probably wrong inward investors think there is a pool of relatively low skilled labour locally, that's wrong but perceptions always lag some years behind. And inward investment infrastructure/support services their perceptions are probably still some way behind reality. They're [the council] promoting the area on the basis of a pool unskilled labour and therefore cheap, and that's what we are getting. The enquiries that we are getting for the Manton Enterprise zone in Worksop are food processors, now the last thing Worksop needs is another food processor, you're talking about sandwich manufacturers basically. You could argue that that is not a good idea in the long run, 'cos these resources are scarce once an Enterprise Zone is full its full, you can't have it twice. So if you fill it full of jobs at any price you haven't got the resources in terms of land and infrastructure to promote to someone a bit higher up the scale.

The problem that this respondent recognised was that local authorities were desperate to see any form of employment come to the area but while he was sympathetic to this position he also saw the contradictions inherent in the strategy and the series of problems that short term action was creating for the medium and long term:

It is entirely understandable for them [councils] to take that stance if I can get 200 food processing jobs, that's better than not having them at all. And it might be in the short run, but I am just not sure as a strategy its a good thing. And you get a reputation, that's the problem, cos industries tend to cluster these days. So once you've got a couple you tend to get more of the same, almost inevitable. Its like Mansfield is the textile end of automotive supply, once you've got a couple you will get the same - head lines, seats and carpets that sort of thing - but its not doing anything for the skill base of the area, and nor subsequently does it do anything for the GDP. It also leaves them exposed because these are fairly mobile multinationals.

And this situation was also identified in South Wales where it was the foreign inward investors that were seen as perpetuating a low wage economy:

...literary hundreds of millions of pounds has been thrown at foreign investment. They have come in and dictated their own terms, and its a continuation of this low wage economy with part time working, selective employment of individuals (Aberdare Unemployed Workers' Centre interview).

Workers from the South Wales Co-op also pointed out the problem of low wages:

I mean, we're a proud people as well...there's no sense of ownership anymore, you know, when the mines went everything went out of the window, it became dog eat dog, it became accept low wages because that's the only thing we can accept...you know...I mean even re-training ex-miners, and I've seen a lot of it, wasn't particularly successful because basically they were re-training them to be security guards or work in factories on a quarter of the wages that they used to be on before and then you get some politician based in London telling us that employment in Wales is bouncing, but it's not, it's all negative employment because they're still subsidised by the state through family credit.

One of the main issues facing all the areas, and perhaps the British economy, was that in the concentration on wages the skill levels were being ignored. Thus the logic of the situation was that the local economy and the labour market that serviced it was being locked in to a spiral of low wage levels and paralleled low levels of skill. The

interviewee from North Nottingham TEC pointed out in response to a question about former miners finding employment and their lack of transferable skill:

It might have been (an issue) if the labour market had demanded any, but in all honesty it doesn't, locally the skills base is relatively low any way. And what there is coming from inward investors as far as skill demands is concerned can be accommodated pretty quickly, its not rocket science, its fairly simple stuff, a few weeks learning textile or some sort of heavy sewing machining work is the sort of thing they could do pretty well.

The same responded gave an account of the way the focus on wage costs above other factors meant that low skill employers were unwilling to give anything over very basic training:

The opportunities to do level three training (NVQ) are limited for kids 16 plus the industry standards are that low they don't want it, in fact they positively discourage it "I don't need it, I don't need empowered young people, I need people to sit at this machine and do that, I don't want them thinking" two industries locally tell us that textiles and construction, their standards are NVQ level two....So you've got two big industries locally saying "I don't want you to have too many aspirations, 'cos it doesn't suit my picture of the labour market.

In the Mansfield the District Council saw the market as providing the long and medium term solution to both wages and skill levels. Essentially it was seen the job of the council to attract as many employers as possible into the area to push up wages and therefore training levels, as one economic development officer explained:

I suppose, as we're pulling more and more companies in, the competition is increasing for the same workforce and therefore inevitably to get the best, you know, it's like a knock-on effect, that you have to increase your wage- raise to get those same people really. So I suppose, you can pull them in two angles. You can pull selective companies, which have a particular niche market, like, IT, that'll pay higher wage rates, then can have a between the workforce that you've got within Mansfield, who may not be appropriately skilled, to move into those employment positions. Or you can say 'Right, well we'll pull in as many inward investors as we possibly can, you know, to the create this kind of effect where their competing for the same workforce, after a period of time and therefore that in itself has an effect of increasing wage rates.

And there was some evidence that there was wage drift between employers occurring in the local labour market, as the interviewee from the North Nottingham TEC said:

They'll move around and chase coppers £3.50 an hour here £3.60 there and they'll go and then its the next one where can I get £3.70 'cos they're pretty transferable 'cos the skill levels are that low. There is a lot of it around at that level.

He went on to say that the movement of workers annoyed inward investors greatly as they lost the little investment they had made in skills training. It would seem then that beneath the official line about the four places there is a more problematic picture.

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