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**THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND**

Dydd Gwener, 19 Mawrth 2021 Dydd Gwener, 19 Mawrth 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

### **PWLLGOR CRAFFU ADFYWIO**

A meeting of the Pwllgor Craffu Adfywio will be held in Siambr y Cyngor, Canolfan Ddinesig on Dydd Mercher, 24ain Mawrth, 2021 at 10.00 am.

***Please note that a pre and post meeting will be held 30 minutes prior to the start and following the conclusion of the meeting for members of the committee.***

Yours faithfully

Michelle Morris  
Managing Director

### **AGENDA**

### **Pages**

#### **1. CYFIEITHU AR Y PRYD**

Mae croeso i chi ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg yn y cyfarfod, mae angen o leiaf 3 diwrnod gwaith o hysbysiad ymlaen llaw os dymunwch wneud hynny. Darperir gwasanaeth cyfieithu ar y pryd os gwneir cais.

We welcome correspondence in the medium of Welsh or English. / Croesawn ohebiaith trwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg.

2. **YMDDIHEURIADAU**  
Derbyn ymddiheuriadau.
3. **DATGANIADAU BUDDIANT A GODDEFEBAU**  
Derbyn datganiadau buddiant a goddefebau.
4. **PWLLGOR CRAFFU ADFYWIO** 5 - 14  
Derbyn cofnodion y cyfarfod o'r Pwyllgor Craffu Adfywio a gynhaliwyd ar 10 Chwefror 2021.  
(Dylid nodi y cyflwynir y cofnodion er pwyntiau cywirdeb yn unig)
5. **DALEN WEITHREDU – 10 CHWFROR 2021** 15 - 16  
Derbyn y Ddalen Weithredu.
6. **DIWEDDARIAD CYNLLUN RHEOLI CYRCHFANNAU** 17 - 48  
Ystyried adroddiad y Rheolwr Gwasanaeth Busnes ac Adfywio.
7. **DIWEDDARIAD CYNNYDD: PROSIECT RE:FIT** 49 - 56  
Ystyried adroddiad y Rheolwr Tîm Cyfleoedd Adfywio.
8. **CYLLIDO TORFOL DINESIG** 57 - 68  
Ystyried adroddiad y Rheolwr Tîm Cymunedau Cysylltiedig.
9. **ADRODDIAD CYNNYDD CYNLLUN TREFTADAETH TREFLUN TREDEGAR** 69 - 80  
Ystyried adroddiad y Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol Adfywio a Gwasanaethau Cymunedol.
10. **ADRODDIAD CANOLFAN PEIRIANEG UWCH A MTC** 81 - 102  
Ystyried adroddiad y Rheolwr Datblygu Sgiliau.
11. **BLAENRAGLEN GWAITH: 28 EBRILL 2021** 103 - 106  
Derbyn yr adroddiad.

To: J. Hill (Cadeirydd)  
G. A. Davies (Is-gadeirydd)  
M. Cross  
M. Cook  
G. L. Davies  
H. McCarthy  
K. Hayden  
S. Healy  
W. Hodgins  
J. C. Morgan  
J. P. Morgan  
L. Parsons  
K. Rowson  
B. Willis

All other Members (for information)  
Manager Director  
Chief Officers

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**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2021**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HILL (CHAIR)**

Councillors G.A. Davies  
 G.L. Davies  
 M. Cook  
 P. Edwards  
 K. Hayden  
 S. Healy  
 W. Hodgins  
 J.P. Morgan  
 L Parsons  
 K. Rowson  
 B. Willis

**AND:** Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services  
 Head of Regeneration & Development  
 Service Manager Business & Regeneration  
 Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities  
 Skills Development Manager - Aspire Blaenau Gwent  
 Marketing Projects Officer  
 Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p>	

	Apology for absence was received from Councillor J.C. Morgan.	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>The following declaration of interest was reported:</p> <p>Councillor W. Hodgins – Item No. 6 Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 6<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2021</u></b></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:</p> <p><i><u>Forward Work Programme (Truck Shop, Tredegar)</u></i></p> <p>In response to a question raised by a Member, the Head of Regeneration reported that an ‘in principle’ agreement had been received from CADW to demolish parts of the building.</p> <p><u>TVR</u></p> <p>In response to a further question the Head of Regeneration &amp; Development confirmed that the Tech Board building would be refurbished in any event. She understood that TVR was seeking additional private sector finance, and the fact that WG was refurbishing the Tech Board building would provide some level of confidence to private sector financiers. However, the Officer confirmed that substantial interest had been expressed in the building should TVR not come to fruition.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.</p>	

No. 6

**ASPIRE SHARED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to report of the Skills Development Manager.

The Skills Development Manager presented the report which provided an update on the performance of the Aspire Programme and associated external business engagement; and the performance information on the BGCBC internal apprenticeship programme.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. To date the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme had:

- Recruited and supported 84 apprentices placed in over 20 manufacturing companies across Blaenau Gwent in addition to employment of 10 apprentices within Council departments.
- 51% of apprentices within Cohorts 1 & 2 (2015 & 2016) have progressed onto higher education/HNC.
- 100% of apprentices on cohort 1 have been employed, of which 67% retained within host employer.
- Framework completed: Cohort 1 –83%, Cohort 2 – 79%
- 100% of apprentices in cohorts 1-5 have had the opportunity to rotate to another company to fulfil skills gaps.

In 2020, 17 Apprentices were furloughed due to Covid. This was the largest number at any one time with some apprentices being placed longer than others. The priority during that period was to support the Apprentices and help them to continue their learning through college, usually virtual lessons and continue where possible NVQ work. In addition, the Aspire Team supported them with their health and wellbeing to guide them through uncertain times with encouragement and open communication.

The Officer confirmed that no apprentices on the Aspire Programme were made redundant during this period of time and have all since returned to their work place. It was felt that the support provided to apprentices by the Aspire

Programme Team, along with employers facilitated this outcome.

A Member commended the report and said it was good to see Aspire being recognised throughout Wales. He then asked whether Tai Calon had taken on any apprenticeships.

In response the Officer confirmed that discussions had taken place with Tai Calon on the Corporate Traineeship Programme. She pointed out that Aspire was initially set up to facilitate manufacturing and engineering apprenticeships, and many of the skills offered by Tai Calon related to the construction industry. However, she was aware that 2 or 3 people on the Corporate Traineeship Programme had progressed to an apprenticeship through those routes. Engagement would also be undertaken with Monmouthshire's Apprenticeship Trainee Programme as they had the skills with CITB to facilitate that area of learning. In terms of other apprenticeships from an internal perspective, discussions had also been undertaken with ALT to highlight any opportunities that may arise.

A Member referred to the fact that of the 30 apprentices, 91% are male and 9% female, and asked how this compared with the situation across Wales.

The Officer explained that it depended on the sector, manufacturing and engineering was a male dominated industry, and BG was on a par with other LA's. In terms of apprenticeships across Wales there was a more balanced approach with female apprenticeships, and there had been many initiatives established to encourage more females into the industry.

In terms of apprenticeships within the Council, the Officer confirmed that of the 10 recruited, 1 was female, and based within Technical Services on an engineering pathway, which was excellent. She said it was about ensuring we go into schools at an early stage to highlight opportunities and demonstrate the different skill sets required to attract more females into apprenticeships.

A Member sought further clarification on the review of housing and digital pathways.



In response the Officer explained that this highlighted that we have engaged with the Digital and Housing Teams to look at apprenticeship pathway to fulfil what was required by those Teams, and working with Officers and local college to identify what qualifications an apprentice could follow.

The Officer pointed out that an organisation or Council Department had to pay for an apprenticeship in post, and sometimes the budget was not always available. Within the Council, each Department has undertaken a budget analysis to ensure they are able to afford an apprenticeship, not only to fill an opportunity at a particular time, but to become employees at the end of the apprenticeship programme.

In response to a question raised, the Officer reported that visits to schools were aimed at Key Stage 2 Year 6 across primary schools, and then at Year 8 with the Inspiration event undertaken in conjunction with Careers Wales, and also assemblies for Year 10. She said it was intended to initiate communication at young age, but this was dependent on resources available, however, through the Tech Valley partnership there was now a STEM facilitator in place in one of the Borough's Comprehensive Schools to enable more coordinated engagement and raise opportunities thereafter.

In relation to housing and digital pathways, the Corporate Director Regeneration & Communities Services said the apprenticeship programme was a Corporate activity across the Council, and confirmed that any restructure proposals were being challenged to find opportunities for apprenticeships. He said colleagues within the Council could see the value of apprenticeships in building for the future, and it was important for the Council to show leadership and demonstrate the value in the opportunities we provide as an organisation.

To conclude the Skills Development Manager reported that it was National Apprenticeship week and there were many case studies available to read on social media which provided an idea of the progress made by the young people on the programme, and also the Council.

	<p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).</p>	
<p><b>No. 7</b></p>	<p><b><u>PROGRESS UPDATE: TOWN CENTRE TASK &amp; FINISH GROUP</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities.</p> <p>The Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities presented the report which provided an update on the work of the Town Centre Task &amp; Finish Group.</p> <p>The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein. She confirmed that a second meeting of the Task and Finish Group took place on 20<sup>th</sup>, January 2021, where the Group received a presentation on the Tredegar Advisory Group which included details of how the Advisory Group was established, how it operated and how it had supported Officers and Members to collectively work on the regeneration of Tredegar.</p> <p>Members felt it would be beneficial to explore the possibility of replicating the approach taken in Tredegar across all other towns within the Borough, and Officers agreed to support Members to consider these options and the establishment of the groups.</p> <p>A Member thanked the Officer for her work on the Task &amp; Finish Group and said he felt that the Group was making progress. In relation to the recommendation for updates to be reported back on a quarterly basis, he suggested that these be brought to Scrutiny when necessary.</p> <p>A brief discussion ensued regarding the timing of updates being reported to Scrutiny.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and progress of the Task &amp; Finish Group be noted, and further updates be received as appropriate.</p>	

**No. 8**

**USE OF CONSULTANTS**

Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services/Head of Regeneration & Development.

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services presented the report which provided information requested by Members in relation to expenditure incurred during 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 on the use of consultants to support, supplement and complement the work of Officers across the Council.

He said consultants were widely used across the whole public sector including Welsh Government for a number of different purposes, and with Blaenau Gwent, consultants were used in a number of way, i.e.

- To provide assistance in specialist areas where there was no or limited expertise or experience within the Council
- To provide independent advice and a different perspective (challenge)
- To supplement resources where there was insufficient capacity to undertake a specific, identified task e.g. because the work has come into the Council unexpectedly, or where the work needed to be progressed within a specific / limited time period.
- To provide training to BG staff to enhance their own expertise e.g. changes to legislation
- A substantial amount of the consultant costs was associated with project delivery and funded through external grants

He said the advantage of engaging Consultants was also that they were only required for a short period of time enabling an organisation to pay for that skill on demand only when needed. This was often an effective use of the Council's resource and avoided / replaced the need to employ additional staff, with specialist knowledge & skills, on a permanent basis.

During 2018/19 and 2019/20 the Council spent a total of £0.7m and £1.1m on Consultants across all services, and

the attached Appendix identified those Consultants, the costs and the reason for engagement relating to the Economy portfolio.

A Member endorsed the explanation provided by the Corporate Director for the use of consultants.

Another Member stressed the importance of using consultants wisely and only when absolutely necessary, as he was aware of a number of occasions where consultants had been used and the resulting reports had been shelved. He also referred to the consultancy costs incurred as a result of the test track and Revive & Thrive initiative.

In response the Corporate Director said in terms of the prospective test track facility and the potential opportunity for Blaenau Gwent, further external expertise would be required to support the project which was a large project with a number of aspects that would require specialist and industry knowledge. Hopefully the further use of consultants on this project would be done in partnership with our partner LA's, who were also supportive of taking the project forward and the additional work to explore opportunities. However, he stressed that consultants were only used for specialist expertise or for additional capacity.

In terms of the Revive & Thrive initiative, the Head of Regeneration & Development confirmed that the company was used to help set up the bid for both the Rassau and Tafarnaubach and this work was now complete.

A Member said looking at the figures over the 2 years he felt that 17.5% per annum was well justified against the amount of investment brought into the Borough in terms of job creation and regeneration.

In response the Corporate Director said the Regeneration Department was securing £m's into Blaenau Gwent, and consultants were used where needed to provide capacity for that work, and he was comfortable that money had been spent in the right places to secure investment.

	<p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).</p>	
<b>No. 9</b>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 24<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2021</u></b></p> <p>The Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on the 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2021 was submitted.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Officer reported that the Community Benefits report would be removed and replaced with the Skills Academy report.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted.</p>	

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**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

**Action Sheet**

**Regeneration Scrutiny Committee – 10<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Action to be Taken</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Action Taken</b>
8	<b><u>Use of Consultants</u></b> A Member enquired if the work by Revive and Thrive had been completed.	Ellie Fry	Work has been completed with Revive and Thrive and no further work is planned.

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# Agenda Item 6

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **24<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Report Subject: **Destination Management Plan Update**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D Davies, Executive Member Regeneration and Economic Development**

Report Submitted by: **Owen Ashton, Service Manager – Business & Regeneration**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
02.03.21	04.03.21	11.03.21			24.03.21	14.04.21		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to request Members endorsement of the draft Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan (Plan) for 2020-25.
- 1.2 The report provides a summary of the Plan's content and the Themes around which it is based. The report also summarises the context in which the Plan sits, and the role of the Destination Management Partnership and other stakeholders in its production.

## 2. Background and Current Position

- 2.1 The Destination Management Plan is a strategic document that sets out priorities for tourism development in Blaenau Gwent over the period 2020-2025 and complements the new Visit Wales Tourism Action Plan over the same period.
- 2.2 The Plan has been co-produced by a number of stakeholders and has been overseen by the Destination Management Partnership which includes the following Members: Cllr Phil Edwards, Cllr Mandy Moore, Cllr Lee Parsons, as well as representatives from the public, private and third sectors.
- 2.3 The BGDMP differs from many strategic documents in that the ownership and delivery sits with both BGCBC, the Destination Management Partnership and stakeholders across the tourism sector – it is not solely a Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council document.
- 2.4 The BGDMP is recognised by Visit Wales as the strategic document for tourism within a geographical area and will help support funding applications.
- 2.5 The BGDMP aims to ensure that people, businesses and organisations work together in a coordinated way to deliver agreed targets and priorities for investment. The Plan contains eight chapters including an Introduction to Destination Management, Strategic Context, a SWOT analysis, a review of the 2016-19 BGDMP, Covid-19 implications, Strategic Priorities and the Action Plan.

2.6 The Plan identifies six Cross Cutting Themes and five main Themes. The cross cutting Themes are:

- Business Development
- Challenging and Changing Perceptions,
- Partnership Working,
- Research and Analysis,
- Skills
- Transport

2.7 The main Themes are:

- Business Tourism;
- Culture, Heritage including the NHS & Genealogy;
- Events
- Green/Eco Tourism including Outdoor Activity & Trails
- Town Centres.

2.8 The BGDMP and associated Action Plan have taken account of national, strategic and local trends and priorities, and has been co-produced and informed by stakeholders and partner organisations. Should the Plan be endorsed, it's proposed that it will be formatted into an appropriate marketing/promotional document with photographs and other imagery.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option one – The BGDMP 2020-25 is endorsed.

3.2 Option two – The BGDMP 2020-25 is endorsed with amendments requested.

### 4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board: Established in April 2016, and is currently working towards preparing a Well-being Plan for the area. Tourism will offer an opportunity in Blaenau Gwent to help the area contribute towards the long-term future of the area.

4.2 The Blaenau Gwent Local Plan 2018-2022  
The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (Section 15), places a duty on all Local Authorities in Wales to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. As part of this, the Council is required to develop a Corporate Plan. The priorities developed for the Corporate Plan incorporate the previous Council Well-being Objectives and also represent our Improvement Objectives, as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure.

## 5. Implications Against Each Option

### 5.1 Impact on Budget (*short and long term impact*)

- 5.1.1 The proposed BGDMP 2020-25 has been co-produced with a range of stakeholders and the Destination Management Partnership.
- 5.1.2 The Action Plan will be delivered collaboratively with the identified partners, who will also have responsibility for sourcing the necessary funding, with support from the DMP Officer as appropriate. Where the Authority is the identified lead, the project will be funded via internal budgets e.g. Destination Management and where necessary external funding opportunities will be explored.
- 5.1.3 The Plan will support the Authority in making funding applications to external funding bodies including Welsh Government, Visit Wales and others, to deliver projects.
- 5.1.4 Any priorities identified within the action plan requiring additional funding will be reported as appropriate, identifying any potential impact on BGCBC resources.
- 5.1.5 Retention of the Destination Management budget is essential to supporting the five-year delivery of the Blaenau Gwent DMP.

### 5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions

- 5.2.1 The DMP is Blaenau Gwent's strategic document to support destination related activity. Without such a plan there is a risk to the authority and other stakeholders in terms of securing funding to deliver projects.

Reduction in available staff resources will impact upon the Council's ability to implement activity contained within the action plan.

- 5.2.2
- 5.2.3 There is a risk of partner organisations not prioritising agreed actions which will negatively impact upon the implementation of the overall plan.

Failure of local tourism stakeholders to engage in the Destination Management Partnership will result in a weak monitoring of the Plan. The Destination Management Officer will dedicate time to strengthening the partnership membership.

### 5.3 *Legal*

- 5.3.1 There are no legal implications to the development of the BGDMP. Any activities arising as a result of the plan will be delivered within existing legal governance arrangements.

## 5.4 **Human Resources**

5.4.1 Destination Management related activity will be undertaken and co-ordinated through the Council's Destination Management Officer.

5.4.2 The Destination Management Officer is a critical role to ensuring the effective co-ordination and implementation of the plan.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 Nationally - The plan referenced Welsh Government's / Visit Wales new tourism framework and The Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

6.1.2 Regionally – South Wales Tourism Forum, South East Wales Destination Management Group and South East Wales Destination Implementation Group

6.1.3 Locally - Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board, the Blaenau Gwent Local Plan 2018-2022 and the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan.

### 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

6.2.1 The BGDMP could benefit local businesses, residents and visitors alike through developing a more prosperous economy, pleasant environment and inspiring pride in our heritage.

### 6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

The Destination Management Partnership meet quarterly at various venues across the County Borough. The group has increased membership and is a strong and cohesive voice for local tourism.

6.3.1 The Destination Management Officer regularly engages with stakeholders and the community to ensure that their voices are heard and acted upon.

6.3.2 This Plan was developed by the Partnership and consultation has been undertaken with the BGCBC and wider tourism stakeholders. There has not been the opportunity to undertake a public consultation due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

6.3.3 All views have been considered by the Partnership and based on this, the plan has been amended accordingly.

### 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

6.4.1 The BGDMP lifetime has been extended from 3 years to 5 years to allow the partnership to take a long term vision for tourism.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

6.5.1 Without a Destination Management Plan for Blaenau Gwent there will be no focus and monitoring of tourism delivery in the area. Regular business and community engagement addresses issues at an early stage or prevents them occurring in the first place.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

6.6.1 The Local Authority works collaboratively with Welsh Government, other local authorities, local businesses, trusts, public bodies and the voluntary sector in delivering the Destination Management Plan. In Blaenau Gwent we are working together to deliver the Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan through the community, stakeholders and the Destination Management Partnership.

Officers of the Council are represented on the South Wales Tourism Forum, South East Wales Destination Management Group and South East Wales Destination Implementation Group who link to the City Region board.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

6.7.1 Prosperous - The Destination Management Plan aims to improve the profitability of business performance through building the capacity of the industry.

6.7.2 Healthier - walking and activities in the outdoors through the development of walking and cycling routes will benefit the physical and mental wellbeing of the community and visitors.

6.7.3 Equal- By making recreational activities accessible to all.

6.7.4 Culture & Language - Through the use of the Welsh language in all our promotional materials and on line and celebrating our heritage and culture.

6.7.5 Globally Responsible - By protecting and promoting our unique natural and built environment, encouraging use of sustainable transport and supporting businesses in securing the Green Dragon environmental standard awarded to organisations that are taking action to control their impacts on the environment.

6.8 ***EqIA***

6.8.1 The BGDMP embraces all residents and visitors. It has no adverse impact on people or groups from the nine protected characteristics.

## **7. Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The BGDMP is monitored quarterly through the Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Partnership which receives updates on the progress made and forward planning.
- 7.2 Annual updates are provided to Scrutiny Committee and Executive every and on request.

### **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

**Appendix 1 - The Draft Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan 2020-25**

**BLAENAU GWENT DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN 2020 -2025**

INDEX	1
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## **FOREWORD**

As a keen naturalist and photographer I spend a great deal of my spare time in the beautiful countryside of Blaenau Gwent, over the past 40 years I have seen a dramatic change as the wildlife has reclaimed the mountains and rivers following the demise of our once flourishing heavy industry.

Red Kites now circle high above the Borough's oldest standing building St Illtyd's Church, whilst the formerly extinct native of Britain the Goshawk has re-established itself within our coniferous forests and its chilling call can be heard once again.

Dippers can be seen bobbing on the rocks of both the Ebbw Fach and Ebbw Fawr rivers and a keen eye will pick up the elusive Otter as it glides effortlessly through the watercourses, the transition has been considerable and there are now endless opportunities to capture wonderful images on my door step.

The whole of Blaenau Gwent is just a short walk from mountain tops with acres of wilderness to explore. It isn't just the wildlife, there are great walking trails, cycling routes, fabulous places to stay and amazing heritage sites to visit.

In the Eighteenth Century, we became the focus of the industrial revolution, people flocked here to make their living in the ironworks and pits and this migration made Wales the world's first industrial nation. Hundreds of years later, whilst our ironworks and colliers have long gone, the roots they put down then are now sending us visitors researching their family history. Gwent Archives receives visitors from all over the world researching their ancestors with Australia, New Zealand and North America topping the list.

Our last Destination Management Plan delivered a rise in visitors, more bed spaces in our guest accommodation and a huge increase in cottages, flats and rooms to rent. We saw many new tourism businesses setting up locally, capitalising on the location and all it has to offer. We also have a wealth of businesses tourism opportunities with unique conference and meeting venues that are growing in their potential and profitability. We are challenging and changing their perceptions of the area and in doing so, attracting more visitors.

More films were shot here recently than ever before and we achieved this by linking up our services and knowledge to make it easier for film makers to shoot in Blaenau Gwent. The continued investment in local infrastructure with the developments to the Heads of the Valleys road, the Ebbw Valley rail link and cycle routes make it easier to get here and to enjoy what we have to offer. The future plans for The Metro will bring exciting new opportunities and we look to maximise these connections with our tourism product.

In closing I would like to thank the Destination Management Partnership for steering us through the last 3 years. With their guidance and the input from stakeholders we have put together a new Plan that plots the course for the next 5 years. We know from feedback that when visitors spend time in Blaenau



Gwent that they have a wonderful time, we have delivered so much through our previous Destination Management Plan and it is now time to ensure that even more visitors enjoy what we have to offer.

It is crucial that we all work together to deliver the plan to make Blaenau Gwent a better place to live and visit.

Councillor Lee Parsons

Chair of the Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Partnership

## **INTRODUCTION TO BLAENAU GWENT DESTINATION MANAGEMENT**

### **The Destination Management Partnership**

The success of Destination Management will be dependent on key stakeholder engagement and strong collaborative working in meeting the priorities set out within the Plan.

Destination Management Partnership is responsible for co-producing the Destination Management Plan with other stakeholders. The Plan will be monitored and reviewed quarterly by the Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Partnership consisting of tourism stakeholders, Blaenau Gwent members and the relevant officers, all of whom have a good working knowledge of the sector and bring their skills, expertise and enthusiasm to the partnership. The Destination Management Partnership membership is reviewed annually and welcomes new members to bring fresh ideas and dynamics to the group.

An effective Partnership is key to the success of the Destination Management Plan and as such its ongoing monitoring, challenging and delivery will be a key to success. The partnership has reviewed our last plan and based on progress made and changes to the visitor economy and has developed new directions for a sustainable and successful way forward.

The Destination Management Partnership consists of representatives from the public, private and third sectors and currently includes the following:

Cllr Phil Edwards, Cllr Mandy Moore, Cllr Lee Parsons, Aneurin Leisure, Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Ebbw Vale Works Museum, Gwent Archives, Brynmawr History Society, Private Sector Partners and Council Officers.

### **The Destination Management Plan**

Destination Management is co-ordinating and delivering all the many facets that enhance the visitor experience. It looks at things from the visitor's viewpoint and ensures that residents, businesses, and our environment are well positioned to deliver the best possible experience in our destination. Ensuring a destination works effectively from a visitor perspective is the essential ingredient of successful Destination Management.

The Destination Management Plan is the strategic document that sets out our vision for a visitor-focussed way forward for tourism development in the area. Its main output is a Destination Action Plan which sets out practical steps that if taken forward jointly by all stakeholders, can make a positive difference; improving the quality of the visitor experience and growing the visitor economy in Blaenau Gwent. Some steps will be small and immediate, whilst others may be far reaching and ambitious.

The Plan has been co-produced with a number of stakeholders including:

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Departments

Blaenau Gwent Destination Partnership

Aneurin Leisure

Blaenau Gwent Business Forums

Social Business Wales

Visit Wales

Private Sector Businesses across Blaenau Gwent

### **THE BLAENAU GWENT DESTINATION PLAN VISION**

‘The Vision’

**“Visitors will be attracted to a destination where vibrant businesses work together to provide a warm welcome to everyone exploring the rich heritage, dramatic landscape, captivating towns and wide range of events and activities that Blaenau Gwent has to offer”.**

### **THE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN THEMES**

- BUSINESS TOURISM
- CULTURE & HERITAGE INCLUDING NHS AND GENEALOGY
- EVENTS
- GREEN/ECO TOURISM INCLUDING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND TRAILS
- TOWN CENTRES

**STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

**National Context**

Visit Wales / Welsh Government are currently reviewing their policy and have developed a ‘Plan on a Page’ that summarises their new framework. There is no set growth target as in previous policies.

<b>OUR AMBITION</b>			
To grow tourism for the good of Wales.			
<b>OUR GOALS</b>			
Economic Growth			
Environmental Wellbeing	Cultural Wellbeing	Health Wellbeing	
<b>OUR APPROACH</b>			
High-quality experiences – that are good for visitors and host communities.			
Inherently Welsh – with a global outlook			
<i>Welsh and local – BRO</i>		<i>Global - BYD</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Experiences with a Welsh sense of place</li> <li>— Friendly, welcoming communities</li> <li>— A showcase for Welsh food and drink</li> <li>— Thriving music and cultural experiences</li> <li>— Driving local economies/supply-chains</li> <li>— Accessible and inclusive – value for money</li> <li>— Open year-round, across all parts of Wales</li> <li>— Growing home-grown businesses</li> <li>— Celebrating the Welsh language</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— A respected destination brand</li> <li>— Attracting new international business</li> <li>— Driving value over volume</li> <li>— World-class experiences &amp; events</li> <li>— Meeting international quality standards</li> <li>— Relevant, innovative and contemporary</li> <li>— Harnessing data and insight for decisions</li> <li>— Multi-lingual and culturally aware</li> <li>— Minimising its environmental impact</li> </ul>	
<b>OUR OFFER</b>			
Outstanding Natural Landscapes	Creative Culture	Epic Adventure	
Croeso: unique accommodation and local food and drink			
The Wales Way			
<b>OUR TARGET VISITORS</b>			
Values over Volume			
New staycation markets <i>UK cities, Ireland, Wales</i>		International visitors that are new to Wales <i>Near European, USA: targeted elsewhere</i>	
Lifetime relations			
Leisure	Operators	Business Travel	Niche

<b>OUR KEY PRIORITIES</b>				
<i>Great products and places</i>	<i>Quality visitor experiences</i>	<i>An innovative Cymru Wales brand</i>	<i>An engaged and vibrant sector</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visit Wales-led projects</li> <li>- Industry-led capital investment</li> <li>- Integrated place-making</li> <li>- International and home grown events inc. Business Events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brilliant basics</li> <li>- Great hospitality through grading</li> <li>- Food and Drink</li> <li>- Skilled people</li> <li>- Product-led Teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A stronger nation brand</li> <li>- Adaptive flag-carrier marketing with off-peak focus</li> <li>- One campaign, two themed years</li> <li>- Digital-first industry</li> <li>- Marketing Centre of Excellence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effective industry engagement one industry voice</li> <li>- Improved data and insights based on industry need</li> <li>- Strengthened strategy and policy function inc. Transport focus</li> <li>- An agile and responsive Visit Wales</li> </ul>	
<b>COMMERCIAL PRIORITIES</b>				
Improved routes to market		A focus on special interest products		Commercial partnerships
<b>BRAND OBJECTIVES</b>				
Elevate our Status	Surprise and inspire	Change perceptions	Do good things	Be unmistakably Wales
<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>				
Restructured internal team		Refreshed governance structures		Streamlined business support
Review of delivery at local level			New approach to partnership delivery	
<b>MEASURING SUCCESS</b>				
Economic Growth				
Environmental Sustainability: TBC	Cultural Wellbeing: TBC		Health Benefits: TBC	
Local engagement with tourism	Visitor satisfaction		Business confidence	

### **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:**

The law is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It places statutory duties on public service bodies to work together towards seven national well-being goals (appendix). Tourism is key in Wales, contributing to the seven national well-being goals. Tourism can bring sustainable economic growth, showcase and celebrate Wales' social and

cultural assets, and protect and promote our unique natural and built environment.

1. A Prosperous Wales 2. A Resilient Wales 3. A Healthier Wales 4. A More Equal Wales 5. A Wales of Cohesive Communities 6. A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language 7. A Globally Responsible Wales

### **Regional Context**

Since the last Destination Management Plan was written there have been changes in the delivery of tourism regionally. The in house Regional Engagement Team for S E Wales has been reduced to one manager responsible for engaging on a one to one basis with local authorities. The Regional Team also act as secretariat for the South Wales Tourism Forum.

South Wales Tourism Forum: The forum is made up of private sector and local authority representatives from each area along with other key stakeholders. The remit of the South Wales Tourism Forum includes the exchange of relevant views and ideas on tourism issues, and a mechanism for effective collaboration between Welsh Government and key stakeholders in the region.

South East Wales Destination Management Group: The group is made up of local authority senior managers and heads of service whose primary aim is to provide strategic and professional support and advice to the South East Wales Regional Partnership Board and Cardiff Capital Region Board, the South East Wales Tourism Forum and Visit Wales on Destination Management issues affecting the Region.

South East Wales Destination Implementation Group: The group is comprised of Tourism Officers who ensure that the tasks identified by South East Wales Destination Management Group are researched and delivered and are directly linked to local Destination Management Partnerships.

Valleys Regional Park is a partnership established by Welsh Government to inspire positive changes in the way we care for our Valleys landscape, connect people with a wide range of outdoor activities for health and wellbeing and to support communities to explore new ideas and enterprises. Parc Bryn Bach is one of 12 Discovery Gateways that act as nodes to encourage visitors to explore the local area and region.

### **Local Context**

Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board: Established in April 2016, and is currently working towards preparing a Well-being Plan for the area. Tourism will offer an opportunity in Blaenau Gwent to help the area contribute towards the long-term future of the area.

## The Blaenau Gwent Local Plan 2018-2022

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (Section 15), places a duty on all Local Authorities in Wales to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. As part of this, the Council is required to develop a Corporate Plan. The priorities developed for the Corporate Plan incorporate the previous Council Well-being Objectives and also represent our Improvement Objectives, as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure.

Our core vision - Proud Heritage, Strong Communities, Brighter Future.

Our core values – Proud & Ambitious, Trust & Integrity, Working Together, Raising Aspiration and Fair & Equitable.

Our Council priorities are an Efficient Council delivered through Strong & Environmentally Smart Communities, Economic Development & Regeneration, Social Services and Education.

## Blaenau Gwent Transport Strategy

The Destination Management Plan will complement the Blaenau Gwent Transport Strategy which is currently being developed. There is potential to improve the integration of the cycle network and Active Travel routes with visitor attractions across Blaenau Gwent, improving access, increasing dwell time at venues and the attractiveness for day visits and activities for visitors and residents.

There is also scope to investigate whether the Integrated Responsive Transport pilot project can assist in providing transport to venues and attractions outside of scheduled timetables. Visits by walkers using trains and buses as stop off points are becoming increasingly popular, and with a range of attractions and with Blaenau Gwent located at a southern gateway to the Brecon Beacons, there is a clear role for transport to play in supporting the visitor economy and maximising the opportunities for local businesses.

## Blaenau Gwent Employment and Skills Plan

The Plan has five priority areas

1. Business and Enterprise
2. Learning and Skills
3. Social Mobility, Inclusion and Employability;

#### 4. Education and Schools

#### 5. Procurement and Community Benefits

The priorities identified are inclusive of all business types and employers. Similarly support to individuals will encapsulate all, including enterprise and business start-up; however, a focus on specific groups will be critical to deliver change and support economic growth.

The plan though applicable to all areas of the economy, aims to position Blaenau Gwent in meeting the needs of key sectors within the region including; Advanced Material and Manufacturing, Compound Semi-Conductors, Construction, Creative, Digital and Enabling Technologies and Human Foundational Economy including, Education, Health, Social Care and Childcare, Hospitality, Retail and Tourism.

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**BLAENAU GWENT DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN – SWOT ANALYSIS**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
Unique valley landscape - everything from woodlands to open moorlands amazing views	Reluctance of some businesses to market and invest in their product.
Proud history and heritage with Heritage sites and features, Museums and a chronicle of steel working, mining, Chartism and the Home of the NHS	Negative perceptions –landscape scarred by industrial past and media portrayals especially post Brexit vote.
Transport including rail link into Ebbw Vale town and Llanhilleth and A465 Head of the Valleys road improvements increasing accessibility and connectivity to Midlands, M4 and West Wales.	Limited distribution and range of restaurants/hospitality across the area. No chain and few quality restaurants.
Growing accommodation and restaurant sector with some new high quality additions.	Limited stock of group accommodation.
Ultimate destination for the outdoors - Walking, cycling and running. A wide variety of walking routes, mountain biking and off road cycling, and strong local Park runs. Events including Junior Tour of Wales and Triathlons.	No Tourism Association or Network.
Family history tourism fully exploiting the links to Gwent Archives.	Challenging economic climate for town centres.
The warmth of the welcome and sense of community	Limited range of accommodation (self-catering sector is mainly Airbnb).
	Litter and Fly tipping
	Limited take-up of Digital Technology – by businesses and access to town centre Wi-Fi

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Tourism is one of the nine key sectors for growth recognised by Welsh Government. External investment e.g. Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative, Town Centre Regeneration Initiative, Valleys Task Force and Tech Valleys funding	Perceptions of the destination.
Development of South Wales Metro including new station in Abertillery and increased services. A465 Heads of the Valleys Road improvement along with the introduction of an Integrated Responsive Transport pilot project to test a new approach to access bus services linked to train and other modes of travel	Lack of private sector confidence in the economy/lack of investment and increased uncertainty following Brexit and Covid 19.
New trends including Glamping Wellness retreats Music venues Festivals Wellbeing Climate change leading to staying local, local food etc.	Available public funding opportunities. Changes in Welsh Government's Tourism Investment Support Scheme from grant to loan. Future funding sources (no EU funds available) – replacement Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) availability is unclear
Increased opportunities following Brexit if the pound weakens (overseas visitors & staycations)	Digital and eco networks - Lack of Wi-Fi availability in town centres and Eco cars – availability of charging points
NHS – dedicated National Museum of Health. Circuit of Blaenau Gwent marathon linked to NHS	Labour and skills - Post Brexit labour threat and chef shortages along with perceptions that tourism is a low pay low skill employment opportunity
Cultural Tourism, Artworks, film & TV locations, artists and galleries.	Off peak public transport (evenings and weekends).

## **REVIEW OF BLAENAU GWENT DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN 2016-29**

The previous Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Strategy ran from 2016-19. It had 10 priority areas of Business Development, Business Tourism, Challenging and Changing Perceptions, Transport and Trail Development, Culture & Heritage, Research and Analysis, Events, Partnership Working, and Town Centres

### **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

- Worked with 39 accommodation developers. Key developments include the opening of The Tredegar Arms – 4 Star, The Castle Lodge apartments, Nantyglo Roundhouses Holiday lets. There are now 18 self-catering businesses offering 138 bed spaces; 1 campsite offering 60 camping pitches, 16 serviced accommodation businesses providing 138 rooms 426 beds
- New hospitality businesses have opened including The Henrison, The Railway, The Looking Glass and Seren cafe.
- Award winners – Seren Business Growth 2020 winner Welsh in Business, Highly Commended Food, Drink and Hospitality. Bedwellty House Welsh Café Awards 2019 winner of Best Café Food and runner up in Best Café Visitor Experience
- Secured location for mobile food businesses in layby at the Highest Point A465.
- Development of BG Business hub 105 businesses linked with 386 contacts.
- Businesses entering the BG Business Awards with Tourism and hospitality class launched in 2019/20

### **BUSINESS TOURISM**

- Working with venues on developing their offer on MEET Cardiff Capital Region. Acting and Conference Bureau to link customers to venues.
- New brochure for The General Offices. New room naming to add sense of place to venue
- Secured funding for new Business Tourism project across SE Wales
- Tabor, Brynmawr opened and promoted as a business tourism venue.

### **CHALLENGING AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS**

- Major events – Hosting the Man Engine visit at Parc Bryn Bach received huge influx of visitors and wide UK and international media coverage. Steelhouse video features on Visit Wales new marketing.
- Worked on securing locations for TV and film these include Who Do You Think You Are? – BBC, The Widow ITV/Amazon, Requiem BBC and the feature films and His Dark Materials. Jewellery for BBC series Dracula made by Gemtime.

- Filmed Weatherman Walking which was broadcast autumn 2018
- UK Blogger/Vlogger visits mainly focusing on outdoor, activities, families, food and events. Sites featured included Tudor brewery, Soar Chapel Guest House, Bedwellty House, Guardian, Owl Sanctuary, Parc Bryn Bach and local walking trails.
- Three Blaenau Gwent locations feature in the 29 epic Welsh backdrops to Hollywood films – Wrath of the Titans, Arabesque and Transformers: the Last Knight <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/whats-on/film-news/welsh-hollywood-films-movie-tourists-12837385>
- There are 7 Green Flag Parks in Blaenau Gwent – Beaufort Hill Woodlands, Bedwellty Park, Garden Festival Parklands, Parc Bryn Bach, Parc Nant y Waun, Terence Garden at Brynmawr Welfare Park, Trevor Rowson Park.

## TRANSPORT

- A465 improvements Brynmawr to Gilwern continuing including the new Jack Williams Gateway bridge
- Ebbw Valley line. As part of the new rail partnership, Welsh Government and Transport for Wales Rail Services are developing the delivery plan for improved services and a spur to Abertillery.

## TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

- Worked with Cwm a Mynydd RDP Local Action Group to develop trails that link to the train and Halls Tramroad with Bryn Oer Tramroad. Delivered consultant report, path upgrades, way marking, website and leaflet.
- New cycling link between Llanhilleth and Cwm open.
- Mapping of Ebbw Fach Trail complete. Ebbw Fawr Trail developed with complimentary logo and sculptures along the trail.
- Clydach Gorge Project with BBNP and MCC at an advanced stage.

## CULTURE AND HERITAGE

- Continued to work with *The Valleys That Changed the World*, developing and promoting Industrial Heritage Product.
- Worked with Blaenau Gwent Heritage forum helped to establish new Facebook site and marketing.
- Delivered the Man Engine event. Highly successful on all fronts especially in telling our story. The theatre group told the story of life before the NHS. The narrator included Six Bells disaster, naming all the victims to tell of the true price of coal and the role of Tredegar Workingmen’s Medical Aid Society and Aneurin Bevan in delivering the NHS. Ebbw Valley Brass, Beaufort Male Voice Choir, Ad Hoc Theatre Company and Head 4 Arts Gamelan

group all involved in delivering the musical soundtrack of commissioned music for Man Engine. Tredegar Orpheus Male Voice Choir were involved in the Blaenafon event.

- Aberystroth history and Archaeological Society project that has explored and uncovered the history of the Cwm Celyn valley.
- Consultation report to maximise the tourism potential of BG as the Home of the NHS and Aneurin Bevan.

## **RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS**

- Expanded locations and installed people counters.
- Collation of footfall data
- Took part in the VW biannual visitor surveys in 2017 and 2019.
- New bed stock report compiled.
- STEAM report produced that analyses volume and value of tourism in Blaenau Gwent.

## **EVENTS**

- Local Events - Production and distribution, on and off line of event posters - 16 posters with 519 events covering all of Blaenau Gwent for Spring, Easter, Summer, Autumn, Remembrance and Christmas. Promotion of Blaenau Gwent events on The Valleys website.
- Delivered the Man Engine event. Highly successful on all fronts especially in telling our story. The theatre group told the story of life before the NHS. The narrator included Six Bells disaster, naming all the victims to tell of the true price of coal and the role of Tredegar Workingmen's Medical Aid Society and Aneurin Bevan in delivering the NHS. Ebbw Valley Brass, Beaufort Male Voice Choir, Ad Hoc Theatre Company and Head 4 Arts Gamelan group all involved in delivering the musical soundtrack of commissioned music for Man Engine. Tredegar Orpheus Male Voice Choir were involved in the Blaenafon event.
- Steelhouse video features on Visit Wales new marketing.

## **PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

- Continued membership of The Valleys. Successfully secured WG funding for 2017-19.
- Produced series of brochures including event-led seasonal brochures, great outdoors and Valleys Gateway sites. Website updates and full Welsh translation completed, PR campaign, regional competitions. Hosted series of blogger visits.

- Continued membership of Southern Wales – attendance at trade shows, Familiarisation visits, BG Travel Trade Brochure. Secured WG funding to encompass Consumer, Business and Travel Trade Tourism.
- Continued membership of TVTCTW – networking events across south Wales.
- Continued to organise and deliver Wales Valleys Walking Festival.
- Working with Coalfields Regeneration Trust to develop work around 10 The Circle, Bevan Trail and other significant product.
- Development of NHS/Nye Bevan project.

## **TOWN CENTRES**

- Local Events - Production and distribution, on and off line of event posters - 16 posters with 519 events covering all of Blaenau Gwent for Spring, Easter, Summer, Autumn, Remembrance and Christmas.
- Delivery of Small Business Saturday. In 2018 our media campaign comprised of a series of animated posts developed by our in-house communications team. Twitter – 52 posts, 33125 tweet impressions, 1102 media views and 346 engagements. Facebook – 51 posts, 38191 reach, 1127 clicks, 3779 video views, 149 shares and comments.
- Promoted membership of discount cards that can increase business e.g. Defence Card, Blue Light Card.
- Working with new Ebbw Vale Business Group to establish regular events throughout the town centre
- There has been an agreement to re-establish a Task & Finish group to consider the report and make recommendations. They will review the draft strategy with specific consideration to:
  - a. Generating a new strategy, focus and direction
  - b. Common principles that should underpin the strategy, action plan and associated delivery across all towns.
  - c. Complementarity of offer across the Authority and associated town centres.
  - d. Key strategic projects for town centre delivery, Blaenau Gwent wide.
  - e. Partnership and delivery mechanisms to support implementation of priorities contained within the strategy.
- A Town Centre Business Development Officer has recently been appointed and will work with the Destination Management Partnership

## **VOLUNTEERS**

- Blaenau Gwent employs 24 Litter pickers who on average remove over 600 tonnes of litter a year. They also have 53 individual volunteers registered as Litter Champions.

- In Blaenau Gwent Keep Wales Tidy annually supports 1445 volunteers who spent around 6877 hours a year working on environmental projects including removing 67.5 tonnes of waste and recycling or reusing 3631 bags of waste. The types of projects included 225 clean ups, 28 protected species, 115 biodiversity, 30 access, 14 allotment/food growing, 39 community Gardens and 217 measures to prevent fly tipping.

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

### **THE BLAENAU GWENT DESTINATION VISION**

“Visitors will be attracted to a destination where vibrant businesses work together to provide a warm welcome to everyone exploring the rich heritage, dramatic landscape, captivating towns and wide range of events and activities that Blaenau Gwent has to offer”.

### **THE THEMES**

On reviewing the priority areas in the previous Destination Management Plan, it was decided to divide them into 6 Cross Cutting Themes that underpin the plan and 5 Main Themes for specific tourism areas.

### **MAIN THEMES**

#### **BUSINESS TOURISM**

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events. For several years there has been an embryonic business tourism sector in Blaenau Gwent the potential of which has not been realised. Recent development has brought together a number of facilities who have a better understanding of the market and a desire to capitalise on the income it can generate. Improvements to the transport network give the ideal platform to fully embrace the opportunities that exist.

#### **CULTURE & HERITAGE INCLUDING THE NHS AND GENEALOGY**

The heritage and culture of the area is probably the stand out reason for visitors coming to the area. We have a special and proud history, a landscape that tells of the earliest settlers in the area and a wealth of historical sites, museums and archives that draw in visitors on a daily basis. It is essential that we protect, maintain and capitalise on this valuable asset. Two areas that are particularly suitable for development are genealogy with the proximity of Gwent Archives, registry office and several local museums and Blaenau Gwent as the home of the National Health Service.

#### **EVENTS**

The value of events to the tourism sector is increasingly evident. Large annual events give a huge boost to the local economy while many smaller local events are growing as is the support needed to run them safely and successfully. To maximise the benefits, a clear way forward for marketing, training, development and financial sustainability is required.



## GREEN/ECO TOURISM INCLUDING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND TRAILS

The mining and ironmaking industries left an indelible mark on the landscape however years of land reclamation and reforestation has restored the beauty and the biodiversity of the area. Tourists are much more aware of sustainability and the need to respect our environment and it is therefore incumbent on our industry to address environmental issues and promote a sustainable way forward.

The desire to be outdoors and active continues to grow with the markets for walking, cycling and adventure activities increasing. We must ensure we are at the forefront of developing and reacting to existing and emerging trends. The existing trails on offer continue to be well received however it is essential that we look at new opportunities to enhance the offer to niche markets and to increase accessibility, through developing new and longer trails.

The development of the Valleys Regional Park across what is geographically known as the South Wales Coalfield will improve, enhance and promote the unique landscape of the area.

## TOWN CENTRES

Addressing the difficulties faced by our town centres, is a far broader task than can be delivered by this Destination Management Plan however we must strive to maintain a thriving and vibrant welcome for residents and visitors alike. This will not be done by relying on traditional town centre business mixes and approaches, we will have to accept change and embrace digital opportunities.

## **CROSS CUTTING THEMES**

### Business Development

To ensure a thriving and vibrant tourist economy, it is essential that we work with individual businesses to maximise their potential. Blaenau Gwent, along with other agencies, has a key role to play in business development to support those who want to grow and increase their profitability. In addition to the specific development needs of each business, there are many ways that we can work together to improve our individual performance and that of the destination. Sharing knowledge, gaining new skills and teaming up to form a cohesive way forward is important and enhances the destination offer.

### Challenging and Changing Perceptions

The perception of our area is often dominated by historical industrial portrayals and the subsequent decline through the post-industrial passage of time, yet when visitors arrive they are captivated by our heritage, impressed by the beauty of and the welcome received in the valleys.

Changing these perceptions will not be immediate but we must continue to build on the positives and unite to inform new audiences of why they should visit the Valleys, capitalising on our proximity to the Brecon Beacons.

### Partnership Working

Blaenau Gwent is one of the smallest Local Authorities in Wales and the UK. Whilst this has some disadvantages, it also has many advantages. It is broadly recognised that we achieve more by working together than working in isolation. A better knowledge of the sector, developing local supply chains and forming cohesive and clear partnerships can maximise our return from visitors.

### Research and Analysis

In order to improve our performance, it is essential that we continually measure and monitor our achievements. To do this, ongoing data collection is essential for accurate quantitative information. It is also important to find out what our customers feel, as this is the best way to improve our service and in turn results. A new Tourism Strategy is essential for the strategic development of the destination.

### Skills

In order for our visitors to have the best experience possible, it is essential that our workforce maximises the opportunities available to them through formal and informal training options. This can be achieved by raising awareness and encouraging take up of training and development opportunities and ensuring accessibility for potential learners

### Transport

There is a need to continue with improvements to our connectivity, with works to increase rail services on the Ebbw Valley rail link and completion of the A465 improvements. Regional and local bus services are also an essential part of the network especially in the north and west of the area. With moves towards increased sustainability the importance of linking these to walking and cycling trails is important.

## **COVID-19**

Since this document has been compiled the Covid 19 pandemic has decimated the economy and in particular the tourism sector worldwide. Government at all levels have concentrated efforts on the health and wellbeing of our communities. The ebb and flow of the virus spread has led to the introduction of measures and restrictions that can change daily and our businesses have had to react instantly to keep their visitors and staff safe.

Throughout the pandemic, Blaenau Gwent officers have worked closely with Welsh Government to keep our businesses informed, operational, supported and safe. The financial support from Welsh Government, given to local businesses and organisations, has helped most of them survive. We have fed back to Welsh Government the thoughts and feelings of the sector, they have listened and in reacted.

A survey of tourism stakeholder showed that 85% fully closed following national lockdown on 23 March 2020 and 88% lost 100% of their income. All had kept in touch with their customers and 88% were going to reopen as soon as they were allowed to or it was safe to reopen. Most had received government funding and there was an increase in the sign up of industry newsletters to keep on top of announcements – 76%.

This close co-operation within the sector will continue and ongoing engagement will safeguard the future of tourism locally.

**ACTION PLAN**

Theme	Description	Activity	Delivery (Who)
Business Development	Business engagement and support	1.1 Undertake proactive business engagement with the tourism sector, including inward investment, to encourage growth and development of businesses through raising awareness of the opportunities available.	BGCBC (DM), Aneurin Leisure, Visit Wales, Business Wales, Federation of Small Businesses, Social Business Wales, Big Ideas Wales, Superfast Business Wales
Challenging & Changing Perceptions	Awareness	2.1 Realise a comprehensive awareness of the destination, on and off line, through media, marketing, vivid imagery, websites and hosting familiarisation visits, vloggers and bloggers.	BGCBC (DM & Comms) Stakeholders
	Regeneration	2.2 Develop and deliver regeneration initiatives to strengthen the business, physical and social environment of the destination e.g. Tredegar THI, VVP, RDP, TRI.	BGCBC (Regeneration), Stakeholders
Partnership Working	Group membership	3.1 Secure membership and affiliation to regional and national groups/ bodies, as appropriate to ensure the Authority and local business are represented appropriately.	BGCBC (DM),
	Cross promotion	3.2 Encourage collaborative working and cross promotion opportunities amongst business clusters e.g. town centres, business tourism, tourist attractions.	BGCBC (DM & Comms), Stakeholders
Research & Analysis	Performance data	4.1 Ensure appropriate measures and arrangements are in place to capture, record and monitor footfall data for STEAM, Visit Wales Occupancy reports and	BGCBC (DM), Stakeholders
Skills	Training	5.1 Audit and encourage businesses to take up accredited and non-accredited training opportunities to developed a better skilled and payed economy.	
	Guides	5.2 Ensure Ambassadors and Blue/Green Badge guides are up to date and involved in the area, recruiting additional volunteers as necessary. Consideration to be given to specialist module for 'Home of the NHS	BGCBC, WOTGA,
Transport	Connectivity	6.1 Improve connectivity across the local authority through the completion of the A465 HoV dualling through Blaenau Gwent and	

		the Delivery of the Metro infrastructure including new station in Abertillery and increased services to Cardiff (and Newport).	
	Public Transport	6.2 Improving public transport connectivity to and across the Local Authority, improving ease and range of access to destination attractions.	Welsh Government, BGCBC (Transport), TfW, Local services.
Business Tourism	Collaborative approach	7.1 Encourage all stakeholders to work collaboratively to establish and strengthen the Business Tourism offer within the Local Authority and to promote offer locally, regionally and nationally.	BGCBC (DM) Stakeholders
	Performance	7.2 Undertake reciprocal visits with key MICE locations and develop surveys to monitor and improve performance.	BGCBC (DM) Stakeholders
Culture & Heritage Including NHS Genealogy	Heritage	8.1 Celebrate and promote our local history and heritage through accessible trails, museums, archives, genealogy and research opportunities	BGCBC (DM), Heritage and walking groups
	Home of the NHS	8.2 Implement the proposals of the Nye Bevan /NHS report that celebrates Blaenau Gwent as the Home of the NHS.	BGCBC (DM), WG, Aneurin Leisure and other stakeholders.
Events	Development	9.1 Develop and enhance the event provision across the borough, including annual events and festivals and promote to a local and national audience.	Stakeholders
	Event Stewards	9.3 Develop a volunteer steward resource to support event delivery in Blaenau Gwent.	GAVO, Event organisers, Aneurin Leisure, BGCBC (Env Health)
Green/Eco Tourism Including Outdoor Activities Trails	Clean environment	10.1 Maintain clean and litter free environment across the destination.	BGCBC(DLO), Volunteers
	Valleys Regional Park	10.2 Work with the VRP partnership and Discovery Gateways to deliver their goals and ambitions across the valleys	Valleys Regional Park Partnership BGCBC Aneurin Leisure

	Trails	10.3 Develop and market walking, running, cycling and longer cross border trails	BGCBC (DM) Other LAs, volunteers, Community groups
	Adventure activities	10.4 Develop easily accessible adventure activities for individuals and groups.	Aneurin Leisure BGCBC (DM)
Town Centres	Appearance	11.1 Maintain a clean, litter free and visually appealing environment in Town Centres with key facilities, infrastructure and events to attract visitors.	BGCBC (Environment)
	Wi Fi	11.2 Introduce Town Centre Wi Fi into our towns	BGCBC (Regeneration) Business Forums, Town Partnerships, Town Councils, Community organisations



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# Agenda Item 7

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**  
Date of meeting: **24<sup>th</sup> March 2021**  
Report Subject: **Progress Update: RE:FIT Project**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D. Davies, Deputy Leader & Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development**  
Report Submitted by: **Amy Taylor, Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
21.02.20	x	11.03.21			24.03.21	14.04.21		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. To provide Regeneration Scrutiny Committee with an update on progress of the RE:FIT project.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1. RE:FIT is a commercial model for public bodies wishing to achieve financial cost savings, to improve the energy performance of their buildings and reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> footprint through the use of a performance backed contract/tender.
- 2.2. In November 2016, Executive Committee approved a proposal to allow the Council to move forward with a project under the RE:FIT framework as following a mini-competition with suppliers on the framework, Matrix Control Solutions were appointed as the Preferred Contractor.
- 2.3. Funding to deliver the programme was also provisionally secured through the Salix / Invest to Save (Welsh Government) interest free loan scheme.
- 2.4. Around 35 buildings were originally considered to form part of the Blaenau Gwent RE:FIT project and an initial phase was developed. This phase was further split into smaller stages to enable works to be undertaken as proposals were developed and agreed. These are described in sections 2.5 – 2.17.

### Phase 1a

- 2.5. Phase 1a of the Re:Fit project is made up of the following Council-owned buildings:
- Corporate Landlord Buildings (including but not limited to, Civic Centre, ViTCC, Cwrt Mytton etc.);
  - Leisure Trust Premises (Sports Centres, Libraries, Bryn Bach Park, Bedwellty House and Park); and
  - Willowtown Primary School.

- 2.6. Technologies installed during this phase included Solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels, LED lighting, boilers, Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Unit and Building Management System (BMS).

#### Phase 1b

- 2.7. Schools considered as part of phase 1b of the RE:FIT Project included: Abertillery Comprehensive, Abertillery Roseheyworth Primary Campus, Swffryd Primary, Canolfan Yr Afon, Brynmawr Foundation School, Cwm Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive.
- 2.8. Due to the devolved nature of the education budgets agreement was needed between the Council and each school to agree loan repayment. Although projects were required to pay back within 8 years, the option to repay the costs for the project over 10 years was made available. This option was presented to schools for consideration.
- 2.9. The works contract between the Council and preferred supplier (Matrix Solutions Ltd, part of E.ON) was signed on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2019. After discussions with all of the schools identified in 2.6, two decided to proceed with project delivery.
- 2.10. Abertillery Comprehensive School and Roseheyworth Primary School have received new LED lighting. Works commenced in late 2020 and final sign off is expected in February 2021.

#### Phase 1c

- 2.11. This phase included the installation of Solar PV at Ebbw Vale Sports Centre and the installation of Variable Speed Drives (VSDs) at Ebbw Vale Learning Action Centre. All works under this phase were completed during 2020 and are operational.

#### Phase 1d

- 2.12. An initial phase 1d programme of street lighting replacement was confirmed for 4,490 non LED street lighting lanterns. These works also included replacement of existing nodes with Telensa nodes to enable the street lighting stock to be transitioned and managed from one management system instead of multiple management systems being in place.
- 2.13. Previously street lighting across the Borough was operated using three different management systems: Telensa, Mayflower and Leafnut. Of these systems Mayflower is now considered to be an obsolete system and is no longer supported by a management company. In the event of failure of the Mayflower system, the Council would have to find the budget to transition the nodes on the lighting system in order for it to operate correctly.
- 2.14. Due to the functionality of a node, there is no realisable saving from their replacement. We are therefore relying upon the potential savings from the

replacement of the lanterns to LED to generate the savings required to achieve the required payback.

- 2.15. As a result of underspends elsewhere within the project it was possible to include a further 1600 non LED lanterns in the programme for replacement. Works are expected to start in February 2021 and be completed in March 2021.

#### Phase 1f

- 2.16. Current lighting levels and configuration within the pool hall of the Ebbw Vale Sports Centre building are in need of replacement. Technical Services provided a proposal to replace the existing lighting with updated LED lighting together with a new design that will make cleaning and maintenance easier. Works started in January 2021 and are due to be completed in February 2021.

#### Phase 1g

- 2.17. Pool covers at Sports Centre Pools help pools to retain water temperatures. This phase will install motorised pool covers on a number of the pools across Blaenau Gwent in conjunction with Aneurin Leisure Trust. This will help to costs associated with heating water in pools.
- 2.18. It is currently envisaged that works across all phases will be completed by the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. At this point the project will move into the Measurement and Verification (M&V) Phase.

### **3. Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1. There are no options to be considered as part of this report. Regeneration Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the progress of the project and further report on performance will be provided in the future.

### **4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1. Generation of renewable energy in Wales is supported and encouraged through legislation as follows:

Welsh Government Energy Policy Statement 'A Low Carbon Revolution' (2010)  
- Notes the potential involvement of WG in encouraging renewable energy industries in order to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable economic growth.

#### Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 4.2. Welsh Government 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act' 2015 – Large scale renewable energy is directly aligned with:

'A prosperous Wales' goal, striving towards creating an innovative, productive and low carbon society, which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

- 4.3. There is also a direct link to the well-being goal for 'A globally responsible Wales' in tackling climate change. The Act encourages long term generational thinking by public bodies to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

#### Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Corporate Plan Refresh 2020-2022

- 4.4. This topic supports the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan Refresh 2020-2022 in the following areas:

- To create strong and environmentally smart communities we are taking a strategic approach to the management of our land in different ways;
- To be a carbon neutral Council by 2030;
- To develop a portfolio of potential energy opportunities to deliver economic, business and community benefits; and
- To develop a more commercial organisation to generate income and deliver cost reductions to make local services sustainable and raise money to re-invest in our priorities.

#### Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan

- 4.5. In Blaenau Gwent generation of renewable energy development is supported within the LDP under LDP Strategic Policy 7 – Climate Change, which seeks to address the cause of climate change through 'encouraging more of the County Borough's electricity and heat requirements to be generated by renewable and low/zero carbon technologies'.
- 4.6. Development Management Policy 4 – Low and Zero Carbon Energy, also encourages major development proposals to incorporate schemes which generate energy from renewable sources.

#### Blaenau Gwent Energy Prospectus 2019

- 4.7. The project is one of a number identified within the Energy Prospectus endorsed by the Council's Regeneration Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

#### Blaenau Gwent Decarbonisation Plan, 2020-2030

- 4.8. This project will also work towards addressing some of the key challenges identified within the Council's decarbonisation plan 2020-2030. For the Council to become carbon neutral by 2030 we will have to exploit local opportunities for renewable generation and using energy differently.

## 5. Implications Against Each Option

### *Impact on Budget*

- 5.1. This programme is being heavily subsidised through the Welsh Government, who have received funding support from ELENA, (European Local Energy Assistance) a European funding stream to bridge the gap between sustainable energy plans and real investment through supporting all activities necessary to prepare and mobilise investment into sustainable energy projects.
- 5.2. Participation in the RE:FIT programme shall be limited to a single capital payment of £10,000 assuming that a RE:FIT project is progressed. Such costs can be capitalised into any overall project funding proposals that are prepared as part of the business cases for this project.
- 5.3. RE:FIT provides a solution which delivers a comprehensive retrofit of energy efficiency and renewable generation solutions across the organisation's assets. It has the potential to deliver significant savings to energy bills (typically range in the order of 15%) or agreed kWh outputs with renewables, dependent on the building's condition, solutions provided and also the project's business objectives/ rules.
- 5.4. The Welsh Government's 'Invest to Save' interest free loan for energy efficiency improvements was available during the development stage of the project and an Expression of Interest was submitted seeking support for a project with an approximate value of £2m - £2.5m. To be eligible for the loan the project portfolio must have an overall payback that is eight years or less and cost no more than £200 to save a tonne of carbon dioxide over the expected lifetime of the project.
- 5.5. All savings achieved by the RE:FIT project are retained by the Council and if there is failure to meet the savings target by the Service Provider, the RE:FIT contract protects the council, with the supplier responsible for funding the difference between the guaranteed and actual saving.
- 5.6. After completion of the tender process and preparation of high level assessments it became clear that further budget would be required for the Project so additional funding was sought from Salix / Invest to Save.
- 5.7. Salix/Invest to Save agreed 'in principle' to fund projects up to a total value of £4.1m but detailed business cases would be required to secure the investment to proceed towards project delivery.
- 5.8. The Welsh Government allocation of Salix funding for Blaenau Gwent CBC has been separated into four phases:
  - Phase 1a – Corporate Landlord Buildings, Leisure Trust Premises and Willowtown Primary School. Total value £1,122,690 and approx. £144,712.09 annual energy savings

- Phase 1b – Schools which may\* include Abertillery Comprehensive, Abertillery Roseheyworth Primary Campus, Swffryd Primary, Canolfan Yr Afan, Brynmawr Foundation School, Cwm Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive. Total value £271,328 and approx. £29,878 annual energy savings.
- Phase 1c – Ebbw Vale Sports Centre, Abertillery Leisure Centre, Ebbw Vale Learning Action Centre, Silent Valley and Coed y Garn Primary. Total value £351,511 and approx. £36,023 annual energy savings.
- Phase 1d – Street lighting at total value £2,638,846.12 and approx. £374,285 annual energy savings.
- Phase 1f – Ebbw Vale Sports Centre replacement of pool hall lighting. Total value £51,208.98 and approx. £6,444 annual energy savings
- Phase 1g – Sports Centres Motorised Pool Covers installation. Total value £45,055 and approx. £14,606 annual energy savings

\*due to the devolved nature of education budgets, each school's Governing Body will be responsible for determining the School's commitment to this Project.

- 5.9. Whilst there will be annual energy savings those identified in section 5.8 are gross energy savings. The savings will be used to make the bi-annual repayments of the loan to Salix. In order to realise in-year savings, the loan repayments will be extended from 8 years to 10 years and this will allow buildings to benefit from some of the savings generated from participating in the project. Once repayment is complete all buildings will benefit from all the savings.
- 5.10. Once the project is closed, a further report presenting the final position of the project, annual repayment and net savings to the buildings.

***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

- 5.11. There is a risk that the energy efficiency measured do not achieve the energy savings estimated at the time of developing the investment grade proposal. The impact of this risk is mitigated through the use of the performance contract used for this project. In the event energy savings (kWh) do not achieve the estimated level, the contractor shall be required to compensate the Council for savings not achieved.
- 5.12. Risks associated with the management of the works to deliver the project have been managed throughout the project in conjunction with the Contractor. They will continue to be monitored for the remainder of the works phase and in the ongoing contract management phase.

## ***Legal***

- 5.13. We are being advised by Technical Services Legal Officer on the Contract of Works terms and conditions. Legal support is also available through the Welsh Government Energy Service (formerly RE:FIT Cymru).
- 5.14. As delivery body of the project the Council has entered into the loan agreement with Salix / Invest to Save (Welsh Government). The Council will ensure that where budgets are outside Council control i.e. Schools and Aneurin Leisure Trust, partnership agreements will be entered into. This will ensure that agreements are in place to require repayments to be made in line with loan repayment requirements.

## ***Human Resources***

- 5.15. Project management of the RE:FIT project has been undertaken by Regeneration. Significant support has also been provided from Welsh Government Energy Service (Formerly RE:FIT Cymru) throughout the process. This has included quantifying the potential energy savings and initial scoping, identifying funding options, legal support, procurement support through to monitoring of Asset performance.

## **6. Supporting Evidence**

### ***Performance Information and Data***

- 6.1. Potential KWh and Carbon reduction savings can be calculated and costed using the data provided on the chosen buildings and assets.
- 6.2. For each phase of works contract the Suppliers are required to ensure that the energy savings are monitored, quantified and verified through robust Measurement and Verification in order to assess and report on the savings performance. This will enable the Council to assess overall performance against the agreed Contract and enforce financial penalties in the event that the actual savings do not match those as guaranteed within their tenders and the preferred contractors investment grade proposal.

### ***Expected outcome for the public***

- 6.3. Re:Fit will deliver more efficiently managed energy within Council properties and reduce energy costs to the Council, Leisure Trust and Schools in forthcoming years. Re:Fit will increase public awareness about the overall health benefits of carbon reduction and energy efficiency, particularly amongst pupils in the participating schools.

### ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

- 6.4. There has been ongoing dialogue with the Education Department and selected School Head Teachers and meetings held to discuss the proposed technical solutions.

- 6.5. The Team met with Head Teachers / Business Managers / School Governors from Abertillery Comprehensive, Abertillery Roseheyworth Primary Campus, Swffryd Primary, Canolfan Yr Afon, Brynmawr Foundation, Cwm Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive.
- 6.6. A number of leisure buildings under the control of Aneurin Leisure Trust were included in the project. Consultation and engagement with the Trust ensured that energy efficiency measures installed offer the greatest benefit to the buildings operated by the Trust on behalf of Blaenau Gwent.

***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

- 6.7. Energy costs have risen in recent years and it is expected that they will continue to rise in the future.
- 6.8. Re:Fit delivers energy, cost and carbon savings to the Council and therefore positively contributes to overall economic, social and environmental wellbeing in line with Future Generations legislation.

***Collaboration / partnership working***

- 6.9. Elements of the project have required collaboration and partnership working in order to ensure successful project delivery. The team has worked closely with Aneurin Leisure Trust to investigate and deliver energy efficiency measures across Leisure Trust Buildings. This will support the Leisure Trust financially and ensure that they are able to continue to provide invaluable services to the Communities of Blaenau Gwent.

***Integration(across service areas)***

- 6.10. Delivery of the project has required there to be significant integration across service areas. Officers from Regeneration have worked extremely closely with Community Services, Education, Social Services, Finance and Planning to ensure technologies and project design meet Council needs.

**7. Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1. Delivery against the works contract is monitored by Technical Services via the Clerk of Works and Regeneration from a project / contract management perspective.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

N/A



# Agenda Item 8

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **24<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Report Subject: **Civic Crowdfunding**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D Davies, Executive Regeneration and Economic Development**

Report Submitted by: **Bethan McPherson, Team Manager Connected Communities**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
23.02.21	25.02.21	11.03.21			24.03.21	14.04.21		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek endorsement in order to gain Executive approval to:
- 1.2 Submit a CCRCF Challenge Fund application for a regional civic crowdfunding programme, operating as the lead authority.
- 1.3 Subject to funding award, implement a regional crowdfunding programme, inclusive of Blaenau Gwent, to support solutions to locally identified projects and challenges.

## 2. Scope and Background

### Civic Crowdfunding

- 2.1 Civic crowdfunding funding provides a unique platform that enables local people, groups and businesses with ideas for improving their local area, to bring projects to life.
- 2.2 It has the capability to deliver a programme of projects led by the public that delivers rich social and economic impact and add to the fabric of the area; building social cohesion.
- 2.3 A civic crowdfunding approach places citizens at the heart of improving places, which results in a difference to the types of projects being delivered and also the process by which they are delivered.
- 2.4 Other benefits to the approach include:

- Maximising the impact of public sector investment to those projects with demonstrated community support, leveraging X3 value on average.
  - Extends beyond the traditional project applicants, bringing new solutions and creators to civic project development.
  - Skills development for the project creators, leading to increased capacity for local people to deliver civic projects.
- 2.5

2.6 The civic crowdfunding is built from a “coalition of willing funders” to back projects, including, local businesses, national partners, local community and voluntary organisations, philanthropic grant-makers and local citizens.

2.7 Utilisation of a dedicated platform is proposed to facilitate this crowdfunding activity. The product suite automates many of the processes required to deliver change and offers an end-to-end digital solution that will automatically match projects to grants, distribute funds, collect impact data and report, in real-time, on all the projects in your portfolio. Certain platforms offer additionally in terms of project due diligence checks.

Alongside the dedicated technology, civic crowdfunding platforms deliver a comprehensive support package consisting of targeted marketing, community engagement, project, support and capacity building events to communicate the initiative to potential project creators. As part of the agreement, the LA would seek:

- Strategy, setup and account management
  - Management of funding rounds (x2 per annum)
  - Development of a funders ecosystem
- 2.8

A recommended investment fund is identified in order to generate the optimum fund level for maximum engagement and programme outcomes. A level of flexibility exists but the fund level is based on, multiple factors, not least:

- The need to demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting communities and their individual projects.
  - Provide a strong offer to perspective projects, including those not traditionally engaged.
  - Committing a level of investment to help individual projects realise their fundraising targets.
- 2.9

2.10 The civic crowdfunding platform model has been successfully adopted by a number of authorities across the UK, including Swansea who have launched their platform within the last 18 months. A case study outlining their achievements to date is included as Appendix 1.

### **Regional Civic Crowdfunding model**

Reflective of the economies of scale required to deliver an effective programme and associated investment levels, a regional approach across the

2.11 CCRCD is proposed, aligned to their recently launched Challenge Fund, enabling community led activity and solutions.

2.12 The CCRCD team has encouraged a submission from BGCBC as the proposed lead authority by the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021, with a subsequent decision anticipated after board determination on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

2.13 BGCBC would be the lead authority, managing the relationship and entering into contract with an appropriate provider to deliver the crowd funding platform for an initial period 2021/22 through to 2023/24.

2.14 This opportunity will extend beyond the HoV proposal previously considered. Reflective of this and the approach supported by CCRCD, a briefing note will be circulated to all 10 LA Chief Executives, seeking endorsement, a desire to be part of the proposal, consideration to potential contribution to the investment fund and nominated lead officers.

2.15 An appropriate governance structure would be implemented in line with the funding requirements, ensuring appropriate representation from each participating LA in the decision making associated with the investment fund.

2.16 The fund criteria will align with those of the CCRCD Challenge Fund, including: improving the health and wellbeing of the region's citizens, and supporting, enhancing and transforming communities.

There may be opportunity to develop more specific priorities where there is additional investment to the overall fund from individual Local Authorities that would underpin local investment decisions.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option 1 Do Nothing

3.2 Option 2 (Preferred Option)

To endorse the submission of a CCRCD Challenge Fund application for a civic crowdfunding platform, acting as the lead authority.

Endorse the implementation of a regional crowdfunding platform, inclusive of Blaenau Gwent, to support solutions to locally identified projects and challenges; subject to funding award.

### 4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

#### **Regional Priorities**

#### **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- Blaenau Gwent wants safe and friendly communities
- Blaenau Gwent wants to look after and protect its natural environments

- Blaenau Gwent wants to forge new pathways to prosperity
- Blaenau Gwent wants to encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play

### **Corporate Plan**

- Strong & Environmentally Smart Communities
- Economic Development & Regeneration
- Efficient council

## **5. Implications Against Each Option**

### **5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The financial proposal is outlined within Appendix 2 of the report.

A full funding proposal will be submitted to CCRC, seeking the full project costs associated with a regional crowdfunding project.

A project proposal to the value of £1,241,222.28 over 3 financial years (21/22, 22/23, 23/24) is proposed. The investment fund sought from CCRC is £833,333.34. The funding application will also seek funding for the hosting platform (also exploring WG funding as potential match) and a dedicated staff resource to co-ordinate the regional programme delivery

The value of the investment fund total will be amended accordingly where LA match funding is identified. This is not a requirement for the application but will add value and demonstrate partnership working and commitment.

Optimum fund level £750k to £1m over 3 years' full delivery.

CCRC will consider a submission seeking 100% funding; however, match funding (financial or in-kind) from participating partner Local Authorities is encouraged and will be further identified as part of the engagement work that will be undertaken as the first part of the regional project.

A note has been prepared and will be shared, via the CCRC Team, with all Chief Executives of the respective LAs within the CCR in order to outline the challenge proposal, seek a commitment to engage and give consideration to financial contribution to the proposal.

Funding of up to £50k over 3 years (21/22, 22/23, 23/24) has been identified by Regeneration (associated with income generated specifically to support community based initiatives), as the BGCBC contribution to the project. No further funding is anticipated from BGCBC sources.

Wider investment from partner funding streams (e.g health, RSLs) available to support Blaenau Gwent based groups and activity will form part of the larger funding ecosystem developed as part of the crowdfunding platform model.

Evidence highlights that there is scope to lever an additional £3 for every £1 invested. This could potentially lever a minimum of £2.5million additional investment into the region.

## 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The primary risks associated with the project are outlined below and actions to mitigate would be undertaken as part of the project development and in advance of a contractual commitment being made.

- Securing partner endorsement to the regional proposal. CCRCD funding would enable delivery across the regional, whilst reducing the investment required from partner authorities, making the proposal more attractive. Engagement from all authorities will be sought but is not a requirement to enable the proposal to be implemented.
- Appetite for the fund from community based groups and organisations will impact on the fund and its under or over subscriptions. Several measures will be in place to mitigate this risk including; appropriate fund levels, fund promotion, engagement of key support organisations, including CVCs. The COVID pandemic may further influence the uptake of the funding; delivering the proposal over 3 years will allow the programme to respond and adapt accordingly.
- Project governance, deliverability and sustainability considerations to minimise any long term liability is a further risk. The available crowdfunding platforms including a due diligence exercise (via a third party body) to ensure all appropriate permissions are in place and consideration to sustainability is made. Contracts are built into the platform that ensure legal responsibility for the delivery of the project, providing further mitigation in relation to this risk.

## 5.3 ***Legal***

A funding awarded and associated T&C would be in place.

An approach which is procurement compliant will be adopted in commissioning the crowdfunding platform, with consideration to specific requirements, inclusive of independent verification checks.

## 5.4 ***Human Resources***

An officer to co-ordinate the regional delivery of the civic crowdfunding and manage relations if proposed as part of the challenge fund application. The post would be a fixed term post for 3 years, hosted within Regeneration.

## 6. ***Supporting Evidence***

### 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Update reports, aligned to funding rounds, would be produced, outlining key performance data including:

Projects supported,  
Funding levered,  
Value added achieved,  
Impact metrics and qualitative responses,  
Project success rate.

Some example stats from a crowdfunding platform identify;

73% of projects have come from deprived wards  
50% of project creators have not been involved in civic projects before.  
13% av. ratio programme costs to value of projects funded  
88% av. Success rate of projects backed by our partners.

## 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Community activation  
Capacity building  
Community ownership  
Community designed/led solutions  
Sustainable delivery

## 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The success of the project will in part be dependent on effective involvement;

LA commitment across the CCR

Partner agencies, not least third sector including CVCs, providing support to potential applicants and ensuring sufficient capacity and engagement in the project.

Community groups are aware engaged and empowered to take forward projects via the civic crowdfunding platform.

Potential partners are aware and engaged as a potential part of the funding ecosystem e.g. members of the Public Service Board, members, RSLs, local businesses etc.

## 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

Consideration to funding the model beyond the initial funding commitment will be required. The requirement may reduce as the funding ecosystem grows and establishes. With an intensive level of investment to local community led regeneration projects could reduce the long term requirement for the platform and/or BGCBC level of investment.

A mechanism through which resident/community led solutions are facilitated could enable wider long term benefits to be realised, including reduced dependency on public sector service delivery, additional resource and added value to existing services and sustainable delivery.

#### 6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The project concept seeks to support local development activity through an alternative approach that levers maximum investment to a range of community based projects within defined parameters. This encourages;

Needs based delivery aligned to community needs and wants not perceived need, only those projects that fulfil this requirement are likely to achieve their total funding target.

Projects identified and driven from within local communities may increase long term sustainability of the project.

#### 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The proposal was originally explored as a HoV delivery model with the investment requirement centred on each participating LA. The proposal is now focused on the CCR region and there will be engagement with all LAs across the area.

#### 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The investment criteria and therefore the projects supported could fulfil the objectives of many service areas as a proactive and preventative approach.

#### 6.8 ***EqIA***

The project will seek to be inclusive and is focused on supporting community based initiatives, which could include those aimed at specific groups.

### 7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Annual/Six monthly update/outcome report.

#### **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Case Study
- Appendix 2 – Financial Profile

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## **Appendix 1 – Civic Crowd Funding Case Study**

### **Swansea Civic Crowdfunding - Space hive**

#### **The impact**

- 604 backers
- 20 projects
- £127,388 pledged
- £30k pledged by Swansea CC

Most projects have exceeded their funding requirements and those projects supported include:

- Bike shelters and ebike mounts
- Copley Common Regeneration - Eco friendly
- Room to Grow – Community Food Corridor
- Beach Clean Stations
- Sheelair – women creating together using discarded material and inventiveness
- COVID 19 Emergency response fund
- Coedback park – a park for the people
- A brighter future for Swansea children – annual competition for primary children to design and make products to sell

Considering exploration of a Swansea Bay City Region Platform roll out.

<https://www.spacehive.com/movement/crowdfundswansea/projects>

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## Appendix 2: Civic Crowdfunding CCRCO Challenge Fund: Financial Profile

PROJECT COSTS	21/22	22/23
Investment Fund	£ 183,333.34	£ 350,000.00
Hosting Platform (potential WG funding)	£ 65,000.00	£ 65,000.00
<i>Optional event for project creators</i>	£ 2,000.00	£ 2,000.00
Management Overheads:		
<i>BGCBC Lead Officer Staff Costs</i>	£ 35,774.56	£ 40,055.48
<i>Oncosts (34.20%)</i>	£ 12,234.90	£ 13,698.98
<i>Equipment</i>	£ 2,000.00	£ 500.00
	<b>£ 300,342.80</b>	<b>£ 471,254.46</b>

CCRCO Funding Requirement		
<i>Investment Fund</i>	£ 166,666.67	£ 333,333.33
<i>Platform</i>	£ 67,000.00	£ 67,000.00
<i>Management Overheads</i>	£ 48,009.46	£ 53,754.46

LA Match Funding Pledge(£):	21/22	22/23
<i>Blaenau Gwent</i>	£ 16,666.67	£ 16,666.67
<i>Bridgend</i>	TBC	TBC
<i>Caerphilly</i>	TBC	TBC
<i>Cardiff</i>	TBC	TBC
<i>Newport</i>	TBC	TBC
<i>Merthyr</i>	TBC	TBC
<i>Monmouthshire</i>	TBC	TBC
<i>Rhondda Cynon Taff</i>	TBC	TBC
<i>Torfaen</i>	TBC	TBC
<i>Vale of Glamorgan</i>	TBC	TBC
	<b>£ 16,666.67</b>	<b>£ 16,666.67</b>

LA Match Funding (inkind) TBC TBC



23/24	TOTAL
£ 350,000.00	£ 883,333.34
£ 65,000.00	£ 195,000.00
£ 2,000.00	£ 6,000.00
£ 41,076.77	£ 116,906.81
£ 14,048.25	£ 39,982.13
£ 500.00	£ 3,000.00
<b>£ 472,625.02</b>	<b>£ 1,244,222.28</b>

£ 333,333.33	<b>£ 833,333.34</b>
£ 67,000.00	<b>£ 201,000.00</b>
£ 55,125.02	<b>£ 156,888.94</b>
	<b>£ 1,191,222.28</b>

23/24	TOTAL
£ 16,666.67	£ 50,000.00
TBC	TBC
TBC	TBC
TBC	TBC
TBC	TBC
TBC	TBC
TBC	TBC
TBC	TBC
TBC	TBC
TBC	TBC
<b>£ 16,666.67</b>	<b>£ 50,000.00</b>

TBC

TBC

# Agenda Item 9

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **24<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Report Subject: **Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative Progress Report**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D. Davies, Executive Member Regeneration and Economic Development**

Report Submitted by: **Richard Crook, Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services**

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2021	4 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	11.03.21			24.03.21	14.04.21		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to update Scrutiny on the current position regarding the Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative, also providing Members with a snapshot of projects completed to date.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The report outlines progress against projects delivered under the Heritage Lottery funded 'Townscape Heritage Initiative' to date. A detailed closure report will be submitted to Scrutiny on conclusion of the programme in December 2021.
- 2.2 In December 2013 the Council secured £1,550,000 from the Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) under the Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) towards the restoration of all properties contained within the Historical Core 'The Circle' of the Tredegar Southern Conservation Area.
- 2.3 The HLF funding has been matched from the following sources: -
- |                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| Welsh Government VVP | £550,000   |
| Blaenau Gwent CBC    | £486,000   |
| Welsh Government TRI | £350,000   |
| Cadw                 | £60,000    |
| Private Sector       | £2,670,000 |
- 2.4 The projects require a project specific amount of private sector investment. There is no set rate of intervention, projects are either funded via the 'Conservation Deficit' gap funding approach where projects include vacant floor space and external works; or they will be determined using the intervention rates for re-instating authentic details (up to 90%) and appropriate structural works (up-to 70%).
- 2.5 Complementary Initiatives were also integral to the THI Programme, with funds contributing to the delivery of the following schemes:
- Free Town Centre Wifi

- QR Codes for heritage trails (integral school curriculum)
  - Heritage Centre interpretation panels
  - Heritage Filming Project
- 2.6 The heritage filming project saw a team of professional's work on a project guiding young people to research local history and produce a series of small films based on their findings. Each team of young people learned how to investigate, document and research local history that is largely unknown. This project linked to pupils from local schools across Tredegar. Their findings will then be included in a digital gallery for the community to view.
- 2.7 The programme was initially scheduled to be concluded in July 2020, although as a consequence of the current Covid-19 pandemic, the HLF have now agreed to extend the programme until December 2021.
- 2.8 The following schemes have been completed to date, and Appendix 1 provides a pictorial snapshot of how the grant intervention has provided the opportunity to redevelop the following properties:
- The Tredegar Arms
  - No. 10 The Circle
  - No. 4 Morgan Street
  - No's 4-5 The Circle
- 2.9 The Coalfields Regeneration Trust have just completed works to No.10 The Circle, the original birthplace of the National Health Service. For decades prior to the setting up of the National Health Service in July 1948. The Medical Aid society was famously the blueprint from which Aneurin Bevan, born in the town and its representative in Parliament as MP for Ebbw Vale – developed the idea of the NHS, as minister of health in Labour's post-Second World War government. No 10, The Circle was the society's office for much of its 105-year existence, the place where subscriptions were paid and claims were made, enabling people to be able to access medical care that for many would otherwise have been unaffordable. The restoration works took nearly 2 years, with the building being used as an open access multi-functional space for educational classes, training, seminars, meetings, and include a heritage centre which will tell the story of the building.
- <https://youtu.be/ewoKhYilkAQ>
- 2.10 Works to the former Town Hall (NCB Club) continue and remains the only scheme uncompleted within the programme. The scheme has experienced significant delays as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic with the contractor furloughing staff through the months of March to September 2021. The HLF have agreed a revised programme of works and are currently considering a request for additional financial support to cover costs associated with the delayed programme.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 To note the extension to the THI Programme originally planned for closure in July 2020 and the revised completion date of December 2021.
- 3.2 To acknowledge progress made to date with the refurbishment of properties outlined in 2.4 above and also highlighted within Appendix 1 of this report.
- 3.3 To note the involvement of the THI Advisory Board who are responsible for the continued management of the Tredegar THI Programme and ensure the following key principles are applied to the methodology of the programmes delivery:
  - a) To hold the vision for the Historical Core.
  - b) To assist in designing, programming and delivering events.
  - c) To assist the selection process.
  - d) To ensure the emergent interpretive and access proposals in accord with the underlying vision for the project.
  - e) To develop further the interpretive ideas and links with relevant audiences.
  - f) To develop further detailed briefs on:
    - g) Educational delivery
    - h) Community involvement
- 3.4 The Council continue to rollout a Building Enhancement Grant Programme, which is a thematic of the Welsh Government funded Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme (TRI). The programme provides an opportunity to continue refurbishing properties located in the Historical Core now all the HLF funds has been fully allocated.

### 4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1 The project supports the Corporate Plan Outcome to support a fairer sustainable economy and community. Through these projects will work with partners to develop a new vision for our town centres ensuring their long term future.

### 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

There are no direct cost implications associated with this report, only acknowledgement of the grant process administered by Officers of the Regeneration Department.

#### 5.1 ***Impact on Budget***

Should the NCB Club not be finished within the extended deadline, the outstanding funds may be lost to the programme and subsequently the applicant.

## 5.2 *Risk*

Although there is an identified risk that the former NCB Club is completed within the extended deadline imposed by the HLF, the ramifications of not finishing will have financial implications for the applicant.

## 5.3 *Legal*

In order to administer grants, work has been undertaken with the Councils property solicitor to establish a process for grant applications, due diligence and terms and conditions which enable a full audit trail to be put in place.

## 5.4 *Human Resources*

The projects are currently project managed within the Regeneration Opportunities Team. This supported service areas including Resources, Community Services, Estates and Asset Management and Planning.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

In order to secure the funding through under the THI umbrella, projects were required to identify how they contributed towards meeting the outputs identified in the original THI business plan. Details of the outputs already achieved and those associated with the NCB Club refurbishment will be documented in the closure report.

### 6.1 *Expected outcome for the public*

The funding opportunities provided through the THI grant intervention will contribute towards the overall regeneration of Blaenau Gwent by improving the viability of our town centre and also providing a more attractive environment for tourists.

### 6.2 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*

Consultation and engagement activity was undertaken on numerous occasions throughout the THI programme. Member engagement will continue, with a closure report being planned on conclusion of the programme.

### 6.3 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*

The projects and work carried out through the Tredegar THI programme are aimed at improving and upgrading the physical infrastructure of Tredegar that will help us to meet requirements in terms of creating a more pleasant environment to live and work. The programmes will also assist in improving the long term viability of the town centre. It will enable us to bring derelict / vacant buildings back in to use for the benefit of our businesses, residents and visitors.

### 6.4 *Preventative focus*

Derelict or vacant buildings if left to further deteriorate will require greater works to bring them back into use and in cases of listed buildings the liabilities for building owners will only increase more and more until works are undertaken.



6.5 *Collaboration / partnership working*

The THI Advisory Board is a strategic working group with key partners delivering the vision of the Tredegar heritage ethos. The group comprises of the likes of Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Museum Society, Business Forum, Ward Members, Town Council, Cymru Creations, Tredegar Comprehensive.

6.6 *Integration (across service areas)*

The projects being delivered cut across a number of service areas and as they are developed appropriate governance and project management arrangements across the multi-disciplinary teams.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 A number of monitoring arrangements are in place to monitor performance of the projects. These include

- Quarterly monitoring reports submitted to the Heritage Lottery.
- Risk register
- Progress reports submitted to the THI Advisory Board, Management Team and Scrutiny Committees.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – photographic evidence of schemes completed to date

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# Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative

March 2021 update

**12 The Circle** – External refurbishment: New ‘heritage’ shop front, refurbishment of middle floor for beauty treatment room with office accommodation on upper floor.

Exterior Before THI works



Exterior After THI works



Shop Frontage Before THI works



Shop Frontage After THI Works



**The Tredegar Arms** – Internal and external refurbishment of empty derelict building to create a restaurant, hotel and multi-purpose function space

**Exterior Before THI Works**



**Exterior After THI Works**



# The Tredegar Arms - Internal Photos



## 4 Morgan Street – External refurbishment of Pharmacy

Exterior Before THI Works



Exterior After THI Works



**10 The Circle** – Internal and External refurbishment of former Tredegar Workmen’s Medical Aid building.

Exterior Before THI Works



Exterior After THI Works



**Former Town Hall (Grade II Listed) – Internal and External refurbishment**  
Exterior Before THI Works



Exterior During THI Works





# Agenda Item 10

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **24<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Report Subject: **Advanced Engineering Centre & MTC Report**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D Davies, Executive Member Regeneration and Economic Development**

Report Submitted by: **Tara Lane, Skills Development Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
02.03.21	03.03.21	11.03.21			24.03.21			

## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek endorsement of the Blaenau Gwent Future Skills report and the subsequent funding proposal submitted to Tech Valleys for the refurbishment of the Monwell Building into an Advanced Engineering Centre.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In 2018 the Council acquired the former Monwell Factory and set about developing the site to realise an ambition to create a venue which would support the future skills needs of the manufacturing industry across Blaenau Gwent and the Heads of the Valley.

### 2.2 MTC – Future Skills Recommendations Report

In December 2020, MTC Training Services published their findings based on research across Blaenau Gwent industry for Future Skills Recommendations and delivery within the proposed training centre. (Appendix 1)

- 2.3 The report highlighted several factors not least the impact of Brexit and more recently the Covid pandemic that needed to be considered. The area is largely made up of SME companies who albeit expressed the need to maintain with traditional engineering techniques, there was a requirement for more support and knowledge on the implementation of robotics and automation, in addition, additive manufacturing and digital manufacturing awareness. All of which have been considered for delivery within the facility by the Coleg Gwent Team.

- 2.4 The employer survey identified that “SME businesses are not currently in a financial position that would encourage any significant investment in either staff training or new equipment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many SMEs are experiencing a great deal of uncertainty – primarily due to the impact of the pandemic, but also due to the lack of clarity regarding trading conditions post-Brexit. Even prior to the impact of the pandemic, the reluctance (or inability) of many SMEs to invest in training was a concern

- 2.5 As a result, the report recommended that the Advanced Engineering Centre offers a range of technology awareness programmes that will allow SMEs to explore, at minimal cost, the benefits of deploying a range of technologies with the potential to improve the efficiency of their business, while also developing additional revenue streams via diversification into additional products and services. It is with these recommendations that the teams at Coleg Gwent and the Local Authority have considered carefully the equipment purchases for the facility that will be required to support industry.
- 2.6 One of the headline recommendations within the MTC report: “is that all necessary efforts should be made to support, enhance and, where possible, expand the activities of the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship programme. The Programme is an award-winning programme which has been of benefit to companies in the Blaenau Gwent region since 2015. The recommendation is for this to continue, along with several recommendations to provide support for school engagement and career guidance:

### **Key Supporting Documents**

- 2.7 In addition to the MTC report the Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership Plan 2019-2022, a 3-year vision for employment and skills across the region developed by the Regional Skills Partnership in consultation with business, education and training partners details Advanced Material & Manufacturing as a Key Sector – there is a reported skills gap of 21% in Wales which is the highest reported figure for Wales by sector. It suggests that a relatively large proportion of the workforce do not possess the skills to meet current needs.
- 2.8 The Advanced Engineering Centre will aim to reflect what Welsh Government has outlined in ‘A Manufacturing Future for Wales’ document. The ten themes to future proof the manufacturing community across the Heads of the Valley feature as cross cutting themes; one of the key points is the collaboration between Government, Industry and Academia which is the basis of the partnership for the delivery of this proposal.

### **Tech Valleys**

- 2.9 Since 2018 a number of meetings have been held with the Tech Valleys board to fund the refurb. The delivery concept of the facility has changed and developed in that time and on the advice of the board to source an anchor tenant at the end of 2019 a partnership with Coleg Gwent was established.
- 2.10 On January 29<sup>th</sup> 2021 the TV Board endorsed the proposal and have written a letter of recommendation to go alongside the Business Case which has been submitted to Welsh Government.
- 2.11 The Tech Valleys programme has a vision:

*"In 2027 the South Wales Valleys and Blaenau Gwent in particular, will be a globally recognised centre for the development of new technologies, to support cutting edge industry"*

In support of this vision BGCBC and Coleg Gwent have proposed to develop an Advanced Engineering Centre which will create an environment that will attract hi-tech inward investors within the Advanced Manufacturing sector.

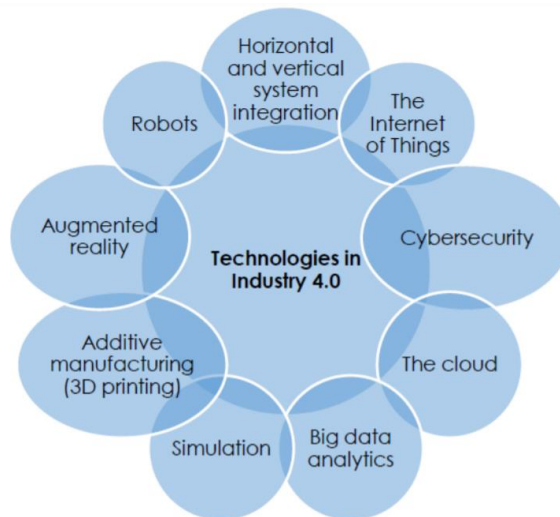
2.12 **Advanced Engineering Centre**

The facility will be sector-leading, a pioneering Centre of Excellence embodying the ideals of Industry 4.0, the Digital 2030 Framework and with education at its core. The goal is to provide an adaptable platform capable of delivering a new curriculum fit for the engineering industry of the future.

2.13 There is no venue or facility currently across the Heads of the Valley that seeks to capitalise on the collaboration between academia, industry and challenges the boundaries of manufacturing to create more efficient methods of working.

2.14 The curriculum offer will range from L1 to L6 in the areas identified as in-demand by the Welsh Government, local industry and the Manufacturing and Technology Catapult Centre (MTC) as written in the recent recommendation report for Blaenau Gwent (2020).

2.15 These areas include Autonomous Manufacturing, autonomous vehicles with battery technology and Collaborative Robotics incorporating the ever-increasing Cyber influence, such as machine learning, predictive analytics, artificial intelligence and security. Aspects of this will be embedded in and delivered in conjunction with the Cyber College initiative Coleg Gwent has already established with University of South Wales



2.16 There will be focus on the use of Augmented and Virtual Reality to design, analyse data in real-time and manufacture. Students and Industry will have access to the latest in Materials Technology such as metal additive manufacturing and composites. As the face and future of Engineering is rapidly changing to heavily rely on these new technologies and respond to industry 4.0, it has never been more important that these new technologies are embraced and brought to the forefront of our community.

- 2.17 Across Blaenau Gwent and the Heads of the Valley primary and secondary schools will have access to the facility and will be able to have guest lectures, demonstrations and develop STEM knowledge through project work through accessing the equipment and experiences outside of a school's limited capability.
- 2.18 The Advanced Engineering Centre will be constantly adapting to produce highly trained students who have a real passion for engineering and upskill the current engineering workforce, ready for the next industrial revolution. The partnership with the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme will ensure local industry and Tech Valleys are provided with skilled young people for the jobs of the future.
- 2.19 Ebbw Vale (along with the rest of the South Wales Valleys) has significant socio-economic challenges, and these are detailed in strategic documents such as Our Valleys Our Future Evidence Paper 2018.
- 2.20 The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 specifies two highly relevant challenges for places like Ebbw Vale, namely, equipping everyone with the right skills for a changing world and the need to build capacity for lifelong learning.
- 2.21 It is proposed that 600 full time, part time, HE, apprenticeships and commercial learners by 2026/27. The additional state of the art equipment and resources will allow for a far greater range of commercial training and additional income all identified as required in Ebbw Vale by the Manufacturing and Technology Catapult Centre Report (MTC) conducted on request by Tech Valleys and BGCBC.
- 2.22 The aim of the Advanced Engineering Centre is not to duplicate current provision but to ensure that there is holistic provision across the region to enhance skills development in the Advanced Manufacturing Sector and Digital Industries. It will complement the immersive digital arena centre at Thales (NDEC) as their new building will have an area dedicated to public engagement and there are already partnership developments in reviewing learning pathways for apprentices across this sector.
- 2.23 There have also been curriculum developments at the Coleg Gwent campus which will enable cyber security learning opportunities and also universities and stakeholders will in turn bring benefits to the regional economy

### **The Building**

- 2.24 The team are keen to explore the implications of a low carbon approach to running the building and have made an allowance in the cost model for appointing a specialist consultant in that field to advise together with a provision in the construction budget for the findings from such a study.  
Photographs of the site (appendix 2)

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

#### 3.1 Option 1 Do Nothing

- Do not endorse the MTC report and associated recommendations
- Do not note and endorse the TV submission for the refurbishment of Monwel into the AEC.

#### 3.2 Option 2 Preferred option

- To endorse the MTC report and associated recommendations
- To note and endorse the TV submission for the refurbishment of Monwel into the AEC.

### 4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan: Forge new pathways to prosperity through employment and skills development
- Corporate Plan: Economic Development and Regeneration
- Regeneration Priorities: employment and skills, enterprise and innovation.

### 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

#### 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

##### Short Term

In the short term the implications for BGCBC is the cost of officer time and resource to develop proposal and to initiate developments until the funding is confirmed. This is the funding contribution to the overall programme.

In terms of asset contribution that equates to the cost of the purchase of the site itself £57k with a property value of £150k

The proposal under consideration will require capital investment from Tech Valleys.

The overall capital investment sought is £8million:

- Construction costs £5m
- Consultants / Surveys /Professional Design fees – £800k
- Equipment costs £2.2k

The annual revenue investment – Coleg Gwent

- £196k

## Long Term

Coleg Gwent will be the tenant and therefore all operational cost will be covered within their budget which been agreed by their finance and resource committee in Jan 21. The estimated running costs will be £196k per year.

Should funding not be awarded for the refurbishment, the property would not be fit for use and therefore it would be reasonable to advise to sell and utilise the land for other uses.

### 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The risks associated are:

- Not acknowledging the future skills needs of the local authority and therefore not putting in place measures to support training and future employability opportunities.
- If the proposal is not endorsed, then the building will not be refurbished or even fit for any learning purposes. There would have to be alternate plan for the use maybe disposal.

### 5.3 ***Legal***

There will be lease arrangement with BGCBC & Coleg Gwent on a peppercorn rent basis for a term yet to be determined.

BGCBC along with the College has taken VAT advice on the proposed arrangement throughout the proposal development to ensure that the zero VAT position currently assumed is feasible. Advice has supported the position subject to a number of key controls including:

- The total scheme must be commissioned and procured by BGCBC
- There must be no capital contribution from the College.

### 5.4 ***Human Resources***

Not required for this update

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

There is a target programme of events for this development which will require early funding decisions. There is an expectation that the facility will be open for learning in September 2022.

### 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The Employment and Skills plan will outline specific priorities and associated actions to:

- Increase the number of employment opportunities available
- Increase the range of employment opportunities available
- Ensure appropriate employment provision to support people into work and progress once in work
- Train and upskill local residents aligned to demand or growth sectors
- Raised awareness of opportunities to support educational attainment and aspiration
- Increased employment and skills opportunities secured through community benefits.

### 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

To date the emerging proposal has been developed in consultation/discussions with:

- Schools across Blaenau Gwent
- University of South Wales
- Cardiff School of Engineering, Cardiff University, UK
- Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC), Coventry
- Renishaw
- Thales (NDEC)
- Industry Wales
- Welsh Valleys Engineering Project (WVEP)
- Technology Connected
- Local Industry
- Employability & Skills partners
- Coleg Y Cymoedd

### 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

- The future proposals aim to meet the needs businesses; future skills planning and fulfil current skills gaps. with learning providers.
- The Aspire team are continually working with education to identify progression routes onto higher education as industry requires these higher level skills and with this apprenticeship pathway it provides alternative routes to employment for young people
- The proposal is offering employers and local authorities to demonstrate the employment opportunities within local areas providing skilled young people locally and meeting regional needs

### 6.5 ***Preventative focus***

### 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

- The proposals are integral to collaborative working across the city region and with individual local authorities, that is the key to its success, to date there has been RSP engagement, partner LA and FE discussions, business engagement,

- It is vital that the team works closely as they have done in the past with FE. It will be important to utilise the apprenticeship contract within individual providers for each area. Relationship with the FE to support delivery

#### 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The contents of the plan will link closely with Education.

#### 6.8 ***EqlA***

The plan is aimed at ensuring Blaenau Gwent Prospers, this is inclusive of all in our efforts to raise skills and employment levels for residents.

### 7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 A baseline, aligned to the proposals will be developed to measure the medium and long term impact of the programme. An annual review and update on progress will be prepared and reported through Scrutiny and Executive Committees and the PSB.

7.2 This will also be monitored through the Post 16 Partnership in line with the governance structure of the Employment and Skills plan.

#### **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – BG Aspire Academy – Future Skills
- Appendix 2 – Photographs of the Site



**BLAENAU GWENT ASPIRE  
ACADEMY – FUTURE SKILLS  
RECOMMENDATIONS (V 2.0)**

**AUTHOR:**  
William Fowler

**DEPARTMENT:**  
MTC Training Services

**DATE OF ISSUE:**  
15<sup>th</sup> December 2020

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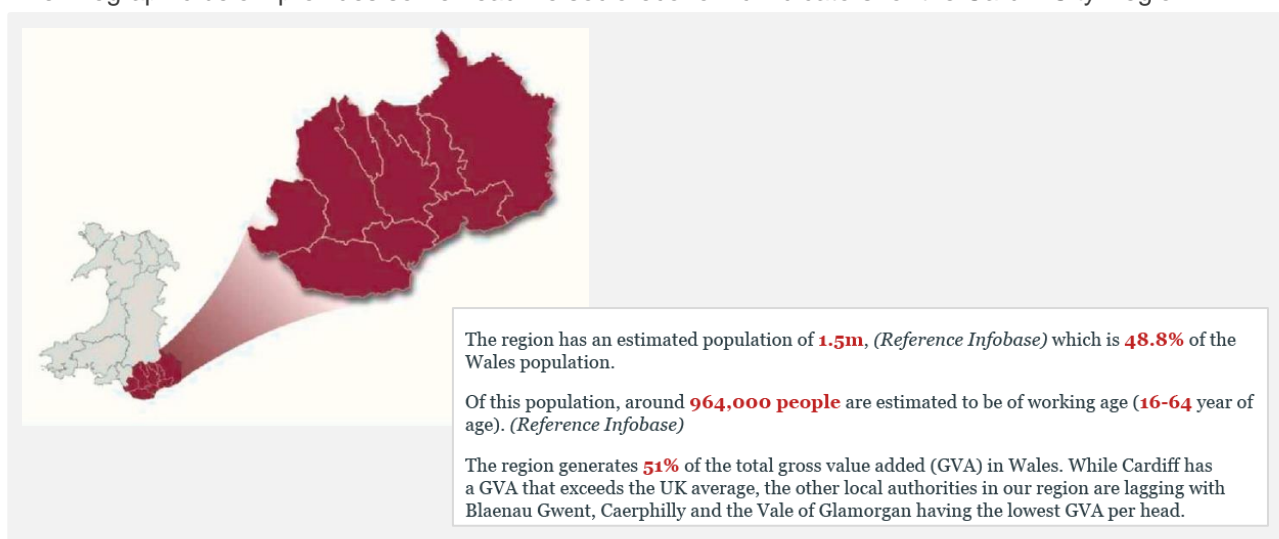
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## Foreword

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council lies within the Cardiff Capital Region of Wales and has a rich industrial and manufacturing heritage, being an early centre of industrial innovation, including coal, iron and steel production, during the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840) and beyond. Iron and steelmaking were of particular importance in the area, some notable dates being:

- 1789 Iron making began in Ebbw Vale
- 1790 First blast furnace established at Ebbw Vale
- 1857 Ebbw Vale Ironworks produced the world's first steel rails for trains
- 1914-18 Women made artillery shells at the Ebbw Vale steelworks for the war effort
- 1927 52 miners killed in an explosion at Marine Colliery
- 1930s Ebbw Vale Steelworks was the largest steel mill in Europe
- 1978 Closure of Ebbw Vale steel plant
- 2002 Closure of Ebbw Vale tinsplate and galvanising works

The infographic below provides some headline socio-economic indicators for the Cardiff City Region:



Source: <sup>1</sup>

- Gross Value Added (GVA) is a widely-quoted economic indicator that is used to compare the relative economic performance of regions of different sizes.
- In this case, GVA represents the monetary value of products and services produced within a local authority within a defined period of time.
- GVA is calculated as the total of all goods and services that are produced during the reference period (output), less goods and services used up or transformed in the production process, such as raw materials and other inputs.

<sup>1</sup>

[https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/sites/skillsgateway/files/documents/2020\\_02\\_005%20Cardiff%20Capital%20Region%20Skills%20Partnership%20Employment%20and%20Skills%20Plan%202019%20-%202022..pdf](https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/sites/skillsgateway/files/documents/2020_02_005%20Cardiff%20Capital%20Region%20Skills%20Partnership%20Employment%20and%20Skills%20Plan%202019%20-%202022..pdf)

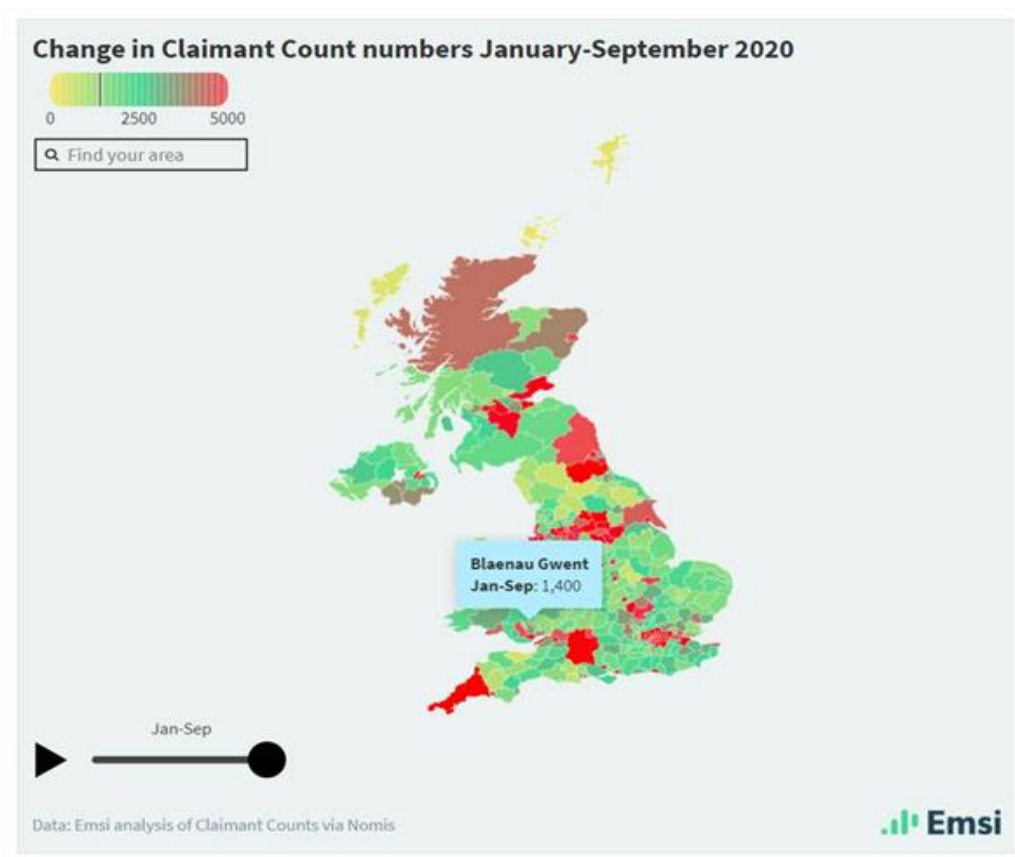
By the early 1920s the Ebbw Vale Steel, Iron & Coal Company employed 34,000 men – its expansion driven by a booming market for Welsh steam coal that was used all over the world in steam locomotives and ships. However, the demise of the use of coal and steam to power industrial machinery led to the decline of many heavy industries, and the subsequent closure of coal mines, steel works and associated activities. This left a legacy of high rates of unemployment, and other associated socio-economic challenges, to be faced by those communities affected by these issues.

Consequently, in common with many post-industrial regions in the United Kingdom, Blaenau Gwent has faced a range of social and economic challenges which have arisen from the shift from an economy and workforce based primarily on secure and relatively well-paid jobs in heavy industries, to a modern economy based upon a diverse range of smaller manufacturing companies.

While the emergence of manufacturing in newer sectors (e.g. automotive, aerospace and pharmaceuticals) in the Blaenau Gwent region is welcome and encouraging, it has yet to replace the volume of jobs and opportunities afforded to earlier generations by large-scale employment in heavy industry.

Unfortunately, the automotive and aerospace sectors are among those that have been most seriously affected by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with job losses affecting not only manufacturing companies but also leading to jobs being shed throughout their associated supply chains.

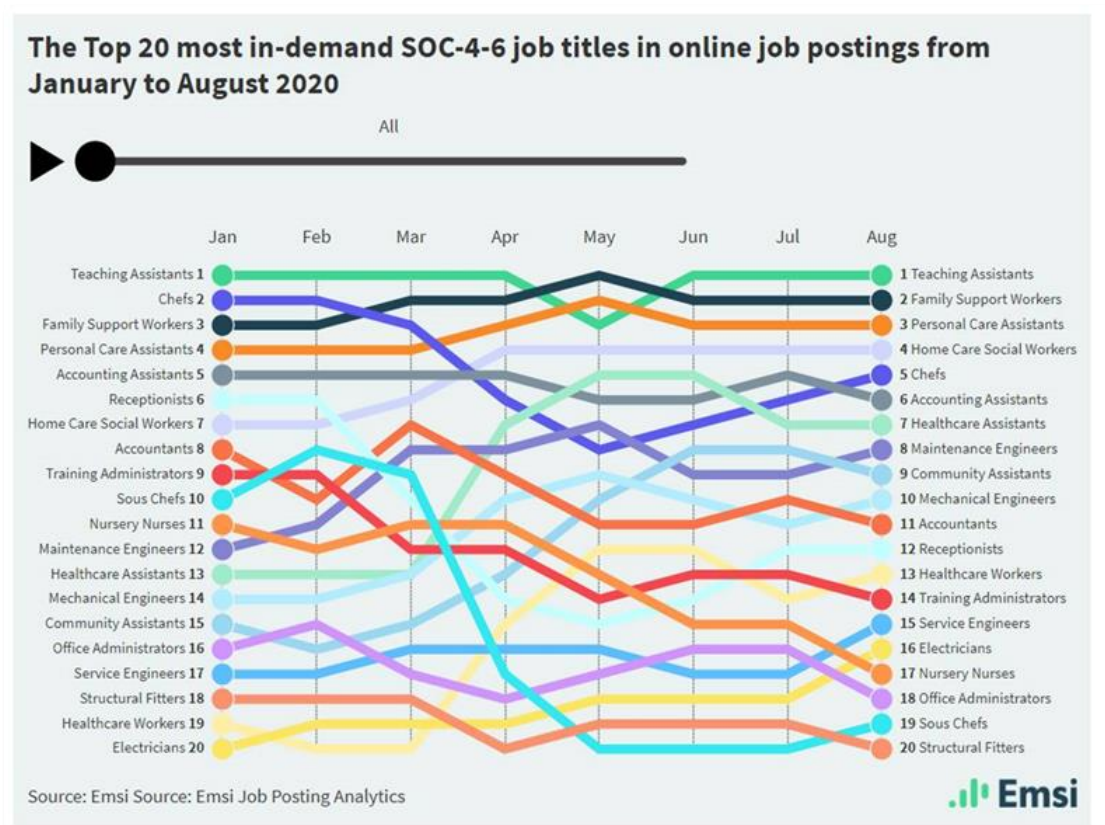
The following chart provides some insight as to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020 – with 1400 jobs having been lost in Blaenau Gwent by September 2020:



Source: <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.economicmodelling.co.uk/2020/10/16/an-analysis-of-september-claimant-counts/?utm\\_campaign=UK%20Blog%20Posts&utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsmi=98335885&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8A1cGs-](https://www.economicmodelling.co.uk/2020/10/16/an-analysis-of-september-claimant-counts/?utm_campaign=UK%20Blog%20Posts&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=98335885&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8A1cGs-)

The chart below illustrates how the pandemic has initiated a shift in demand for those in-demand job roles which typically require a Level 3 to Level 5 education:



Source: <sup>3</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Covid-19 pandemic has driven a significant increase in demand for workers in the Health and Social Care sector (e.g. healthcare assistants, home care workers, personal care assistants, etc.).

**However, it is interesting to note the increase in demand for workers in the following engineering/trades disciplines:**

- Electricians (2,997 current vacancies across the UK)
- Service Engineers (3,090 current vacancies across the UK)
- Mechanical Engineers (4,169 current vacancies across the UK)
- Maintenance Engineers (4,773 current vacancies across the UK)

While this data reflects the current situation across the UK, **it is also consistent with the findings of an employer survey commissioned by Blaenau Gwent Borough Council which identified demand for Level 4 multi-skilled maintenance engineers (i.e. HNC level<sup>4</sup>), across all manufacturing sectors within the Blaenau Gwent region.** These findings are supported by those job vacancies currently being advertised within a 10-mile radius of Merthyr Tydfil which evidence strong demand for workers with both mechanical and electrical engineering skills at Level 4.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.economicmodelling.co.uk/2020/10/13/which-medium-skilled-jobs-are-in-demand/?utm\\_campaign=UK%20Blog%20Posts&utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsmi=98335885&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz-80wBFp5-veWpIO8d6W1rfyTTpG9hkOsrTZQqnTDOvOgagTjNcglDZx7mvRIHAKYqSeWd0GL\\_xoWlvPJM3RUgalqUDQ&utm\\_content=98335885&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://www.economicmodelling.co.uk/2020/10/13/which-medium-skilled-jobs-are-in-demand/?utm_campaign=UK%20Blog%20Posts&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=98335885&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-80wBFp5-veWpIO8d6W1rfyTTpG9hkOsrTZQqnTDOvOgagTjNcglDZx7mvRIHAKYqSeWd0GL_xoWlvPJM3RUgalqUDQ&utm_content=98335885&utm_source=hs_email)

<sup>4</sup> HNC – Higher National Certificate: a Level 4 qualification equivalent to the first year of a university undergraduate programme.

**The existence of a strong demand for multi-skilled maintenance engineers validates the important work of the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme<sup>5</sup>** that seeks to enhance skills development within local manufacturing and engineering companies to develop business growth - while tackling unemployment and providing aspirational opportunities for young people across the local authority.

## The post-Covid economy

Clearly, in the current environment, there are difficult challenges to be faced but, with targeted economic support and political will, experience tells us that there will also be opportunities for some businesses to diversify by creating new products and services, hence creating new employment opportunities for residents of Blaenau Gwent.

In time, this will begin to address some long-standing socio-economic challenges, helping to **establish Blaenau Gwent as an attractive place to live, thrive and conduct business.**

**This report will provide a realistic appraisal of the current and post-Covid-19 business landscape in the Blaenau Gwent region by:**

- Analysing primary data gathered from an online survey of local businesses, along with secondary data collated via a desktop study.
- Considering the results of this survey in the wider context of economic key indicators and other relevant metrics.
- Researching, identifying and considering a range of national and local government strategies and initiatives that are aligned to the strategic aims of the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme and the planned Blaenau Gwent (Aspire) Future Skills Academy.
- Proposing a curriculum for the Aspire Future Skills Academy that supports and reinforces the existing Shared Apprenticeship Programme, while also articulating a future skills programme that will deliver, in collaboration with local education and training providers, those skills needed to transform the workforce and realise the ambitions of local and national government.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/business/jobs-skills/aspire-support-for-employees/>

## Blaenau Gwent (Aspire) Future Skills Academy

Blaenau Gwent Future Skills Academy:

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### *‘Helping the local workforce to reach their full potential’*

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The proposed Blaenau Gwent (Aspire) Future Skills Academy is an essential component of the Welsh Government ‘Tech Valleys’ programme<sup>6</sup>, a brief synopsis of which is shown below:

*‘The lag of the economy of the Blaenau Gwent behind the rest of Wales, demands renewed intervention by the public sector along with private sector intervention. Without such assistance, educational under-achievement and limited employment prospects will continue to hinder the prospects of the current and future generations, limiting their ability to realise their potential. Against this background, the announcement by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport of a programme of investment of £100million, aimed at creating 1,500 new jobs has generated a real focus on achieving change in Blaenau Gwent. As important as the job creation figures will be the transformation of the economy to one of innovation, research and development and skilled employment. The creation of a culture of learning will equip individuals, communities and enterprises investing in Tech Valleys to achieve sustainable, resilient growth.’*

The quote above is taken from the Tech Valleys Strategic plan which was published in April 2018. It is reasonable to assert that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will make achieving those aims outlined in the plan even more challenging - yet achieving those aims has never been more important.

A further complication is posed by the uncertainty created by the UK’s decision to leave the European Union (Brexit), and the imminent expiry of the Brexit transition period on 31st December 2020. At the time of writing, a trade deal with the European Union has yet to be agreed: without a trade deal UK goods will, from 1st January 2021, be subject to tariffs and border checks under the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Even the most optimistic scenario - where a trade deal with the European Union is agreed prior to the expiry of the Brexit transition period – may well lead to economic uncertainty, and possible disruption to supply-chains, especially in the short-term.

**To summarise, it is clear that those ambitions outlined in the Tech Valleys programme will only be realised by adopting a collaborative approach between all stakeholders. This report will identify opportunities to meet these challenges, justify their inclusion in the current political and economic landscape, and, crucially, propose realistic and innovative solutions that will address the core outcomes of the Blaenau Gwent Future Skills Academy, which are:**

- Reduce unemployment
- Reduce the numbers of 18-24 year olds who are claiming benefits
- Increase median earnings (by place of residence)
- Reduce the number of economically inactive people
- Continue to reduce/maintain the number of young people who are NEET
- Increase skills level 0-4 (NVQ).

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<sup>6</sup> <http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/Data/Executive%20Committee/201807251000/Agenda/att8703.pdf>

## Alignment with Tech Valleys Strategic Plan (April 2018)

The Tech Valleys Strategic Plan, published by Welsh Government in April 2018, maps the transition from the Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone (established by Welsh Government in 2012), to a programme of activities that will address the economic and societal needs which are *'founded in the demise of traditional industries in many of the South Wales Valleys, and, in particular, those of Blaenau Gwent.'*

The objectives of the Tech Valleys Strategic Plan are to be realised via the curation and promotion of a portfolio of related and complementary projects, underpinned by a commitment from Welsh Government to invest £100million over a 10-year period. To achieve this, collaboration between all **stakeholders (i.e. business, academia and the public sector)** is essential, along with developing an environment that is conducive to **inward (public and private) investment**.

In addition to these economic proposals, the core tenets of the Tech Valleys programme will be **growth, fair work and decarbonisation** – to the mutual benefit of all residents.

It is recognised that a successful outcome to the Tech Valleys programme will require strong and effective strategic governance, along with access to the following key elements:

- **Property (commercial and residential)** – to accommodate businesses and their workforces
- **Education and Skills** – to enable businesses to implement new technologies, secure existing revenue streams, and diversify their products and services into new markets
- **Infrastructure** – improved transport links, and, crucially, digital connectivity throughout the region
- **Inward investment** – companies, especially the smaller SMEs will require access to funding to enable them to **invest in Industry 4.0 technologies** such as automation, data analytics and additive manufacturing

Prior to the publication of the Tech Valleys Strategic Plan, proposals to establish an automotive technology park in Ebbw Vale were already well advanced. In April 2018, the South Wales Valleys area was home to several significant and well-established automotive manufacturing facilities, including the Ford engine plant at Bridgend which employed over 1600 workers.

In addition, Aston Martin Lagonda had announced plans to build its DBX model at a new manufacturing facility at St. Athan, leading to the creation of 750 jobs by the second quarter of 2020. There were also plans for TVR to build their new Griffith supercar in Ebbw Vale, leading to the refurbishment and refitting of the currently-disused Techboard factory on the Rassau industrial estate – with 200 jobs being created when production is fully up and running.

Clearly, a strong automotive sector would provide a firm foundation for manufacturing within Blaenau Gwent, while supporting a diverse supply chain, creating high-quality employment opportunities for local residents, and attracting inward investment and talent to the region.

However, events occurring since the Tech Valleys Strategic Plan was published have dealt a severe blow to the automotive sector in the South Wales Valleys, most notably **the decision by Ford in June 2019 to close its engine plant at Bridgend by September 2020**.

A further blow has been the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the automotive industry worldwide. As a consequence, **Aston Martin Lagonda have announced plans to cut their workforce by 500 staff as part of a restructuring exercise**, following a collapse in the company's share price from over 400p per share at the beginning of 2019 to 70p at time of writing. The impact of this announcement on the St. Athan manufacturing facility is unclear, but the outlook remains uncertain, with pre-tax losses of more than £120million for the current financial year and net debt nearing £1billion.



At time of writing, **TVR have yet to commence production of the Griffith model at the Rassau site** – the Techboard building is still awaiting refurbishment and the TVR website has not been updated since March 2020; the last update on the TVR Twitter feed being 11<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

More disappointingly, proposals by Sir Jim Ratcliff, the CEO of Ineos Automotive, to build a new 4x4 vehicle – the **'Ineos Grenadier'** - in Bridgend, creating up to 500 jobs, have been scrapped, with the vehicle **now to be manufactured in France**.

The decision by Ineos to build its factory in Europe was followed by an announcement in the same week that **plans by the lithium-ion battery start-up company, BritishVolt, to establish an automotive battery 'Gigafactory' in the Vale of Glamorgan, have also been abandoned in favour of a new location in North-East England**.

Finally, it is reasonable to assert that the UK government's recent announcement that the sale of petrol and diesel cars and vans will be outlawed in the UK by 2030, in tandem with the yet-to-be realised impact of Brexit on the UK automotive sector, will lead to a period of considerable uncertainty within the sector, with investment decisions likely to be postponed until clarity returns.

Nonetheless, the opportunity for innovative projects to have a positive impact within the automotive sector remains, as evidenced in the prospectus for the *'Test Facility for Future Mobility'* - published by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council - which articulates the requirement to refocus the South Wales Valleys automotive sector away from a reliance on traditional manufacturing, towards those value-added services that will be required to support the future automotive sector

**This prospectus identifies four trends that will change the way in which the automotive industry will develop future vehicles:**

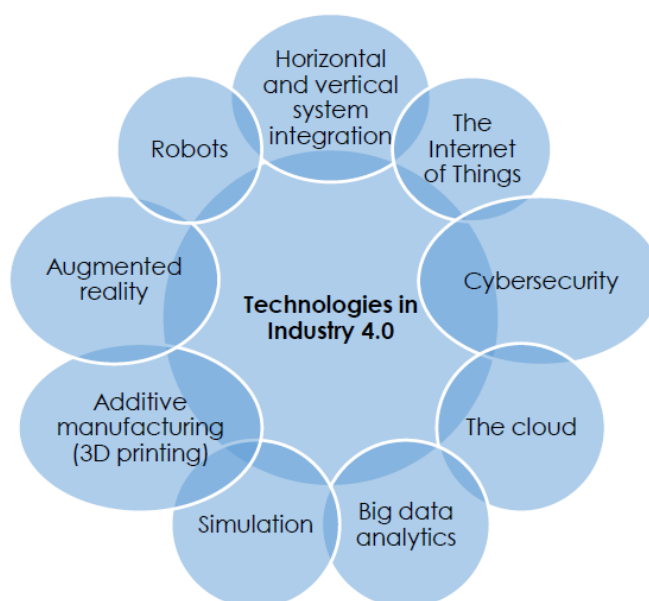
- Autonomous driving
- Diverse (shared) mobility
- Connectivity to high-bandwidth mobile networks (5G)
- Vehicle electrification (and hydrogen – fuel cell – power)

All of these trends will demand a workforce with the appropriate skills. This will support existing and future supply chain development, offering local SMEs a potential path for economic growth via the development of new products and services.

**Clearly, in light of these developments, it would be prudent to explore opportunities afforded by activity in other manufacturing sectors - while continuing to track the progress of the TVR project at Ebbw Vale, and other similar projects that may bear fruit as the impact of the pandemic eases.**

By analysing this rigorous and unambiguous body of evidence, this report is, nonetheless, able to offer a dual strategy for delivering the vision of the Tech Valleys programme:

1. Offering viable and realistic solutions to support existing members of the manufacturing community within Blaenau Gwent - via the signposting and provision of a range of products, services and training solutions, **which have been proven by the MTC's members and clients to facilitate the adoption of those Industry 4.0 technologies** illustrated in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1** Technologies Related to Industry 4.0

2. The impact of the pandemic on the automotive sector has been unforgiving. While opportunities for innovation within this sector doubtless remain, it is difficult to envisage how, in isolation, such activities will be able to deliver socio-economic benefits at the scale demanded by the Tech Valleys strategy. Consequently, **this report offers an opportunity for the Tech Valleys advisory board, and other local stakeholders, to work alongside the MTC, and other High Value Manufacturing Catapult (HVMC) partners, to help develop an advanced manufacturing sector to meet the needs of the Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) industry** - which has been identified as an essential component of Welsh Government strategy to deliver affordable, high-quality social housing at scale to residents of Blaenau Gwent and further afield. The following benefits could be realised by such a programme:
  - SMEs who are currently active in the construction sector supply chain can diversify into the MMC sector, with the potential to attract investment and develop new revenue streams.
  - SMEs who are **not** currently active in the construction sector may also identify opportunities to diversify into the MMC supply chain.
  - The upskilling and reskilling required by the adoption of MMC methods will require a comprehensive programme of skills and training to be delivered via local colleges in partnership with other providers.
  - Local residents will benefit from better access to high-quality social housing, along with the opportunity to gain employment in a sector that delivers sustainable social and economic benefits to their communities.
  - Blaenau Gwent will be at the heart of a developing sector with the potential to deliver transformative change at local and national levels.

Many of those techniques and methods required by MMC are transferrable skills that will be of value to other sectors within advanced manufacturing (e.g. CAD, software simulation, etc.).

## Executive summary

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The original scope of this project was agreed in November 2019 between Martin Dury (Head of Future Skills at the Manufacturing Technology Centre) and Tara Lane and Bethan McPherson of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

The initial aim of the project was to identify the future skills which would be required by the local workforce to support advanced manufacturing in the Blaenau Gwent region, with the intention of developing a Future Skills Academy focusing on the advanced manufacturing sector. The Academy's aim is 'to enhance the existing local education and training offer to support local and national industrial strategies and skills agendas,' as per the core outcomes indicated previously.

However, during the early phase of the project it quickly became apparent that the impact of Covid-19 on several hitherto thriving sectors (particularly the aviation and automotive manufacturing sectors), would necessitate a rapid reappraisal of the project aims – to ensure that our recommendations for the future skills curriculum to be supported by the Aspire Future Skills Academy are still relevant in the post-Covid economy.

In the current environment, it is essential that all recommendations are underpinned by empirical evidence that will test their relevance and impact – especially their potential to meet the skills and training requirements that are necessary to support key government policy initiatives at local and national level.

To achieve this, a comprehensive **desk top study** of local, regional, and national policy and strategy documents was undertaken, along with analysis of key economic indicators from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and other audited sources.

In addition, an **on-line survey** was carried out to ascertain the attitudes of local businesses in the Blaenau Gwent region, and to begin to identify those skills which are currently in demand by the Blaenau Gwent business community. As the survey was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, it captures current attitudes, uncertainties and challenges, thus providing, at a micro-level, some insight as to how the pandemic may potentially reshape the local and wider economy.

While the employer survey identifies an ongoing requirement for 'traditional' engineering skills across a variety of sectors (particularly multi-skilled maintenance engineers with higher-level qualifications), it also gives some indication of opportunities for companies within Blaenau Gwent to **diversify their current business activities** by becoming involved in strategic projects within the construction sector – especially within **the rapidly-developing Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) sector**.

This is an exciting prospect, as it affords an opportunity to not only 'enhance the existing local education and training offer to support local and national industrial strategies and skills agendas' - in accordance with the aim of the Future Skills academy – but to equip local communities within Blaenau Gwent region with the skills and knowledge to enable them to tackle pressing social issues, such as building new social housing and retaining young talent within the region.

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Photos of Site & Proposed Vision



Photos of Site & Proposed Vision



# Agenda Item 11

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**  
Date of meeting: **24<sup>th</sup> March 2021**  
Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme: 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr David Davies, Deputy Leader and Executive Member Regeneration and Economic Development**  
Report Submitted by: **Cllr John Hill, Chair of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	11.03.21			24.03.21			

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 To present to Members the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021 for discussion and agreement.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 The Scrutiny Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
  - 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's revised Corporate Plan, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
  - 2.3 Effective work programmes are essential to ensure that the work of scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services.
  - 2.4 The Committee's Forward Work Programme was agreed in September 2020, recognising the fluidity of the document to enable the Committee to respond to urgent and emerging issues, and included timescales when reports will be considered by the Committee. The work programme is managed and implemented by the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer under the direction of the Chair and Committee.
  - 2.5 The forward work programme for the forthcoming meeting will be presented to Committee on a 6 weekly cycle in order that Members can consider the programme of work; request information is included within the reports, as appropriate and / or make amendments to the work programme.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** The Scrutiny Committee consider the Forward Work Programme for the meeting 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021, and

- Make any amendments to the topics scheduled for the meetings;
- Suggest any additional invitees that the committee requires to fully consider the reports; and
- Request any additional information to be included with regards to the topics to be discussed.

3.2 **Option 2:** The Scrutiny Committee agree the Forward Programme for the meeting 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021, as presented.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme – Meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021.



## Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Dates / Deadlines	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
<b>SPECIAL MEETING</b>  <b>Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021</b>  Deadline: Monday 12 <sup>th</sup> April 2021	1. Performance Information on the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Quarterly Report	<b>Performance Monitoring</b> Members to consider the activity of Blaenau Gwent Council as part of the overall CCRC and influence areas of focus.	Ellie Fry	Executive
	2. Employment and Skills Plan	<b>Performance Monitoring</b> To provide Members with an update on employment and skills activity linked to the Plan.	Bethan McPherson	Executive
	3. Aneurin Bevan report	<b>Pre-Decision</b> To consider the Nye Bevan report findings and action plan moving forward and recommend approval to the Executive.	Owen Ashton / Moe Forouzan	Executive
	4. Tech Valleys Progress	<b>Progress Update</b> To provide a progress update and spend re Tech Valleys.	Ellie Fry	Executive
	5. GovTech Catalyst Project	<b>Progress Update</b> To provide members with an update on the GovTech Catalyst Project	Amy Taylor	Executive
	6. Lime Avenue Business Park and Boxworks	<b>Performance Monitoring</b> To provide members with details of the delivery of the developments.	Nick Landers / Amy Taylor	Executive
	Visit to Turkish Glass Bottle Factory	<b>Information</b>	Ellie Fry	

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