

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **8th November 2022**
Report Subject: **Tredegar Placemaking Plan**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J. Morgan, Cabinet Member for Environment and Place**
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	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
X	X	27.10.22			08.11.22	07.12.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. To present and seek endorsement of the Tredegar Placemaking Plan from Scrutiny Committee.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1. As one of five towns across Blaenau Gwent, Tredegar like all towns faces significant challenges as a result of the shift to online retailing and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Many of our regeneration focus on the town in the past has looked at how the town could be refurbished and updated.
- 2.2. Whilst we still seek to carry out refurbishment of properties in need of attention we must also take a step back and reconsider the spaces and properties in and around our town centre. In Wales placemaking is a statutory requirement of the planning system. We will therefore take a placemaking approach to deliver sustainable development and provide solutions and investment that addresses the needs of Tredegar.
- 2.3. In 2014, the Council successfully bid for a Heritage Lottery funded Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) Programme which focused on the restoration of historic buildings located in the Southern Conservation Area around The Circle, Morgan Street and Castle Street.
- 2.4. In addition to the HLF funds, the Council were also able to take advantage of funding from the Welsh Government's Targeted Regeneration Initiative programme which offered loans and grants to refurbish and bring key buildings in the town back into use. These funds were available between 2019-2021.
- 2.5. In 2020, the Council were awarded funding by Welsh Government from the Transforming Towns programme to engage consultants to undertake development of a Placemaking Plan for Tredegar. This commission falls in line with other Placemaking plans currently being developed in Ebbw Vale,

Brynmawr and Abertillery, with a further study also being considered for Blaina within the coming months.

- 2.6. After a competitive tendering exercise the Contract to deliver the Placemaking Plan was awarded to Austin-Smith Lord Ltd.
- 2.7. The work undertaken by Austin-Smith Lord will be delivered in two parts:
 - i. **Deliverable 1: Placemaking Plan**
A public facing, overarching strategic vision that identifies priority areas for action within the study area.
 - ii. **Deliverable 2: Delivery Plan**
An internally focused, 'detailed delivery plan' that utilises an appropriate methodology for the detailed analysis of the study area sites and puts forward 'evidenced based' recommendations on the preferred development/redevelopment options for the Council to take forward.
- 2.8. This report presents the first of their deliverables the Placemaking Plan and overall strategic vision that identifies our core ambitions for the town. This will then be followed in early 2023 with the proposed Delivery Plan.
- 2.9. The aims of placemaking are outlined within the Placemaking Guide (Placemaking Wales 2020). The way places are planned, designed, developed and managed has the potential to positively shape where and how people live, works, socialise, move about and engage. Placemaking is ensuring that each new development or intervention contributes positively to creating or enhancing environments. It places people at the heart of the process and results in places that are vibrant, have a clear identity and where people can develop a sense of belonging.
- 2.10. The primary focus of the Placemaking Plan for Tredegar is to inform and influence strategic decision making for regeneration activity within the town and act as an evidence base to support the Council with future external funding options and support development of the replacement Local Development Plan (LDP). All place making plans will be used to form the town centre policies that will be used to support future planning decisions within the towns. It is the intention that placemaking plans will all be complete or substantially complete in advance of the finalisation of the deposit Local Development Plan.
- 2.11. The Placemaking Plan study area includes the town centre comprising of Lidl and Gwent Shopping Centre in the north along Commercial to Castle Street and down to Tredegar Town Clock at the heart of The Circle, Coronation Street, Iron Row and Tredegar Business Park. The plan aims to provide a new vision for Tredegar and identifies the type of projects and investments we want to attract to the town centre. All the proposals within the plan are 'people centred' with a focus on improving the experiences of the town. A plan of the study area is shown on page 8 of the Placemaking Plan (**Appendix One**).

2.12. Tredegar like many towns across the UK has faced extremely challenging times as a result of the increase in online shopping and the economic challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic. This has intensified challenges already being faced as a result of town centre decline and we need to look at how we can refocus and reinvent the town centre spaces.

2.13. The overall vision of Tredegar Placemaking Plan is:

“Maintain and improve Tredegar as a Convenience and Community Centre, serving its local communities well, but overlay this by developing a Speciality Town signature where the anchor is not just retail”.

The vision seeks to enhance and protect characteristics of the town whilst creating a place that meets the ambition of ‘building sustainable places that supports active and healthy lives’. This is supported by the goal of the 20-minute neighbourhood concept ‘creating healthier, happier communities fit for a zero-carbon future’.

2.14. Delivery of our vision shall be done by:

- i. Delivering a sustainable mix of different uses to create a vibrant town, which is welcoming and inclusive to resident and visitors.
- ii. Improve access and movement around the town centre
- iii. Build on heritage of the town being the birthplace of the NHS to attract tourism.
- iv. Providing the building blocks for additional employment opportunities.
- v. Creation of additional housing.
- vi. Improved transportation linkages.
- vii. A healthier environment.

2.15. Within the draft Tredegar Placemaking Plan ambitions have been identified to support us in transforming the town and delivering upon the vision which are:

- Transition the town to meet the 20-minute neighbourhood concept to better align what is in the town with transport infrastructure to make it easier for people to walk, cycle and use public transport.
- Improve gateways into the town that open up the high street, enhance the retail environment, green the centre and create new homes, work spaces and leisure uses.
- Revitalise connections between the town centre and local and regional areas.
- Transform Gwent Shopping Centre to meet the current and future needs of the town and remove the underpass to open up the area and road infrastructure.
- Transform vacant pockets of land on Coronation Street and Iron Row into exemplary modern homes.

2.16. Taking forward these ambitions, the plan identified a series of intervention areas and high level actions. These are:

1. **Gateway Enhancements to the Northern and Southern Entrances to Tredegar** - new entrance space from the north, redesign of the junction prioritising pedestrians and cyclists, new green space and redevelopment of key buildings to create an attractive and engaging townscape. Creation of a new southern entrance to Tredegar Business Park.
2. **Gwent Shopping Centre** – Removal of the underpass to allow for the creation of a new bus interchange between local and regional services. Building restoration and shopfronts that include a diverse mix of uses that include retail, business, workspaces, leisure, homes and live/work spaces. Introduction of green spaces and re-use of underutilised land to create outdoor events space.
3. **Commercial Street and Castle Street** – improve the street scene, enhance buildings and create synergies between the historic and modern buildings in the town. Add wayfinding, stopping and leisure points and improve active travel routes for walking and cycling.
4. **Church Square** – the ‘knuckle’ between Commercial Street and Castle Street. Highway redesign to provide more public realm space and establish a central public space at the heart of the town.
5. **Coronation Street/Iron Row** – new site entrance to the southern area of Tredegar Town Centre with improved access to Tredegar Business Park which opens up new gateways to Coronation Street and Iron Row. New housing proposals and improvements to public realm.
6. **New Bus Interchange Development** – removal of underpass through Gwent Shopping Centre to allow for the creation of a new bus interchange for local and regional bus services.
7. **Enhance Connectivity between the Town Centre and Tredegar Business Park** – improved cycling and pedestrian infrastructure including National Cycle Routes 467 and 411 and active travel routes between the town centre and Tredegar Business Park.
8. **Sirhowy River Embankment** – improvements to river corridor and embankment connecting Tredegar Business Park and the town centre. New green leisure and recreational facilities.

2.17. The projects listed above are predominantly physical regeneration projects. Non-physical projects are not included in the intervention areas, but they are pivotal for the success of the town centre and are also included within the Placemaking Plan.

2.18. Each intervention area is considered in the Placemaking Plan in **Appendix One** with details on the potential opportunities/projects to address these issues.

Transport and Movement Strategy

- 2.19. A movement and access appraisal has been undertaken by Asbri Transport as part of the commission (**Appendix Two**).
- 2.20. The Movement and Access Appraisal proposed transport improvements which could improve accessibility to Tredegar town centre for pedestrian, cyclists and road users and enhance the viability of the town centre and support economic development.
- 2.21. The potential transport improvements identified are by no means exhaustive and a WeITAG Assessment will be commissioned subject to funding.

Stakeholder Engagement

- 2.22. As a result of Covid-19 engagement has been undertaken with key stakeholders via online workshops. Engagement with business stakeholders has been undertaken via telephone calls. Stakeholder engagement is being undertaken in three stages:



- 2.23. Stakeholders that have formed part of the engagement to date include:

- The Council (Officers and Elected Members)
- Welsh Government
- Tredegar Advisory Board
- Gwent Police
- Coalfields Regeneration Trust
- Local businesses
- Bryn Bach Primary School
- Design Commission for Wales

- 2.24. The initial engagement has supported the assessment of issues and opportunities that face Tredegar. Pages 19 - 23 of **Appendix One** provide details of the issues and opportunities that were identified by Austin-Smith: Lord along with stakeholder feedback on these and any other issues / opportunities that were identified.
- 2.25. Wider public engagement is also to be undertaken and will be used to support development of the delivery plan which will support this placemaking plan.
- 2.26. The Council's Regeneration Department intend to undertake public consultation as the next stage of work. This will help us to ascertain public perception on proposals identified with the Placemaking Plan.

Decarbonisation

- 2.27. The Council has set a target for the Local Authority to become net zero by 2030. Mirroring this ambition there is a commitment towards supporting the borough of Blaenau Gwent to become net zero. The projects that emerge from the Placemaking Plan offer an opportunity to support further decarbonisation across Blaenau Gwent.
- 2.28. Green urban areas can be used to offset carbon emissions of businesses that operate within the town. They can also help improve air quality.
- 2.29. New build and refurbishment projects can be used to deliver buildings that have a lower carbon impact. This can include using local supply chains to reduce travel of materials, energy efficient lighting and appliances.
- 2.30. Transport and movement projects can also support decarbonisation. Improved active travel routes alongside multi-modal transport systems and wayfinding can assist with reducing dependence upon car travel within the Town Centre.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1. The options contained within this report relate only to the approval of the overall vision and series of core ambitions contained within the Placemaking Plan in **Appendix One**. Future reports will be submitted in relation to the delivery plan and details of potential projects to be developed and implemented in order for us to achieve our overall vision.

Option 1 – Do Nothing

- 3.2. Note the contents of the Placemaking Plan and take no further action. Without Council endorsement of the projects contained within the plan it is unlikely that we would be successful in securing Welsh Government Transforming Towns money for redevelopment/refurbishment of the Town.

Option 2 – Endorse the Placemaking Plan

- 3.3. Agree the Tredegar Placemaking Plan, its vision and core ambitions for the future. This will enable us to finalise the draft of the delivery plan and steps towards implementation of the projects that will be contained within it.

Preferred Option

- 3.4. The preferred option is Option Two. This will enable the projects that will support achievement of the core ambitions to be brought forward as part of the Delivery Plan. Such projects are likely to be eligible to apply for Transforming Towns funding.
- 3.5. Projects which show a strategic vision and delivery approach that are supported by Placemaking Plans will be more positively received by potential funders such as the Welsh Government than ad-hoc projects which don't consider overall impact upon the area.

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

Future Wales – The National Plan 2040

- 4.1. Future Wales - The National Plan 2040 is the national development framework, setting the direction for development in Wales to 2040. It is a development plan with a strategy for addressing national priorities through the planning system. As the national development framework, Future Wales is the highest tier of development plan and focused on challenges at a national scale.
- 4.2. Policy 2 of the plan is Shaping Urban Growth and Regeneration – Strategic Placemaking. The aspirations of Future Wales are an opportunity to regenerate our towns. The plan sets out the policy for a strategic placemaking approach and principles to help shape urban growth and regeneration.
- 4.3. Policy 3 of the plan is Supporting Urban Growth and Regeneration – Public Sector Leadership. This policy highlights the role the public sector can play in assembling land and enabling development to realise aspirations.
- 4.4. It also supports delivery of the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan:
- Safe and friendly communities;
 - To look after and protect the environment;
 - To forge new pathways to prosperity and;
 - To encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places they live, learn, work and play.
- 4.5. The Town Centre Strategy will seek to ensure that our town centres are safe and friendly communities for our residents and visitors to shop within. This will include projects to maintain and enhance the local environment, increase business occupancy and create an environment in our town centres that encourages our residents to spend time there for work, learning and leisure.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Corporate Plan Refresh 2020-2022

- 4.6. The report supports the following Corporate Plan priorities:

To protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities;

To support a fairer sustainable economy and community; and

An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities

- 4.7. Town Centres is one of the key themes identifies for the Regeneration and Community Services which support delivery of the priority areas identified in the Council's Corporate Plan 2018/22

5. Implications Against Each Option

Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

- 5.1. Option 1 – there would be no financial implications association with option one of this report.
- 5.2. Option 2 – there would be no immediate budgetary implications as a result of endorsing the Tredegar Placemaking Plan. There would however be medium and long term capital and revenue implications associated with taking forward the emerging projects that will form the Delivery Plan.
- 5.3. In the medium to long term taking forward Option 2 will result in future development and implementation costs. It is likely that development costs such as surveys, feasibility studies would be eligible under the Transforming Towns programme (subject to a successful application) but this would only be for up to 50% of the eligible costs and there would be a need for the Council to identify suitable revenue match funding for the remaining 50%.
- 5.4. Implementation costs are also likely to be eligible for capital funding under the Transforming Towns programme (subject to successful application) but this would only be able to cover up to 70% of these costs and the Council would need to identify capital match funding for the remaining 30%.
- 5.5. Further detail on development and implementation costs will be included within the Delivery Plan which will be presented for approval in early 2023.
- 5.6. The future maintenance cost implications will be incorporated into the project proposals when they are presented for approval. All project proposals will be developed to limit maintenance liabilities for the Council and this will be included in the proposals along with proposals to establish a maintenance budget.

Risk including Mitigating Actions

- 5.7. Option 1 – if no further action is taken there is risk that sites will remain undeveloped or fall into disrepair.
- 5.8. Option 1 – footfall within the town centre associated with retail has been severely hit with the increase in online shopping and enforced lockdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key to recovery will be intervention that supports repurposing and reinventing our town centres. This would not happen if option 1 is chosen and then we would have a further risk of deterioration in footfall.
- 5.9. Option 2 – further work to develop / implement projects that will achieve the core ambitions would require revenue and capital funding. Such funding is likely to be eligible for application under the Transforming Towns programme but there is a requirement to identify a suitable source of match funding to fully meet the costs.

Legal

- 5.10. There are no direct legal implications for any of the options considered within this report. The report seeks endorsement of a Vision and set of ambitions that set out our approach to future regeneration of Tredegar Town Centre
- 5.11. Legal implications associated with project delivery will be explored as part of the delivery plan.

Human Resources

- 5.12. Staff within Regeneration and Development are leading the preparatory work and working across other service areas within the Council where required.

6. Supporting Evidence

Performance Information and Data

- 6.1. A health check of the study area was undertaken in November 2021. The health check identified key issues within the town:
 - Retail is suffering with increasing numbers of empty units in the high street and of particular concern, Gwent Shopping Centre at the heart of the primary retail area is in significant decline.
 - Tredegar Town Centre has a vacancy rate of 25% compared to a national vacancy rate of circa. 15% across Wales and 12% across the UK (Q1,2020).
 - In April 2021, 40 properties within the town centre were considered in poor condition with significant defects and damage to the property noticeable from the high street e.g. cracks to render, peeling paint, broken windows, visible build-up of dirt and mould growth. In addition, 52 buildings had visible damage to the shop-front fascia / signage at street level.
 - 65% of customers surveyed stated the quality of shops was poor or very poor but 75% of customers said they use the town centre on at least a weekly basis.
 - There are a higher than UK average number of A1 retail premises - hair and beauty and tattoo parlours and a higher than average A3 - fast food and takeaway premises.
 - Half of customers surveyed thought that the attractiveness and experience of food and drink establishments around the town were poor or very poor.
 - Car parking is well catered for in the northern area of the town but Commercial Street is car dominated.
 - The interchange between local and regional bus services is impeded by the restricted vehicular access created by the underpass within Gwent Shopping Centre, preventing access for regional busses.

Expected outcome for the public

- 6.2. Some of the sites included within the study area are no longer fit for purpose or underutilised. The Placemaking Plan seeks to identify these sites and identify alternative uses or opportunities for refurbishment or redevelopment.
- 6.3. Active travel routes between the town and sites such as Tredegar Business Park need improvement. Improved active travel will provide greater accessibility for residents and visitors to move within the area.

Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

- 6.4. Initial engagement was undertaken with the stakeholders to understand how the town works currently and what ambitions there are for the future. The initial phase of engagement included fact finding and this was used to identify the issues and opportunities discussed within the Place Making Plan (**Appendix One**).
- 6.5. Engagement has also taken place with the Tredegar Advisory Group consisting of key public, 3rd sector and business stakeholders. The Tredegar Ward Members have also been part of the overall engagement process.
- 6.6. As a result of COVID-19 much of the engagement has been undertaken with stakeholders via online workshops or by one-to-one telephone discussions.

Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

- 6.7. The Placemaking Plan sets a vision and series of core ambitions that are aimed at planning for the long term future of the Town Centre.

Preventative focus

- 6.8. Taking forward the outcomes of the placemaking plan will ensure that areas of the town that are in need of attention are protected and enhanced in the future.

Collaboration / partnership working

- 6.9. Many of the projects that will be identified to deliver on our core ambitions for Tredegar Town Centre will require collaborative approaches to delivery. This will be developed further alongside stakeholders subject to endorsement of this report and the delivery plan.
- 6.10. The Tredegar Advisory Group was formed in 2015 to support delivery of the Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative project. It consists of officers, elected members, business representatives, third sector and members of the Community. The purpose of the board is to oversee the delivery of projects for Tredegar.

- 6.11. Since its inception, the Advisory Board has worked alongside Council Officers and Elected Members to deliver projects in Tredegar and this approach has received positive feedback from all stakeholders involved. The advisory board have been involved in the stakeholder engagement for the placemaking plan process.

Integration(across service areas)

- 6.12. As outlined above, initial consultation has been undertaken across service areas within the Council. This includes service areas such as highways, housing, planning and education.

Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions

- 6.13. Blaenau Gwent declared a Climate Emergency in 2020 and as a Council we have committed towards achievement of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Creating high quality green spaces in the town centre will help with decarbonisation and offsetting carbon emissions. It will also help improve air quality.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1. Progress will be reported through the Regeneration and Development business plan.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix One – Tredegar Town Centre Placemaking Plan – Please note this is currently in draft format but the final version will be available for Scrutiny Committee*
- *Appendix Two – Movement and access appraisal*