

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **14 March 2023**
Report Subject: **Brynmawr Placemaking Plan**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J.C. Morgan, Cabinet Member for Place and Regeneration**
Report Submitted by: **Amy Taylor, Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
X	02.03.23	06.06.23			14.03.23	19.04.23		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. To present and seek support of the Brynmawr Placemaking Plan from Scrutiny Committee.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1. The Brynmawr Placemaking Plan aims to direct change and investment in Brynmawr town centre over the next five years and is intended for use by Blaenau Gwent CBC as a 'roadmap' for future regeneration in the town centre, with a view to inspiring renewed economic growth and vitality in and around the town centre, and function as Supplementary Planning Guidance for Local Development Plan (LDP).
- 2.2. The Placemaking Plan highlights opportunities to diversify the town centre to support existing business and facilities and to create the conditions to attract new enterprise. These opportunities have been considered in the context of available funding and delivery streams, and the particular economic conditions of Brynmawr.
- 2.3. Brynmawr like many towns across the UK has faced extremely challenging times because of the increase in online shopping and the economic challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2.4. Town centres remain important focal points of communities and are increasingly becoming places to live, centres of community and cultural activity, a focus for public services such as health and education, and the location of new co-working spaces. They are more than the extent of designated retail areas. Town centres are the most accessible parts of our towns and should be the focus of growth and regeneration.
- 2.5. 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 Brynmawr.

- 2.6. The Council secured funding from the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Programme to commission consultants to develop a Placemaking Plan for Brynmawr in line with other studies that have been developed or are currently in development for the 5 main town centres.
- 2.7. The work undertaken by Arup 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.
- 2.9. Placemaking Plans are a mechanism introduced by the Welsh Government for communities to engage creatively with the planning process and for planners to support in place-making initiatives with local people. The Placemaking agenda was developed in conjunction with the Design Commission for Wales with a pledge to:
- Involve the local community in the development process.
 - Choose sustainable locations for new development.
 - Prioritise walking, cycling and public transport.
 - Create well defined, safe, and welcoming streets and public spaces.
 - Promote a sustainable mix of uses to make places vibrant.
 - Value and respect the positive qualities and identity of existing places.
- 2.10. The primary focus of the Placemaking Plan for Brynmawr 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).
- 2.11. The core of the study area is centred on cross town routes of Market Square, Bailey Street, Davies Street, Worcester Street, Beaufort Street and King Street. There are four 'threshold spaces' that define the entry and exit points of the Town Centre. Both the Stagecoach and Boilerhouse buildings remain in private ownership, although have been integral to future considerations as part of a scoping exercise within the Brynmawr Placemaking Plan.
- 2.12. The overall purpose of the Brynmawr Placemaking Plan is:
- To highlight development and redevelopment opportunities that will increase the viability, vitality and functionality of Brynmawr town centre and implement measures that will act as a catalyst for private sector investment and plan a

comprehensive range of development projects suitable for applications for Transforming Towns funding.

- To direct change and investment in Brynmawr town centre over the next five years. It is intended for use by Blaenau Gwent CBC as a 'roadmap' for future regeneration in the town centre, with a view to inspiring renewed economic growth and vitality. in the town centre. The plan highlights opportunities to diversify the town centre to support existing business and facilities and to create the conditions to attract new enterprise.
- Brynmawr is a compact town surrounded by a residential area, making it an ideal candidate for the 15-minute town concept. With an enviable combination of urban and rural qualities, access to beautiful landscapes and a strong community, Brynmawr has some of the base ingredients to improve the life of residents and visitors alike, this is a core principle for the strategy for Brynmawr.

2.13. The overarching vision is for Brynmawr to be a 15-minute neighbourhood, where everything you need is within a 15-minute walk of your home. This model for self-sufficient, sustainable town centre offers improved access to nature, employment, housing diversity, amenity and services while reducing car dependency, supporting active travel, and strengthening sense of community and place.

2.14. The overarching vision is supported by six themes which act as a guide for future development and change in Brynmawr supporting its transformation:

- **Community:** creating a shared ethos of enterprise and fostering a strong inclusive community. Brynmawr's engaged and passionate community is one of its greatest strengths. This theme would support the diversification of the town centre, whilst also supporting well-being of the community.
- **Circularity:** directing sustainable growth and meaningful change. Adaptive re-use of existing buildings are major opportunities, as well as more strategic ambitions around low-carbon economy, local business and reducing waste.
- **Connectivity:** improving active transport and links across the town centre. Improved pedestrian and cycle movements within the town will be important for connecting the community and local businesses. It can also provide benefits to health and well-being, air quality and the natural environment. Digital connectivity also benefits local business by creating opportunities for advertising and reaching out to a wider audience.
- **Economy:** uplifting local business and the foundational economy. This could be through opportunities for training, upskilling and collaboration particularly within the foundational economy, with support for start-ups and social enterprise. Flexible public spaces can also be beneficial, supporting Brynmawr's existing markets and events.
- **Health and Well-being:** supporting a healthy and happy community in Brynmawr. Re-shaping the physical environment by promoting active travel

and taking advantage of Brynmawr's access to wider landscapes including the Brecon Beacons will have positive impacts on the future health and well-being of the community.

- **Creating a destination:** diversifying what Brynmawr has to offer to attract visitors. Varying the offer in terms of uses, activities and calendar of events will create an enhanced sense of place for the community and raise the town centre profile.
- 2.15. Within the draft Brynmawr Placemaking Plan a number of possible projects have been identified to support the Council in transforming the town and delivering upon the vision. It must be recognised that Brynmawr has been fortunate in attracting considerable private sector investment in recent years, with the likes of Costa Coffee and the recently developed former NMC retail site, which was supported financially by the Welsh Government.
- 2.16. The placemaking plan has identified several possible projects which could act as catalysts for regeneration and help realise the vision for Brynmawr. These include:
- Stagecoach Site.
 - Beaufort Street.
 - The Boiler House (Grade II listed).
 - Market Square and bus station.
 - Active Travel routes.
 - Improved pedestrian linkages between Lakeside and the Town Centre.
 - Environmental enhancements.
 - Introduction of public art.
- 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. More detailed information is contained in sections 5.0 to 5.2 within the Place Making document that has been included as background paper to this report (**Appendix One**).
- 2.19. It should be noted that some of the opportunities for key buildings identified within the placemaking plan will include building currently in private ownership. The role of the placemaking plan is to identify the possible future role of key buildings within the context of the rest of the town centre and where possible we will engage with existing owners to explore their future plans for buildings in their ownership. The detail around these potential opportunities will be explored further during development of the delivery plan and will involve further discussions with building owners and partners.

Urban Place and Highways Plan

- 2.20. An Urban Place and Highways Plan has also been undertaken by Arup as part of the commission and to prepare a Strategic Outline Case, in accordance with the requirements for Stage One WelTAG, aimed at improvements to the Blaina Road corridor in Brynmawr, to the south of the town centre.

‘WelTAG is the Welsh Transportation appraisal guidance, which helps plan transport programmes, policies and projects.’

The guidance was developed “with the intention that it is applied to all transport strategies, plans and schemes being promoted or requiring funding from the Welsh Assembly Government”.

2.21. The study area comprises the following strategic sites and connections between them:

- Lakeside Retail Park including access to neighbouring communities;
- Former NMC brownfield site (consented development for retail)
- Stagecoach Depot Site (3a) and Austin & Sons Vehicle Repair Garage (3b) to the rear of the site and linkages to the neighbouring Warwick Road Park and housing estate;
- Auto Links Garage across Lake Road;
- 5. Roundabout on Blaina Road and linking to Blaen-Afon Road;
- Former GP Surgery site on Blaina Road;
- The Boiler House, Grade II Listed heritage building;
- Costa Coffee Shop, Blaina Road;
- Vacant Brownfield Site (9i) and Petrol Station (9ii), Blaina Road; and
- Improvement to the lakeside environment, including access to the waterside and enhancement of the Pump House as a local landmark should be considered as a local stopping point and feature of the landscape.

2.22. The Council has also commissioned further development of the WelTAG process with Stage 2 being completed and a Stage 3 currently under consideration. A Stage 3 WelTAG would focus on the delivery of detailed design options for the schemes proposed under earlier stages.

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 any further work to support redevelopment/refurbishment of the Town.

Option 2 – Support the Placemaking Plan

- 3.3. Support the Brynmawr Placemaking Plan, its vision and core ambitions for the future and recommend approval by Cabinet. 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 developed in greater detail as part of the Delivery Plan. Such projects are likely to be eligible to apply for funding through the 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.
 - 3.6. A placemaking approach will be taken for all towns across Blaenau Gwent, with the Ebbw Vale and Tredegar plans already having been adopted as policy, with the Abertillery and Blaina plans currently in development.
- 4. Evidence of how 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.

Local Development Plan

- 4.4. The Placemaking Plan will play a key role alongside the replacement Local Development Plan that is being prepared for Blaenau Gwent. 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 and function as Supplementary Planning Guidance for Local Development Plan (LDP). 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.

Well-Being Plan – ‘The Blaenau Gwent We Want’ (2018-2023)

4.5. 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.

4.6. 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 2022/27

4.7. The vision of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council:

‘Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities’

4.8. The Corporate Plan 2022/27 sets out an ambitious programme of activity for the Council over the next five years. The Corporate Plan 2022/27 priorities are:

- *Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities* – we aim to greatly reduce carbon emissions and provide an environment which supports growth and well-being and connects communities
- *An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place* – working in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local need, and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community
- *Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent, and resilient* – increasing resilience of communities, where everyone is welcome and safe which minimises dependency and maximises independence

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 Brynmawr 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.
- 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 recommendations to establish a maintenance budget.

Risk including Mitigating Actions

- 5.7. Option 1 – if no further action is taken there is risk that vacant 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 because 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. Without match funding to develop projects there is a risk that they will be unable to be developed further.

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. The town centre health check, which can be found on page 26 of the Placemaking Plan, is a study of the existing physical, social, and economic conditions and historic trends of Brynmawr town centre. It draws on both published data and findings from site visits and analysis including knowledge from the previous Brynmawr masterplan and WelTAG study. The key findings and opportunities from the baseline study are detailed below:

- The current Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan has identified sustainable growth and regeneration opportunities in Brynmawr, including sustainable economic growth, quality housing and complimentary roles around tourism and mixed-use development.
- The key interventions from the WelTAG Stage 1 study (2021-2022) were to divert traffic away from town centre, reinforce active travel, enhance public transport, focusing on buses, and explore potential for meanwhile uses.
- The town centre and new Lakeside Retail Park are disconnected by roads physically and experientially. Businesses in the town centre face strong competition for footfall and trade from the new retail park. At present Lakeside Retail Park is a self-contained attraction with weak pedestrian links and little customer spill over to the town centre. It is a major draw to Brynmawr, but the challenge is to attract some of these customers into the town centre
- There has been a sustained decrease in footfall in the town centre which presents a real challenge. There must therefore be a focus on projects and measures that will attract people into the centre.
- The Gross Value Added (GVA) for Blaenau Gwent has been increasing over the past 10 years with manufacturing constituting the largest proportion of GVA, followed by real estate activities. Yet the underlying economic performance lags behind large areas of Wales and the UK.
- Despite being surrounded by beautiful landscapes such as The Brecon Beacons and The Valleys, the relationship is peripheral, and the town centre lacks green spaces.
- The vacancy rate in the retail submarket in Blaenau Gwent is low, compared to Cardiff and other towns in Blaenau Gwent. However, the drop off in business rates is a trigger for action to help town prosperity

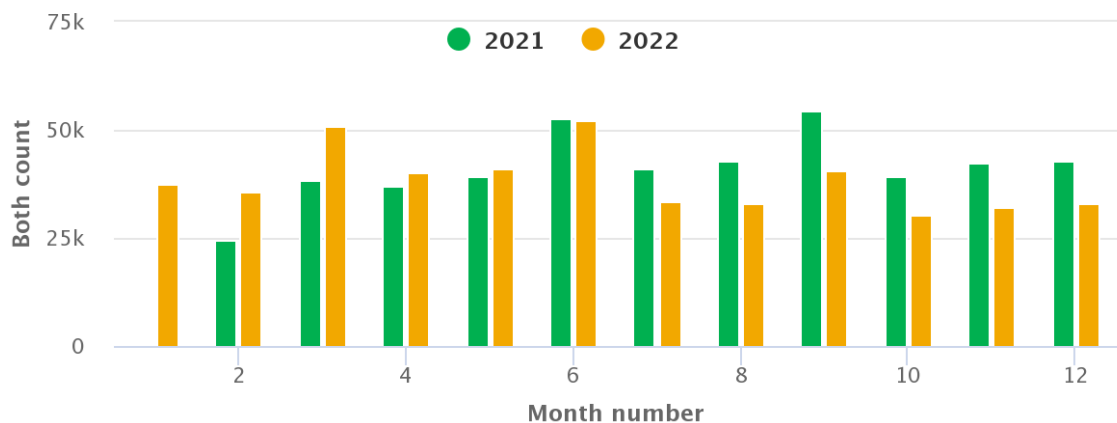
6.2. Town Centre footfall was declining prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in complete lockdowns in early 2020. Some footfall data from Brynmawr is shown below:

Month	2018	2019	2021	2022
March	39,454	39,863	7,684	10,176
		+1.04%	-80.72%	+32.43%

Footfall in March 2022 was 74.21% lower than the footfall that the town saw in March 2018. Whilst we saw an increase in footfall between March 2021 and March 2022 of 32.43 percentage points the footfall for Brynmawr did not return to preCOVID-19 pandemic levels.

6.3. More recent data from November and December 2022 shows footfall is still struggling to return to pre-pandemic levels. Footfall for the week of the Christmas Light switch-on in 2022 was 7,495 compared to 11,028 for the same week the previous year. Likewise, footfall for the week of the Santa Express in 2022 was 7,241 compared to the same week in 2021 when footfall was 8,601.

Annual Performance



6.4. The graph above shows footfall performance by month for 2021 and 2022. It should be noted that the last COVID-19 restrictions did not end in Wales until May 2022. Footfall data between June and December 2022 each month was lower than its corresponding month in 2021.

Expected outcome for the public

6.5. 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.

6.6. Active travel routes between the town and sites such as the lakeside retail areas need improvement. Improved active travel will provide greater accessibility for residents and visitors to move within the area.

Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

- 6.7. 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**).
- 6.8. 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. The Council's Regeneration Department intend to undertake further public consultation in early summer 2023 to ascertain public perception on proposals identified within the attached Placemaking Plan for Brynmawr
- 6.9. Stakeholders that have formed part of the engagement to date include:
- The Council (Officers and Elected Members)
 - Welsh Government
 - Brynmawr Business Forum
 - Gwent Police
 - Local businesses
 - Stagecoach (as part of the WelTAG process)
 - Design Commission for Wales
 - Tech Valleys
- 6.10. The initial engagement has supported the assessment of issues and opportunities that face Brynmawr, namely being:
- Lack of public transport with no rail connection and poor bus connections
 - Heavy traffic and vehicle dominance roads with lack of public realm and green infrastructure
 - Lack of connection between 'old' and 'new' town
 - Maintenance of buildings and shop fronts need updating and modernising
 - Lack of night-time economy
 - There is the threat of not addressing the issues and lack of action as the town needs regeneration or will get left behind
 - Competing with the neighbouring towns has led footfall to dramatically decrease
 - There is a lack of developable space within the compact town
 - Perception of Brynmawr is tainted with the increase of anti-social behaviour.

Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

- 6.11. 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

- 6.12. 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

- 6.13. Many of the projects that will be identified to deliver on our core ambitions for Brynmawr 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.

Integration (across service areas)

- 6.14. 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

- 6.15. Blaenau Gwent declared a Climate Emergency in 2020 and as a Council we have committed towards achievement of net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
- 6.16. 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.
- 6.17. Creating high quality green spaces in the town centre will help with decarbonisation and offsetting carbon emissions. It will also help improve air quality.
- 6.18. The Stagecoach building may be considered for demolition and site clearance to form a green urban area, which could be used to offset carbon emissions of businesses that operate within the town. They can also help improve air quality.
- 6.19. New build projects 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.
- 6.20. 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.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

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

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix One – Brynmawr Town Centre Placemaking Plan*