

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

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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.

OUR AMBITION			
To grow tourism for the good of Wales.			
OUR GOALS			
Economic Growth			
Environmental Wellbeing	Cultural Wellbeing	Health Wellbeing	
OUR APPROACH			
High-quality experiences – that are good for visitors and host communities.			
Inherently Welsh – with a global outlook			
Welsh and local – BRO		Global - BYD	
<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>	
OUR OFFER			
Outstanding Natural Landscapes	Creative Culture	Epic Adventure	
Croeso: unique accommodation and local food and drink			
The Wales Way			
OUR TARGET VISITORS			
Values over Volume			
New staycation markets UK cities, Ireland, Wales		International visitors that are new to Wales Near European, USA: targeted elsewhere	
Lifetime relations			
Leisure	Operators	Business Travel	Niche

OUR KEY PRIORITIES				
<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>	
COMMERCIAL PRIORITIES				
Improved routes to market		A focus on special interest products		Commercial partnerships
BRAND OBJECTIVES				
Elevate our Status	Surprise and inspire	Change perceptions	Do good things	Be unmistakably Wales
IMPLEMENTATION				
Restructured internal team		Refreshed governance structures		Streamlined business support
Review of delivery at local level			New approach to partnership delivery	
MEASURING SUCCESS				
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

