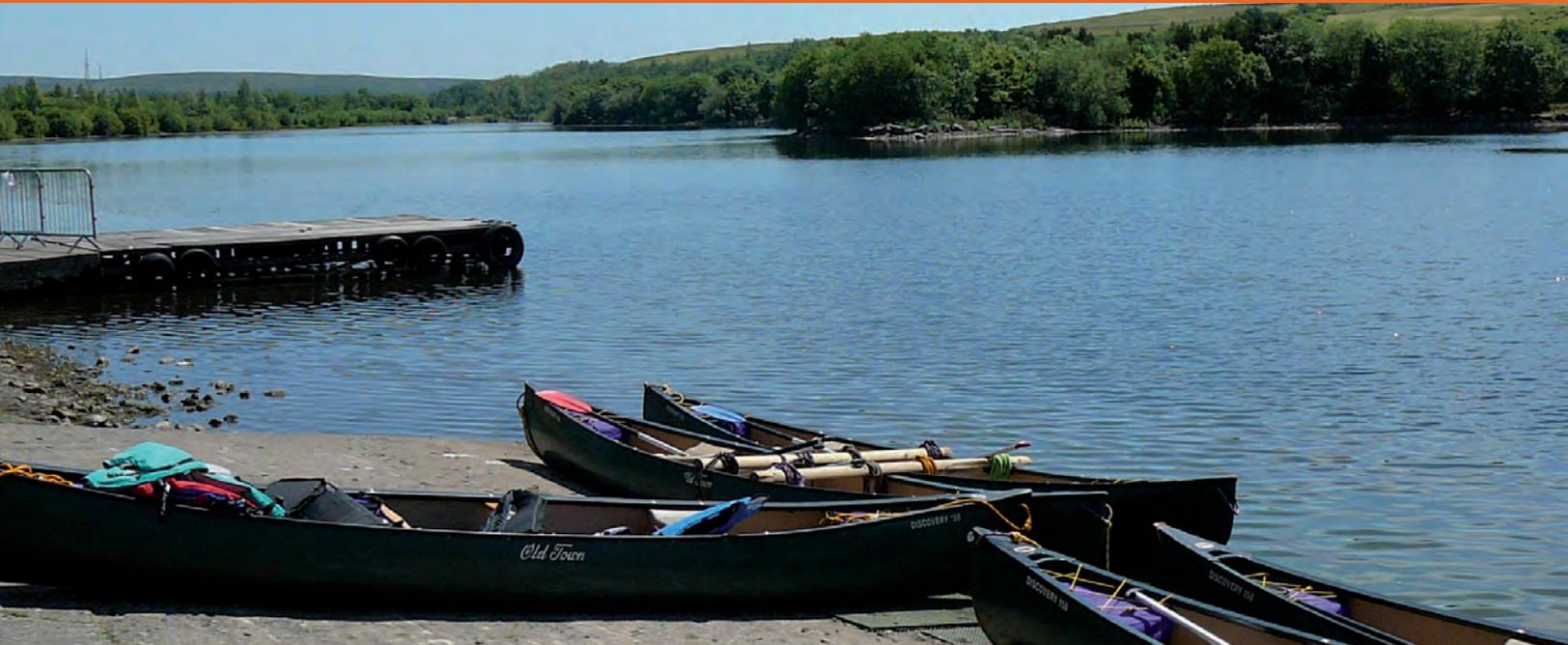


Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol Blaenau Gwent



Tourism Background Paper

Papur Cefndirol Twristiaeth

Deposit Local Development Plan

Cynllun Adeneuo Datblygu Lleol

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Aim of this Paper

- 1.1 To set out the background and evidence for how objectives, allocations and policies have been identified and developed.

Overview of how this Paper fits into Plan preparation

- 1.2 This paper will provide information for Officers and Members of the Authority, stakeholders, members of the public and the Inspector to help explain the approach taken on Tourism.

Context

- 1.3 The creation of a successful tourism sector is an important aim of the Local Development Plan (LDP). The Council is committed to building a modern economy with a broad economic base and fostering tourism is one way to diversify the economy. The Council will ensure that through the LDP, land is available to accommodate a range of tourism opportunities over the life of the Plan and land allocations will accord with the principles of sustainable development and support the Preferred Strategy for the LDP.

- 1.2 This background paper sets out:

- **National Policy Context** for tourism;
- **Regional Policy Context** for tourism;
- **Local Policy Context** for tourism;
- **Current and Future Provision** of tourism;
- **Key Issues in Blaenau Gwent**, which relate specifically to tourism;
- **Preferred Strategy**, policy in respect of tourism, representations to the Strategy and proposed policy responses; and
- **Draft LDP Policy**, which provides the proposed planning policy context for tourism in Blaenau Gwent.

2.0 NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

People, Places, Futures – The Wales Spatial Plan (Update 2008)

- 2.1 The Wales Spatial Plan (WSP) provides a framework for the future spatial development of Wales and integrates the spatial aspects of national strategies, including social cohesion, economic health, transport and environment policy. The purpose of the update was to reflect new drivers for change, including One Wales and to give status to Area work undertaken by each region. The core themes are: Building Sustainable Communities; Promoting a Sustainable Economy; Valuing our Environment; Achieving Sustainable Accessibility; Respecting Distinctiveness and Working with our Neighbours.
- 2.2 Blaenau Gwent along with neighbouring authorities; Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Bridgend, Newport and the Vale of Glamorgan have been identified as part of the South East – Capital Zone Network.

The Vision for the area is:

'An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life – international yet distinctively Welsh. It will compete internationally by increasing its global visibility through stronger links between the Valleys and the coast and with the UK and the rest of Europe, helping to spread prosperity within the area and benefiting other parts of Wales.'

2.3 Whilst the Spatial Plan may not provide a detailed framework for the development of tourism in South East Wales it does nevertheless provide a number of clear propositions. These include the following:

- A wide range of mid and upper valleys towns need modern shopping, leisure, community and cultural facilities, more attractive and affordable housing, clean, vibrant town centres, accessible open countryside and employment opportunities.
- High quality natural and built environments, which everyone can enjoy through an emerging cycling and walking network, and spaces designed to enhance and create clean, safe environments are essential characteristics of these areas.
- The Capital region accounts for a third of all tourism revenue to Wales. The Heads of the Valleys programme will support development of the economy of the mid and upper valleys, including the sustainable tourism and leisure sector, which has the potential to contribute to a much greater extent than is currently the case.
- Getting the best of both high quality urban living and close proximity to stunning countryside, making the most of the unique dispersed low-density, metropolitan development and green spaces in the Area
- Identifying strategic wildlife areas to join up natural habitats, linking existing designated habitats where possible. This will enable people to enjoy and participate in the countryside and wildlife, whilst providing high quality environments within which species can develop.
- Addressing river habitats, which are important for wildlife and biodiversity. This function needs to be combined with their role in protecting against flooding and in offering opportunities for leisure and tourism.
- Action to strengthen the environmental networks will enhance the quality of life, and support tourism and leisure. The development of wildlife areas, public rights of way and cycle paths in the Heads of the Valleys area and the Valleys part of the Connections Corridor should be managed by all stakeholders in partnership as a Valleys Regional Park, building close associations with the Brecon Beacons National Park.
- Recognising the value of the Area's diversity of landscapes, built environments and distinctive communities will be key to building confidence and helping to market a regional offer for inward investment and for tourism.

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 4, 2011)

2.4 Assembly Government Tourism policy is embodied in chapter 11 of Planning Policy Wales (2010). Further guidance in relation to Tourism is contained in Technical Advice Note 13.

- 2.5 The Assembly Government's objectives for tourism are
- to encourage sustainable tourism in Wales, promoting local prosperity and supporting community well-being and involvement, while protecting and giving value to natural heritage and culture and
 - to manage the tourism sector in ways which minimise environmental impact.
- 2.6 Land use planning can help to achieve the Assembly Government's objectives for tourism through:
- Ensuring tourism development is sustainable in ways, which contribute to economic development, conservation, rural diversification, urban regeneration and social inclusion.
 - Encouraging appropriate tourist related commercial development in new destinations, including existing urban and industrial heritage areas.
 - Limiting tourism development, which will encourage damage to the environment and the amenities of residents and visitors.
 - Ensuring well-designed and sympathetic tourist development especially when located in rural areas, in the scale and nature to the local environment and the needs of the local community.
 - Promoting development of tourism on previously developed land.

Technical Advice Note 13: Tourism (1997)

- 2.7 Technical Advice Note 13: Tourism (TAN 13) supplements Planning Policy Wales and, sets out the key planning considerations in relation to planning for tourism. The TAN aims to further integrate the links between tourism and sustainable development.
- 2.8 TAN 13 highlights that tourism comprises a range of different, but interdependent activities and operations that overlap with sport, entertainment, and the arts as well as other recreation and leisure activities. It makes a major contribution to the Welsh economy, provides employment in a wide variety of occupations and can bring benefits to local economies and communities in urban and rural areas. It is subject to change in the type of holiday taken and the length of the holiday season.
- 2.9 While it cannot be regarded as a single or distinct category of land use, the issues it raises should be addressed in preparing or revising development plans and may feature in development control decisions. Development plans may provide guidance on opportunities for larger scale or innovative projects, appropriate facilities for the countryside or designated areas and the provision of facilities in historic towns.
- 2.10 Hotel development can bring benefits for the local community and support amenities and activities for residents and tourists. Such development should be compatible with neighbouring uses. Other types of accommodation should also be promoted such as bunkhouses.
- 2.11 In preparing development plans, local planning authorities should investigate the adequacy of facilities for both static and touring caravans and reconcile these needs with the protection of the environment. Holiday and touring caravan parks are an important part of the self-catering holiday sector and can contribute as much to the

local tourism economy as serviced holiday accommodation, while using less land for the purpose. Holiday caravan sites can be intrusive in the landscape and special consideration needs to be given to proposals for new sites, especially in National Parks, and sites of national and international importance designated for their natural features

Draft Revised Technical Advice Note 13 – Tourism (2006)

- 2.12 WAG have revised TAN 13 and consulted upon this in July 2006, but is yet to publish the revised version. It is more comprehensive and specific than the previous TAN.
- 2.13 The main objectives set out in the Draft Revised TAN 13 for Tourism in Wales are:
- Creating a sustainable tourism base which reduces the impact of seasonality and which will create a modern economy with a broader economic base.
 - Protecting the environmental quality and other qualities of areas in Wales, which are key to tourism.
 - Encouraging well located tourist facilities and
 - Ensuring that the local identity of communities is safeguarded.

'Shaping the Way We Work, Rest and Play: Practical guidance on delivering sustainable development through the planning system' (WLGA, 2007)

- 2.14 Wales has substantial environmental and heritage assets, and tourism jobs account for over 10% of the workforce. The tourism sector is identified as having major growth potential. Traditional skills can contribute to the upkeep of assets that are attractive to tourists, as well as maintaining culture and community heritage. The need to maintain diversity and prevent clone towns is essential if Wales is to have a competitive advantage.
- 2.15 Modern “greener” industries have the potential to create high-skill jobs and economic growth that do not damage the assets that underpin tourism and general quality of life. Eco-parks can further reduce environmental impacts, and working from home reduces the cost and impact of travelling.

3.0 REGIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

“Turning Heads...” – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 (June 2006)

- 3.1 The Heads of the Valley Strategy sits within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan and sets out a broad framework for change in the Heads of the Valleys (HoV) area, which covers all of Blaenau Gwent. It highlights the intention that tourism and leisure will play a more significant role in the economic prosperity of the area with activities complementing the offer elsewhere.
- 3.2 The Strategy contains 5 priority themes, one of which relates to tourism and is entitled ‘An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience’. In addition, the following Strategic Programmes relate to tourism:

- **SP9: Linked local and regional attractions and facilities**

This relates to making the most of the existing offer including sites within the HERIAN (Heritage in Action) initiative and attractions such as Big Pit as well as promoting some large-scale projects such as Valleys Regional Park. In parallel, the development of an integrated support network of cultural, heritage, leisure, retail and tourist facilities, within (or linked to) town centres, including places to eat and stay, and provision for business tourism will be encouraged.

- **SP10: An integrated 'offer'**

SP10 refers to working with partners to ensure that there is an increased focus on tourism in the Heads of the Valleys within the context of wider initiatives aimed at promoting the South Wales Valleys as a visitor destination. A unified and coherent, well-branded proposition, which clearly illustrates what the area has to offer, will be developed.

3.3 The HoV strategy and its objectives should be considered when preparing the Local Development Plan due to the impact it will have on the area.

3.4 The Local Development Plan should seek to ensure that the Heads of the Valleys becomes characterised as an attractive place to live and stay/visit, offering local people and visitors high quality facilities and attractions, including cultural and sporting events. The tourism sector should play a more significant role in the economic prosperity of the area, with activities complementing the offer elsewhere.

Capital Region Tourism (CRT)

3.5 CRT is the regional tourism partnership for South East Wales and is responsible for the implementation of the regional tourism strategy. The strategy, reviewed in 2008, is a key plank of the economic framework for the region developed by South East Wales Economic Forum and identifies as priorities for the region Business Tourism and 5 key tourism 'experiences': City breaks, Countryside and scenery, easy activities, 'Browsing' (towns, villages, retail, food) and Culture & Heritage.

Valleys Regional Park

3.6 The Valleys Regional Park concept (VRP) is a funded scheme that has arisen from the Heads of the Valleys Strategy. The Valleys Regional Park vision is of a high quality, sustainable network of greenspace offering outstanding recreational opportunities, which will change the image and perception of the Valleys in the long term. It's objectives are as follows:

- improve the quality of life, health and well being of local people.
- generate pride in the area.
- create an environment that stimulates inward investment and becomes an attractive destination for visitors.
- putting the Valleys on the map internationally and for all the right reasons.
- tackling historic landscape problems that cross political divides providing an opportunity to demonstrate that, in keeping with a duty to deliver sustainable development, a significant piece of environmental infrastructure alongside other plans for social and economic investment is being created.

- 3.7 Many other parts of the country have outstanding scenery and countryside, which has attracted tourists for many years and are well established brands - the Lake District, Cotswold's, Snowdonia or more locally the Wye Valley, Brecon Beacons, and Gower peninsula. To be successful the Valleys must strive to 'raise the standard' and become an established destination in its own right, maximizing the potential of existing tourism activity. The Valleys Regional Park can enhance existing tourism destinations and linkages, for instance, the potential to rejuvenate cycle trails.
- 3.8 The Valleys Regional Park will serve both local residents and visitors although, in the short term, its priority should be to improve the quality of experience for existing users and to target the inactivity of those who currently do not use the countryside. For the visitor, however, the landscape offers outdoor facilities for a whole range of pursuits including walking, cycling and adventure activities for those seeking adventure in world-class settings. Any new facilities need to be of the highest quality that will improve the overall reputation of the Park and increase its attractiveness for visitors and local people.
- 3.9 It is intended that a Valleys Regional Park would incorporate an area extending from eastern Carmarthenshire to western Monmouthshire, roughly equating to the historic coalfield boundaries. The designation would include land north of the M4 motorway and along the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road. As the whole of Blaenau Gwent County Borough is included within the VRP area its objectives and strategies should be considered when preparing the Local Development Plan.

4.0 LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

- 4.1 As a corporate document, the Local Development Plan must have regard to other documents produced by the Council. The relevant documentation in terms of tourism is set out below.

Making a Difference – A Community Strategy for Blaenau Gwent 2010-2030

- 4.2 The Community Strategy builds on the work undertaken by the Community Plan and takes forward the vision of making: Blaenau Gwent a better place to live, work and visit. The Community Strategy has 7 key themes and each theme has its own vision.

 **Lively and Accessible Communities**
Creating communities that people enjoy and want to live in

 **Thriving Communities**
Offering the opportunities, support and resources in our communities for people to thrive

 **Fair and Safe Communities**
Making people feel safer and included in our communities

 **Learning Communities**
Giving people the skills to succeed

Healthy Communities

Helping people to be healthy and get the right care and support when they need it

Green & Sustainable Communities

Improving our environment today for tomorrow

Leading Communities

Working with, and for our communities

- 4.3 One of the seven themes ('Thriving Communities') identified in the Community Strategy refers to the promotion of tourism in order to improve the economic base of the area.

Blaenau Gwent Tourism Strategy (2004)

- 4.4 This strategy covers the five-year period from 2004 to 2009 and contains an action plan to develop all aspects of tourism and thereby increase the volume and economic benefit of tourism within the area. The document provides strategic advice and guidance in developing opportunities for the development of tourism in Blaenau Gwent for the public and private sectors.

- 4.5 The Strategy recognises that any tourist development should be sustainable, i.e. environmentally, economically and culturally and be in response to operator, customer and industry needs. Whilst there is much to offer in terms of tourism due to the size and diversity of Blaenau Gwent there is no dominant brand that makes it a destination and it is therefore essential to work in partnership with other groups to maximize the tourism potential. The importance of marketing is also recognised in the Strategy in order to maximize opportunities to develop tourism.

Blaenau Gwent Tourism Action Framework 2010-2015

- 4.6 This framework gives a clear, focussed direction for tourism development in Blaenau Gwent for the next 5 years. It will contribute to the economic, cultural and community prosperity of the area and will help to enhance the perception of Blaenau Gwent as a visitor destination.

- 4.7 The strategy for 2010-2015 identifies as priorities for Blaenau Gwent the following 5 propositions, which are included in the current Capital Region Tourism Action Plan:

- Countryside, coast and scenery
- Easy and accessible outdoor activities
- Browsing (towns, villages and foods)
- Culture and heritage
- Business Tourism

Blaenau Gwent Heritage Strategy (2008)

- 4.8 There is a close link between tourism and heritage and the tourist provision in Blaenau Gwent draws its primary strength from heritage and cultural attractions. Blaenau Gwent's Heritage Strategy was adopted in 2008 and has been developed against the general themes of:

- Learning

- Visiting
- Protecting
- Development

4.9 The tourism element of the Strategy is contained within the 'Visiting' theme and refers to projects such as Bedwellty Park and House and one entitled 'Green Mines' The latter tourism/heritage project was completed in 2008 and involved officers from Blaenau Gwent working with partners from Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Flintshire to encourage heritage and cultural tourism. Another tourism/heritage project called 'Atlanterra' is a follow-on project from Green Mines with some changes in partners, which will develop tourism opportunities based on our mining heritage.

Blaenau Gwent Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan- Draft First Revision (December 2010)

4.10 The Regeneration Strategy, which was approved in September 2009, identifies an overarching aim and five principles along with proposals to translate them into action. The overarching aim is to 'Share Benefits of Regeneration Widely' and this will be achieved by ensuring that the benefits of regeneration are shared by all those in Blaenau Gwent. The principle relevant to tourism is Principle 1: Diversify the Economy and Develop Manufacturing

Build on the diversification of the local economy by promoting and supporting new areas of opportunity, and developing the strengths of Blaenau Gwent's manufacturing industry

4.11 The revised Regeneration Strategy makes reference to the opportunities to diversify the local economy in other sectors such as Tourism & Leisure which have been highlighted by existing strategies, such as the Heads of the Valleys Strategy "Turning Heads".

4.12 According to the Strategy one of the strengths of Blaenau Gwent is its attractive natural environment. It also states that leisure and tourism will be at the forefront of regeneration in Wales over the next 10 years and that there is an opportunity to use natural assets to build the tourism and leisure sector, including Festival Park, Local Nature Reserves (such as Parc Bryn Bach) and Brecon Beacons National Park.

5.0 CURRENT AND FUTURE PROVISION OF TOURISM

5.1 In order to capitalise upon the tourism potential of the County Borough, it is important to recognise where opportunities exist. This section will examine the current tourism offer within the County Borough as well as identifying any land use implications that should be addressed by the emerging Local Development Plan.

CURRENT PROVISION

Major Attractions

Bedwellty House and Park, Tredegar

5.2 This fine example of an Iron master's residence nestles in six acres of Victorian parkland that includes one of the few remaining Ice Houses in Wales. Amongst its many period features are a grotto, arboretum, block of coal mined for the 1851 Great Exhibition, and Long Shelter. The Bandstand, refurbished to its Victorian splendour, is the focus of summer Sunday afternoon concerts.

5.3 A £5.5 million project is due for completion in April 2011 to restore Bedwellty House and Park to transform it into a high quality heritage centre and make it a major tourist attraction for Blaenau Gwent.

Festival Park, Ebbw Vale

5.4 Following the National Garden Festival in 1992, much of the site was secured as Festival Park. Alongside new housing and commercial developments are the woodlands, wetlands and ornamental gardens, Japanese Pavilion and lakes. The Festival Park Factory Shopping Village houses shops selling an array of goods. There are future plans to develop Festival Park and recent developments at the site include an adventure castle with play area and the UK's longest super tubing run.

Parc Bryn Bach

5.5 Parc Bryn Bach is one of the most popular Country Parks in Wales and has been transformed from an area previously scarred by coal extraction. The focus of the 340-acre country park is a 36-acre artificial lake surrounded by broad swathes of woodland. The Countryside Centre hosts the licensed Lakeside restaurant, souvenir shop, exhibitions, Tourist Information and bunkhouse accommodation for 18 people. The park also has extended and upgraded 42-pitch caravan and campsite, picnic areas, adventure playground, orienteering courses and nature trails. Bryn Bach plays host to many activities including angling, model boating and flying. New cycling facilities include a BMX track, mountain bike tracks, family cycling routes and a training circuit. New golfing facilities are very popular with a 9-hole par three course and a six bay target driving range.

St Illtyds Church, Brynithel

5.6 This sensitively restored 13th century structure retains many original features and is recognised as a building of national importance. Winner of both the Prince of Wales Award and Civic Trust Award, the Church sits high above Brynithel with beautiful views over the Ebbw Valley. The building has been deconsecrated and is now used for live musical performances. It is open on Sunday afternoons in Spring and Summer and by prior arrangement.

Sirhowy Ironworks

5.7 Sirhowy Ironworks, established in 1778, were associated with the Tredegar Works further down the valley. From 1818 Ebbw Vale Ironworks acquired the Sirhowy Ironworks, supplying their pig iron until it ceased iron making in 1883. It continued to produce coke for Ebbw Vale until its closure in 1905. Recent consolidation and conservation work has secured the impressive remains of the 18th century ironworks complex.

Other attractions

Tredegar Town Clock

- 5.8 At the heart of the town is the famous 72 foot town clock, cast in Newport by Charles Jordan. It is the tallest freestanding iron clock tower in the United Kingdom. The structure is a Grade II* listed building and is often the focus of the town's events.

Aneurin Bevan Stones

- 5.9 This monument commemorates Aneurin Bevan (1897-1960) who was born in Tredegar and became the Labour Member of Parliament for the area in 1929. 'Nye' was one of the last century's finest orators and the memorial stands on the hillside between Tredegar and Ebbw Vale where he addressed his constituents and the world. He was the architect of our National Health Service and the instigator of the largest public housing scheme in the U.K. Symbolically the central monolith represents Bevan with the three surrounding stones for the towns of his constituency - Ebbw Vale, Tredegar and Rhymney.

Roundhouse Towers and Tŷ Mawr Nantyglo

- 5.10 Fearing a workers' uprising, ironmaster Crawshay Bailey built the 19th century towers at Roundhouse Farm for protection. The four feet thick walls provide the first line of defence while impenetrable iron posted doors set into a stone porch roofed with spikes prevented entry to upper floors. Nearby are the remains of Tŷ Mawr mansion (c. 1816), once a magnificent ironmaster's residence, fronted by six iron columns and housing a decorative marble staircase.

Museums

- 5.11 Blaenau Gwent is enriched with heritage, which has been captured and celebrated by the four district museums at Abertillery, Blaina, Brynmawr and Tredegar and by Ebbw Vale Works Archival Trust.

Chartist Centre

- 5.12 The centre is based at Salem Chapel in Blaina and will provide the focus for the borough wide Chartist activity. Many who marched to Newport in the insurrection came from this area. Funding for the further development of the site is currently being sought.

Countryside trails and walks

- 5.13 Blaenau Gwent has over 250km (160miles) of public rights of way, together with an expanse of common land, which has open access meaning that there are thousands of acres of countryside available to walkers. For those wishing to undertake set walks, a series of trails have been published in leaflet form to help explore Blaenau Gwent's countryside and history. The more adventurous can set out on the 26 mile Sirhowy Valley Walk from Aneurin Bevan Memorial Stones or the Ebbw Valley walk from Festival Park, Ebbw Vale. The Ebbw Fach trail links 13 green spaces alongside the Ebbw Fach River, which are locally managed and it is hoped, will become a tourist attraction. All of the towns' 12 trails are available on the council website - www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

- 5.14 **Six Bells Miners memorial**

Guardian, the memorial to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Six Bells mining disaster of 1960 towers 20m over the former colliery site and was unveiled in June 2010. The statue has since become a popular landmark and an important stop-off point on the Ebbw Fach Trail.

Accommodation

- 5.15 The accommodation provision within Blaenau Gwent is improving, although more is needed to take full advantage of the potential for tourism development. Blaenau Gwent contains one hotel and one lodge, which are both located in Ebbw Vale as well as 3 graded guesthouses, a bunkhouse, holiday cottage and caravan and camp site. It is necessary to improve the accommodation offer in order to capitalise upon the tourism potential of the area and there are opportunities to build a hotel at Parc Bryn Bach. Please refer to Appendix 1 for a schedule of all tourist accommodation in Blaenau Gwent.

Recreation Sites

- 5.16 In addition to parks and visitor attractions, Cwmcelyn Pond at Blaina, Cwmtillery Lakes, Roseheyworth riverside walk at Abertillery, St James reservoir and Sirhowy Woodlands at Tredegar are popular areas for walking, fishing and having a picnic.

National Events

National Eisteddfod

- 5.17 Blaenau Gwent hosted the National Eisteddfod of Wales in 2010 at the Works, Ebbw Vale, the former steelworks site. The Eisteddfod is a national cultural festival, and attracted visitors from both Wales and worldwide, bringing a range of cultural and economic benefits to Blaenau Gwent.

Abertillery Blues Festival

- 5.18 The Abertillery Blues Festival has become one of the biggest Blues events in Wales bringing top quality live music to Blaenau Gwent. In 2010 it was headed up by legendary guitarist Andy Fairweather Low and fans of blues music traditionally flock to Abertillery for this annual event, which is now firmly established on the UK music calendar.

UK triathlon

- 5.19 Parc Bryn Bach is now established as one of Wales's top venues for triathlons after hosting many national events such as the British Decathlon Championship, the Corus Elite Series and Welsh Triathlon Championship.

Regional Events

Go Wild', Tredegar

- 5.20 'Go Wild' is an annual event held alternately by Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly Council. When hosted by Blaenau Gwent the event takes place at Parc Bryn Bach, Tredegar and provides a family day out with an abundance of wildlife fun with activities and attractions for everyone. The event has an educational aspect, encouraging visitors to take an interest in local wildlife.

Local Events

Aberfest

- 5.21 Aberfest is a festival, which takes place on an annual basis in Abertillery and celebrates all that is good about the area. Activities include heritage walks, sports events, outdoor activities, craft fairs, quizzes right through to concerts featuring the cream of local and international talent.

Parc Bryn Bach

- 5.22 The Park hosts a variety of events throughout the year, which include, Parc Bryn Bach Open Day, cycling races on the newly opened cycling circuit, which also plays host to the Junior Tour of Wales. There are also rallies, fun runs, art exhibitions, fishing competitions, triathlons, BMX events, charity events, and environmental days organised by the Local Authority and local groups.

FUTURE PROVISION

- 5.23 A successful tourism and leisure sector base could be created around the natural and historical assets of the County Borough, the Valleys Regional Park concept and the gateway role Blaenau Gwent can play in terms of access to nearby national attractions such as Brecon Beacons National Park and the World Heritage Site at Blaenavon. It is proposed to establish a large parking/picnic area to act as a stop-off place near the Highest Point in Brynmawr to provide essential gateway visitor information and orientation provision to local and regional sites. The opportunity exists to build upon current offer in Brynmawr, which is the starting point of the Ebbw Fach Trail and where the local museum reflects the rich local heritage.

- 5.24 Outdoor activities are one of the key drivers of tourism in Wales and have a major contribution to make to future tourism growth in the country. They also have a key role to play in improving health and fitness of local communities. In Blaenau Gwent, the area's natural features make it attractive for more formal recreation-based tourism that is increasingly popular and requires land-use provision with little adverse impact on the environment and can bring significant income into the area. The natural landscape of Blaenau Gwent provides the perfect location to enable activities such as walking and mountain biking to be pursued. The countryside makes up three quarters of the land area of Blaenau Gwent and is a positive asset that can strengthen regeneration strategies and maximise tourism opportunities. A section of the Transport Background paper is devoted to walking and cycling and it includes a plan identifying the existing and proposed community route (cycle/footpath) network for Blaenau Gwent. Its further development and the promotion of walking trails are important in delivering several priorities of the new Tourism Strategy.

Eastern Valley Slopes, Blue Lakes and Cwmtillery Lakes

- 5.25 A policy in the LDP will seek to develop opportunities for Blaenau Gwent to contribute to the Valleys Regional Park which is a network of countryside recreation areas linked by strategic footpaths (for example the Ebbw Fach Trail which is a key 'green' tourism initiative) and cycleways and represents a key opportunity to attract tourists and investment. Activity tourism, for example, mountain biking and walking

etc. will be encouraged in such areas. Development proposals that would contribute to the delivery of the Valleys Regional Park, including leisure and tourism development at Parc Bryn Bach, will be considered favourably. At the same time it is important that proposals do not have an unacceptable impact on existing areas of environmental importance. Land has been allocated in the LDP where it is anticipated activity tourism can be developed, such as the Eastern Valley Slopes, Blue Lakes and Cwmtillery Lakes.

Garden Festival

- 5.26 There are plans to develop Festival Park into a major tourist destination and recent initiatives to attract additional visitors include the introduction of an adventure castle, play area and hillside slide. The site has been allocated for tourism in the Deposit Plan as it is intended to build on the existing tourism offer.

Bedwellty Park

- 5.27 In order to exploit the potential to further develop Bedwellty House and Park the site has been allocated for tourism in the LDP. A £5.5 million project has already commenced to restore Bedwellty House and Parkland to transform it into a high quality heritage centre and make it a major tourist attraction for Blaenau Gwent visitors. The park is to be restored in 2 phases and the first will focus on the restoration of the historic element of the park, i.e. the house, park features/buildings and landscape and introduction of additional park lighting. The second phase relates to the upgrading of the recreational side of the park, i.e. the sports facilities including a new bowls pavilion, upgraded tennis facilities, children's play facilities, introduction of a green gym and the establishment of an events area.

Parc Bryn Bach

- 5.28 Parc Bryn Bach is currently a major tourist attraction in Blaenau Gwent and it is planned to develop the tourism offer further by building a hotel on the site which has been allocated for tourism in the LDP.

Nantyglo Roundhouse and Towers

- 5.29 Blaenau Gwent has a rich cultural heritage, which can be used to promote tourism. There are long-term aspirations to develop the Nantyglo Roundhouse and Towers as a tourist attraction and the site has been allocated for tourism in the LDP. The site has potential as a heritage centre and educational resource for local people and an attraction for other visitors. Any plans to develop the site will depend upon the support of the owner as it is in private ownership.

General Offices

- 5.30 The development of the former Corus Steelworks site represents an opportunity to promote tourism in Blaenau Gwent. There are plans to extend and refurbish the historic General Offices at the former Ebbw Vale steelworks into a genealogy visitor's attraction and this will include the relocation of the Gwent Records Office, which has one of the largest archives in Wales. The new £12 million family history and genealogy visitor centre, which is set to open in 2011, will feature the latest in interactive technology including a digital newspaper archive, photos, maps and films as well as multi-touch surfaces, interactive games and a 5D cinema. The complex will also house the Ebbw Vale Steelworks Archival Trust and it is envisaged that it will be the base for the Heads of the Valleys Green Badge Guides.

5.31 **Atlanterra Project**

Heritage tourism will also be promoted through the Atlanterra Project, which will enable the delivery of several capital projects that will benefit the heritage and communities within Blaenau Gwent. The project includes six different Work Components, four of which (Archives, Records and Genealogy, Tourism and Promotion, Cultural activities and Valorisation of mining heritage) Blaenau Gwent will be taking part in.

6.0 **KEY ISSUES IN BLAENAU GWENT**

6.1 Pre-deposit participation undertaken between July and August 2007 has provided a clear indication of those land use issues that key stakeholders consider to be of primary importance in Blaenau Gwent.

The Issues Paper (July 2007)

6.2 The Issues Paper (July 2007) identified key issues that the Plan needed to address:

- To foster sustainable tourism and leisure in order to boost the local economy.
- To foster sustainable tourism, re-engaging local communities with the natural and built environment.

6.3 A consultation exercise on the Issues Paper asked one question in relation to the provision of tourism:

6.4 **Question 7.4 In addition to current provision are there additional opportunities for developing tourism within the Plan area?**

The overwhelming majority agreed that opportunities for tourism did exist. Several comments referred to the potential of Parc Bryn Bach suggesting that a high quality hotel and chalets should be located there. Another respondent stipulated that the prevention of inappropriate developments would positively affect Blaenau Gwent's potential for developing as a tourist area. It was also considered that policies could promote freshwater fishing as a form of tourism and a number of local ponds were proposed to be suitable for developing opportunities for angling.

6.5 Parc Bryn Bach has been allocated for leisure and tourism in Policy TM1 with a hotel earmarked for the site. One of the main policies which protects from inappropriate development in the countryside is SB1, whilst others are also relevant, for example, ENV1, 2 and 3.

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Exercise

6.6 The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Exercise was undertaken between March – December 2007. The process identified key strategic problems, objectives and issues for sustainability. 18 key sustainability issues were identified, one of which is related to tourism:

- Tourism potential

7.0 THE PREFERRED STRATEGY

7.1 The Preferred Strategy provided the following policy framework for tourism in Blaenau Gwent:

Objective 11.

Capitalise on the unique landscape and natural heritage, foster sustainable tourism and promote community pride.

7.2 No comments were made on objective 11.

- **SP7: Development of the Tourism and Leisure sectors**

Foster sustainable tourism and leisure sectors which re-engage local communities with the natural and historic environment and boost the local economy

7.3 One comment was made on this policy requiring that SP7 needs redrafting for clarity; it appears to be very broad and general and could benefit from the addition of some of the detail from paragraph 6.10.

7.4 More detailed strategic policies are included in the LDP, which promote leisure and tourism with supporting reasoned justifications.

8.0 DRAFT LDP POLICY

8.1 To address the issues raised the following is proposed:

CREATE A NETWORK OF SUSTAINABLE VIBRANT VALLEY COMMUNITIES

SP1 Northern Strategy Area – Sustainable Growth and Regeneration

Proposals in the Northern Strategy Area will be required to deliver sustainable growth and regeneration that benefits the whole of Blaenau Gwent. This will be achieved by: -

- a. Supporting the creation of a network of sustainable hubs around the principal hub of Ebbw Vale.
- b. Promoting Ebbw Vale as the principal hub for Blaenau Gwent, where the majority of social and economic growth will be accommodated. The Town Centre will be the main centre for service provision where major retail expansion, administrative and cultural developments will take place.
- c. Delivering strategic sustainable regeneration flagship schemes at 'The Works' and 'Ebbw Vale Northern Corridor'.
- d. Supporting new roles for district and local town centres: -
 - Tredegar District Town Centre will expand its tourism offer through maximising the benefits of local heritage;
 - Brynmawr District Town Centre will explore opportunities to develop complementary roles around tourism; and
 - Blaina Local Town Centre will build on and exploit its local heritage.
- e. Enabling diversification of the economic base through mixed-use development in the district hubs of Tredegar and Brynmawr where it supports and reinforces the roles of the town centres.
- f. Supporting a major destination attraction that would draw large numbers of people to the area and provide a significant number of jobs.

The Northern Strategy Area has experienced high levels of public investment in its infrastructure and this has been accompanied by private sector investment. The development strategy of the Plan seeks to build on major regeneration opportunities in this area to ensure that Blaenau Gwent as a whole benefits.

The Wales Spatial Plan identifies Ebbw Vale as a key settlement that has a critical role to play in the success of the Capital Region. The Strategy recognises the importance of Ebbw Vale and identifies it as the principal hub at the centre of the network of linked hubs across the County Borough. The recent opening of the rail connection to Cardiff, ongoing construction of the Heads of the Valleys Road and the availability of two strategic sites provides major opportunities for Ebbw Vale.

The Principal Town Centre of Ebbw Vale is expected to perform a sub regional retail role (Policy SP3) similar to Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare. Ebbw Vale will be the main retail centre where the emphasis will be on a good balance between comparison (non-food) and convenience (food) shopping. Land is allocated for new comparison and convenience retailing within the town centre of Ebbw Vale, under policy R1. Ebbw Vale will be the focus for service provision in Blaenau Gwent, and provide services such as the Hospital, Learning Zone, Arts Centre and main Civic Centre. The cultural role of Ebbw Vale will be developed through plans to extend and refurbish the historic General Offices at the former Ebbw Vale Steelworks into a family history and genealogy visitor attraction, which will also include the relocation of the Gwent Records Office. There are also plans for the Ebbw Vale Institute to be used for cultural activities, learning and social enterprise.

The Strategy also recognises the potential of two key brownfield sites located in the principal hub of Ebbw Vale which are capable of accommodating significant new development to help regenerate the area. The former Corus Site, now known as 'The Works', already has outline planning permission for housing, a hospital, Learning Zone, Leisure Centre, Arts Centre, Environmental Resource Centre, Employment, new rail station and open space including a Wetland Park. The reclamation work of this 80 ha site is well underway.

The Ebbw Vale Northern Corridor site is allocated for mixed-use including housing, employment and leisure. One of the strengths of the site is its position relative to the Heads of the Valleys Road and its role as a Northern gateway into the centre of Ebbw Vale. Over 70 hectares of land is or will become available over the Plan period part of which is a strategic employment site located in a prime position along the Heads of the Valleys Road.

Both sites will be flagship schemes and incorporate high standards of design.

The role of Town Centres have been identified as a key issue by stakeholders and residents. The Plan seeks to identify new roles for the District and Local Town Centres in order for them to benefit from planned tourism and recreation growth. Tredegar District Town Centre will maximise the opportunities to develop complementary roles around tourism. The planned investment in Bedwellty House and Park and development at Parc Bryn Bach provides an opportunity for Tredegar to attract visitors and for the town to benefit by catering for the needs of the visitors.

The historical legacy provides opportunities to build tourism opportunities around heritage trails such as the Aneurin Bevan Trail and Ironmakers trails.

The location of Brynmawr, at a gateway to the Brecon Beacons National Park, Valleys Regional Park and Blaenavon World Heritage Site provides an opportunity to service visitors either through providing a stop over facility (directing and informing travellers), or by encouraging people to stay over in Brynmawr. Brynmawr is also the starting point of the Ebbw Fach Trail and has a museum that reflects the rich local heritage.

Blaina Local Town Centre will look to build on and exploit its local heritage. The town's historical legacy provides opportunities to build tourism opportunities around heritage trails in connection with the Chartist Movement in the area. A Chartist Exhibition and Information Centre has already been established at Salem Chapel in the town centre. The area also has strong links to mining and ironworks given that, Nantyglo and Blaina was at one point the largest iron-producing centre in the world.

Tourism, leisure and cultural events in the town centres will play a key role in raising the profile of Blaenau Gwent and attracting visitors to the area.

In the hubs of Tredegar and Brynmawr mixed-use schemes which meet the needs of their respective districts and support the roles of the towns will be encouraged. Particular support will be given where schemes enhance town centre based employment in the retail, service, leisure or tourism sectors.

If tourism is to play a greater role in the economy and regeneration of the area Blaenau Gwent needs a major destination attraction. Being well located in terms of access to the heads of the Valleys Road and Brecon Beacons National Park there is great potential for an attraction that could draw large numbers of people to the area and provide a significant number of jobs.

Any proposals will be expected to create a strong image of Blaenau Gwent and increase its profile in the national and international arena. It must also be acceptable in terms of its impact on the natural and built environment and surrounding land uses.

SP2 Southern Strategy Area – Regeneration

Proposals in the Southern Strategy Area will be required to regenerate the area by: -

- a. Ensuring that the district hub of Abertillery is well connected to Ebbw Vale and the wider region through safe, frequent and reliable public transport links;**
- b. Supporting Abertillery District Town Centre in developing complementary roles around culture, leisure and tourism;**
- c. Delivering ‘Activity Tourism’ opportunities in the area;**
- d. Ensuring the removal of dereliction by promoting the reuse of under used and derelict land and buildings;**
- e. Delivering regeneration schemes which provide residential development and infrastructure; and**
- f. Building on the unique identity of the area by protecting the built heritage and the natural environment.**

The main difference between the south and the north is that the south has fewer opportunities for development, is not so well connected and has topographical constraints. The area does, however, have a strong sense of community pride and spectacular landscape. The Strategy needs to build on these strengths to secure regeneration and create sustainable communities.

It is important that this area is well connected with Ebbw Vale and the wider region. There are a number of proposals contained in the Plan for rail, walking, cycling and improvements to the A467 road, which will help address the accessibility issue. There are also plans to improve the bus service along the A467 corridor. With the exception of the cycle and bus improvements all the improvements are expected towards the end of the Plan period (See Delivery and Implementation table in Chapter 9 for further details).

Abertillery District Town Centre will explore opportunities to develop complementary roles around leisure and tourism. One of the strengths of Abertillery District Town Centre is the position of the centre relative to woodland and upland landscapes. There are opportunities to develop new infrastructure to enable people to use these environments and to explore the scope for mountain biking as a way of ‘opening up’ the natural setting of the town. The recent refurbishment of the Metropole and investment in the town centre will enhance the cultural role of Abertillery, in terms of the arts and entertainment. The cultural role has already been enhanced in the southern strategy area through the restoration of Llanhilleth Institute, which was part of an overall regeneration package.

Local opportunities for employment are necessary to ensure these communities are sustainable. The surrounding countryside offers opportunities in terms of activity tourism, which is a sector of the tourism industry that aims to attract visitors by developing activity product such as cycling, walking, riding, watersports, adventure and fishing. Sites allocated for activity tourism are identified in Policy TM1.

Investment in the area will be targeted at removing derelict under used buildings and re-using them for residential, community or commercial development.

It is vital that all new development protects the environment and cultural identity of this area, as it is the key to the areas success.

SP11 Protection and Enhancement of the Built Environment

Blaenau Gwent's distinctive built environment will be protected, preserved and, where appropriate, enhanced. This will be achieved through:

- a. Safeguarding nationally designated sites from inappropriate development in line with national planning policy and guidance and also protecting locally designated buildings of significant importance and conservation areas;**
- b. Enhancing sites of historic or archaeological value; and**
- c. The promotion of heritage tourism.**

Blaenau Gwent boasts ancient monuments, historical buildings and landscapes that reflect its unique archaeology and social history. The area has 13 scheduled ancient monuments, 53 listed buildings, 2 conservation areas, 2 registered historic landscapes (which fall partially within its boundary) and 1 registered historic park and garden. Also, there are a number of buildings, which are of local importance, but are not protected by National Policies, and a list of such buildings will be compiled during the Plan period and they will be afforded protection under this Policy.

A second conservation area has been designated in Tredegar, which provides the opportunity to encourage and promote the conservation of the architectural heritage of the designated area. The LDP considers the historic built environment as a valuable resource that should primarily be protected for its own sake in line with national planning policy but can be harnessed in a sustainable manner, for example, through promoting heritage tourism, for the purposes of regeneration. The Tourism Strategy intends to develop heritage sites as tourism attractions by developing tourism trails to heritage locations, providing on site interpretation and improving the marketing of the sites. Nantyglo Roundhouse Towers, the General Office building at Ebbw Vale and Bedwellty House and Park are three major

projects, which could increase the visitor numbers to the area. The built heritage provides an important cultural and historical identity that if protected and enhanced could provide tourism opportunities. The LDP will ensure that sites are preserved and enhanced and that a framework is put in place to promote tourism opportunities.

MU2 'The Works'

In accordance with Policy SP1 land is allocated at the former steelworks site for mixed use including; the construction of a new hospital, learning zone, leisure centre, playing pitches, arts centre, approximately 520 houses, business hub, family history & genealogy visitor centre, environmental resource centre and wetland park.

Development of the site will be guided by the latest Masterplan and supporting documentation.

The former Steelworks runs along the bottom of the Ebbw Valley to the South East of Ebbw Vale Town Centre. It is about 3 kilometres from north to south and half a kilometre from east to west. The site has the benefit of outline planning permission. The original Masterplan Design and Access Statement sets out a 10-year programme for development divided into 5 phases between 2008 and 2018. The revised masterplan incorporates an amended indicative framework with four phases allowed to run to a maximum of 4 years each to allow development flexibility although the 2018 date continues to be a broad indication of the time-scale envisaged for the delivery of the scheme.

The Vision is:

“The Works is the regeneration of the former steelworks site in Ebbw Vale which is transforming the site into a vibrant and distinctive area. It’s a £350 million project that will create new places for learning, working and recreational. It will be integrated into the existing town centre to make stronger connections and links to important local landmarks. The scheme includes delivering new houses, primary and special education needs school, hospital, commercial floor space, a learning zone, basement park, central valley wetland park, 2km railway extension and a mechanical link. Already some of the projects have been completed (e.g. Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan and the environmental resource centre) and others are ongoing (The learning zone and general offices). The Works is widely recognised as a sustainable exemplar project across Wales and the UK and is driven by four key objectives; economic, social, resources and environmental, all of which give the project its green credentials. These objectives include retaining the history and heritage of the area, involving the community in developing the site and creating wider employment and commercial benefits for Blaenau Gwent.”

Key elements are:

- **Aneurin Bevan Hospital** – a 96 bed Local General Hospital;
- **The Central Valley & Wetlands Park** – a green corridor running through the site;

- **Environmental Resource Centre** – Provides an education facility for local children and the community to explore the heritage and ecology of the site;
- **Employment** – 5 ha of commercial and business space primarily located adjacent to the hospital site;
- **Residential** – Approximately 520 houses at varying densities across the site built to higher than nationally required standards and including 20% affordable housing;
- **Learning Zone** – The Learning Zone includes the provision of education and training for 14-19 year olds. The Works site will also include a 21st Century 3-16 School over two sites that will provide; primary education; an integrated children's centre, secondary education and the relocated Pen y Cwm Special School (subject to ministerial decision and Judicial Review)
- **Leisure Centre and Sports Fields** – A new leisure centre and sports pitches will be developed to provide new leisure amenities for the community;
- **Arts Centre** – A new arts centre will be developed to provide a community and professional arts/cultural event programme;
- **Basement Strategy** – A range of uses are being considered for the basements including sports and leisure, exhibition space, summer markets for food & craft including a café, education and recreation facilities;
- **Retail** – The retail element will only consist of local convenience facilities, including local shops and smaller commercial units;
- **Energy Centre** – A centralised energy hub.
- **Family History & Genealogy Visitor Centre** – The Former General Offices (Grade II* Listed Building) is to become a visitor centre bringing industrial heritage to life and showcasing one of the largest archives in Wales.
- **Public Realm** – Focus on a sequence of public squares running through the site.

Tourism and Leisure

TM1 Tourism and Leisure

The following sites are allocated for tourism related activities:

1. Eastern Valley Slopes
2. Garden Festival
3. Blue Lakes
4. Bedwellty House and Park
5. Parc Bryn Bach (including a hotel)
6. Nantyglo Roundhouse Towers
7. Cwmtillery Lakes

Eastern Valley Slopes

The Eastern Valley Slopes and its juxtaposition with 'The Works' site Ebbw Vale ensures that the site has tremendous potential for the development of tourism, leisure and education, via promotion of access to the countryside and improvement to the natural environment through woodland planting. Much of the land is managed for pasture, with significant areas open to public access for horse riding, cycling (particularly mountain biking) and walking.

The site provides a physical link between the Environmental Resource Centre at the Works site and Silent Valley Nature Reserve and has an interesting and valuable ecosystem of its own. The Council will work closely with interest groups to develop the sites potential for tourism, leisure and education.

Garden Festival

There are proposals to develop Festival Park into a major tourist destination. The improvement of the shopping offer, enhancement of the café, and provision of outdoor recreation facilities, will attract further visitors to the Festival Park. Other initiatives in keeping with attracting visitors to the park will be encouraged including parkland enhancement by creating woodland walks and linking the park to the shopping area.

Blue Lakes

The Blue Lakes lie adjacent to the Aneurin Bevan Stones, and form an important green space between Tredegar and Ebbw Vale. Ebbw Vale and District Development Trust (EVAD) propose to create a new park and establish a new

visitors centre with a café restaurant. It is also proposed to construct an education and learning centre, create a recreation space for walking and provide an enhanced fishing venue for local people and visitors to the area.

Bedwellty House and Park

Tourism could contribute significantly more to the economy of the County Borough. Attractions such as Bedwellty House and Park, which form part of a network of historic buildings and landscapes, are key to attracting people to the area. This will be achieved by restoration of Bedwellty House to provide a visitor experience, restaurant, gardens and function area. There are plans to transform it into a high quality conference, wedding and visitor centre and make it a major tourist attraction.

Parc Bryn Bach

Parc Bryn Bach is conveniently located just off the A465 and is a major tourist attraction with a lake and visitor centre. The Park offers a wide variety of facilities and activities including walking, cycling, golf, angling, model boating and flying and adventure activities. There is potential to further develop the tourism features at the Park, with opportunities for hotel development on the site and to develop the bunkhouse facilities. Parc Bryn Bach, which has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve, is likely to be one of the main park elements of the proposed Valleys Regional Park and could benefit from its close proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Nantyglo Roundhouse Towers

Nantyglo Roundhouse Towers has potential as a heritage centre and educational resource for local people and an attraction for visitors. The Council will work closely with the owners of the property in order to develop the site.

Cwmtillery Lakes

Cwmtillery Lakes provides an educational and recreational resource for the local community and is used for walking, bird watching and fishing. A new community-led project, called CALON, is seeking to establish an Outdoor Gateway and Education Centre at the Jim Owen Pavilion as a base for locals and visitors to utilise the significant potential for outdoor activities within the surrounding countryside of Cwmtillery. The proposed Calon Centre will also serve as a community centre offering venue hire, light refreshments and tourism information.

APPENDICES



TOURISM BACKGROUND PAPER



TOURISM BACKGROUND PAPER

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF ACCOMMODATION

No.	Name	Type	Grading
1	Park Hotel, Station Road, Waunlwyd, Ebbw Vale, Blaenau Gwent.	Hotel	VW *** Also fellow of British Institute of Inn keeping
2	Premiere Inns, Victoria Business Park, Waunlwyd, Ebbw Vale, NP23 8AN	Lodge	
3	Roseland, Dukestown Road, Dukestown, Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent.	Guest House	VW ****
4	Ebbw Vale Guest House, Libanus Road, Ebbw Vale	Guest House	VW*
5	Parc Bryn Bach, Merthyr Road, Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent. NP22 3AY	Bunk House	WTB ***
6	Parc Bryn Bach, Merthyr Road, Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent. NP22 3AY	Caravan and Camp Site	WTB **
7	Tynwydd Farm, Nantybwch, Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent. NP22 3BB	Holiday Cottage	WTB ****
8	Soar Chapel Beaufort Ebbw Vale NP23 5JJ	Guest House	WTB ****





For further information please contact:

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