



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot  
Neath Port Talbot Council

## **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee**

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

### **Report of Simon Brennan Head of Property & Regeneration**

### **Matter for Information**

**Wards Affected:** All

### **Tourism Update**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To update members on the impact of Covid-19 on the Tourism sector within Neath Port Talbot.
2. To update members on the current and forthcoming activities of the Council's Tourism Team.

#### **Executive Summary**

3. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly hard on the tourism sector. The necessary widespread closures of accommodation, attractions, hospitality and events; coupled with restrictions on the movement of citizens during local and national lockdowns, has resulted in an inevitable loss of revenue for tourism operators in the area.
4. The Tourism Team has prioritised delivering support to the tourism sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes providing advice on funding eligibility and working alongside the Environmental Health Team to ensure industry compliance with the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020.
5. Although the Tourism Team's focus has been on Covid-19 support, the Team has continued to deliver existing capital projects and

prepare for the launch of the new Neath Port Talbot place brand. A comprehensive marketing campaign is ready to launch as soon as Covid-19 restrictions allow.

### **The Impact of Covid-19 on the Tourism Industry in Neath Port Talbot**

6. The impact of Covid-19 on the tourism industry throughout Wales (and the UK) has been well publicised. This is acknowledged by Welsh Government which has put in place a range of specific financial measures to support the tourism and hospitality sectors throughout the pandemic.
7. Each year the Tourism Team collects data relating to visitor numbers and overnight stays in the area to feed into the STEAM model which measures the volume and value of the tourism sector to the local economy.
8. The STEAM results for the period **January 2020 to October 2020**, when compared to the same period of 2019, show that;
  - The number of visitors overall to Neath Port Talbot **decreased by 63.5%** to 450,000 visitors. This represents a decrease of 790,000 visitors in total. Staying visitors decreased by a higher percentage of 70.7%.\*
  - The economic impact of tourism within the Neath Port Talbot economy **decreased by 66.4%** to £37.93 million (this represents a decrease of £74.94 million)\*

*\* A note of caution: This data does not represent the full 12 months of 2020, further lockdowns were announced in November and December which will impact further on this data. These findings may change as more data inputs become available for 2020.*

### **Covid-19 Tourism Sector Recovery**

9. As we emerge from Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions begin to be lifted there is likely to be huge demand from UK domestic visitors looking to take holidays and short breaks within the UK.
10. Due to uncertainties surrounding quarantine requirements and fluctuating Covid-19 rates overseas (and the UK) there is likely to be

an ongoing hesitation for travelling abroad over the next 12-18 months, possibly longer.

11. If restrictions are lifted, the peak season of 2021 is likely to see similar levels of high occupancy that were seen in the summer of 2020. Whilst this is hugely positive for the tourism sector, it is going to take some years of stability and year round bookings for the sector to fully recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.
12. The Tourism Team has continued to prepare the forthcoming destination marketing campaign to launch the new Neath Port Talbot place brand and destination website. Although the launch has been delayed twice due to rising Covid-19 rates, the high profile campaign is ready to launch as soon as Covid-19 rates allow. This campaign will be key to the recovery of the tourism sector in NPT and feedback from tourism operators on campaign preparations to date has been extremely positive.
13. The Tourism Team continues to offer tailored advice and guidance to the NPT Tourism sector. The level of support delivered during the Covid-19 pandemic (as summarised below) will continue to be in place during the recovery phase and beyond.

### **Tourism Team Covid-19 Workload**

14. Since the end of March 2020 the focus of the Tourism Team has been on supporting the NPT tourism industry through the Covid-19 pandemic. Delivering this support continues to account for approximately 90% of the team's workload, this support is summarised as follows.

#### **Supporting the tourism sector to access financial support.**

15. This includes informing the sector on criteria and eligibility of Welsh Government funding and supporting those businesses who have been unable to access funds. The Tourism Team has been available to talk via email, Microsoft Teams and telephone to offer advice and guidance during this particularly worrying time for the sector.
16. Since April 2020 the overall mood of the sector has been very low, reflecting the uncertainties that the sector has faced during the pandemic. Although the summer season offered some relief to the sector from the coronavirus restrictions, the general feeling is that any gains made as a result of higher than average occupancy during

summer 2020 were not enough to offset the revenues lost during the rest of 2020 when varying restrictions were in place.

### **Managing the Accommodation Approval Process (for Key workers etc.)**

17. Since April 2020 the Tourism Team has worked alongside the Environmental Health Team to deliver a process for granting approval for accommodation providers to accommodate key workers, displaced persons and other eligible individuals as set out within the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020.
18. Between April 2020 and July 2020 a total of 1,968 bookings were approved for eligible individuals across 15 accommodation establishments.
19. During the local lockdown which was in place in September/ October 2020 the Team provided intensive support to the sector by advising on eligible bookings during this period. Accommodation providers were not ordered to close during the local lockdown but there were a range of restrictions placed upon the sector.
20. During the firebreak lockdown in October 2020 NPTCBC's approach to accommodation approvals changed in order to simplify the process for accommodation providers. Rather than requiring approvals for individual bookings, permission was granted to each establishment and comprehensive guidance was issued to accommodation providers on how to ensure compliance with the Regulations. During this period a total of 21 properties were approved to accommodate key workers and eligible individuals. The Team continued to be available to manage a wide range of queries from accommodation providers on eligible stays.
21. During the current national lockdown (from 19<sup>th</sup> December 2020 onwards) a total of 32 properties have been approved for key workers, displaced persons and other eligible individuals within the County. The team continues to deal with significant levels of queries relating to the eligibility of specific bookings in line with the Regulations.
22. The Tourism Team has also worked alongside the Environmental Health Department in managing complaints relating to non-

compliance with the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020.

### **Collaboration with Public Sector Partners**

23. Throughout the pandemic the Tourism Team has attended virtual Visit Wales Regional Forum meetings and specific Welsh Government meetings with Local Authority Tourism Officers to feed into emerging support packages and raise queries on behalf of the sector.
24. The Team has also met regularly with Tourism colleagues from neighbouring local authorities in order to understand the wider impact of Covid-19 and discuss good practice.
25. Our partnerships with Brecon Beacons National Park in Waterfall Country and Natural Resources Wales in Afan Forest Park have aided communication throughout the pandemic in attempting to manage visitor flows.
26. When restrictions are lifted, we are likely to see further challenges during 2021 whereby popular destinations reach over capacity due to a higher number of domestic (UK) visitors staying in Wales rather than travelling abroad. We will continue to work with partners to inform visitors on visiting responsibly during 2021.

### **Tourism Team Ongoing Projects**

27. Although the Team is currently limited in its capacity to take on new projects due to Covid-19 workloads; work has continued on the delivery of existing projects throughout the pandemic. This includes the following.
28. **Vale of Neath Hub at Resolven Canal Car Park**  
As reported previously the Tourism Team were successful in securing funding of £128,000 to deliver a visitor hub via the Visit Wales Tourism Amenity Infrastructure Scheme. The project is now nearing completion to refurbish the existing public toilet provision, create a permanent café, reconfigure the public toilet provision, deliver a digital information point and undertake landscaping of the existing car park.

29. **Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre Valleys Regional Park Gateway**  
As reported recently to Cabinet Board the Tourism Team were successful in securing £268,000 from Welsh Government's Valleys Regional Park to establish Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre as a Gateway site.
30. The project will deliver the refurbishment of the existing public toilet and shower facilities, additional car parking, 3 electric hook up points for campervans, a digital information point, low key lighting of pathways and a children's adventure playground. The playground element of the project is due to start on site soon and specifications are being finalised for the remaining works.
31. **Gnoll Country Park Masterplan**  
As recently reported, over the last 12 months the Tourism Team has worked in partnership with the Gnoll Country Park Team to compile a development plan for the park with the aim of identifying opportunities to enhance the visitor experience and establish the feasibility of creating accommodation provision within the park.
32. The priority projects and proposed way forward for scoping out the accommodation opportunity have been agreed with Members and the Tourism Team will work alongside colleagues at Gnoll Country Park to deliver the proposals.
33. **Bed Stock Survey**  
A 'bed stock' survey is currently being undertaken to develop an accurate database of the nature and amount of visitor accommodation in the Neath Port Talbot area.
34. All local authorities in Wales are required to undertake bed stock survey's periodically in order to understand accommodation demand, assess trends in the accommodation market and provide a baseline for the calculation of economic data on the value of the tourism industry to the area.
35. The survey; which is being conducted via telephone with accommodation providers, was originally planned to be carried out in early 2020, however due to Covid-19 the roll out of the survey was delayed. The unprecedented situation over the last year means it is more important than ever that the Council has an accurate picture of the accommodation provision within the county.
36. **Aberavon Seafront Signage**

The Tourism Team has worked with colleagues in the Streetcare Services Team to deliver visitor orientation signage for Aberavon Seafront. The signage was funded by Knights Brown, the construction company which carried out the recent coastal defence works at the seafront, as part of the company's community benefits commitments. The six new signs are due to be installed soon.

37. **Destination Marketing**

As reported previously the Tourism Team is continuing to prepare a high profile destination marketing campaign to launch the new Neath Port Talbot place brand. The campaign has received funding from Visit Wales' Regional Tourism Engagement Fund and close contact has been maintained with Visit Wales throughout the pandemic in relation to the delivery of the campaign as soon as Covid-19 rates allow.

38. Although the launch of the campaign has been delayed due to Covid-19 the Team has continued to engage with campaign stakeholders and has conducted two online training sessions in October 2020 and November 2020 for businesses who were successful in bidding to form 'cluster' experiences for the campaign.

39. To recap, the campaign will deliver;

- 6 experiences which have been compiled in response to an 'open call' exercise which asked tourism businesses to cluster together to deliver experiences which reflect NPT's strengths as a visitor destination.
- A public relations campaign which includes attracting journalists and travel bloggers to the area.
- A digital/ online campaign which includes utilising the power of social media and digital media (such as video) to appeal to key target markets.
- A group travel campaign to engage with group travel organisers such as coach operators and tour operators in the UK.
- Videography for each product cluster.
- Photography for use within the campaign.

40. The Team has also continued to complete works on the new Neath Port Talbot destination website. This website showcases the area through high quality content such as videos, blogs, photography and interactive mapping. The website will launch at the same time as the marketing campaign and place brand.

41. Feedback from tourism stakeholders has been extremely positive on the new place brand, marketing campaign and destination website. These destination marketing activities will be key to the post Covid recovery of the tourism sector in NPT.
42. Although it was disappointing to delay the launch of the campaign due to Covid-19, we are now in an excellent position to deliver a high profile marketing campaign at a time when the industry will need it most.

### **Post Pandemic**

43. Due to the prioritisation of the Tourism Team's work in delivering Covid-19 support to the tourism sector since March 2020, it has not been possible to draft and consult on the new Neath Port Talbot Destination Management Plan as previously planned in spring 2020.
44. As we move into the recovery phase of the pandemic this work will recommence and will reflect the actions and projects needed to continue to increase the contribution that tourism makes to the local economy and aid recovery from the impacts of Covid-19 on the sector.
45. The external funding landscape is currently unclear due to the redirection of Welsh Government funding schemes into Covid-19 financial support. This makes it difficult to plan new tourism projects, in particular capital projects. The Tourism Team will continue to submit funding applications for tourism development projects as funds become available.

### **Financial Impacts**

- 46 None. The financial impacts of the projects listed within this report have been addressed in separate reports to Members.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment**

- 47 An IIA is not required to accompany this report as the purpose of the report is for the information of Members rather than for decision. The projects listed within this report have been the subject of individual board reports whereby IIAs have been completed.

### **Valleys Communities Impacts**



- 48 There will be a positive impact on valleys communities as the recovery and future growth of the tourism sector in the area will support the local economy.

### **Workforce Impacts**

- 49 None.

### **Legal Impacts**

- 50 None

### **Risk Management Impacts**

- 51 None.

### **Consultation**

- 52 There is no requirement for external consultation on this matter.

### **Recommendations**

- 53 That Members note the requested updates on the activities of the NPT Tourism Team.

### **Appendices**

- 54 None.

### **List of Background Papers**

- 55 Gnoll Estate Country Park Masterplan, Cabinet Board, 25/11/20
- 56 Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre Valleys Regional Park Gateway Project, Cabinet Board, 11/11/20
- 57 Neath Port Talbot Discovery Clusters Marketing Campaign, Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board, 07/06/19

### **Officer Contact**

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