



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CABINET
BOARD

25 February 2022

Report of the Head of Property and Regeneration
Simon Brennan

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: Glynneath

Waterfall Country Park and Ride Evaluation

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an evaluation of the Waterfall Country Park and Ride Pilot scheme which was delivered between July 2021 and September 2021.
2. To establish whether the Waterfall Country Park and Ride Pilot should continue to be funded for a further two summer seasons in order to attempt to ease parking pressures at Pontneddfechan whilst a permanent solution is further scoped out.

Executive Summary

3. This report provides a summary of available data relating to the operation of the Waterfall Country Park and Ride pilot project which highlights usage data and visitor feedback.
4. The report also summarises general feedback in relation to the car park location at Lancaster Close and summarises the costs associated with delivery of the scheme during the summer of 2021.
5. The report sets out two options for the future of the Park and Ride Pilot Project for Members' decision. Option 1: Do not extend the pilot, or Option 2: Extend the pilot for two further seasons.

Background

Waterfall Country Visitor Pressures

6. Over the past few years, parking pressures have created significant issues for residents within Pontneddfechan. The coronavirus pandemic; coupled with stay home/ local guidance and the popularity of visitor generated content on social media platforms, has further intensified visitor pressures.
7. Neath Port Talbot CBC sits on the Waterfall Country Partnership which aims to achieve a co-ordinated approach to the management and future promotion of the range of waterfalls which make up 'Waterfall Country'.
8. The partnership consists of a range of partners including; Brecon Beacons National Park, Natural Resources Wales, Neath Port

Talbot Council, Powys County Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and the new community organisation 'Waterfall Country Cymru' which includes members from the range of Community Council's which are located within the Waterfall Country boundary.

9. In order to ease these issues the Waterfall Country Partnership has explored the feasibility of a range of large and small scale measures to manage parking across the waterfalls area. One such measure, which was agreed for implementation by Members in May 2021, was the introduction of a Park and Ride service for the summer of 2021.

Waterfall Country Park and Ride Service

10. The Park and Ride Service offered the following provision between 17th July 2021 and 5th September 2021;
 - Started at Lancaster Close Car Park in Glynneath, stopping at each bus stop between this location and the Village Hall in Pontneddfechan (and back again). 10 stops in total. The full round trip took no more than 16 minutes.
 - Operated half hourly between the hours 9:00-12:00 and 14:00-16.30 on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Monday during the summer holidays.
 - Was free to use in 2021 with the intention of starting to change parking behaviours.
 - Research was undertaken during the pilot to build up data on how the service is used and what charges would be tolerated in future years.

Usage Data

11. Appendix 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the usage of the Park and Ride Service during the period of operation (17 days).

12. In total, across the period of operation, the service was used 456 times (please note this includes return journeys from Pontneddfechan to Glynneath).
13. The average number of uses of the service per day was 26.
14. The most used services were at 14:00, 11:30 and 15:45 daily.
15. The busiest date of operation was Sunday 8th August with 67 passengers throughout the day. It was noted that the Brecon Beacons overflow car parks in other locations were closed on this date.
16. The Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNPA) overflow car parks were also closed on the following dates due to waterlog issues; 7th, 14th, 15th and 22nd of August.

User Research

17. As part of the pilot BBNPA commissioned a research company, called Strategic Research and Insight, to undertake a survey to gain the views of users of the service and their price sensitivity to paying for the service.
18. The results need to be treated with an element of caution due to the small sample size achieved, however 25 detailed face-to-face surveys were conducted as part of the research exercise.
19. The results of the survey indicate that;
 - 19.1. In general, awareness of the Park and Ride scheme seemed to be found through social media or word of mouth. Some users had heard about it through other means, such as the

Brecon Beacons website, National Trust, posters and billboards on-street, and even the Tourist Information Centre in Brecon.

19.2. The service typically took visitors to sites they appeared to already be familiar with, with 14 passengers having visited six times or more in the last 5 years, and more commonly stopping at Pontneddfechan to visit Sgwd Gwladys (18 passengers).

19.3. The top five reasons for using the service were;

- Convenient to home (9) – indicating use by local residents
- To enjoy the scenery/ added to the experience (7),
- Curiosity/ saw it advertised (6),
- Less stress (6)
- Don't drive (5).

19.4. Visitors who had purposely wanted to use the service largely rated the service 'location' as 'very good' (22), and they too thought the 'safety and security' is 'very good' (21). 'Ease of parking' didn't seem to be an issue and neither did 'finding a seat' or 'driver knowledge'. However, 'signage' seemed to be a problem for some (8), with these visitors rating it 'very poor' or 'poor'.

19.5. Whilst 24 of the visitors surveyed said they would 'very likely' use the park and ride service again, they gave some suggestions as to what would boost their likelihood of using it. The top five ideas were:

- Goes to the start of the Four Falls trail (12) – outside of NPT

- Extended service (7)
- Run later into the evening (7)
- Better signage (5)
- Additional stop options (4).

19.6. 22 of the 25 respondents said that they would be prepared to pay to use the park and ride. The average price they are prepared to pay is £3.25.

19.7. Research has shown that there is a general consensus of the 25 visitors surveyed that they would use the park and ride service again.

Park and Ride Location

20. In addition to the convenient location of Glynneath, just off the A465; part of the motivation for locating a park and ride service at Glynneath was to direct more footfall, and visitor spending, into the town centre.
21. Lancaster Close Car Park was identified as the preferred base for the Park and Ride service in consultation with the local Members for Glynneath.
22. This car park, which offers approximately 40 spaces had been selected as it is generally under utilised on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays and it was felt that locating the service here would direct more footfall into the town centre.
23. Prior to commencement of the service it is understood (via comments on social media and to local Members) that the local community were somewhat concerned about the selected location at Lancaster Close. Concerns related to the suitability of the car

park for the perceived high number of cars that would use the service and concerns about visitor parking behaviour.

24. The car park did not reach capacity on any of the 17 days of the Park and Ride's operation and whilst this may be because usage was relatively low, there were plans in place to direct cars to alternative parking spots within the town should Lancaster Close reach capacity.
25. Positive feedback was also received (on social media and directly to staff on site) relating to welcoming the potentially increased footfall within the town centre and utilising the car park for the purpose of the Park and Ride.
26. Glynneath Leisure Centre Car Park was also originally considered as a possible location for the Park and Ride base, however this car park was deemed unsuitable as the facility is already busy during weekends and bank holidays and there would not be sufficient car parking capacity remaining to cater for users of the Park and Ride Service.
27. Some antisocial behaviour was experienced at Lancaster Close during weekdays when the Park and Ride service was not operational, however it is understood that this is an ongoing issue at this location.
28. The nature of antisocial behaviour included;
 - Traffic cones which were in place to enable sufficient turning capacity for the bus were regularly moved, damaged or stolen from the site.

- Temporary signage, which consisted of two weighted display boards were vandalised and damaged beyond repair.
29. The cost associated with the above damage was minimal, however significant amounts of staff time were required to regularly visit the site to ensure the safety of car park users by removing damaged items.
30. Overall, despite instances of antisocial behaviour, the location at Lancaster Close Car Park was able to cope well with the demands seen for the service last summer, and is capable of handling higher volumes of cars.
31. If Members opt to extend the Park and Ride pilot to run for a further two seasons, the Lancaster Close car park should be utilised, particularly in consideration of the following;
- The car park did not reach capacity at any point during the pilot exercise.
 - There is scope, subject to securing funding, to expand the car parking provision at this location if the service was to become established.
 - There would be a significant cost associated with the design and installation of signage to any new temporary location (circa £10,000).
 - Operation of the service from the Lancaster Close site can be monitored for any negative community impact if the service is delivered in future years.

Delivery Costs

32. In total the cost for delivery of the Park and Ride Pilot Project was £13,831.87, this can be broken down as follows;

Table 1: Park and Ride Costs

<u>Item</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Delivery of the park and ride bus service	£3,561.50
Design and installation of Highways signage leading to Lancaster Close Car Park (one off capital cost)	£9,969.87
Promotional signage and digital marketing	£300.00
TOTAL	£13,831.37

33. The Welsh Government Hardship Fund funded £13,531.37 of the total cost of this scheme.
34. The £300 cost of promotional signage and marketing were covered through existing NPTCBC marketing budgets and by Waterfall Country partners.
35. If members opt to extend the Park and Ride Pilot into future years and to do so from the original base at Lancaster Close Car Park, the associated costs would not need to take account of Highways signage as this signage has been put in storage for future use.
36. The anticipated costs for the delivery of the service across a similar period in future years could be estimated in the region of **£5,500 to £7,000 per year**. This cost includes the operation of the service itself (subject to quotation), the installation, removal and storage of Highways signage, onsite timetable displays and promotional activities.

37. Although the costs per journey, based on 2021 data, would still be high, it is anticipated that as the service builds momentum visitor usage will increase.

Community Impact

38. Although value for money is an important consideration as part of this evaluation, the potential positive impact of the service on the community of Pontneddfechan should also play a part in decision making.
39. Due to the relatively low level of usage among visitors during 2021 it was not possible to evidence a significant impact on the reduction of traffic levels heading into Pontneddfechan.
40. Also worth noting is the increased availability of paid for parking options on land at Pontneddfechan during 2021, this parking provision is very much part of the overall solution to parking pressures within Waterfall Country.
41. During 2021, due to extensions to permitted development rights as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, the local landowner was able to offer their field for parking for an additional 28 days (56 days in total). The same allowance does not apply in 2022 where permitted development rights will revert back to 28 days.
42. The return to the 28 day limit under permitted development could result in a lack of supply of paid for parking provision for some of the summer season, any reduction in parking provision at Pontneddfechan will further compound pressures for local residents.

43. It is understood that local members received positive feedback from residents in relation to the pilot and there was a marked reduction in complaints from local residents during the summer of 2021. Complaints are likely to increase should no alternative parking provision be offered.

Options for Member Consideration

44. There are two options available to members for consideration:
45. **Option 1: Do not extend the pilot exercise for the Waterfall Country Park and Ride Service.**
46. Option 1 would not see the service run again in 2022 or 2023 and visitor parking options would continue to be offered on the Highway (all year) and on private land (for up to 28 days per year).
47. Option 1 is the lowest cost option, however the Council is likely to see an increase in complaints from residents due to irresponsible parking, and the visitor experience at Pontneddfechan may be affected by lack of parking provision.
48. **Option 2: To extend the Waterfall Country Park and Ride Pilot for a further two summer seasons.**
49. Option 2 would offer visitors a free of charge Park and Ride service from Lancaster Close Car Park on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Monday during the school summer holiday in 2022 and 2023.
50. Option 2 would require NPTCBC to at least part fund the scheme as the service has not yet established as a viable paid for parking option.

51. Option 2 would provide alternative parking arrangements for the summer of 2022 and 2023 and would provide local residents with some reassurance that alternative options are available to visitors whilst a permanent parking solution is scoped out.
52. If Option 2 is agreed by Members, it is proposed that the service;
 - Should be part funded by NPTCBC for the 2022 and 2023 summer seasons whilst the service builds momentum. In this instance officers would approach Waterfall Country partners for a contribution to the cost of delivery.
 - A visitor giving mechanism is developed whereby users can make a donation to the cost of their journey (subject to reasonable costs for a solution to be developed).
 - Further research, with a wider audience and larger sample size, is undertaken to establish price sensitivity and likely future use.
 - That the service is offered as an alternative parking option for visitors to Waterfall Country whilst proposals for a permanent parking solution are fully scoped out.

Financial Impacts

53. There are no associated financial impacts if Option 1 is selected.
54. If Members select Option 2 the estimated costs for the scheme will be in the region of **£5,500 to £7,000 per year** (subject to quotation). NPTCBC would meet some of this cost via the Tourism budget, with the remaining costs to be sourced from partners.

Integrated Impact Assessment

55. A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The first stage assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required.
56. The proposal will not have any adverse impacts on people with protected characteristics. If Option 2 is selected by Members the proposal will have a positive impact on wellbeing objectives and sustainable development principles.

Valleys Communities Impacts

57. If Option 2 is selected by Members the proposal will have a positive impact on the town of Glynneath.
58. If Option 2 is selected by Members the Park and Ride pilot will act to ease some of the weekend parking pressures in the village of Pontneddfechan during the summer of 2022 and 2023.
59. If Option 2 is selected by Members, locating the pilot Park and Ride service within Glynneath town centre will encourage footfall into the town centre and encourage visitors to spend money within the local economy.

Workforce Impacts

60. No impacts.

Legal Impacts

61. No impacts.

Risk Management Impacts

62. If Option 2 is selected by Members a detailed risk assessment will be carried out in relation to the running this service in close consultation with the NPTCBC Health and Safety Officers.

Consultation

63. This proposal has been subject to ongoing consultation with the local Members for Glynneath who have expressed support for the original Park and Ride pilot project.
64. This proposal has been discussed with the Waterfall Country Partnership which consists of members from Brecon Beacons National Park, Natural Resources Wales, Neath Port Talbot Council, Powys County Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and the community organisation 'Waterfall Country Cymru' which includes members from the range of Community Council's which are located within the Waterfall Country boundary.

Recommendations

65. Having had due regard to the first stage Integrated Impact Assessment, it is recommended that Members **approve Option 2**, to extend the Waterfall Country Park and Ride Pilot project to run from Lancaster Close Car Park on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Monday for the school summer holidays of 2022 and 2023.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

66. By extending the Waterfall Country Park and Ride Pilot project NPTCBC will be able to offset some of the foreseeable parking pressures which may be experienced at Pontneddfechan during the forthcoming summer seasons.
67. Although there is a significant cost to NPTCBC, and our partners, associated with delivering Option 2, by continuing the scheme whilst a permanent option is scoped out we have the potential to improve the quality of life of local residents and improve the visitor experience within Waterfall Country.
68. If the pilot project ends after one year of operation we will not have sufficient data (both qualitative and quantitative) on which to base a more comprehensive evaluation of the measure as part of an overall solution to parking pressures within Waterfall Country.

Implementation of Decision

69. The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices

70. Appendix 1: Waterfall Country Park and Ride Usage Data
71. Appendix 2: First Stage IIA Screening Form

List of Background Papers

72. First Stage IIA Screening Form: Waterfall Country Park and Ride Evaluation (Appendix 2)

73. Proposed Waterfall Country Park and Ride Pilot Report, Regeneration and Sustainable Development Board, 14th May 2021.

Officer Contact

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