

# Hiraeth.

## PONTNEDDFECHAN LEVELLING UP PROJECT COMMUNITY CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORT

Pontneddfechan | Pontneathvaughan Rd | Glynneath | Neath | SA11 5NR



Planning Solutions Consulting  
Experts in visitor experiences

Hiraeth.



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*Aerial view of the focus area for development, lower Pontneddfechan village*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Planning Solutions Consulting Limited and Hiraeth Architecture have been commissioned to carry out a module of primary research and manage a series of workshops to help inform the early concept designs for the 'Pontneddfechan Hub' project, which has secured funding from the Levelling Up Fund.

The primary research is based upon an online survey, which was designed by Planning Solutions Consulting and Hiraeth Architecture. The survey was promoted by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and ran from the 25th of September to the 13th of November 2023 and generated 157 responses. The survey was available in English and Welsh.

Alongside this, Hiraeth Architecture held 3 'drop-in' workshop sessions in the area to gain feedback on the early concept design proposals.

It should be noted that the survey was likely to have been completed by people who also attended the drop-in workshops, before they had a chance to interact with the scheme through the workshops.



## 2.0 SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

On the following pages we set out the key findings based on the views of survey participants.

### 2.1 Participants

54% of participants are residents of Pontneddfechan, a further 29% are people living within Neath Port Talbot County Borough and 12% live either within the counties of Powys or Rhondda Cynon Taff counties. 4% were day visitors living outside of the counties of Neath Port Talbot, Powys or Rhondda Cynon Taff. Less than 1% are tourists staying outside of Neath Port Talbot County Borough.<sup>1</sup>

98% of participants either live in or have visited Pontneddfechan. Please see **Appendix One** for demographic data on participants.

### 2.2 Proposed development proposals

A number of project interventions for Pontneddfechan are being considered by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and the design team. These are early-stage concept designs for package of 'interventions', which have been used to secure funding from the Levelling Up Fund. They relate to:

1. Car parking and traffic management
2. Improvements to the public realm
3. A community and visitor hub with a provision for a community / farm shop and toilets
4. Small-scale visitor accommodation

Participants were asked to consider the different options and to identify the scale of their support or opposition for each development option.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note figures have been rounded

## 2.2.1 Car parking and traffic management

### Car parking

The option is focussed on creating additional car parking space to help alleviate the current issues of problem parking and the introduction of traffic calming measures to reduce the speed of vehicles passing through Pontneddfechan.

The car park will be located on the land adjacent to the river and south of the village centre and tucked away discreetly behind the existing Sgwd Gladys Bistro. This will provide permanent parking for cars, coaches and minibuses as well as EV charging facilities.

This will be accessed from Pontneathvaughan Road in accordance with vision splay requirements adjacent to Sgwd Gwladys. The new car park will be unlit, except for the accessible parking area.

The introduction of trees and broad hedgerow planting will help to contribute to nature conservation, increase wildlife corridors and filter views of the hard standing areas. In bringing the tree line forward, the scheme is screened to the southwest side to reduce visual impact on long distance views across the valley basin.

The siting respects the flood map with all works located outside of flood zones 2 and 3 and will safeguard the river and the associated riverbank habitat which will likely provide good refuge and foraging for birds, mammals and amphibians.

55% of participants supported the proposed intervention related to car parking, with 49% strongly supporting it and 6% slightly supporting the scheme. 43% of participants were against the scheme with some 40% definitely opposed to the intervention and 3% were slightly against the intervention. 3% were neutral. Please see Table One below for detail.

Answer option	%
Strongly support	49.0%
Slightly support	5.7%
Neutral (neither support nor oppose)	2.5%
Slightly against	2.5%
Definitely against	40.1%
Don't know	0.0%

Table One: Car parking scheme



## Traffic calming measures

As part of the scheme, traffic calming measures will also be introduced. These could include 20mph speed gateways (roundels set on red surface) and raised table, coloured asphalt surfacing to assist with traffic calming and demarcate pedestrian crossing points.

53% of participants supported the proposed intervention related to traffic calming measures, with 45% strongly supporting it and 8% slightly supporting the scheme. 35% of participants were against the scheme with some 32% definitely opposed to the intervention and 3% were slightly against the intervention. 12% were neutral. Please see Table Two below for detail.

Answer option	%
Strongly support	45.2%
Slightly support	7.6%
Neutral (neither support nor oppose)	12.1%
Slightly against	3.2%
Definitely against	31.8%
Don't know	0.0%

Table Two: Traffic calming measures

### 2.2.2 Improvements to the public realm

This element of the project includes introducing two public spaces and a viewing platform overlooking the River Neath. As part of the project the objective will be to retain, enhance and protect existing vegetation that is ecologically or visually important (i.e., trees and woodland).

Interpretation and clear orientation signage will also be introduced.

#### Creation of public spaces

Two connected 'public squares' either side of Pontneathvaughan Road will be introduced. These will provide spaces for small events such as pop-up markets and outdoor seating. They will also provide connections to the Elidir Trail.

There is quite an even split between those who supported and opposed this intervention. With 48% of participants who supported the proposed intervention related to the creation of public spaces, with 45% strongly supporting it and 3% slightly supporting the scheme. 47% of participants were against the scheme with 44% definitely opposed to the intervention and 3% were slightly against the intervention. 4% were neutral and less than 1% did not know. Please see Table Three below for detail.

Answer option	%
Strongly support	44.6%
Slightly support	3.2%
Neutral (neither support nor oppose)	4.5%
Slightly against	3.2%
Definitely against	43.9%
Don't know	0.6%

*Table Three: Creation of public spaces*

## Viewing platform

The creation of a viewing platform adjacent to the River Neath at the entrance to the Waterfall Trail, would take advantage of important views of the old Pontneddfechan bridge.

46% of participants supported the proposed intervention related to introducing a viewing platform, with 34% strongly supporting and 11% slightly supporting the scheme. 47% of participants were against the scheme with some 38% definitely opposed to the intervention and 8% were slightly against the intervention (rounding adjustments applied). 8% were neutral. Please see Table Four below for detail.

Answer option	%
Strongly support	34.4%
Slightly support	11.5%
Neutral (neither support nor oppose)	7.6%
Definitely against	8.3%
Strongly against	38.2%
Don't know	0.0%

*Table Four: Introduction of a viewing platform*

### 2.2.3 A community and visitor hub

The focus is on creating a community / farm shop which will service both members of the local community and visitors. This also includes the relocation and significant expansion of public toilet provision.

#### Community / farm shop

The proposed community and visitor hub will incorporate a community / farm shop and a light refreshments kiosk with a focus on local produce, basic groceries, and some tourism related retail items.

55% of participants supported the proposed intervention related to introducing a community / farm shop, with 46% strongly supporting it and 8% slightly supporting the scheme. 40% of participants were against the scheme with some 39% definitely opposed to the intervention and 1% were slightly against the intervention. 5% were neutral. Please see Table Five below for detail.

Answer option	%
Strongly support	46.5%
Slightly support	8.3%
Neutral (neither support nor oppose)	5.1%
Slightly against	1.3%
Definitely against	38.9%
Don't know	0.0%

Table Five: Development of a community / farm shop

Participants were also asked whether they would use the community / farm shop – 45% would and 38% would not use the facility. Some 17% of participants may use the community / farm shop.

#### Toilets and associated facilities

The proposal relates to relocating and expansion of the public toilets with an external dog and boot wash-down facility.

62% of participants supported the proposed intervention related to introducing toilets and supporting facilities, with 54% strongly supporting it and 8% slightly supporting the scheme.

34% of participants were against the scheme with some 31% definitely opposed to the intervention and 3% were slightly against the intervention. 4% were neutral. Please see Table Six below for detail.

Answer option	%
Strongly support	54.1%
Slightly support	8.3%
Neutral (neither support nor oppose)	3.8%
Slightly against	3.2%
Definitely against	30.6%
Don't know	0.0%

Table Six: Toilets and supporting facilities

## 2.2.4 Small-scale visitor accommodation

This option is focussed on introducing low impact visitor accommodation with ensuite bedrooms within an accessible building (adjoining the community / farm shop). A landscaped courtyard to the rear of the proposed accommodation building will be introduced, dedicated parking for the accommodation will be allocated within the new proposed car park.

### Visitor accommodation

The building for visitor accommodation is set over two-storeys, which replicates the height of the existing agricultural barn adjacent to Sgwd Gwladys that it replaces. It will include guest accommodation and a communal area incorporating kitchen facilities, which could also be considered a flexible space that might be available for community use or private hire for occasional events.

It is encouraging to note, given the lack of responses from overnight tourists to the survey, that 38% of participants supported the proposed intervention related to introducing overnight visitor accommodation, with 27% strongly supporting it and 11% slightly supporting the scheme. 57% of participants were against the scheme with some 52% definitely opposed to the intervention and 6% were slightly against the intervention. 4% were neutral and less than 1% did not know. Please see Table Seven below for detail.

Participants were asked whether they would stay in the proposed visitor accommodation. 7% stated that they would, 85% that they would not and 8% thought they may. The result is not unsurprising given the low number of responses from overnight staying tourists.

Answer option	%
Strongly support	26.8%
Slightly support	10.8%
Neutral (neither support nor oppose)	4.5%
Slightly against	5.7%
Definitely against	51.6%
Don't know	0.6%

Table Seven: Visitor accommodation

## 2.2.5 Other

Participants were asked whether investment in the facilities described above would encourage them to visit Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan more often or for the first time 41% stated that they would, 54% that it would not and 4% were unsure.

## 2.2.6 Alternative proposals

Participants were asked how the proposals could be revised at Pontneddfechan, which generated a number of responses, however the responses focussed on the key areas below.

There is significant concern that the introduction of the scheme will lead to an [increase in visitor numbers](#) helping to increase the negative impacts which a number of participants feel are directly related to visitors. For example, littering, anti-social behaviour, damage to the footpaths, letting dogs off their leads, leaving dog waste behind, increasing pressure on the emergency services, roadside parking, vehicle movements and spoiling the nature of the village itself.

[Parking](#) is recognised as a key issue. Concerns were raised about the entry/exit point of the proposed car park in relation to the proximity of the nearby bend on Pontneddfechan Road, alongside related noise and air pollution. A parking charge in the car park may encourage people to park along the main road and this will need to be managed. Enforcement is recognised as part of the solution to discourage roadside parking by visitors. The car park would benefit from the introduction of EV charging points.

Congestion was also raised in respect of the proposed car park which could impact on local residents living in Pontneddfechan and the emergency services.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, it was questioned whether there an opportunity to relocate the car park, for example, to the 'area at the traffic lights in Glynneath?'

<sup>2</sup> One participant commented on the parking in Ystradfellte, which is "atrocious" and that this carpark would relieve that

There is a feeling that there is a need for [more engagement](#) with the local community and perhaps there is a feeling, to some degree, that the scheme has been imposed on local residents. There is also a need for some clarity on the proposal e.g. number of car parking spaces available.<sup>3</sup>

It was felt by some research participants that the proposals do not necessarily bring benefits for local residents and are more focussed on the tourist market. [Increasing benefits for local residents](#) should be explored in the future design stages, for example, the introduction of a children's play area, ensuring the EV charging points are available for local residents along with uses such as a studio space for workshops etc. A question was raised as to whether the farm shop could be run by the community - helping to maximise benefits for the community?

The introduction of [tourist accommodation](#) was raised on a limited number of occasions. This is in relation to a number of concerns, for example, from potentially leading to anti-social behaviour by attracting the wrong 'type of visitor' through to encouraging more visitors / tourists to the village (which is seen as an issue), competing with existing accommodation providers (reference was made to approximately 100 existing bed spaces being available). Although, a participant mentioned the potential to include hook-ups points for camper vans and caravans.

Other considerations:

- The impact on the character of the village is a key consideration for some respondents.
- A participant commented that the provision of information could be used to direct visitors away from the honeypot sites to encourage visitors to explore less busy parts of Waterfall Country.
- Public health and safety considerations in relation to visitors were mentioned on a number of occasions, for example, visitors wearing flip flops when walking up the waterfalls.
- A participant felt that a passive house (Passivhaus) building should be considered to ensure the scheme is a 'flagship' eco-project.
- Reported issues of local sewage system capacity and the impact the scheme would have on the current provision.

Whilst there are a number of significant concerns and objections there is some support.

Participants were also asked if they had any [further comments on the proposals](#) and this generated just over 100 responses which we consider below:

There is [some support \(of varying degrees\) for the proposal](#) – with some positive comments. These centre upon maximising enjoyment for visitors, realising potential benefits for the local community including improving the infrastructure, introducing traffic calming measures, helping to manage visitors and providing a shop – which will help to address issues which have been ongoing for a number of years. However, even for participants showing support there were some concerns, for example, around appropriate pricing policy and range of stock sold in the proposed farm shop through to awareness that the investment may draw in additional visitors.

Again, a number of [concerns](#) were raised by participants, particularly around:

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<sup>3</sup> It is recognised that this will emerge as the initial concept designs are developed.

- The potential that the scheme will lead to an increase in visitor numbers (authors' note: a need to emphasise that the project is about 'managing and servicing tourists')
- Negative impacts:
  - On the environment (through the actual physical development itself and potential increase in visitor numbers) and natural beauty, which is a key attraction for residents living in the area and visitors
  - Increased litter
  - Increased usage of the trails leading to further erosion
  - On the character of the village (a special place)
  - Parking issues may not be resolved by creating a paid-for car park
  - Increased vehicle movements leading to congestion on the local road network
  - Related to the construction period
- Recognition of health and safety issues related to crossing Pontneddfechan Road and accessing Waterfall Country (which is not a 'sanitised' environment)
- Feeling of a lack of engagement to date (although several workshops have been hosted after the online survey started)
- Recognition that part of the village is located within Powys County Council and the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park (Brecon Beacons National Park)

Suggestions by participants include introducing a park and ride scheme (which we understand has already been piloted by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council) through to introducing more bins, paying for litter picking patrols, parking enforcement, investment in a play area for children, creating studios for crafters and artists and relocating the parking outside of the village.

THE WORKSHOP ABOUT?

age in the design development, including the opportu  
like to see in the village and to mould the outcome. T  
shop, focused around design thinking - including ident  
blems and understanding users.

RECENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Will the scheme increase visitors?

The concerns of the local community that the sche  
increase visitors is understood, however as part of  
submission to UK government for the Levelling Up  
visitor modelling was undertaken. This showed the  
modest increase would occur naturally without the  
being delivered. The proposals do not intend to en

How many car parking spaces will be created?

This will be confirmed once detailed designs are co  
however it is estimated that the scheme will create  
150 to 230 parking spaces which includes motorbik  
and coach parking to take these vehicles away from  
road. The scheme will also include 13 electric vehicl  
points for use by the community and visitors.

Why are compulsory purchase orders necessary proposals?

In considering options for the scheme a study was ur  
to review where the required car parking numbers co  
accommodated on existing available land, importantly  
access to the entrance to the waterfalls walk. These  
were further restricted to falling within the Neath Port  
boundary as the local authority making the funding ap  
Due to the quantity of the existing cars using the wate  
suitable site was not available without incurring additio  
ongoing management costs. In order to meet the tim  
the Levelling Up Fund a Compulsory Purchase Order p  
has necessarily been initiated. The process is ongoing  
a negotiated agreement is actively being pursued as a  
option in the interim.

How will the farmer farm their land going forwards?

Discussions are ongoing regarding the opportunity to r  
the purchase of the farmland necessary for car parking,  
to alleviate the wider issues expressed by the village. Th  
ongoing use of the farm is forming part of these convert

Why are economic benefits necessary?

The Levelling Up Fund is aimed at local infrastructure pr  
that have a visible impact on people and their community  
that will support economic recovery. Consequently the  
economic benefits are an inherent condition of the fundi  
are a required output of the proposals.

Will the proposals overwhelm the existing drainage in the village?

The drainage solution for the proposals will be designed i  
accordance with the legislative and regulatory requiremen  
This ensures that no additional strain will be placed on exi  
drainage if it cannot be accommodated. The exact detail  
will be developed as the project progresses, but this will b  
required to be demonstrated as part of any planning applic



- PATHWAYS.
- SIGNAGE TO DINAS ROCK.
- RUBBISH
- PARKING SAFETY

ISSUES

- NEEDS
- FACILITIES - WC'S
- SHOP FOR LOCAL PEOPLE
- HIGHLIGHT RESIDENT PARKING.

- STAG / HEN-DO'S
- MOTORHOMES.
- NOISE

CONCERNS

- SIGNAGE.
- POLICING.
- CEGIN BACH. (ALSO IN VILLAGE HALL)
- WHAT'S IN GLYN'NEMTA? SIGNAGE TO OTHER AREAS
- EV CHARGING.

OPPORTUNITIES

- EDUCATIONAL GATEWAY / HUB
- TOURIST INFORMATION
- AWARENESS OF DANGERS

OPPORTUNITIES



NEATH PORT TALBOT



## 3.0 CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS

Hiraeth Architecture were commissioned by Neath Port Talbot Council to facilitate three consultation drop in events in relation to proposals for a new visitor infrastructure centre for Pontneddfechan, forming part of the successful Vale of Neath Heritage Corridor LUF (Levelling Up Fund) application. The events were structured as follows:

### **28th September 2023 – 10:30–17:00 – The Angel Inn, Pontneddfechan**

A free to attend, community drop in event facilitated by bilingual display boards with the aim of explaining the principles of the project as submitted for the LUF application and the subsequent development process. This was attended by Rob Thomas and Michael Plageman of Hiraeth Architecture in conjunction with Karleigh Davies and Delyth Lewis of NPT (Neath Port Talbot Council)

### **23rd October 2023 – 16:00–19:30 – Glynneath Town Hall, Glynneath**

A free to attend, community drop in workshop facilitated by bilingual display boards and engagement material including a plan of the village showing existing boundaries, and labels to facilitate discussions with attendees. Workshops were run on three separate tables by Rob Thomas, Michael Plageman, and Jenny Clemence of Hiraeth Architecture, with Karleigh Davies, Delyth Lewis and Simon Brennan of NPT and Simon Knoyle, Independent Councillor for Glynneath Central and East assisting the running of the event.

### **8th November 2023 – 16:00–19:30 – Village Hall, Pontneddfechan**

Originally planned as a feedback session, this session was amended to be a repeat of the Workshop structure used on the 23rd October to enable a broader engagement. A free to attend, community drop in workshop facilitated by bilingual display boards and engagement material including a plan of the village showing existing boundaries, and labels to facilitate discussions with attendees. Workshops were run on three separate tables by Rob Thomas, Michael Plageman, and Jenny Clemence of Hiraeth Architecture, with Karleigh Davies and Delyth Lewis of NPT and Simon Knoyle, Independent Councillor for Glynneath Central and East assisting the running of the event.

Following the initial community drop in event on 28th September, flyers advertising the subsequent events included a selection of 'Frequently Asked Questions' aimed at clarifying several points raised in the earlier events.

The following is a brief report produced for internal review by Neath Port Talbot County Council summarising the nature of discussion and feedback received during the consultation events. The summary is not exhaustive or a complete record of all points raised and the discussions are intentionally anonymised.

## 3.1 Community Drop-in Event

### The Angel Inn, Pontneddfechan

The community drop in event was very well attended with consistent attendance throughout the day and a significant dwell time. Attendees were from both Glynneath and Pontneddfechan, with a marked difference in the opening opinions of both. The consultation team were able to engage in discussion with most attendees.

It is fair to say that those from Glynneath were, in the main, receptive to the principals of the proposals, whilst those from Pontneddfechan voiced a strong initial concern. A minority of the discussions were hostile reaching a point of confrontation, particularly when focused on land ownership. There was generally an agreement that the impact of tourism had increased to a detrimental level during the period of and since Covid, with this impacting the daily lives of the community and resulting in an increased risk to the safety of visitors. Uncontrolled parking, traffic and generally inconsiderate behaviour was cited by the majority but there were differing opinions voiced on the regularity of the issues. Predominantly in relation to those attending from Glynneath, there was a reasonably common feeling that the project and associated funding presented an opportunity to address existing issues in the village.

Concerns raised regarding the proposals followed consistent themes with responses ranging from points for further consideration to highlighting cause for strong objection. These include:

- A lack of consultation undertaken to date,
- The compulsory purchase of land – and in particular the necessity for smaller parcels of land around the village square to be included,
- The introduction of a bunkhouse which is considered likely to attract stag and hen do's, increasing antisocial behaviour / noise, and competing with existing overnight accommodation,
- Impact on immediately neighbouring properties particularly regarding overlooking from new public spaces and noise,
- Proposals will provide additional attraction as a destination resulting in increased visitor numbers,
- Strong scepticism related to the viability of paid parking to solve existing antisocial parking issues,
- Potential of increased issues relating to the meeting of pedestrians with the highway, specifically focused around the development area,
- Concerns associated with overloading the existing infrastructure including the existing foul drainage system, of which considerable existing issues were described,
- The loss of the rural feel of the village associated with the existing agricultural use and current perception of open countryside.

It emerged that ahead of the event, a community meeting had been held in the Village Hall, Pontneddfechan, in response to the advertisement of consultation events. Based on conversations with attendees throughout the day, it was identified that there was a level of misinformation being shared in the community that did not wholly reflect the proposals or the work undertaken to date. This included specifically: a misunderstanding regarding the stage of development and resolution that proposals were at; the purpose or intention of the consultation events; the process that was being

undertaken as part of the scheme development; and the constraints of the LUF award including the requirement for an economic benefit to the area.

On balance the consultation team were able to conclude -

- those who engaged in discussion recognised the issues faced by the village – including managing existing visitor numbers and car parking – although they were typically suspicious of the intentions of proposed solutions,
- further discussions are essential to provide a broader understanding of the status, context and aspirations of the project and the Levelling-Up Fund award, whilst addressing established concerns with the role of the local authority and communication,
- there are material considerations with the existing proposals which require further design development, and / or omission, and detailed investigation,
- land ownership is a critical concern for the community,
- the majority perception / view of the community represents a considerable risk to the viability of the scheme.

Specific points of note raised during the day include –

- Glynneath Angling, who own the fishing rights adjacent to the area suggested for development. It was highlighted that they require access to be retained and improved. It was further confirmed that they own both the fishing and land on the path to the north east of the Angel pub. They have intentions to position a mobile sandwich bar at the entrance to waterfall country to enhance their offering. Whilst it is noted that this sits outside of the current red-line boundary, it is a material consideration going forwards and one that the Angling club would appreciate assistance with if possible.
- Detailed investigation is recommended into the existing foul drainage infrastructure serving the village which is described as already exceeding capacity.
- Paths within the Waterfall Country are described as requiring immediate attention and conservation.
- Areas within the development boundary are utilised by the emergency services to access the Waterfall Country path network to provide critical care including a set down area for helicopters.

## WHAT IS THE WORKSHOP ABOUT?

This is an opportunity to engage in the design development, including the opportunity to interact with what you would like to see in the village and to mould the outcome. This is a hands-on, activity based workshop, focused around design thinking - including identifying the problems and understanding users.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Please note that these questions represent a sample of those asked at the initial drop-in session. Following the workshop on the 8th November a feedback report will be produced, which will summarise the in-person workshop sessions and online feedback.

### **Why are we seeing people on site?**

Residents will see some activity on site over the coming months as surveys are being undertaken.

### **How can a contractor be appointed if the scheme isn't finalised?**

The work was tendered on a design and build basis which means detailed design happens after the contractor has been appointed.

### **What is the programme for the development?**

The draft delivery programme shows that post community consultation the scheme will be submitted for planning permission in April/ May 2024 with a view to commencing works on site in October 2024. Once the contractor is on site the works will take approximately 60 weeks to deliver.

### **What opportunities are there to engage in the process?**

In addition to the workshop on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023 there will be a follow up feedback and discussion session in November 2023. As the project proposals develop there will subsequently be a Pre-Application Community Consultation and latterly the opportunity to comment on the formal planning application.

### **Why has consultation taken until now to happen?**

Consultation has been ongoing for over 10 years within the village in order to identify issues that are faced by the community. The initial outline scheme presented at the previous consultation was developed in order to attract funding from the Levelling Up Fund. This aims to invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK whilst delivering on economic outputs for communities. Without the allocation of the funding confirming that a scheme could meet the economic requirements, a potential project for the village did not exist.

### **Has the scheme been proposed with the community, not just visitors in mind?**

Easing the pressures felt by the local community is at the centre of this proposal. The negative impact of visitors on local residents has been increasing and the scheme is designed to act on the feedback of residents to manage these impacts more effectively through a permanent parking solution, improving the safety of the highway and encouraging visitors to act in a more responsible way. The scheme includes a community or farm shop in order to put in place provision which has been historically lost within the village and in a location where it is more visible to visitors. Visitor accommodation has been included in order to generate an economic output which will not only mean that visitors spend more money in the local economy but also create employment and business opportunities within the village.

### **What are the benefits of the proposals to tourists?**

Tourists will benefit from an informed and well signposted approach to the waterfalls that will assist in their safe experience of the area, together with highlighting local considerations. This will include clear and obvious car parking with capacity to manage the current demand, together with information boards regarding the waterfalls area and surrounding community.

### **Will the scheme increase visitors?**

The concerns of the local community that the scheme may increase visitors is understood, however as part of the submission to UK government for the Levelling Up Fund detailed visitor modelling was undertaken. This showed that a very modest increase would occur naturally without the scheme being delivered. The proposals do not intend to enhance this.

### **How many car parking spaces will be created?**

This will be confirmed once detailed designs are complete however it is estimated that the scheme will create an additional 150 to 230 parking spaces which includes motorbike, minibus and coach parking to take these vehicles away from the main road. The scheme will also include 13 electric vehicle charging points for use by the community and visitors.

### **Why are compulsory purchase orders necessary for the proposals?**

In considering options for the scheme a study was undertaken to review where the required car parking numbers could be accommodated on existing available land, importantly with good access to the entrance to the waterfalls walk. These options were further restricted to falling within the Neath Port Talbot boundary as the local authority making the funding application. Due to the quantity of the existing cars using the waterfalls, a suitable site was not available without incurring additional ongoing management costs. In order to meet the timescales of the Levelling Up Fund a Compulsory Purchase Order process has necessarily been initiated. The process is ongoing, however, a negotiated agreement is actively being pursued as a preferred option in the interim.

### **How will the farmer farm their land going forwards?**

Discussions are ongoing regarding the opportunity to negotiate the purchase of the farmland necessary for car parking, in order to alleviate the wider issues expressed by the village. The ongoing use of the farm is forming part of these conversations.

### **Why are economic benefits necessary?**

The Levelling Up Fund is aimed at local infrastructure projects that have a visible impact on people and their communities, and that will support economic recovery. Consequently the economic benefits are an inherent condition of the funding and are a required output of the proposals.

### **Will the proposals overwhelm the existing drainage system in the village?**

The drainage solution for the proposals will be designed in accordance with the legislative and regulatory requirements. This ensures that no additional strain will be placed on existing drainage if it cannot be accommodated. The exact detail of this will be developed as the project progresses, but this will be required to be demonstrated as part of any planning application.

*Extract from publication flyers advertising the event dates and locations*

## 3.2 Community Workshop 01

### Glynneath

Following the initial drop-in event, a community workshop was held in Glynneath. Attendance levels were much reduced on those of the initial drop-in event. The majority of attendees had attended the Community Drop-in event with new attendees typically being from the Glynneath. A small number did not live locally but stated an interest typically due to association with organisations operating in the area including neighbouring authorities. The consultation team were advised that the reduced attendance reflected short notice advertisement of the event and its location in Glynneath.

The room was set out with 3 meeting tables each with a plan of the village to promote discussion on the opportunities and constraints that the LUF monies presented. 6 workshops were held in total across three tables. Discussions typically attempted to follow a structure of –

- Introduction to the LUF award, project aspiration and current status,
- Existing issues: i.e. what are the existing issues and needs in the community
- Proposed scheme: Observations; ideas; opportunities; queries and concerns associated with the existing published proposals (i.e. LUF concept scheme).

Most parties engaged in a varied discussion, often wanting to focus on issues with the proposed scheme, but generally engaging in the structure of the event. Most attendees did not express hostility to the proposals to the extent of the first event with an increased proportion expressing a consistent agreement with the issues impacting on the local area. All agreed that issues have increased in recent years reflecting the increase in visitor numbers. The following responses were voiced and are summarised as follows:

#### Existing Issues

- The boundary of NPT and Powys is a significant problem affecting infrastructure, funding and considerations such as enforcement with respondents describing the village as overlooked by authorities.
- Of particular concern is the performance of existing foul drainage systems and particularly the existing treatment plant located in Mellte Avenue which is described as frequently breaching safety standards.
- Pontneathvaughan Road is the only route in and out of the community. At peak periods there are a lot of cars, creating congestion and affecting for example the local agricultural industry.
- The behaviour of visitors is a major problem – theft / antisocial parking / litter / dog mess / walking in the highway were all described as commonplace. The principal of car parking throughout the village including on and across private driveways, particularly at peak times (which varied by respondent, but could be surmised as weekends and statutory holidays). Associated issues including restricted access for emergency vehicles and reduction in width of pavements due to parked cars. Emptying of cars including associated outdoor kit directly into the highway were all cited as generating a major impact and safety concern.
- Visitor safety and respect of the natural environment was voiced with great concern. Visitors are often improperly dressed or unprepared for the walking environment and unaware of weather conditions and the risks presented by the water course. The result is a perceived

increase in critical incidents and an overwhelmingly negative and unwelcome judgement of the visitor population.

- The associated deterioration and lack of appropriate maintenance and conservation of the Waterfall Trails was raised as a major concern.
- A lack of community facilities was raised by several individuals, typically referencing the lack of success with attempts to provide a new children's play area, to replace one prior removed.

### **Concerns with LUF proposals**

- Generally, the proposal is targeted at meeting the needs of tourists above the needs of the local community.
- There is considerable scepticism regarding how a development under NPT jurisdiction can bring economic benefit to a village largely under Powys jurisdiction. A large concern that any money generated will go to and be spent in NPT with little to no ongoing return to the community.
- Pontneathvaughan Road is the only route in and out of the community. At peak periods there are a lot of cars, but at other times there are fewer/none. The new proposal could lead to a 24/7 peak presence including a large car park and buildings. Currently, at non-peak times the village feels like a village, and this may not be the case going forwards.
- 230 car parking spaces is far too many and will not be used if ticketing is implemented.
- The access point by the proposed car park/ buildings, and the area distinguished as a public space for crossing the highway, has limited visibility and could consequently be dangerous for cars and pedestrians, whilst also increasing congestion at a confluence of village activity.
- The aesthetics of the current proposal are too dark.
- The proposal will remove an important green area with agricultural function which is essential to the rural feel of the village.
- There is potential that the scheme will increase litter.
- The scheme would attract more people to the village.
- The cost of produce in any shop would be excessive for locals and not offer the type of product that they would meet their needs.
- The proposals would attract stag and hen-do groups, motorhomes and generate general noise.
- The existing drainage and sewer system could not accommodate the development.
- Proposals would result in a loss of biodiversity and generate light pollution.
- The development is not in the best location and would have less impact if relocated.
- The development will create opportunities for overlooking neighbouring properties and therefore result in a loss of privacy.

### **Agreed Needs**

- Some measure of parking is necessary.
- Traffic wardens are necessary to control parking on the streets even with a dedicated car park.
- Additional toilets are required.
- Improved drainage in the area is required.
- A local convenience shop could be beneficial if appropriately priced and selling useful everyday items.

- Signage giving awareness of the dangers of the area. This could take the form of an educational gateway or hub.
- Improved control of the public on and around the highway.

## Opportunities

- Alternative locations for the car park could be considered including to the western entrance to the village, whilst the existing parking layby could be used as an attractive walk to the village centre.
- A bus service from Glynneath could move parking away from the village.
- Parking should be free or tourists will find other locations to park and will continue to cause a nuisance. Cameras and / or enforcement however could assist in managing this.
- EV charging should be included as part of the proposals.
- A specific park warden is essential. To overcome the Local Authority boundary issue a Community Interest Group could be set up with control over the warden.
- The character of village is important and should be reflected in any architectural proposal. How to screen the car park from the houses to the east – who currently have views over the grazing fields?
- The massing of the buildings is important – single storey was largely felt to be appropriate.
- A park for children could be included as part of the proposal to replace the previously removed village park. There is a strong preference for this to be in several alternative locations within the village.
- A café or kiosk serving drinks and snacks.
- Shops could be located in their historic location at the centre of the village. This may include seasonal pop-ups.
- Workshops or artist's studios could be included as part of the proposals.

## Other Key Questions Raised

- What has changed since the landowner put in for a housing application on the proposed site? A whole lever arch folder of objections from the village re. this proposal and the Council turned it down. But now the Council seem okay with a larger development and car park here?
- What consultation, including specifically within the community, has informed the proposals and why was the community not engaged earlier?
- How are Compulsory Purchase Orders justified?

In summary, the event provided a wide range of feedback some of which was encouraging. The consultation team concluded that although there was considerable opposition a) the foundational principles of the scheme in regards existing issues and needs were generally accurate and acute and b) most concerns could be addressed through investigative and design development stages in order to meet the rigorous demands of statutory consents appropriately.

Generally, it could be concluded that economic benefit, in terms of personal, community or business, was more prevalent in discussions with attendees that were not direct inhabitants of Pontneddfechan.

### 3.3 Community Workshop 02

#### Pontneddfechan

To provide a further opportunity for discussion within the village, a second community workshop was held in the Village Hall at Pontneddfechan following a similar format to the Glynneath event. Attendance levels were good, but not to the level of the original drop-in event. Attendees were largely from Pontneddfechan and the immediately surrounding area including bordering areas in Rhondda Cynon Taff. Most attendees had been to one of the previous consultation events.

Again, 6 workshops were held in total. Discussions typically attempted to follow a structure of –

- Introduction to the LUF award, project aspiration and current status,
- Existing issues: i.e. what are the existing issues and needs in the community
- Proposed scheme. Observations, ideas, opportunities, queries and concerns associated with the existing published proposals i.e. LUF concept scheme.

The structure of the workshops was frequently overwhelmed by individuals wanting to express their concerns with the proposals however most generally engaged in the structure of the discussion.

Responses generally matched those summarised previously. The following responses were voiced and are summarised as follows:

#### Existing Issues

- Existing parking practices by visitors to the area.
- The management of visitors to the village.
- Young / under prepared people using the waterfalls inconsiderately / dangerously, including late at night.
- Access for helicopters and emergency services in the event of emergencies.

#### Concerns with LUF proposals

- A shop would not be financially viable in the village.
- A lack of joined up thinking with adjacent local authorities in procuring the scheme.
- There is a covenant on the proposed land that means it can only be used for agricultural purposes.
- The helicopter would not be able to land in emergencies.
- The proposed viewing platform would overlook existing houses.
- The existing sewerage system would be overwhelmed.
- Overnight parking and antisocial behaviour in any proposed car park.
- Noise pollution and smells, particularly from toilets and bunkhouse.
- The effect on house prices.
- There will be too much accommodation in the village. It was noted that bunkhouses exist at Clyngwyn and Ystradfelte.
- Workshops / studios could undermine ideas for the use of the Village Hall.
- Quantity and visibility of car parking – perception that it will be tarmacking open countryside.



## Agreed Needs

- Management of people accessing the waterfalls.
- Although disputed, a convenience shop for local people.
- An information centre for the waterfalls area and how visitors should conduct themselves.
- Larger / improved toilet and changing facilities with improved drainage.
- A play park for children in the village.
- Signposting, bins and benches.

## Opportunities

- A car park to fund policing of parking in the village.
- The allowance of overflow car parking in the existing agricultural field.
- Consideration of relocating parking elsewhere in the village, particularly to the western entrance to the village.
- Artist workshops and / or flexible office accommodation.
- Residential parking areas.
- Can views to the proposed site from adjacent housing be buffered.
- The existing Chapel in the village is available for sale and could form part of a scheme.
- A community shop could be incorporated.
- Flexible units that could accommodate a variety of alternative commercial activities including artist workshops, childcare services, outdoor activity providers, café / eating establishment.
- Opportunities to engage with local suppliers / producers including groceries.
- Seasonal temporary pop ups in the centre of the village.
- EV charging.

In summary, the second workshop session reflected particularly the concerns and issues raised in earlier sessions. In some cases there remained a level of hostility towards the consultation team and NPT and there also remained a considerable level of misinformation and assumption that was having a negative impact on views. Generally, however workshops were successful in generating an active and valuable discussion with most parties and encouraging attendees to consider the potential value that could be achieved with the awarded funding. Most accepted that some issues could be addressed.



### Eborac Trail

A 100-mile trail



### Eborac Trail

100 miles of scenic walking

Discover the history and heritage of the Yorkshire Dales

Experience the beauty of the Yorkshire Dales

Discover the history and heritage of the Yorkshire Dales

Experience the beauty of the Yorkshire Dales

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Experience the beauty of the Yorkshire Dales

## 4.0 CONCLUSIONS

It is worth pointing out that communication with relevant parties and communities has been presented as an issue in advance of and during the consultation process. This has invariably influenced the approach of those attending the events, with particular concerns regarding the LUF application being made without perceived consultation being undertaken. It is understood that this initially has been due to the deadlines presented by the LUF process and the limited timescales to meet these. It was also generally communicated during the consultation process that without the funding being in place, there was no potential of a project to address these needs and subsequently no consultation to be undertaken. Furthermore, it was reiterated that the brief for the proposal had been developed in response to surveys undertaken in the village over the last 10 years. Further clarity in communication of this is required to distinguish that the surveys undertaken over the last 10 years have informed the need for parking proposals rather than building proposals.

In general, there is an acceptance from the community that there are existing issues in Pontneddfechan caused by unmanaged and poorly informed visitors. The solution to this varies, but it is reasonable to say that there is understanding that if nothing is done the problem will become worse, and that the LUF offers a unique opportunity to address the problems. There remained a predominant ideal that the recent visitor appeal needs to reset to a lesser historic position and that any proposal to control or manage visitors would be contrary to this and would result in increased numbers. It is essential that moving forward there is an acknowledgement and respect that the community did not ask for the growth in tourism and very few realise any benefit from tourism or have a wish to. It is also notable that there is a very limited interest from the immediate community in the potential economic benefit associated with and facilitated by the proposals. Beyond realising some broader community benefit there was less personal interest in the potential of job creation and enterprise than was expected.



## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultation requires reflection from NPT to take on board the comments made by affected and interested parties. Further investigation should –

- Explore the viability of alternative locations for car parking and highway access including the routing of pedestrians.
- Consider an alternative mix of accommodation and commercial function that would result in an equally viable commercial scheme as that presented in the LUF application.
- Undertake a detailed review of the existing foul drainage infrastructure to establish the viability of adding to the existing system. This could benefit the existing community by establishing whether the existing system is performing in accordance with the required standards.
- Consider the addition of community facilities most notably a play area within the development area or offsite.
- Consider the role of a Community Benefit Fund or Cooperative that could fund a community-based workforce to assist and safeguard visitors and / or enforce parking restrictions and help to prevent antisocial behaviour.
- Review the land purchase requirements to ensure that all parts of the current scheme are essential to the delivery of the project objectives.
- Progress detailed enquiry via the pre-application enquiry and pre-application consultation route to engage with all key stakeholders and consultees to ensure that all necessary investigations, surveys and planning considerations are being met with developed design proposals.
- It is essential that the results of these consultations including any further investigations or design development is communicated back to the community to ensure a culture of interaction, visibility and inclusiveness is established around the project.

These investigations might result in a confirmation that the original LUF scheme represents the more balanced scheme. However, being in a position where all viable proposals tabled have also been considered and either incorporated in part or dismissed for valid reasons, will ensure a more robust proposal and justification going forwards. It is recognised that this must all be procured under the backdrop of a limited development period constrained by the LUF timescales, and that any review of the proposals must meet the stringent requirements of the LUF award. However, the benefits of implementing a well-considered and justified scheme that the village will ultimately live with for a considerable time to come, would seem a sensible approach to this transformational proposal.

## APPENDICES

### The Participants

Age of participants	%
Under 16	0.6%
17 - 24	3.8%
25 - 29	7.0%
30 - 39	15.3%
40 - 49	18.5%
50 - 59	22.9%
60 - 74	19.1%
75 - 85	7.6%
86+	0.6%
Prefer not to say	4.5%

Do participants have a disability?	%
No	79.6%
Yes	13.4%
Prefer not to say	7.0%

Sex of participants	%
Female	45.9%
Male	44.6%
Prefer not to say	9.6%

Employment status	%
Employed full time	52.2%
Retired	22.9%
Employed part time	8.3%
Self-employed	9.6%
Unable to work	1.9%
Homemaker	1.3%
Unemployed	0.0%
Carer	1.9%
Student	1.9%

## CONTACT

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