

WELSH LANGUAGE ACTION PLAN

Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan - Visitor Infrastructure Scheme

September 2024



Summary

Proposal:

Proposed development of Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure Scheme to include retail shop, welfare facilities, tourist accommodation, ancillary plant room, car parking facilities, demolition of outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys and existing toilet block, and creation of farm access track with associated infrastructure works

Location:

Pontneddfechan, Glynneath, SA11 5NR

Date:

September 2024

Project Reference:

S23.118

Client:

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Product of:

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Introduction

- 1.1 Asbri Planning Ltd has been instructed by the Head of Property and Regeneration for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council to prepare a Welsh Language Action Plan (WLAP) to accompany a full planning application for the proposed development of Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure Scheme to include retail shop, welfare facilities, tourist accommodation, ancillary plant room, car parking facilities, demolition of outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys and existing toilet block, and creation of farm access track with associated infrastructure works. The proposal includes:
- Dedicated car parking including EV charging, and accessible, coach and minibus space provision;
 - Creation of public squares within the centre of Pontneddfechan which will create a sense of arrival into the village and a gateway for visitors to the waterfalls;
 - Construction of warden's office, a community shop and accommodation block;
 - Additional public WC's as there is currently inadequate provision in the village; and
 - Integrated sustainable drainage schemes, ecology and arboricultural enhancement works, and highways and traffic calming improvements.
- 1.2 The application site does not lie within a Welsh Language Sensitive Area as noted within the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (LDP) Proposals Map, however it has been requested by the Neath Port Talbot Council that a WLAP is produced as this is a public sector tourist development. Policy SP22 (*Welsh Language*) of the Neath Port Talbot LDP outlines that the Welsh language will be safeguarded and promoted within certain areas of the plan area which are Amman Valley, Swansea Valley, Pontardawe and the community of Crynant in the Dulais Valley. LDP Policy WL1 (*Development in Language Sensitive Areas*) outlines that residential development for 10 or more dwellings; and retail, commercial or industrial developments with a total floorspace of 1,000 sqm or more require a Language Action Plan to accompany any planning application. Such a plan is required to set out measures *"to be taken to protect, promote and enhance the Welsh language."*

Background

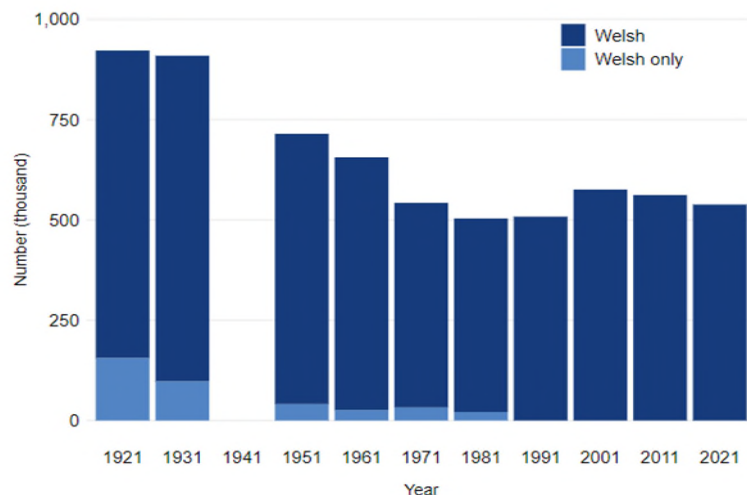
- 2.1 The proposal is for full planning permission for proposed development of Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure Scheme to include retail shop, welfare facilities, tourist accommodation, ancillary plant room, car parking facilities, demolition of outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys and existing toilet block, and creation of farm access track with associated infrastructure works.
- 2.2 The site masterplan includes a shop and coffee kiosk to the south east of Sgwd Gwladys, a welfare building containing a Warden's Office and an accommodation building which compliments what Sgwd Gwladys currently offers. The main buildings proposed contain dedicated enclosures for waste, bike storage and plant. Furthermore, the proposal includes highway improvements, a new car park for visitors, and creation of new/improved public squares and landscaped areas.
- 2.3 The entire proposal has been supported by Levelling Up Funding (LUF) from Welsh Government which *"is especially intended to support investment in places where it can make the biggest difference to everyday life, including ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and coastal communities."* It has been introduced to help local areas identify real local priorities for investment. The scheme aims to utilise the LUF to create an attractive environment and priceless tourism opportunity that will benefit Pontneddfechan along with the wider area, making it a highly desirable destination with many economic benefits. The LUF funding will help deal with the large sums of visitors attending the waterfalls in the area, that has led to several issues in terms of visitor parking. This was highlighted in a BBC article in June 2023 where a ban was to be imposed to deal with inconsiderate parking by visitors in the village. Further information about this can be found in the following link:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-65793955>
- 2.4 The proposals focus upon visitor activity and target a broad strategy for tourism and regeneration not only in Pontneddfechan, but across Waterfall Country. The scheme contributes towards the Waterfall Country strategy that is an on-going collaboration between several authorities which looks at visitor management and environmental/socio-economic regeneration. The development aims to take into consideration the historic and environmental value of the area and improve the experience of visitors to the area, and creating a place that the local community is proud of.

- 2.5 WLAP's are typically produced for residential developments where there is an increase in population, however in this case this is a tourism focused development. Consequently, there will be no long term demographic impact upon the area, and the linguistic make up of the area will vary on a daily basis due to the influx of visitors to the site.
- 2.6 The proposed scheme aims to address the five objectives of good design, which include: Access, Character, Environment Sustainability, Movement and Community Safety. These objectives have all been assessed within the Design and Access Statement produced by Hiraeth Architecture.

Ward/ Local Information

- 3.1 Nationally, the general trend of the number of people living in Wales with an ability to speak Welsh declined between 1921 and 2021, as evident within the below graph:

Chart 2: Number of people aged three years or older able to speak Welsh, 1921 to 2021

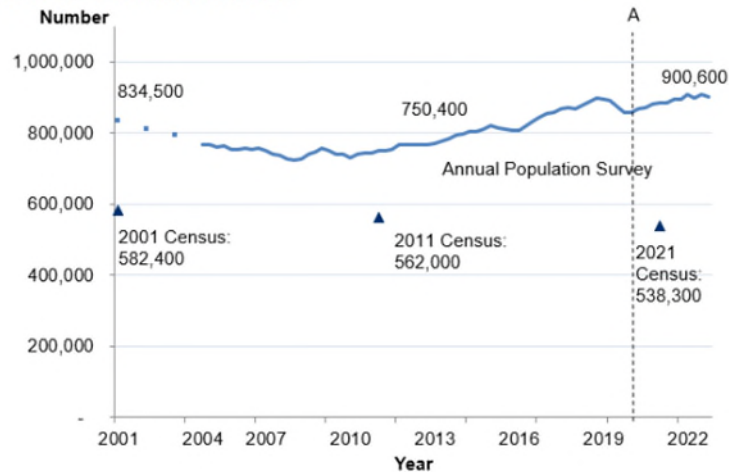


(Source: Annual Population Survey and population census)

- 3.2 Notwithstanding, it is encouraging that the number of Welsh speakers has risen since 1991, a trend which has been accredited to the language being taught more widely in schools, the process of devolution as well as the 1993 Welsh Language Act. However, despite this rise, concern continues to be raised over the preservation of the language in the future in light of continuous changes in terms of Wales' demography.
- 3.3 Notwithstanding the above, for the year ending 30 June 2022, the Annual Population Survey reported that 29.7% of people aged three or older were able to speak Welsh. This figure equates to around 899,500 people. This is 0.5 percentage points higher than the previous year (year ending 30 June 2021), equating to around 14,400 more people. (Source: <https://gov.wales/welsh-language-data-annual-population-survey-july-2021-june-2022>)
- 3.4 The chart shown below how these figures have been gradually increasing each year since March 2010, after they had been gradually declining from 2001 to 2007. The number of people reporting being able to speak Welsh decreased

from December 2018 to March 2020, before generally increasing again since then. Welsh Government note that this increase should be treated with caution due to the change of survey mode since mid-March 2020 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Number of people aged three or older able to speak Welsh, 2001 to December 2022



(Source: Annual Population Survey and population census)

- 3.5 The Welsh Government's strategy, *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers*, notes the Government's ambition of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050. A projection for the number of Welsh speakers aged three and over up to 2050 has been produced as part of the strategy. It is projected that there will be 666,000 people aged three and over able to speak Welsh by 2050, equivalent to around 21 per cent of the population. This is just over 125,000 more Welsh speakers than there were in 2011 but around 334,000 short of the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

County Level – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

- 3.6 At the time of the 2001 Census, it was found that 18.0% of the County's population were able to speak Welsh. The 2011 Census showed that this percentage had fallen to 15.3%, and by 2021 had dropped further to 13.5%. Whilst the number of people who speak Welsh varies greatly across the local authority area, the figures show a decline in the percentage of Welsh speakers over the last two decades by 4.5%.
- 3.7 Menter Iaith Castell Nedd Port Talbot note that "*some communities such as Godre'r Graig and Ystalyfera have seen a decline of over 10% within a decade. It*

could be argued that the area that stretches from Trebanos to Cwmllynfell and Rhos to Gwaun Cae Gurwen is the most important in the county in terms of its linguistic significance as it contains the highest numbers and percentages of Welsh speakers. This area is the county's linguistic axis..."

Local Level – Glynneath

- 3.8 Glynneath is not defined within Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan as 'language sensitive'. Previously, the former Welsh Language Board identified and designated a 'Language Development Area' in Neath Port Talbot which included the communities of Lower Brynamman, Gwaun Cae Gurwen, Cwmllynfell, Ystalyfera, Godre'r Graig. As a result of socio-economic factors however, the integrity of the language is under threat.
- 3.9 The following table provides a comparison of the Welsh language skills from the 2021 Census in terms of the Ward in which the site lies (Glynneath) compared with Neath Port Talbot and Wales as a whole. The below figures highlight that the Welsh language does not play a significant role within Glynneath, with almost three quarters of the population not having any skills in Welsh.

Glynneath – 2021 Census

	Glynneath	Neath Port Talbot	Wales
Can understand spoken Welsh only	6.4%	5.8%	5.2%
Can speak, read and write Welsh	12.6%	10.2%	14.2%
No skills in Welsh	74.4%	78.3%	74.8%

- 3.10 The site is situated within close proximity to some community facilities which are within walking distance. These include public houses, a golf club and chapel. Pontneddfechan Village Hall is 0.7 miles east of the site, whilst the town of Glynneath is 1.3 miles south west of the site and contains several facilities including a library, playground, park, restaurants and convenience store.

Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1 As required by the Supplementary Planning Guidance (Development and the Welsh Language), Asbri Planning have made contact with the following individuals/groups/organisations in order to establish the extent of Welsh language activities and events occurring within Glynneath. The list reads as follows;
- Menter Iaith Castell Nedd Port Talbot;
 - Local Ward Member: Cllr Simon Anthony Knoyle
 - Glynneath Community Council;
 - Urdd Gorllewin Morgannwg Area officers.
- 4.2 As detailed at paragraph 4.1, we have sought details from Menter Iaith Castell Nedd Port Talbot, the local Urdd branch, Community Council and ward members in relation to groups and events that take place through the medium of Welsh. We have received a response from all of the above groups/individuals which are summarised below.
- 4.3 The Local Ward Member confirmed that there are many mini and junior teams running from the RFC and AFC, with activities also being undertaken at the Training Centre and Library also. The Town Hall and Bethania Centre are two others which manage and arrange other activities. There are also two schools in the area which are Cwmnedd Primary and YGG Cwmnedd.
- 4.4 The response of Glynneath Community Council highlighted a number of activities which are ongoing including a bilingual weekly service at Bethel Chapel, Cylch and Meithrin groups along with a Welsh discussion group held for adults which also takes place at the Bethania Centre. They emphasised that the number of speakers and activities taking place through Welsh are increasing, and foresee more Welsh events occurring in Glynneath in the future.
- 4.5 The Urdd stated that no activities are currently held in Glynneath, however a rugby club and multi-sports club were previously held in Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Cwmnedd and they hope to restart these sessions in the future.
- 4.6 Menter Iaith revealed that weekly Welsh coffee mornings are held in Glynneath Library for those learning and speaking Welsh. There is also a `Cwrw a Chlecs` group that meet every three weeks in Glynneath Rugby Club to socialise in Welsh which is suitable for those speaking and learning the

language. They also work within Welsh Primary Schools providing occasional workshops to pupils.

Mitigation

- 5.1 The SPG requires the WLAP to detail the measures proposed to protect, promote and enhance the Welsh language. As detailed within the WLAP, feedback from consultees has been limited to date and therefore it is a little too early to determine and prepare a specific suite of measures. It is the team's intention to firm up and establish the measures once a greater number of consultees respond.
- 5.2 Notwithstanding, the list of measures contained within Appendix D of the LDP provides a helpful starting point and is one that can be reviewed in the context of the list of groups/organisations set out at paragraph 4.3 of this WLAP. The following measures will be considered by the applicant as part of the development.

Set Measures:

- Bilingual signs should be provided;
- When new staff are being appointed, the operator should consider the language skills of the applicants in order to provide a Welsh language service, especially in relation to front-line staff; and
- Structures should be in place to offer support to prepare signs, announcements etc.

Front-line Staff / Employees:

- Front line staff to follow courses to learn or improve their Welsh in order to ensure that a Welsh language service is provided;
- All staff to receive courses in awareness of the language, culture and heritage in order that they are aware of the needs of the Welsh speakers.

Other Measures Proposed by Client

- Bilingual interpretation to be provided;
- Payment instruction to be bilingual at car park pay kiosks.

- 5.3 The applicant intends for the development to be run by a third party, therefore it will be difficult to manage the staffing requirements noted in Appendix D of the Supplementary Planning Guidance, but attempts will be made to encourage staff to learn Welsh.
- 5.4 The above suggests efforts seeking to protect, promote and enhance the Welsh language within Glynneath. The community is served by some existing groups and organisations, and it is considered that contributions provided by

virtue of this development would serve to support what is already in place. Details regarding how the measures can be delivered including details timescale will be confirmed in due course, subject to more detailed discussions with relevant consultees.

Conclusion

- 6.1 This Welsh Language Action Plan has been prepared by Asbri Planning on behalf of the Head of Property and Regeneration for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council to accompany a full planning application for the proposed development of Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure Scheme to include retail shop, welfare facilities, tourist accommodation, ancillary plant room, car parking facilities, demolition of outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys and existing toilet block, and creation of farm access track with associated infrastructure works
- 6.2 Although the application does not lie within a '*Language Sensitive Area*', a WLAP has been prepared in line with the requirements of LDP policies SP 22 and WL 1, as the proposal represents a public sector tourist development.
- 6.3 The WLAP has been prepared in line with the guidance provided within Appendices C and D of the Development and the Welsh Language Supplementary Planning Guidance document.
- 6.4 The WLAP has highlighted the known extent of local groups/organisations working within the community and has suggested appropriate mitigation measures to protect, promote and enhance the Welsh language. The responses from local groups and organisations have been set out within this report. Notwithstanding, it is considered that this document comprises a robust starting point and should be considered as a 'live document' moving forward.