

INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared by Hiraeth Architecture in support of an application for full planning permission from Neath Port Talbot Council for the development of landscape and built proposals in the village of Pontneddfechan. The proposals are born out of a desire to respond to and alleviate pressures put on the village by tourists visiting the Waterfall Trails. In addition, the works look to provide opportunities to capitalise on the potential for revenue generation that tourists can bring to the local economy, through creating space for commercial ventures, including a shop and overnight accommodation.

The project is being implemented following a successful grant application for Levelling Up Funding. The Levelling Up Fund *'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 is also designed to help local areas select genuine local priorities for investment by putting local stakeholder support...at the heart of its mission'*.

The proposals directly look to address the key element of the Levelling Up Fund – the infrastructure of everyday life - focusing on the needs of the individual place and the strategic case for investment to improve people's lives and, in the case of Pontneddfechan, creating a sustainable balance between the valuable opportunity of tourism and the wellbeing of the local community.

Andrew Scott have led the consultant team in developing the LUF concept design through an RIBA Stage 3 process, in conjunction with Neath Port Talbot Council and their Projects' Team. The proposals presented in this document thus represent an evolution of the project brief and design responses following the grant award.

This document collates:

- the developed brief, which has been influenced by prior research into the community need, undertaken by the local councils, and through community consultation following the award of funding;
- local and site specific context analysis;
- a commentary on the strengths and weaknesses of the village and existing infrastructure;
- how the site analysis and brief has informed a design strategy;
- detailed design development following the award of Levelling-Up Funding;
- the resultant proposals and how these meet the objectives of good design.

PROJECT CONTEXT AND AIMS

The proposals form part of a wider 'Waterfall Country' strategy which is an ongoing collaboration looking at visitor management and environmental and socio-economic regeneration involving Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Powys County Council, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust and local Community Councils.

The proposed development area occupies the junction of Pontneathvaughan Road as it meets the River Neath to the western edge of the village of Pontneddfechan. The area is known as the Gateway to Waterfall Country - the site occupying the start of a network of trails extending north east into the Brecon Beacons National Park. It is an easy distance for day visitors travelling from the conurbations to the south, with connections generally improving with the Heads Of The Valleys works. Waterfall Country currently receives over 300,000 visitors annually.

It is notable that recreational pressure on Waterfall Country increased during the Covid pandemic, as the public sought nearby green and open spaces to visit. In the long-term this is anticipated to result in sustained pressures.

The brief for the scheme has been informed by a number of studies and strategic plans undertaken over the last few years covering the specific concerns of the village of Pontneddfechan and the wider concerns of the Waterfall Country. These studies have included developed consultations with a wide range of audiences including: the local community; outdoor

activity providers; statutory consultees; and local and national government.

The project proposes to prioritise the general needs of the local community, enable economic enhancement and holistically improve the visitor experience of Pontneddfechan, as a gateway to the Waterfall Trails. Specifically the brief has called for a proposal that meets the following aims:

- To create dedicated and discreet parking facilities that sit comfortably within the village environment and reduce the potential for illegal parking, congestion and general disturbances to village life in peak periods, which are regularly experienced by residents;
- To provide an exemplar of robust, sustainable public facilities within the context of a sensitive, protected landscape with appropriate capacity for anticipated visitor numbers;
- To compliment existing commercial offers and create opportunity for the local community to realise new commercial opportunities, whilst benefitting from improved local services;
- To encourage visitors to pause within the village and region, engage with local businesses and stimulate new enterprise;
- To celebrate the entrance gateway to the Waterfall Country with improved interpretation and signage, alongside safety information.

Of particular ambition is the opportunity to build upon the unique sense of place, in an environment which currently experiences the conflicting priorities of visitors and residents.

THE BRIEF AND VISION (DEVELOPING THE BRIEF)

Along with the overall aims outlined on the previous page, the scheme should specifically provide:

- The creation of public ‘squares’ within the village centre to improve the sense of arrival in the village, enhance the offering for locals and manage a safe and sustainable gateway for visitors to the waterfalls.
- A warden’s office, located in a prominent location on the site to act as an information point for visitors and to proactively encourage positive, responsible behaviour that follows the Countryside Code;
- Additional public WCs, to cope with the pressures that the volume of visitors brings to the village, for which the current toilet provision is inadequate.
- A community shop and associated coffee kiosk, to provide space for commercial ventures;
- An accommodation block, which is to provide bespoke overnight accommodation to target a family/ couples market.

Sustainability Objectives

A key element of the initial design brief was to establish clear principles for the project’s sustainability objectives. These objectives take the form of broad principles associated with reducing embodied carbon and energy loss, allied with the use of renewable technologies and local, natural and recycled materials that improve health and wellbeing and promote the principals of the foundational economy.

These objectives align with the client’s sustainability objectives and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

- Solutions should aspire to deliver a development which considers both embodied carbon emissions and operational carbon emissions.
- The project should incorporate renewable technologies and maximise the site’s natural energy contributions to negate the need for fossil fuel use.
- Embodied carbon emissions associated with the design and construction, maintenance and ultimate end of life of the project should be minimised. This means making efficient use of low embodied carbon materials throughout the design and designing for reuse and recycling. Where local and regional resources, materials and systems are available these should be considered for appropriateness.
- Promote the principles of the Foundational Economy through the consideration of local skills, resources, supply chains and materials.
- Proposals should embrace a fabric first approach developing solutions that reduce energy losses, incorporating high levels of insulation and dramatically reducing drafts and heat loss through air gaps and thermal bridging.
- Integrate sustainable drainage solutions in conjunction with permeable landscaping.
- Employ locally appropriate natural landscaping solutions and preserve and enhance key ecological features on site to ensure a net enhancement of biodiversity within the development area.

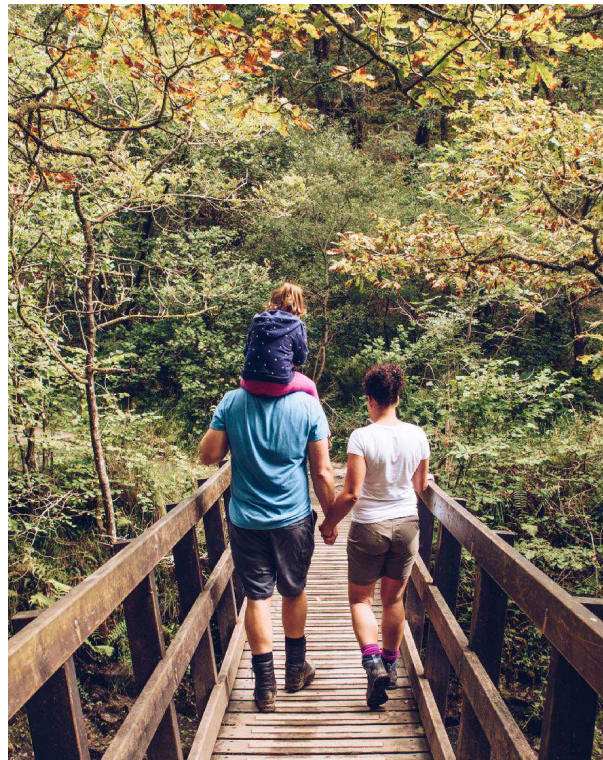
The design team and client have set out an aspiration to deliver an exceptional and innovative development both in architectural and sustainability terms.

VISION

Address issues that currently undermine the quality of life for local residents including insufficient parking and associated traffic congestion, speeding vehicles, waste generation and general nuisance associated with an inadequate provision of visitor facilities.



Provide high quality and robust facilities that tap in to the potential benefits that tourism can bring to the local community and local economy, whilst also enhancing the visitor experience.



Deliver new sustainable development that enhances the infrastructure of the village and offers an exemplar of high quality design in a sensitive rural setting.



ANALYSIS

