

North Monmouthshire Community Planning For a Better Place



Contents

Foreword	4
Our vision for 2021 and beyond	5
Setting the scene	7
Priorities for this area	9
Spreading the word	11
Encouraging business success	15
Enabling communities to thrive	17
Enhancing our environment	19
Moving around more easily	23
Getting things done	27
Contacts	29



Foreword

Welcome

It is with very great pleasure that I commend this excellent document to you. Facilitated by Team Abergavenny, it represents the culmination of a lot of hard work undertaken by many community groups and volunteers who are committed to increasing the prosperity and amenity of our local area. The five key themes that have been identified highlight key areas for enhancing the quality of life for those of us who are fortunate enough to live in this beautiful area.

Abergavenny lies at the centre of the area covered by this plan. It is very much the hub which attracts people from the surrounding area for work, recreation, shopping and so on. As the Town Council for this central area we have a new legal duty to write and carry out a 5-Year Well-Being Plan for the town under the recently introduced Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. There is much in the North Monmouthshire Community Plan that will enable us to get off to a flying start with this task. Abergavenny Town Council looks forward to working with Team Abergavenny in a spirit of collaboration and friendship, with our volunteer community and elected councillors working side by side to promote the very best interests of our town.

May I thank all those who have contributed so much to the development of the North Monmouthshire Community Plan. It contains a wealth of useful information, ideas and calls to action. I have enjoyed reading it myself and it gives me great pleasure to commend it to you.

David Simcock – Mayor of Abergavenny 2017.

A vision for 2021 and beyond

North Monmouthshire is a thriving area

North Monmouthshire is a beautiful ‘agri-urban’ area, long known as the ‘Gateway to Wales’ as it stands on the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Its location offers a very good quality of life with an attractive town and many active villages. There is good local shopping and easy access to the rest of the country. There is much for people to do here, with theatres, sports facilities, fine dining and many active social and community groups.

Visitors come for the food, the unique shopping, the many events, the history and the great, great outdoors. Indeed, few places have such a rich array of activities available.

The prosperity of the area relies heavily on successful tourism, agriculture and local businesses. The local hospital is one of our biggest employers. Yet we also have communities here that are among the most deprived in Monmouthshire. One of the main factors in prioritising the initiatives in this plan has been about bringing benefit to the community as a whole.

The public sector in Wales is changing

Two new and very significant pieces of Welsh legislation are aimed at improving well-being by making public bodies think more about the long-term, work better with people and communities, look to prevent problems before they arise and take a more joined-up approach. These are The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act.

With these changes and budget pressures, we can expect that over the coming years the shape of public services in Wales is therefore likely to change significantly.

With less money available to meet public needs the community is being encouraged to take a more active involvement in voluntary work and to ensure that limited public funds are being spend to obtain maximum benefit.

Our vision for 2021 and beyond

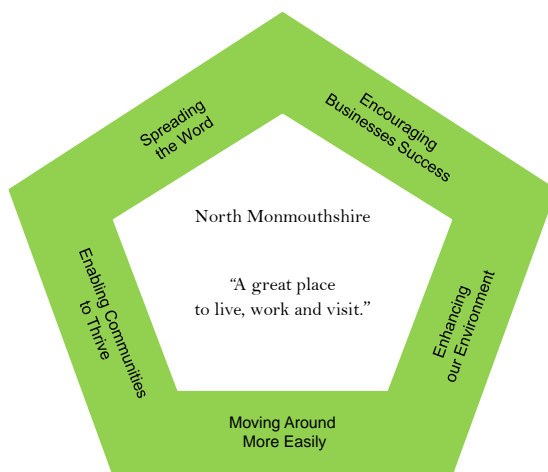
We need to be positive, ambitious and realistic

Whether we are volunteers or currently working in the private or public sectors, we need a positive, ambitious and yet realistic sense of where we want to get to by 2021 and beyond. We have influence on what happens in our area, but we are also affected by wider changes.

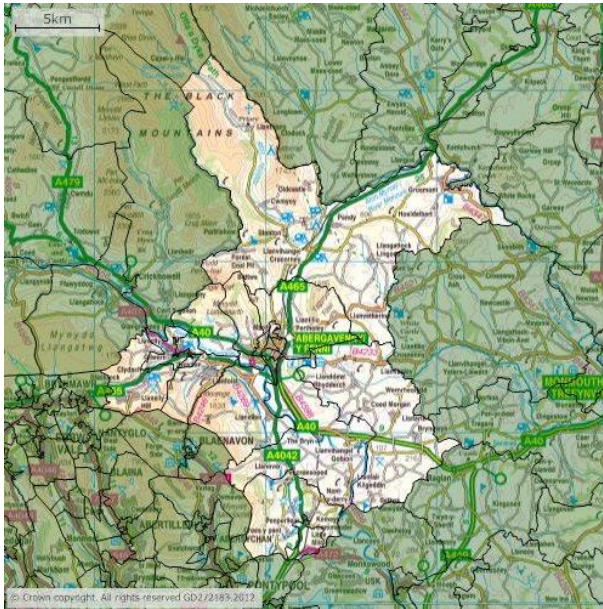
Some changes over the next few years will affect how easy it is to get to and from North Monmouthshire, such as the promised removal of the the Severn Crossing toll charges, the opening of the upgraded Heads of the Valleys Road, and possible improvements to public transport as Abergavenny becomes a South Wales Metro hub.

Against this changing background, we have kept our vision simple and put much effort into how best to achieve it. The rest of this plan uses the outer statements as themes through which to shape our thinking and our actions.

Our Vision for North Monmouthshire



Setting the scene



What is North Monmouthshire?

North Monmouthshire is the area in South East Wales shown on the map above. It extends from Goytre in the south to Llanthony in the north, with Abergavenny at its centre.

In council administrative terms, this area is called ‘Bryn y Cwm’ (which loosely translates as ‘Hills and Valleys’) and is made up of the areas covered by Abergavenny Town Council and the Community Councils of Crucorney, Goetre Fawr, Grosmont, Llanarth, Llanelly, Llanfoist Fawr, Llanover and Llantilio Pertholey (with each Community including several villages, hamlets and the surrounding rural landscape).

Setting the scene

How many people live here?

Overall, across the town and surrounding rural communities, we have about 30,000 residents. Many young people move away for education and jobs before coming back later in life, which presents a substantial demographic challenge. The employment rate in Monmouthshire, though, is one of the highest in Wales, as are educational attainment and, perhaps unsurprisingly, house prices. About 10% of residents here can speak Welsh.

What about businesses?

There is a vibrant retail and hospitality sector in the area, catering for locals and visitors through both independent and High St. names. Shop vacancy rates are low and footfall often high, particularly on market days and Saturdays. Customers spend more than average on a normal visit, and many (88% in a recent survey) would recommend the town and the markets to others.

There are also successful non-retail businesses, including those providing a full range of commercial and financial services, those focusing on agriculture and food production, and those in the creative/media sectors.

Are there many visitors?

With about 4 million visitors each year to Monmouthshire and the Brecon Beacons National Park, tourism directly and indirectly supports about 4,000 jobs. This area has very good road and rail links. Surveys (2014) found that most visitors come from London, Essex, Cardiff, Swansea, Bristol/Bath, the M4/M5 corridors and the Midlands. Anecdotally, an increasing number of visitors recently are also coming from overseas. Most visitors come for just a few days at a time (46% stay 1-2 days, 27% stay 3-5 days).

Priorities for this area

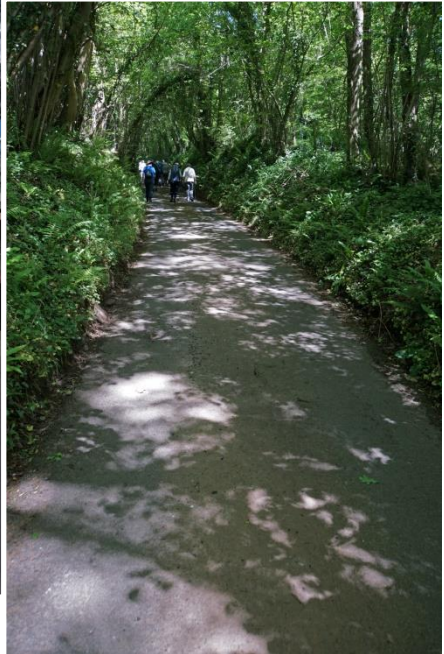
Shortlisting actions for this plan

Helped by volunteers who consulted many others, and drawing also on previous plans, a longlist of over 600 ideas was drawn up. Potential priorities emerged through considering factors such as the benefit to the community and likely ease of implementation. Discussions were also held with the various Councils, businesses and community groups, and other local towns. A public consultation meeting was held on 5th Dec 2016. This all led to a shorter list of about 90 potential initiatives (including difficult but worthwhile ones).

Guided by the vision, new legislation and similar plans elsewhere in the UK, the initiatives were grouped into 5 main themes. Each of these themes is being taken forward by a Theme Group which brings together people with the shared interest and expertise required.

- **Spreading the word** – publicising local facilities and attractions.
- **Encouraging business success** – incl. traditional and growth businesses
- **Enabling communities to thrive** – well-being incl. health, education, sport.
- **Enhancing our environment** – incl. open spaces, built environment, energy.
- **Moving around more easily** – incl. walking, cycling, cars, public transport.

The Theme Groups have reviewed the 90 potential initiatives and selected those to take forward in the next year or so. In the following pages, you will find more about each theme and those selected initiatives.



Theme 1: Spreading the word.

Why?

Abergavenny and North Monmouthshire has a lot to shout about, with many attractions and facilities. We want to make sure everyone knows about the shops, heritage sites, the beautiful landscape and outdoor activities, community activities, festivals and the many other activities here.

While many residents make good use of the facilities, some may be unaware of the full range of what is available or the importance of joining in. We want to promote and support local facilities and organisations, whether sporting, cultural, educational or commercial, and encourage all residents of all ages to make the most of them.

The area has always been popular with visitors, both day trippers and tourists. Increasingly, we are seeing more visitors, from other parts of Wales, the rest of the UK and also from overseas, enjoying what we have to offer. We regularly feature in good food guides and various ‘top places to visit’ supplements. The success of the food festival, the cycling festival and other iconic events has greatly helped this.

When both residents and visitors make the most of our facilities and attractions, the whole community benefits. This also helps encourage new investments and return visits.

What do we aim to do?

A summary of the projects which we aim to start in 2017/19 is shown below.

Theme 1: Spreading the word

Priorities for 2017/19

Most effort from the local area

- Create/update and better publicise more themed walking trails around topics of interest such as heritage, food, art, churches.
- Continue to encourage food, heritage, cycling and other outdoor activities as key attractions of the area, including support to the variety of well-attended festivals that are an established part of the ‘festival year’ here.
- Actively promote the Arts of all types, including visual, performing and other creative arts, as another of the key attractions of this area, preparing for an inaugural Arts festival in 2018 and supporting the local network of creative groups, individuals and businesses.
- Encourage more young people to get actively involved in developing facilities and events they enjoy.
- With the Enhance our Environment group, encourage supermarket shoppers to visit the rest of town.
- With the Encourage Business Success group, support businesses in publicising event-specific offers, and also in opening in the early evening.

Theme 1: Spreading the word

Led by the county council or others, with local support

- Update the weekly and specialist markets programme e.g. consider moving the Farmers Market to the weekend, extending the Christmas Market. Also encourage more use of the Market Hall, Brewery Yard (with, if possible, a new canopy) and St John's Square.
- Support the proposed development of better outdoor space at Abergavenny Castle, including for local events and community uses.
- Support the restoration of The Gunter Mansion on Cross Street.
- Make good use of the new digital notice boards to publicise not only public services but the facilities and attractions of the area.
- Modernise public toilets and keep them open around the town, taking into account how and where people arrive and where they visit. Also publicise public access to, for example, cafe and pub facilities.
- Encourage increased use and funding opportunities for the Information Centre, located in the Tithe Barn on Monk Street.

Progress beyond 2017/19 will depend on how much is achieved with the above programme, and continuing active local commitment:

- Create more cycle itineraries (on and off-road) for different levels of experience and publicise them more widely, encouraging local businesses and residents to provide a 'bikes for rent' service.
- Review options for conservation and public display of medieval vestments and textiles.
- Encourage more people to become ambassadors for the area.
- Get ready for, and make the most of, the new transport developments to encourage more people to visit North Monmouthshire.



Theme 2: Encouraging business success

Why?

There are many active and successful businesses within Abergavenny and the surrounding area. The retail offering is varied, including both national chains and many independent shops offering unique and specialist products. There are also many other businesses, from agriculture to the web, which contribute to our success and we must do all we can to support them.

The attractiveness and accessibility of the area is good for encouraging businesses to come as well as tourists. As areas such as Cardiff and Bristol overheat, we have a strong story to tell and high wage/low footprint/high growth businesses would attract the 25-45 year olds that anchor and grow vibrancy in a community.

There are also risks. Other towns are developing and competing for tourists, businesses and national resources. Nevill Hall Hospital is our largest single employer and the planned reduction in employment as the new Grange University Hospital opens at Llanfrecha could have a significant effect on the local economy. We need to be actively aware of such factors.

Whilst the history of local businesses working together can be viewed as chequered, the recent introduction of Y Fenni Business Community (YBC) is a positive and encouraging step.

What do we aim to do?

A summary of the projects which we aim to start in 2017/19 is shown below.

Theme 2: Encouraging business success

Priorities for 2017/19

Most effort from the local area

- Review visitor experience in particular with respect to signage (and in collaboration with other Theme Groups).
- Work towards setting up a support group for small and new businesses.
- Create a simple marketing toolkit that all businesses and groups can use to help promote their offerings and activities.
- Support the work of Y Fenni Business Community (YBC).

Led by the county or others, with local support

- Get message across that Abergavenny/North Monmouthshire is open for business.
- Identify areas of research/growth industries/manufacturing we wish to attract.
- Actively engage with county and national government, including through the Local Development Plan, to help ensure developments within Abergavenny and area are supportive of businesses and build the attractiveness of North Monmouthshire for visitors and locals.

Theme 3: Enabling communities to thrive

Why?

The extent to which communities in the area are thriving is variable. Some communities are doing very well while others find it more difficult.

Problems include finance, lack of manpower/volunteers, poor facilities and even competition from other like-minded groups. We will work to help all people in our community familiar with facilities that are available and how to access these.

Many community groups are quite content to continue in their present state while others might look to expand and develop certain specialities not available in the area.

We will work to communicate, listen and help communities take positive steps towards actively improving their ability to achieve their goals. For example they may benefit from support in financial planning, grant applications and communication.

It is essential that community groups do not feel isolated or unable to continue without help and encouragement.

What do we aim to do?

A summary of the projects which we aim to start in 2017/19 is shown opposite. We may also work on supporting local voluntary groups and building allotments and community gardens.



Theme 3: Enabling communities to thrive

Priorities for 2017/19

Most effort from the local area

- Increasing participation and Improve sports facilities, in parks and open spaces.
- Keep Community Centre(s) – ongoing fundraising and other support.
- Work to engage communities in creating the future for their town and area.
- Develop and support theatres.
- Permanent Police presence in town and continuation of ‘your voice meetings’.

Led by the county or others, with local support

- Creation of digital inclusion hubs in village halls, complete superfast Broadband across communities.
- Invest in the town hall as Community facility, using the new 'Hub' concept and refurbishment of the Market Hall.
- Provide allotments and more community gardens.
- Establish employment and training links between local labour market and young people.
- Find new use for current Carnegie library.
- Investment in and retention of Nevill Hall.
- Further integration of health services across the area.
- Further developments around care of the elderly.
- Take stock of the current range of community services and centres.

Theme 4: Enhance the Environment

Why?

We should build on the recent successes in environmental improvements made to the town, such as Brewery Yard, and the more recent High Street area improvements. Better designed pedestrian/cyclist/disabled urban spaces are good for the town's economy as well as its people.

There have been expanding levels of participation with MCC (Monmouthshire County Council), stakeholders and local volunteers. We are keen to build on these inclusive processes. There are funds available for the next phase of these improvements, but discussions should begin on a longer term plan of improvements for the whole town.



There have been problems in planning applications over the last decade (e.g. Llanfoist/Westgate and Morrison's sites), for example in the consideration given by MCC to submissions from local community groups. The Welsh Government's new Pre-Application rules for developers offers us all an opportunity to improve this situation, e.g. for Tudor Street changes. We will also support MCC in Local Development Planning to ensure effective planning of housing and larger developments.

The group is also keen to pursue a longer term green infrastructure project that embraces our existing parks and open spaces, while also focussing on sites for growth and recreation alongside the Gavenny River.

Theme 4: Enhance the Environment

Priorities for 2017/19

Most effort from the local area

- Produce outline development/urban design briefs for key sites along Tudor Street liaising with all and with the backing of MCC planners to become part of 'Pre-App' engagement from developers.
 - Work in parallel on developing briefs and outline designs for the next public realm improvements (Baker St/Lewis Lane Cross St, Lower Castle Street).
 - Start consultation with the Town Council's Planning Committee on a design advice group formed from suitably skilled voluntary groups.
 - Liaising with Civic Society and TC Projects Committee, explore green infrastructure projects with adjacent communities up the Gavenny river and liaise with other groups on Castle Meadows extension.
 - Set up public debating events on other means of housing delivery and explore potential sites for self build affordable homes with growing plots.
 - Produce a vision document for whole southern edge of town from the Castle to Linda Vista.
- Seek an Abergavenny Allotment site, as Llanfoist site reaching capacity.



Theme 4: Enhance the Environment

Led by the county or others, with local support

- Work closely with MCC Highways and the Town's larger Public Realm consultation group, assembled by Team Abergavenny, to deliver the Frogmore Street/ Lion Street public realm improvement in two phases 2018 and 2018/19.
- While the group intends to lobby for future site development briefs, as part of the LDP review these would have to be led in the end by MCC officers and owned by the Town Council. We would submit and promote outline observations and design opportunities to the Town Council Planning Committee.

Progress beyond 2017/19 will depend on how much is achieved with the above programme, and continuing active local commitment.

- Following up on a programme of further public realm improvements etc. in Baker Street, Lewis Lane, Cross Street, Lower Castle Street.
- Develop more detailed proposals for green infrastructure plans for the Gavenny River and adjacent site.
- Produce more outline development site briefs for the Post office site and the site opposite the Hen and Chickens public house.



Theme 5: Moving around more easily

Why?

We are keen to help make Abergavenny a more 'liveable' and 'accessible' town, principally by reducing car dependency and removing road danger, to encourage more walking and cycling and the use of public transport.

The main current obstacles to moving around more easily include: the impact of through traffic on the main A40 trunk road, including occasional 'grid-lock'; low frequency of local bus services (particularly in rural areas) and, to a lesser extent, of rail services; lack of taxi services (available around the clock, affordable and willing to/from travel to rural areas); absence of a network of safe routes for walking and cycling between homes and key facilities; on-street conditions which deter the mobility of the less able, together with a lack of wheelchair-friendly taxis; shortage and cost of all-day parking, not least at interchanges with rail and long-distance bus services.

The Welsh Government and the County Council have primary responsibilities for dealing with most transport and highway needs, many of which can only be solved by substantial capital expenditure.

We recognise that transport planning priorities need to be substantiated by facts and trends that are currently held by various organisations. However, local councils, community groups and individuals know where there are problems, and so may be able to help with surveys and suggestions. We are committed to work with the highway authorities to identify priorities that meet our objectives.

What do we aim to do?

A summary of the projects which we aim to start in 2017/19 is shown below.

Theme 5: Moving around more easily

Priorities for 2017/19

Most effort from the local area

- Improve railway arrival point and information at station, with signed walking route into town.
- Lobby for early provision of new footbridge suitable for the less able at railway station.
- Initiate study of traffic flows and potential traffic management improvements; with public consultation and liaison with highway authorities and Enhancing the environment group.
- With Enhancing the environment group: consult and recommend public realm improvement priorities (Cross Street, Frogmore Street, Lion Street, etc.) with preliminary details; liaise with County Council and implement as opportunities arise.
- Lobby Welsh Government for early flood relief work on A4042 at Llanellen and provision of pedestrian/cyclist bridge.
- More local council and volunteer involvement in management of public rights of way.
- Survey local provision of buses and taxis that satisfactorily accommodate the disabled and wheelchairs.
- Review and, where possible, improve road and pedestrian signs with the Encouraging Business Success group.

Theme 5: Moving around more easily

Led by the county or others, with local support

- New bridge for pedestrians and cyclists between Llanfoist and Abergavenny through Castle Meadows.
- Active travel integrated network map preparation by County Council (5 and 15 year delivery periods).
- County Council taking over local street parking and deliveries enforcement; Abergavenny pilot to establish guidance on enforcement priorities; local action for short term policing.
- Measures to sustain the availability of local bus services.
- County Council's new car park management arrangements to consider transferability of tickets between car parks, number plate recognition systems, etc. and monitor when operational.

Progress beyond 2017/19 will depend on how much is achieved with the above programme, and continuing active local commitment. For transport initiatives often large sums of money need to become available. It is hoped that progress will also be made within five years on the following projects:

- Railway Station improvements.
- Rural public and community transport improvements.
- Alternative route for A40 trunk road traffic.
- Review Hardwick junction road signs and lane markings.
- Noise reduction measures on A40 at The Bryn.
- A4042 improvements to Little Mill.
- Cycling promotion; training, parking/storage, rental.
- Bus station improvement.



Getting things done

Teams working together, consulting and communicating

Community and business groups, those in our public sector and other volunteers are already tackling some of the initiatives shown here. A 'Theme Group' for each theme is working together and, with others interested in the theme, to help implement the initiatives successfully. They are seeking to involve and consult the wider public and others who have an interest in the outcome, so what is created works well for everyone.

As always there is more to do than time and help available so, if you would like to lend a hand or get involved, please get in touch.

Good communications are really important. Theme Groups and individual teams are communicating with one another about their initiatives, particularly where they depend on, and/or can learn from, each other. They also plan to issue regular updates so that everyone can see what's going on.

Finding the money

There is no 'pot of gold' available here in North Monmouthshire and we are relatively prosperous when compared to many areas. We aim to raise some of the funding required locally but other funding will be sought through submissions and grant applications to bodies such as the relevant Councils, the Welsh Government, The National Lottery and the Sports Council. This will be an ongoing challenge and we will learn as we go. Much work will still be completed by volunteers, with funded activities only where necessary and feasible.

Getting things done

Keeping on course

In keeping with the new Welsh legislation on improving well-being and taking a joined-up approach, this is very much a collaborative endeavour.

Learning along the way

We expect that those involved in making all this happen will share and learn from the ups and downs along the way. Once a year, we will pull this learning together, and refresh this plan in the light also of any new ideas and priorities that have emerged, including from the Agri-Urban initiative.

Updating this document

This plan will be updated as Theme Groups revise their activities and as new information is available. Facilitation will be provided by Team Abergavenny in support of the Theme Groups.

Using one consistent format, updates will be provided to the Town, Community and County Councils, as well as to the main community and business groups. The focus of such updates will be on recognising and celebrating success, highlighting what is holding things up and seeking help where needed. Which body decides what will depend on which particular project is being discussed.

Contacts

If you would like to discuss anything in this plan, please contact one of the following in the first instance. If necessary, they will direct you to the appropriate person:

- Team Abergavenny Secretary, Peter Johns
(peter.johns1@btinternet.com)
- Team Abergavenny Chair, Alan Michie
(alanne.michie@btinternet.com)
- Team Abergavenny Support, David Straker
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