

Background Information

Regeneration

We became interested in Town Centre Regeneration in 2015 as my wife and I had a retail business in Ebbw Vale. Our first action was to contact Blaenau Gwent Council to see what plans they had and what we could do to help. Our attempts to arrange a meeting were unsuccessful as Blaenau Gwent Council refused to meet and discuss. We then became aware of the Ebbw Vale Town Centre Business Forum so we joined. At Ebbw Vale Town Centre Business Forum meetings which were infrequent we asked what contact had been made with Blaenau Gwent Council. There was to our knowledge no dialogue or contact between the Business Forum and the Council. This was really disappointing as we could see the steady decline in the Ebbw Vale Town Centre this decline was also happening in Blaenau Gwent's other Town Centres.

At this point we began looking into what other Groups, Boards, Working parties..... etc were involved in Economic Regeneration:

Blaenau Gwent Council Economic and Regeneration Department.

Blaenau Gwent Enterprise Board.

Enterprise Zone.

Tech Valley.

Valleys Taskforce.

Town Centre Regeneration Taskforce.

City Deal.

South East Wales Metro.

Regeneration Managers

Education and Public Services Welsh Government Merthyr Tydfil

We also held meetings with Business Wales and joined the FSB (Federation of Small Businesses), to see if they could help or advise on how we could engage with Blaenau Gwent Council.

We also contacted out AM Alun Davies, MP Nick Smith and Ken Skates directly.

It was at this point we were advised to create our own Business Forum so we created the Ebbw Fawr Business Community.

We again tried to arrange a meeting as Ebbw Fawr Business Community with Blaenau Gwent Council and again they refused to meet or discuss.

Public Transport

In March 2018 Stagecoach cut 2 Bus Services Ebbw Vale – Cwmbran and Ebbw Vale – Newport they also made other alterations to Bus Service Timetables. These cut backs resulted in a 50% - 60% decrease in footfall as these services brought customers into Ebbw Vale from all towns between Newport and Ebbw Vale and Cwmbran and Ebbw Vale.

We then organised a petition which we presented to Blaenau Gwent Council in June 2018 with Nick Smith MP. The details of this meeting and a subsequent meeting in the Autumn 2018 has been documented in previous correspondence to the Petition Committee.

Response from Blaenau Gwent Council

Can Blaenau Gwent Council elaborate on the statement “*There are difficulties being experienced by the Town Centre Forum which makes it difficult to engage with Business Owners*” as we were members of the Town Centre Forum and were not aware of these difficulties.

Also have any meetings taken place between Blaenau Gwent Council and other Towns representatives.

Regional / Local Transport Planning

I would be interested to see this plan, also who has been involved in developing the plan? What consultation has taken place with the Business Community and the General Public?

Buses in Blaenau Gwent

The statement “*We subsidise many of the commercial services across the County Borough*” as prior to June 2018 as stated in the meeting with Nick Smith MP. Blaenau Gwent Council did not have a transport policy for the preceding 12 years and as far as I know still do not have one. If so what criteria have they used to allocate the bus subsidies.

The statement “*We know that travelling by Bus is not popular with younger people as it tends to have a stigma attached to travelling*” can they identify what data / study they have used to backup this statement.

The general public do not use Public Transport in Blaenau Gwent as it is of poor quality and unreliable. At our meeting in the Autumn 2018 we challenged the Council Officers and Council Members to use Public Transport to see how poor and unreliable it was. This challenge was not taken up.

The only people who use Public Transport are those who have no other option.

Active Travel

Please see my comments concerning Active Travel in previous correspondence.

Rail Services

There is still the problem of Public Transport links to the Train Stations.

Does the proposed increase in Rail Services means that WAG and Blaenau Gwent Council see Blaenau Gwent becoming a Commuter area.

Integrated Responsive Transport (IRT)

I am not aware of this Service running, I assume it has been delayed because of Covid-19.

5G Project

I would be interested in more information on this project. Also what consultation has taken place with the Business Community and the General Public?

2019/20 Welsh Government Funding

Can Blaenau Gwent Council identify how this money has been spent:

Local Transport Fund £150K

Safe Routes in Communities £295K

Active Travel £409K

In conclusion: I appreciate we are at present living in difficult times. But since we have raised our initial concerns about Public Transport and Economic Regeneration (Town Centres). Blaenau Gwent Council's response has been poor in not willing to meet to discuss our concerns regarding regeneration and ultimately stating that the problems with Public Transport is to quote them *“This is unfortunately something that is beyond our control”*.

Valleys Taskforce Response

Blaenau Gwent Integrated Responsive Transport Pilot

Could we have more information on how this service will be run. For how long this Pilot will run for, and what criteria will be used to gauge its success or failure.

Strategic Hubs and A465

I would be interested to know what these Priority Projects are, and what projects are specific to Blaenau Gwent?

Can the Valleys Taskforce also identify where these Strategic Hubs are?

I see that £600K is being provided for feasibility studies into Integrated Transport Hubs for Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf not Blaenau Gwent.

Why has Blaenau Gwent not been included?

Bus Reform

When will the Bus Strategy detailing the Short, Medium and Long term proposals be available.

My initial concern that it will not be a plan but a wish list of how they would like Public Transport to look.

Cross Valleys Link

Have Valleys Taskforce a timescale as to when these links will become available?

Valleys Transport Pilot

This looks like an interesting project, could Valleys taskforce publish more information on how this pilot is working and if it is a success or failure.

In Conclusion

I welcome the work that is being done by Valleys Taskforce. I would like to know what consultation there has been between Valleys Taskforce and the Business Community also how the General Public have been consulted, because ultimately the General Public will be the ones using Public Transport.

During my investigation into Economic Regeneration I have uncovered Plans, Strategy Documents, Consultancy Reports dating back over 40 years. All of these documents highlight Infrastructure (Good Road Links, Public Transport) as a major requirement of Economic Regeneration. Will we still be having this conversation in 40 years time!

I offer the same challenge to the Valleys Taskforce as offered to Blaenau Gwent Council. That is to use the Public Transport System that they are developing for the general public.