# Newport Destination Action Plan

## Introduction and purpose

This Action Plan provides a framework for further developing Newport as a visitor destination. It recognises Newport’s strengths and also addresses Newport’s weaknesses as a destination, identifying key actions needed to improve the visitor experience, as well as on-going actions which underpin this .

Although Newport City Council takes responsibility for driving the Action Plan forward this is a plan for all stakeholders , organisations and businesses involved in the development and management of tourism in Newport. The actions identified here have been put forward through consultation with the different service areas of Newport City Council, Newport Unlimited , the private and voluntary sectors.

Major partners include The Newport Tourism Association, The Caerleon Tourism Forum , Cadw, National Museums and Galleries Wales (Amgueddfa Cymru) , the National Trust, Friends of the Newport Ship, the Fourteen Locks Canal Centre, Celtic Manor , Holiday Inn and other private sector .

Part of the context is to recognise the financial challenges in the future of the public sector , and thus the need to work in partnership and collaboratively . As such actions identified here are subject to the necessary resources being deployed . In additional there is the complementary context of the City region consultation that is currently on going , which may inform the actions further .

Principal Aim of the Newport Tourism Destination Action Plan .

 The principal aim of the Tourism Destination Plan is to support and create jobs for the residents of Newport , by encouraging local spend through the visitor economy . That is to encourage more visitors , and especially those with higher yield spend .

It needs to be done in a way that benefits the local community in a wider sense . That is creating a better environment in which to live, evoking greater pride in the place and enjoying the products it offers.

The strategic objectives to achieve the above are: -

1. To improve the city as a visitor destination, for the benefit of local residents, businesses and visitors.
2. To improve the image of Newport and create an identity for the city so that it becomes a thriving, prosperous place.
3. To improve satisfaction with Newport as a place to visit.
4. To increase business tourism, conference and events income which has a high yield.
5. To increase tourist visits at the weekend to fill gaps in business tourism occupancy levels.
6. To embrace Newport’s historic sense of place to promote a joined up story of Newport’s heritage, connecting the city with the river and its historical roots.
7. To encourage a varied programme of events showcasing Newport’s culture and history.
8. To facilitate and undertake place marketing.
9. To support the economic regeneration of Newport.
10. To help create a welcoming city centre.
11. To help create a greener and healthier city by supporting the product development, and promotion of sustainable transport.
12. To help create a greener and healthier city by supporting businesses in reducing landfill, costs, and increasing skills.
13. To engage with communities to be part of and take part in the visitor experience and destination management , cultural and leisure activities.
14. To encourage a better food experience and encourage local food supplies .

**Vision Statement for Newport**

To create and market a modern, vibrant, forward looking city - connected with its sense of place, its independent identity, culture, history and traditions: a city visitors will want to visit, smart and connected . (based on Newport 2020 Refresh, (2011)

## Strategic documents underpinning this Action Plan

This plan builds on the 2020 Master Plan refreshed by Newport Unlimited in 2011, Newport City Council’s Economic Strategy 2011- 2015, Newport City Council’s CLL Strategy (2012), and the Corporate Plan ‘\Standing Up for Newport ’ 2012 -2017 reflecting the community plan.

Tourism contributes to the Corporate Plan as a Learning and Working City . It is about the visitor economy supporting jobs to contribute to a strong and confident economy , It also contributes to creating a Greener and Healthier city . This reflects the desired outcomes of the Local strategic Partnership.

The Destination Action Plan should always evolve and reflect the stakeholders changing context and needs . The Economic Development Strategy is currently being updated .

# Context and background

## The importance of tourism to Newport

Tourism is vital to Newport’s economy, which has seen a transformational shift in jobs from heavy industry and manufacturing to jobs in the public sector and service industries, of which tourism is a crucial sector representing about 5 % of the total workforce of Newport.

Over the passed six years the value of tourism to Newport has been increasing from 176 million in 2005 to a high of 232 Million in 2010 , the year of the Ryder cup event . The Ryder Cup raised the profile of Newport internationally and has left a positive legacy with visitor levels to the city 11% higher in 2011 than 2009,

2,814 jobs were supported by the tourism sector in 2011. (Source: STEAM)

Business tourism - meetings, incentives, conferences and events - is the most important sector for Newport, with past research indicating a 60 % Business Travel, 40 % Leisure split, varying through the week and the year. With flagship venues such as the Celtic Manor Resort business tourism has the biggest impact in terms of visitor numbers and contributes the highest yield. In recent years Newport has been bucking the national trend with an average room occupancy of 62 % in 2012, compared to a Wales average of 53% (Source: Visit Wales Occupancy Survey).

The current bed stock level in Newport is 4,694 bed spaces.

The development of flagship new attractions such as the RSPB National Wetlands Centre, and the National Trust adding Tredegar House to its portfolio, has strengthened the attractions base for the city, creating opportunities to develop the day visitor market. This is growing as more of the city’s heritage assets are brought to the market place. It has a good range of attractions on which to base a great day visitor offer.

Caerleon has attractions of international importance managed by Amgueddfa Cymru ( formerly National Museums and Galleries Wales ) and Cadw, where there is on-going investment to develop and improve the product.

With the draw of the new Newport International Sports Village and National Velodrome, improved Rodney parade facilities, and the Ryder Cup venue the Celtic manor including training facilities , the importance of sports tourism and events to Newport continues to increase.

Events are also a significant market for Newport, which now has the tried and tested infrastructure and support mechanisms in place to host events on the scale of the Ryder Cup. Newport also plays a key role as overspill and park and ride for major events held in Cardiff. The Newport Centre hosts a significant number of major events whilst the Riverfront Theatre provides an important cultural evening entertainment offer in the city centre.

The accommodation offer is varied but offers award winning products from Bed and Breakfasts to 5 star resorts . There are gaps and improvement in the offer to be addressed . ( See appendix 2 for accommodation base ) .

The Accommodation Occupancy is currently good averaging above the National Average for Room occupancy (Source TNS Welsh Local authority Occupancy analysis 2012 )

Newport Average : Room 61.8 % Wales Total : 53.4 %

See Appendix 3

## The current tourism offer - Newport as a destination

### **Heritage**

Heritage is a key leisure offer integral to the tourism product in Newport. The offer is strong, with flagship attractions such as Tredegar House, a city centre Museum and Art Gallery, the unique Transporter bridge, a canal centre, a medieval ship of international importance (of greater significance than the Mary Rose according to historians), and world class Roman sites in Caerleon including one of Wales’ National Museums, the National Roman Legion Museum and Cadw’s Roman Fortress Baths. It includes significant stories from the industrial revolution such as the Chartist rising of 1839.

The future role of Newport Museum and Art Gallery needs to be considered and redefined: It could be a regional Severn-side Museum, telling the story of the city’s links up and down the River Severn. There has been some scoping work to consider the possibility of the Museum and Art Gallery sharing a new site with the conserved Newport Ship. This will now need further consideration with the redevelopment of the city centre redevelopment and the scale of funding required housing a 30metre ship in a purpose-built facility. As the conservation of the ship progresses towards completion options for its future, including the possibility of establishing a trust to take this forward, need to be explored more rigorously.

Newport has one of the finest secular medieval buildings in Wales – its castle – but its isolated location rules out the possibility of improved physical access at present. Improved online interpretation, digital reconstructions and an official Cadw guidebook would help to raise awareness of this significant riverside site and support the Welsh Government’s pan Wales story-telling strategy.

Newport has recently benefited from investment in high profile sporting venues apart from the Ryder Cup venue , The Celtic Manor Resort ,including the International Sports Centre and the National Velodrome. Substantial investment has been made in developing cycle and walking routes, making Newport potentially the hub of a regional network, running along the Usk, fanning out along the Wales Coastal Path and linking into the Valleys along the Sirhowy Valley long distance path. This infrastructure is bringing in more running and activity events , such as the Newport Half Marathon.

This network also helps to link the outlying attractions such as Tredegar House and the Wetlands Centre, and the 14 Locks Canal Centre, which is located at the start of a 50 mile linear canal side path to Brecon. Cycling and walking connectivity is now a key strength for Newport which has the opportunity to create a strong, sporting and green/ sustainable profile for the city. There has also been investment in the natural heritage of the area with the development of the flagship RSPB Newport Wetlands Centre, located adjacent to the Wales Coastal Path.

### **Caerleon**

Caerleon, as a stand alone destination, undertakes destination marketing in its own right. Caerleon’s Roman heritage has the potential to put the town on the international map with its National Roman Legion Museum Amphitheatre, Barracks and the Fortress Baths. The innovative work being undertaken by the University of Newport in terms of digital recreations of how Roman Caerleon would have looked are providing an enhanced visitor experience and an exciting marketing asset to engage with new audiences and encourage new visitors to experience Caerleon in person. Caerleon considers itself home to the legend of King Arthur . This is based on literary associations , but the idea that the amphitheatre was Arthur’s Round Table creates a product with international appeal. This attractive riverside town is now linked to Newport via the riverside cycle path and down to the Wales Coast Path on the Severn Estuary .

 It has foodie connections, award-winning venues including a University , a summer arts festival and acts as a true tourism ‘destination’ in its own right. ( see Destination Action Plan for Caerleon )

**The City centre**

Due to the economic downturn the redevelopment of Newport city centre has not progressed as

planned, and this lack of a real heart to the city remains a significant weakness to Newport’s credibility as a visitor destination. The new city centre shopping development is planned to be completed in 2016, bringing Newport up into the top 100 shopping destinations in the UK. At present there is no real coordinated city centre destination marketing, but this will become a priority as the development progresses.

### **Management**

Several groups interact to 'manage' the city centre as a destination, including safety and licensing (regulatory services), a retail group (but no real private sector lead) and a city centre liaison group which addresses public realm coordination such as events and city centre dressing.  Although constrained by the economic climate product development activities continue in the city centre, pending the major redevelopment programme.  Physical upgrading works to the Market, Cambrian and Queensbury sites, along with public realm improvements, a proposed new Business Improvement District and new development by the private sector are helping to change the image of Newport as an attractive place to visit.

A single Streetscene service areas, to address a combined approach to environmental aspects of cleansing, signage and parking have been created by Newport City Council in the past few years . This is a major step forward in working towards a destination management approach by the Council, having a significant impact on how public realm issues can be swiftly resolved.

## Business tourism

Newport has an impressive range of conference and meeting venues including the Celtic Manor with its purpose built conference centre and 1200 sq m exhibition hall, the 2024 seater Newport Centre conference venue, the City Centre University’s exhibition, conferencing and meeting spaces, and the Magor Junction 23A conference venue for 250. This is backed up with a range of hotels from budget to 5\*, great golf courses such as the Ryder Cup 2010, backed by superb scenery surrounding Newport. This marketing profile sits well with inward investment. There needs to be on-going work and support, in partnership with Visit Wales, to continue to improve standards and quality in the accommodation sector. Where the market demands it this should include increasing capacity .

Newport City Council takes the lead role in promoting Newport as a destination for Business Tourism, running a conference bureau for Newport, Torfaen and Monmouthshire. The Council’s policy needs to be promoting Newport for more discretionary business travel and high profile events. This should be backed up by addressing weekend gaps in occupancy, promoting short breaks to the Leisure market .

## Events

Newport’s infrastructure for sporting events is first class, including the Celtic Manor Resort and the Ryder Cup 2010 golf course. The Wales National Velodrome is one of only four internationally recognised indoor velodromes in the UK. This world class cycle track is used by enthusiasts to test and perfect their cycling skills with track sessions for all abilities. The Newport Centre hosts major events whilst the Riverfront Theatre provides an important evening entertainment offer in the city centre. Newport also plays a key role as overspill and ‘stay and ride’ for major events held in Cardiff. Opportunities exist to identify events which Newport City Council’s Conference and Events Unit can bid for or support, taking advantage of the city’s track record of holding major events like the Ryder Cup.

Community groups play vital role in enhancing the sense of place of Newport as a destination through the range of local and community events they organise - such as the Lower Machen Music Festival and the Caerleon Arts Festival and events related to Newport’s role in the Chartist Story.

### **Perceptions**

One of Newport’s biggest problems is that of perception. Newport is constrained by its image, or rather its lack of an image. People do not think of Newport as a tourism destination, although the statistics (above) show that it is clearly a destination for visitors. Improving the image and identity of Newport is a key corporate aim for Newport City Council within the Community Plan , and is a desired out come of the private sector . Considerable work has been done on improving city legibility, but there is an on-going need to improve information on events, car parking opening hours, highways signposting, visitor information and to provide a better welcome to the city for arriving visitors to enhance the visitor experience.  Activities to address this on the ground include the Heads Up Mapping and Fingerposts project improving information, interpretation and signposting undertaken during 2012 which continue to be a priority in this Action Plan. This includes work on the new Newport Explorer programme, which tells the stories of Newport in the places where they happened - from the coal trade to the Chartist riots. Activity now needs to focus on how the different strands can be connected and reflected in marketing and promotional activity. This will help create a stronger sense of place for the city and improve its identity - as a city looking to the future with a fascinating past linked to the river and coast.

### **Marketing Areas**

With changes to the Wales Tourism Marketing Areas, Newport will no longer sit within the Wye Valley and Vale of Usk marketing area as it has done for over ten years. This gives the opportunity to readdress marketing Newport as a destination in its own right , particularly by embracing e – marketing and digital delivery channels.

It is intended to relaunch t**he recently formed Newport Marketing Partnership,** working with the public, private , third and higher education sectors . This would look at branding and key USPs to roll out Place Marketing to improve the public perception of Newport as a destination.

Marketing activities need to be realistic and flexible, working strategically with partners where it makes best business sense. Improved visitor research and monitoring are required to support marketing decisions.

There is a need to have this local sense of place accountability .

Proposals in the Wales Spatial Plan for the City region approach, will direct to an extent an agreed partnership collaboration . Newport is part of the Southern Wales collaborative marketing group for tourism . At a time of Public Sector financial cuts the emphasis must remain on improved marketing for Newport at a time of recession, supported by even greater private / public partnership.

A communications strategy needs to be prepared and adopted to improve the flow of information between all the partners .This will assist Tourism Association and Caerleon Tourism Forum members in better packaging visitor attractions and using guides to make tours more accessible. More partnership working/marketing/ better communication will create a more joined up approach, including referrals from attractions and accommodation and more effectively distributed information about attractions and activities.

# Assessing Newport’s tourism product

## Product strengths

* Excellent business and conference offer
* Good stock of accommodation including 5 \* resort
* Track record of hosting major events including golf and cycling with proven infrastructure / systems in place
* Riverside location
* World class heritage sites – Tredegar House, Roman Caerleon, Transporter Bridge
* Unique heritage stories to create strong sense of place
* World class sporting offer – from Ryder Cup golf course to National Velodrome and Newport Sports Village
* Excellent location and access
* Cycling and walking connectivity linking city to coast and Caerleon
* Green and sustainable projects such as WRAP, Carbon Trust and walking/cycling options

## Product weaknesses and gaps

* Lack of heart to the city centre
* Little coordinated city destination marketing (pending redeveloped shopping centre)

Little private sector leadership within the city centre retail group

* Little brand identity and image for the city - the main issue hindering progress towards Newport becoming a thriving and prosperous city
* Ongoing need to improve city legibility (signposting) and visitor information/ interpretation
* Visitor research and monitoring
* Resources
* Product development needed linked to the Coastal Path
* Food offer and the quality eating establishments
* Indecision/ uncertainty about future location/ character of Museum and Art Gallery and the Newport Ship
* Significant castle, adjacent to riverside cycle and pedestrian route, but access currently limited
* Improve communication channels so that trade know what is happening and to reinforce Public Relations .

## Product opportunities

* To maximise the international appeal of the Roman heritage of Caerleon and the literary association with the Legend of King Arthur.
* To create a highly individual story and sense of place based on the heritage of this riverside city
* To develop calendar of sporting events building on track record and maximising the use of superb infrastructure of Sports Village/Celtic Manor / training facilities and the cycling network
* To create leisure package around sporting venues
* To grow weekend leisure break market (filling gaps in accommodation stock used during the week)
* To develop and market Wales Coastal Path
* To develop Newport Ship as a waterfront attraction to create a truly maritime city in the region .
* To develop the food offer in Newport.
* To engage with customers/ visitors and content stakeholders to further develop Newport Explorer project
* To promote the links to surrounding superb scenery via cycle routes, footpaths and the canal network
* To maximise the profile of Newport as the National Trust attract new audiences to Tredegar House
* To maximise Public Relations opportunities by working more closely using partner resources/Visit Wales etc.
* Planned new shopping centre and city centre developments .

The Newport Destination and Management Plan

# Taking the Destination Action Plan forward

## Implementation

Existing networks and organisations will be used to progress the Destination Action Plan in Newport. Councillors, trade and the public sector already come together and work in partnership through Newport Tourism Association and Caerleon Tourism Forum. These organisations will work to take the Action Plan forward; where appropriate working groups may take specific actions forward. Other groupings, such as the City Centre and Retailer Group will take forward actions within their remit. The Caerleon Tourism Forum takes forward destination management, marketing and product development at the local destination level of Caerleon, whilst working in partnership with the wider Newport city area. With the current economic climate of reducing budgets Newport City Council’s role is to communicate and enable, and to act as a catalyst and coordinator as well as .

At the strategic level the Newport Destination Action Plan feeds into Newport City Council’s Economic Activity Measure (Marketing and Image indicator) within the One Newport Strategy and reports to the Local Strategic Partnership via the Corporate Director for ‘Place ‘.

The principles of stakeholder accountancy have influenced our thinking around monitoring and evaluation and how we judge success. Community Panels are regularly asked about Newport as a place to live and work and whether the city is improving. They are a valuable resource and will be part of the process of judging success where appropriate.