SMART TOWNS – AN OUTLINE FOR ABERGAVENNY

January 2023

BACKGROUND

'Smart Towns' is a new way of thinking about places in a data-driven world. It ensures the social, cultural, environmental, and economic goals of an area are thought of and designed with technology and data in mind.

At a time when Local Authorities, developers, businesses and communities are seeking to create more successful, liveable and attractive destinations, digital placemaking and establishing a Smart Towns helps provide access to high quality data that drives economic development, increases service efficiency, reduces environmental impact, and enhances overall liveability

This is a concept that is being driven forward by the Welsh Government who are actively supporting towns looking to adopt this approach and have committed to funding the Smart Towns Wales programme to 2025.

In Abergavenny a Digital Place Plan has been produced by local placemaking consultants Owen Davies Consulting (2022) with the involvement of the Town Council, businesses, and local stakeholders. The Plan outlines the steps the town can take to become a Smart Town. This includes the role that tech and data can play in addressing the town's main challenges and opportunities, such as, promoting the town, growing festivals and events, streamlining town centre management and reducing CO_2 emissions.

PROPOSALS

Building off this Plan a series of complementary initiatives are being developed, and in some cases already delivered, that will establish Abergavenny as a Smart Town:

1. Monmouthshire CC installing key pieces of digital infrastructure in the town centre
2. Abergavenny & District Tourism Association (ADTA) are interested in digital marketing and exploring the creation of a town app
3. Abergavenny is one of 4 towns in Wales with a Digital Place Plan that have been chosen by the Welsh Government's Smart Towns programme to take forward a

digital placemaking project working with the Town Council to enhance environmental management in the town centre

1) Monmouthshire CC have committed to install key pieces of digital infrastructure in the town centre. This includes units for smart footfall counting and a LoRaWAN gateway, both of which will be installed later this year. This infrastructure will enable a wider range of smart solutions to be delivered and provide data on visitor numbers, dwell time and other metrics.

This can be used to grow tourism and the local economy, supporting businesses to improve performance by targeting their promotions, adjusting their opening hours, etc. In future, the live data could be distributed and accessed by businesses and other stakeholders through an app if one is in place.

2) The ADTA are in early discussions around investing in digital marketing methods that will promote Abergavenny as a destination online. The ADTA are exploring developing an app for Abergavenny that promotes the town and enables businesses to run targeted promotions (e.g. dynamic offers linking in with ongoing events).

The focus of this work is to grow tourism in the town and surrounding area, attracting more visitors to the area and increasing the revenue of local businesses. The smart footfall counting and a LoRaWAN gateway will provide essential infrastructure to support the dynamic use of the App. This is complemented by the Town Council who are partnering with a local digital marketing company to promote Abergavenny hosting Britain in Bloom online and on social media.

3) Following the initial pilot study and the preparation of a Digital Place Plan, Owen Davies Consulting have been appointed through the Welsh Government's Smart Towns programme to work with Abergavenny Town Council and stakeholders to design a digital project that addresses a key challenge or opportunity in the town – ready to be taken forward for funding (to be completed by end March 2023).

Initial discussions with the Town Council suggest that there is an opportunity to enhance environmental management, linking in with the town's success at Britain in Bloom, as well as monitor air quality and congestion in the town centre.

NEXT STEPS

With a Digital Place Plan, strong performing town centre, and clear funding commitments already in place, there is significant potential for Abergavenny to become a new leader in this field, emulating Cardigan which has become Wales' leading Smart Town.

The strength and sustainability of these initiatives is dependent on them being taken forward together as a single package. This requires support and collaboration between key stakeholders (Town Council, ADTA, MCC, etc) to ensure that the projects integrate with each other where possible and focus on delivering on the town's ambitions and goals. One suggestion is to form a project steering group to coordinate and integrate all the activity.

With the support of Owen Davies Consulting, the offer of support is available to develop a digital solution as well as to assist in the coordination and development of the overall project.