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## **1 Executive Summary**

This Community Destination Plan complements the development of the Landscape of North West Wales's World Heritage Site Nomination; it has the following two objectives:

- To increase awareness, pride and understanding of the rich heritage of the slate industry;
- To promote the social and economic regeneration of the area.

The development of this Plan has itself been informed by extensive primary and secondary research, which has included:

- A document and data review of Bethesda's demography and economic profile, strategic context, regeneration projects and visitor/ tourism profile.
- Detailed assessments of the town's infrastructure, services, community provision, visitor offer and historic built environment – some of which has included audit work from the perspective of a 'secret visitor';
- An assessment of Bethesda's key strengths and weaknesses, as well as the challenges and opportunities presented;
- Identification of potential funding sources to inform the prioritisation/ viability of projects;
- Conclusions and recommendations in which we identify themes for the development of Bethesda.

The Plan is accompanied by an Action Plan, which sets out and prioritises ongoing, proposed and potential projects, alongside requisite resources, timescales, project lead and potential partners; this document is a working document and will be updated regularly and reviewed annually by Gwynedd Council and its stakeholders. Projects, and their prioritisation, have been identified in consultation with the community and stakeholders; prioritisation is reflected in the Action Plan.

The **key findings of our secondary research** can be summarised as:

- The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that income, access to services, community safety, housing and employment are all issues in Bethesda, but that the physical environment compares favourably to the rest of Wales. Data gathered from the 2011 census shows that there are higher than average levels of unemployment in Bethesda.
- Partneriaeth Ogwen has delivered a number of successful community development, regeneration and environmentally sustainable projects since its establishment in 2013, which have delivered tangible outcomes for Bethesda's community.
- An online survey (as part of the development of Gwynedd's Destination Management Plan) highlighted that visitor and public facilities, including quality visitor attractions; access to infrastructure and services, including parking; tourist friendly engagement; and shops/ shopping opportunities were all issues that should be addressed.
- 2016 was the most successful year to date for Gwynedd's tourism sector, with expenditure reaching over £1 billion, visitor numbers of over 7 million and an increase in spending outside the summer months.

- Visitors are attracted to Gwynedd for its landscape, countryside and beach, as well as its extensive outdoor activities. 82% of visitors were highly satisfied with their visit and 98% reported that they were likely to return to Gwynedd.
- Bethesda's community benefits from the operation of two well established community organisations. Between 2013 and 2016, Partneriaeth Ogwen generated an economic impact of £1,255,293 for the local community; Ynni Ogwen generated an economic impact of £1,331,390, both of which greatly benefit community development and regeneration activity in Bethesda.

The **key findings of our primary research** can be summarised as:

- The need to attract visitors, increase footfall and enhance the town centre's amenities and overall vibrancy was evident. In addition, the following priorities for development were identified:
  - Improve the town centre; address issues such as the decline in the townscape and empty shop units
  - Identify ways to extend the evening recreational offer – particularly cafes/ bars/ restaurants
  - Encourage small, town centre businesses to engage in town improvement activity and joint marketing initiatives
  - Promote and interpret the town's social and cultural identity
  - Explore new interpretive approaches and new spaces for interpretation
  - Research Bethesda's unique collection of slate art and identify ways to interpret this
  - Ensure that Bethesda benefits from any increased activity in respect of the world heritage status bid process.
- Visitor flow through/ to the town is limited due to a lack of visitor facilities, poor evening economy, a lack of car parking spaces, the declining townscape and an over dependence on budget accommodation provision in the town centre. Low visitor numbers to the town is affirmed by the lack of online visitor reviews on the town itself; visitor reviews are limited to the surrounding area and Zip World, rather than Bethesda.

The outcomes of our SWOT analysis (informed by findings of primary and secondary research) form our **conclusions**, which are based on the following themes as regeneration priorities:

1. Town centre improvement
2. Interpretation of the town's social and cultural identity
3. The historic built environment
4. Visitor facilities and transport infrastructure
5. Support and promotion of local businesses
6. Environmental sustainability

The report **recommends** the following projects for further consideration:

- A town centre improvement scheme to address the decline of the townscape.
- The introduction of the park and ride scheme (served by an electric bus) which is currently in development by Partneriaeth Ogwen;

- The establishment of a community wifi scheme to provide wifi to Bethesda High Street;
- Explore ways to open up the Riverside and to better integrate the town with the River;
- Undertake options appraisals on the prioritised built environment projects to identify ways to safeguard the buildings that have historical significance for Bethesda;
- Explore the potential to create an interpretation space in Siop Ogwen/ Neuadd Ogwen
- Undertake comprehensive research on Bethesda's slate art;
- Enhance visitor facilities and amenities in the town centre, as well as increasing the evening/ night time economy.

## **2 Introduction**

This Community Destination Plan has been developed to complement the development of the Slate Landscape of North West Wales World Heritage Site Nomination in order to increase awareness, pride and understanding of the rich heritage of the slate industry and to promote the social and economic regeneration of the area.

The Penrhyn Quarry was developed from the 1770s by Richard Pennant, later Baron Penrhyn. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was the world's largest quarry, worked by nearly 3000 quarrymen.

It remains Britain's largest slate quarry.

The town, which grew in the vicinity of the quarry, was named after Bethesda Chapel which opened around 1821. At its height, in 1901 the population was 5,281.

The narrow gauge Penrhyn Quarry Railway, an early iron edge railway, was opened in 1801 to transport slate from the quarry to Port Penrhyn at Bangor.

In 1900, the Bethesda quarrymen went on strike which, supported by the North Wales Quarrymen's Union, lasted three years, the longest dispute in British industrial history. These years of hardship and struggle created deep rifts within the community.

From 1906 onwards, Blondins a type of aerial ropeway for transporting wagon loads of rock between locations were used at Penrhyn Quarry. Today the Zip World visitor attraction transports people along zip wires 500 metres above the quarry lake.

Bethesda is the fifth largest community in Gwynedd with a population of 4,735 (source: census 2011)

## **3 Demography and Economic Profile**

The total population of Bethesda is 4,735; however, Bethesda falls into two ward areas Gerlan and Ogwen (and three Lower Super Output Areas – Gerlan, Ogwen 1 and Ogwen 2, which we provide data on below). In order to provide an overview of the economic context of Bethesda it is necessary to analyse data (source: census 2011) from each ward, which is presented individually in Appendix 2; we provide a summary here:

- The population of Gerlan is 2,380; 1,738 (73%) of whom are of working age (aged 16-64); and the population of Ogwen is 2,355; 1,717 (73%) of whom are of working age (16-64).
- There is a significantly higher than average (65% in Gwynedd and 66% in Wales) proportion of economically active residents in both Gerlan (74%) and Ogwen (71%); we provide more detail on employment sectors in Appendix 2.
- 26% of residents in Gerlan and 29% in Ogwen are classified as economically inactive, which are considerably lower than the averages for Gwynedd (35%) and Wales (34%); 7% of whom in both Gerlan and Ogwen are unemployed, which is higher than both the averages for Gwynedd (5.5%) and Wales (6.5%).

- The proportions of residents in both Gerlan (18%) and Ogwen (19%) that are classified as long-term sick/ disabled are higher than the Gwynedd average (12.5%), but comparable to the Wales average (18%).
- Gerlan has a lower than average proportion (20%) of adults (aged 16+) with no qualifications than Ogwen (25%), which is similar to the averages for Gwynedd (23%) and Wales (26%).
- Property ownership is higher than average (66% for Gwynedd and 68% for Wales) in Gerlan (70%), but lower than average in Ogwen (62%); these levels are reflected proportionately in the number of households that rent socially (12% in Gerlan and 21% in Ogwen) and privately (18% in Gerlan and 17% in Ogwen).
- There is a significantly higher than average proportion of households that do not have a car in Ogwen (27% ) than average (21% for Gwynedd and 23% for Wales), however the proportion is significantly lower in Gerlan (17%).
- 84% of Gerlan's population are in very good/ good health, which is higher than the averages for Gwynedd (81%) and Wales (78%) and compares favourably to Ogwen (81%), which is commensurate with the average for Gwynedd; 11% in Gerlan and 13% in Ogwen are in fair health, both are lower than Gwynedd (14%) and Wales (15%) averages; and 4.5% in Gerlan and 6% in Ogwen are in poor health, which is commensurate with the average for Gwynedd (5%), but lower than the average for Wales (8%).
- With regard to social class, Gerlan has a higher proportion (31%) than average of managerial and professional, whereas Ogwen (27%) is commensurate with the averages for Gwynedd and Wales (both 27%); 30% in both Gerlan and Ogwen are skilled, which is commensurate with the average (for both Gwynedd and Wales); the proportion of the population that is part/ unskilled in Gerlan (26.5%) is commensurate with the average for Gwynedd (and is slightly lower than the average of 29% for Wales) but the proportion in Ogwen (31%) is higher; 13% of Gerlan's and 12% of Ogwen's population are students/ other, both of which are lower than the average for both Gwynedd (17%) and Wales (14.5%).

The main employers in the area include:

- Welsh Slate – Welsh Slate/Breedon owns and operates Penrhyn Quarry; across all its sites (which includes a number of quarries in North Wales) it employs 170 people. It is felt that the WHS bid is likely to increase the profile of Welsh Slate's high quality product and thereby have a positive impact on its commercial operation.
- Zip World Penrhyn Quarry– set within the quarry, the fastest zip wire in the World, Velocity 2, flies 500m above the quarry lake.
- Little Greene Paint Company - is an independent British paint manufacturer that is committed to the socially and environmentally responsible production of high quality paints and wallpapers; the company dates back to 1773 and has partnerships with both the National Trust and English Heritage.
- CL Jones Timber and Builders Merchants - a family run timber and builders merchants established in 1982; the business was founded in Bethesda and as well as

the Bethesda site the company has five additional sites in Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy.

- National Trust – offers employment at Penrhyn Castle, nineteenth century castle with extensive gardens; and local nature reserve wardens.

#### The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2014 is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales; these are called Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) and have an average population of 1,600 people. Because all LSOAs have around the same population it is easier to carry out comparative analysis. The Index is presented as a set of ranks; rank 1 reflects the most deprived area and rank 1909 reflects the least deprived area, which allows us to know which areas are more (or less) deprived than others, but not by how much.

In Appendix 2 we provide data that shows how the three LSOAs in Bethesda compare to other areas across Wales and within Gwynedd; the table shows that all three LSOAs have different issues but that the physical environment compares favourably in all three LSOAs (albeit less so in Ogwen 1) to areas in the rest of Wales. The tables also show that all three LSOAs have similar levels of multiple deprivation and score below 50% for their overall weightings for multiple deprivation.

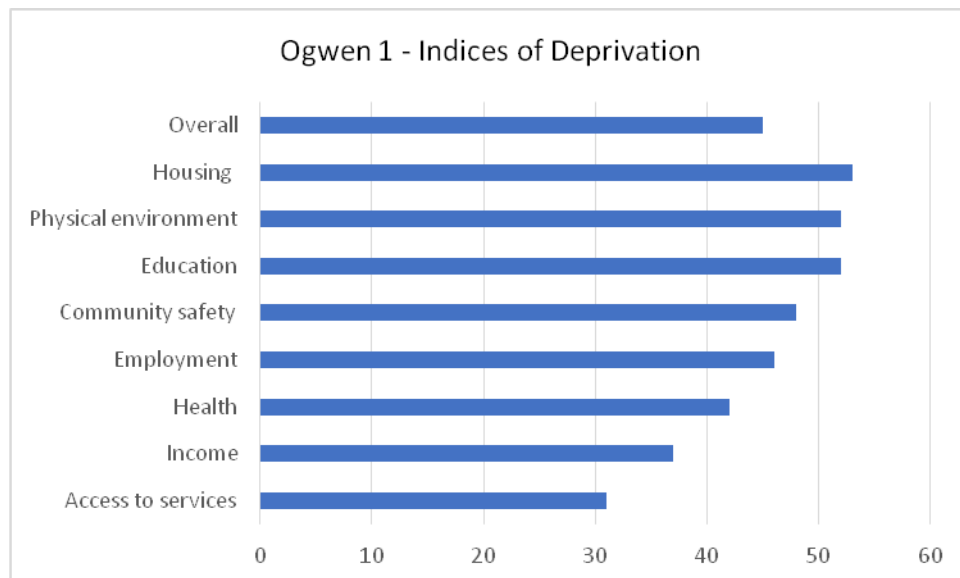
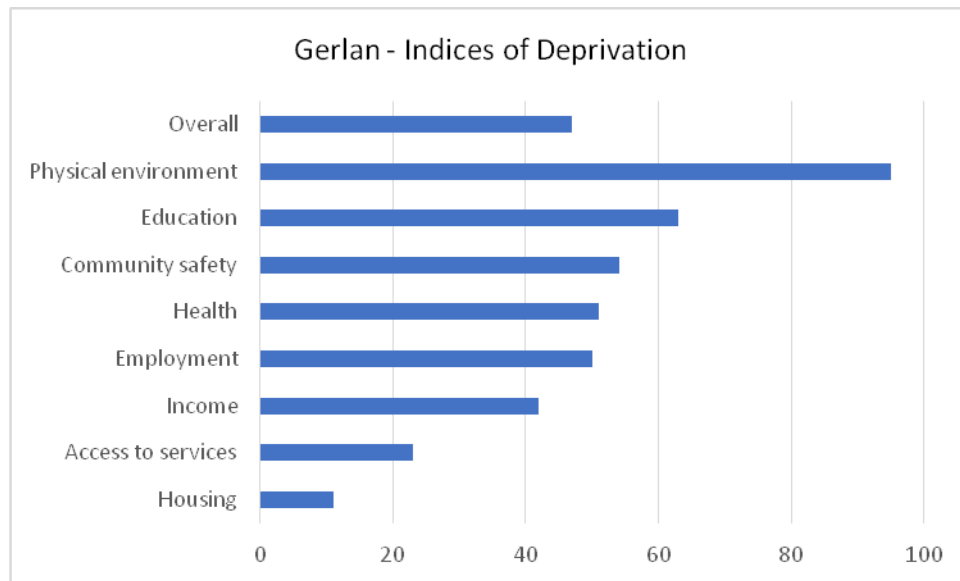
The data shows that income and access to services are the most significant areas of deprivation in Gerlan; that access to services and income are the most significant for Ogwen 1 and community safety, housing and employment for Ogwen 2.

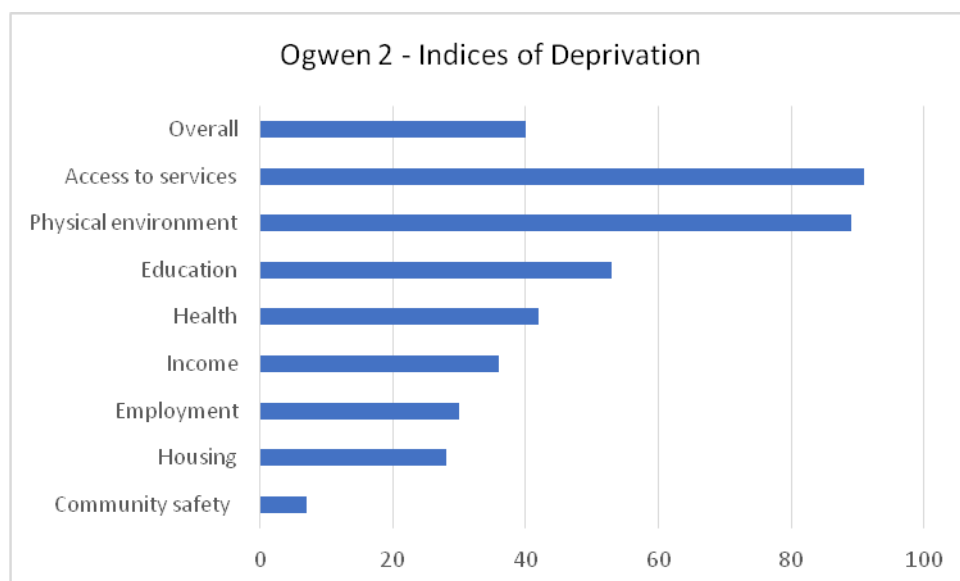
#### Ranking of LSOAs in Gwynedd

The following charts show how each area ranks within Wales against individual indicators. As we set out above, the data is presented in a reverse index, i.e. the lower the score the higher the deprivation level and vice versa – the higher the score the lower the deprivation level; for example the chart below shows that Ogwen 2 has a low ranking for community safety, which means that it is amongst the most deprived (within the top 10%) in Wales.

The charts allow us to understand how the deprivation levels in the three LSOAs of Bethesda compare to the rest of Wales.







#### **4 Strategic Context**

The strategic context for the area is detailed in the separate *Strategic Context for the Slate Area* document; in summary, these are the policies which currently influence activities in the Blaenau Ffestiniog area:

##### **National:**

- Wellbeing for Future Generations Act; Welsh Government
- Tourism 2020 (Partnership for Growth); Welsh Government
- The Wales way; Visit Wales
- Themed Years; Visit Wales
- Light Springs through the Dark: A Vision for Culture in Wales; Welsh Government
- Historic Environment Strategy for Wales; Cadw
- Inspire Our Strategy for Creativity and the Arts in Wales; Arts Council Wales

##### **Regional/County:**

- Gwynedd Council Plan 2018-2023; Gwynedd Council
- Gwynedd Council Improvement Plan 2018 – 2023; Gwynedd Council
- Gwynedd Council Wellbeing Statement; Gwynedd Council
- Gwynedd Council Arts Plan; Gwynedd Council
- Regional Skills and Employment Plan; North Wales Regional Skills Partnership
- Gwynedd Destination Management Plan 2013-2020; Gwynedd Council
- The Snowdonia National Park Management Plan; SNPA

##### **Local:**

- Wales Slate World Heritage Site Nomination 2016 – 2020 Economic Plan; Gwynedd Council
- Our Local Economies, Communities Building Prosperity; Building Communities Trust

- Partneriaeth Ogwen Strategy, 2018 -2021
- Bethesda Town Centre Improvement Study, 2013, Gwynedd Council

## **5 Regeneration Projects**

### **Partneriaeth Ogwen**

Social enterprise established in 2013 by Bethesda, Llanllechid and Llandygai Community Councils whose funding (in return for clerking services) gives a sustainable source of income, which is topped up by a diverse range of grants for specific activities.

Partneriaeth Ogwen's vision is to create a strong community organisation that works innovatively for the benefit of the communities of Dyffryn Ogwen; environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability is integral to its operation and its business plan has the following aims that are relevant to Bethesda:

- To protect and create new income streams
- To prioritise projects that create economic, environmental and social benefits with a focus on transferring community assets, buying new assets to generate income and projects that make our community stronger and more resilient.

Partneriaeth Ogwen runs a one-stop shop on Bethesda High Street, which houses its own office, as well as services that include the Police, Citizens Advice, Grŵp Cynefin Housing, Group Energy Wardens, Nest & Energy Local, as well as the community council. It also owns and manages out four residential units and six commercial outlets on Bethesda High Street, which are let to local companies and social enterprises; the rent is set below the private rental average.

### **Community projects**

- **Dyffryn Ogwen Community Library:** Partneriaeth Ogwen has signed a three year lease on the Library.
- **Canolfan Cefnfaes:** community centre located in Cefnfaes; funding has been earmarked to employ a Project Manager to guide the development of the centre.
- **Gerlan Car Park:** potential development of Gerlan Car Park with Bethesda Community Council.
- **Siop Ogwen:** carries out administrative, general management and marketing work on behalf of Siop Ogwen, contributing to the wider vision of regenerating Bethesda High Street.

### **Sustainability Projects**

Dyffryn Gwyrdd (Green Valley) combines the various sustainability initiatives within the Ogwen Valley communities:

- **Cyd Ynni – Ynni Lleol:** Partneriaeth Ogwen is a local partner of Community Energy Wales in the development of the Energy Local scheme and employs an Energy Local Officer one day a week to raise awareness of Energy Local, energy efficiency and sustainability.

- **Ynni Ogwen:** is a community hydro scheme kick-started by Partneriaeth Ogwen which ran its highly successful community shares scheme. Now a separate company, it forms part of the regional consortium of community hydro organisations. It is a partner in the 27 High Street sustainability centre's development
- **Sustainability Centre 27 High Street:** grant of £25,000 received from the Welsh Government's Community Facilities Programme fund towards the purchase of a building on Bethesda High Street to be used as a hub for Partneriaeth Ogwen's environmental and sustainability activity.
- **Community Transport and Electric Cars Project:** has been developed through consultation with the community and stakeholders in response to complaints about community/ public transport problems in the Ogwen Valley; the potential to develop a community transport plan - ideally powered by renewable local electricity has been identified.
- **Egin Ogwen:** Partneriaeth Ogwen holds community growing events with local volunteers; it aims to further develop this project as part of the Sustainability Centre's activities.

#### Tourism development projects

Partneriaeth Ogwen is developing and delivering a series of projects to strengthen the 'local tourist offer' and help promote and market local businesses and societies. It aims to develop a communications strategy to promote Bethesda, its local businesses, heritage and culture. We provide a brief summary of each of the schemes:

- **Community WiFi:** Partneriaeth Ogwen has secured financial support from the Digital Gwynedd scheme to develop a Community Wi-Fi scheme that will deliver free wifi access be free for all users (visitors, residents and businesses) on Bethesda High Street.
- **Ogwen Valley website:** a website to promote the Ogwen Valley is under development; the site will promote the area, local businesses and the tourist/ cultural offer.
- **Exploring the Ogwen Valley leaflet:** guide for 8 circular walks in the area, distributed to businesses and tourist centres in the area.

A recent analysis of both Partneriaeth Ogwen's and Ynni Ogwen's social return on investment as a means of measuring the impact of its activity on the local community between 2013 and 2016 found that:

- Partneriaeth Ogwen has an SROI ratio of 4.71:1, which indicates that for every £1 invested the equivalent of £4.71 of social benefit has been delivered to the community.
- Ynni Ogwen has an SROI ratio of 2.90:1, which indicates that for every £1 invested the equivalent of £2.90 has been delivered to the community.

The study also found that both organisations' activities delivered significant economic impact to the community; Ynni Ogwen's investment of £459,100 in its hydro scheme was

raised through the sale of shares with the majority of the investment provided by the local community in Bethesda. In the period of 2013 – 2016 Partneriaeth Ogwen has raised an income of £418,431 (sustainable communities grant: £204,502; other grants: £75,054; community councils: £77,266; and rental income: £61,609); this results in an economic impact of £1,255,293 generated for the local community.

#### **Bethesda Rugby Club Community Hub**

Bethesda Rugby Club's Clubhouse re-opened in March 2019 as a Community Hub, providing a purpose built community facility to meet the community, business and sporting needs of the area.

It now has an important role as a focus for well-being and future generation initiatives in the area. The project secured grant funding from the Big Lottery Fund (£250,000) and the Rural Communities Development Fund (£128,000), and contributions were also made by Cist Gwynedd and the Club's sponsor, Peninsula Home Improvements.

The new building houses seven new businesses, including a homeopath, physio; twenty local organisations use its facilities including the Urdd; and in total 2,000 people are estimated to use its facilities annually.

#### **Carneddau Landscape Partnership Project**

The Carneddau Landscape project has been developed in partnership by a number of local organisations: Abergwyngregyn Regeneration Company, Cadw, Conwy Borough County Council, Gwynedd Council, Menter Iaith Conwy, National Trust, Natural Resources Wales, Outdoor Partnership, Penmaenmawr Historical Society, Snowdonia Active, Snowdonia Society. Partneriaeth Ogwen represents the Bethesda area which serves as one of the gateways to the mountain range.

The project's aim is to develop a project to help people discover, record, care for and celebrate the Carneddau, its mountains, settlement fringes and valley sides, through the provision of new ways of learning about the area, better information, events and activities, resources for schools and young people, skills training, access improvements and grants for landscape conservation works.

The partnership, which is led by the Snowdonia National Park Authority, has applied for £1.92 million of funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver the five year project, which will be delivered between 2019 and 2024.

#### **6 Visitor/ Tourism profile**

Here we provide a summary of the profile of visitors to Gwynedd in order to better understand the type of visitors Bethesda currently attracts and can hope to attract, as well as visitor motivations and expectations.

#### **Gwynedd Destination Management Plan 2013-2020**

The main aims of the Gwynedd Destination Management Plan 2013-2020 are:

- to extend the tourism season,
- to increase visitor spend,
- to improve the quality of the visitor experience,
- to improve integration of tourism with other aspects of life,
- to enhance the natural, built and cultural environment, infrastructure and amenities,
- to build and maintain quality public buildings and amenities
- to provide well paid, year-round quality jobs and skills development.

The Destination Management Plan carried out an online survey and whilst the findings relate to Gwynedd as a whole the majority of issues raised are pertinent to Bethesda; the following can be noted as key issues to address:

- Better visitor facilities
- Better public facilities, e.g. visitor superstructure such as holiday accommodation and dedicated
- Activities to infrastructure elements including roads and other public spaces,
- Quality visitor attractions,
- Parking provision,
- Better local services,
- More tourist friendly engagement,
- Improved shops and shopping opportunities

Any tourism developments in the Bethesda area should take the aims and issues noted above into consideration, in order to ensure that any projects at a local level feed into the strategic priorities of the Destination Management Partnership.

#### Wales Visitor Survey, 2013; visitor needs

A survey undertaken in 2013 on visitor needs (as part of the Wales Visitor Survey) found the following **key findings**:

- Day trip planning is minimal; 69% interviewed day visitors to Wales reported that they did not use any information to plan their trip to Wales.
- 57% of UK staying visitors used online information to plan their visits, compared to 18% that used offline sources, however many participants expressed the importance of printed material during their visit; 38% of UK staying visitors to Wales used offline sources during their trip, compared to 17% who used online sources.
- The most fundamental influences on attracting new visitors to a region are recommendations and experiences of friends / relatives / colleagues
- Local people, especially accommodation providers, play a very important role in influencing visitors where to go. Their advice is sought and trusted more than online reviews because they live there, and so many visitors use local knowledge to verify their list of planned activities, or seek new ideas.

It is clear that both online and offline marketing material/ information is important for visitors and these findings are important to consider when reviewing Bethesda's online presence and profile, as well as when planning future marketing campaigns and the development of promotional/ printed material, for example, the possibility of establishing an Ambassador's scheme could be explored, through which local people act as Ambassador's/ guides/ information sources for visitors.

### Wales Visitor Survey, 2016

The 2016 Wales Visitor Survey, undertaken by Beaufort Research, reported the following **key findings on Gwynedd's visitor profile:**

- The majority of visitors to Gwynedd live in England (60%),
- higher than average proportion of staying visitors in Gwynedd and is much higher than the all Wales proportion (37%) of visitors from the rest of the UK
- approximately a third (37%) of visitors live in Wales compared to 59% of overall visitors to Wales; 3% live abroad, compared to 4% of the all Wales average
- Gwynedd attracts a higher proportion of more affluent ABC1<sup>1</sup> visitors (48%) compared to all Wales sites (32%).
- The survey found that over a third of visitors (35%) to Gwynedd visit with children (the majority of whom are younger children
- Just under a third of visitors (30%) are couples
- The significant majority (71%) of visitors (who were interviewed) to Gwynedd were on a day trip, which is substantially lower than the all Wales average of 88%.
- The vast majority of staying visitors lived in England (82%) and the average number of nights stayed in Gwynedd was 5.8, which compares to 6.0 across Wales

### **Motivations for visiting and activities undertaken:**

- A greater proportion of visitors to Gwynedd (73%) cited that their reason for visiting was to enjoy the landscape/ countryside/ beach than for all Wales (56%).
- Visitors to Gwynedd were also much more likely to have come to take part in outdoor activities compared to all sites in Wales (41% compared to 25% respectively)
- The three most popular activities, each undertaken by around a third of visitors to the region, were visiting the beach (34%), general sightseeing (33%) and visiting country parks (31%).

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<sup>1</sup> ABC1 and C2DE are approximated social grades; the six categories (A, B, C1, C2, D and E) and is a socio economic classification produced by the UK Office for National Statistics. The categories break down as follows:

AB – higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, professional occupations

C1 – supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative, professional occupations

C2 – skilled manual occupations

DE – semi skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations.

**Satisfaction with the overall experience, revisiting and recommending:**

- In general, visitors to Gwynedd were highly satisfied with their visit to Wales, with over eight in ten (82%) awarding a score of 9 or 10 (out of 10) for Wales overall as a place to visit.
- Visitors' trips to/ in Wales exceeded expectations for just over a third of visitors to Gwynedd - 37% reported that their trip was better than expected
- Almost all visitors to Gwynedd reported that they were likely to return to Wales in the future (98%); 92% of whom said they would definitely visit again, while 6% said they would probably visit again.

**Visitor numbers and the associated economic impact**

The tourism sector in Gwynedd in 2016 had its most successful year to date (2016 being the most recent set of data available); tourism expenditure in the local economy reached over £1 billion. As well as increases in peak season visitor numbers, there was an increase in visitor spending outside of summer months – the period October to April showed a substantial increase in expenditure compared to previous years.

Over 7 million people visited Gwynedd in 2016, which marked an increase of 3.2% on the previous year; 3.5 m of these visitors were staying visitors (an increase of 5.5% on 2015), the remaining 3.6 m were day visitors.

In terms of economic impact, direct expenditure reached £0.75 billion in 2016 (an increase of 4.7% on the previous year), which resulted in an economic impact of just over £1 billion (a 4.5% increase on 2015). Direct employment (FTEs) through tourism was 12,725 in 2016 (an increase of 1.6% on 2015); and total employment (FTEs) reached 15,557 (an increase of 2.1% on the previous year). (Source: STEAM data).

Key visitor attractions and sites in Bethesda received the following visitor numbers in **2017/2018:**

- Penrhyn Castle received 109,395 visitors in 2017 (a decrease of 5% on 2016 figures) and was 175<sup>th</sup> on the list of the UK's most visited visitor attractions; it received 115,542 visitors in 2016, which was an increase of 7% on 2015 visitor numbers (source ALVA – Association of Leading Visitor Attractions).
- Zip World Penrhyn Quarry (visitor numbers are not yet available)
- Zip World Rocks – an annual day music festival held in June at Penrhyn Quarry; in 2018, 1,800 people attended.
- Cwm Idwal : 89,185 visitors (source: Visitor Monitoring Figures Report, 2018, Snowdonia National Park)



## **7 Infrastructure and Services**

**Bus:** There are two bus services from Bethesda to Bangor, one via Mynydd Llandygai, Monday – Saturday only, 07.35 -16.35; the other via villages of Gerlan and Rachub, Monday –Saturday 07.00 – 19.00; Sunday and Bank holidays, every two hours, 09.00 – 19.00. These connect at Bangor with bus services to Caernarfon/Llandudno; Anglesey.

The Snowdon Sherpa service runs from Bangor Train Station on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays, departing at 07.55, arriving at Ogwen Lake 8.30, then on to Capel Curig/Pen y Pass. Returns from Ogwen Lake at 17.35. This service is primarily used by climbers/walkers.

**Road/Parking:** Bethesda is located on the main A5 road; there are two car parks: Cae Star, pay and display, 55 spaces, Pant Dreiniog/John St, free, 47 spaces.

There are a limited number of short stay parking spaces along the High St for access to shops and services.

**Cycle Route:** National Cycle Route 82 runs from Bangor, following the old railway line from Port Penrhyn, and enters Snowdonia National Park at Bethesda.

**Wi-Fi / Mobile networks:** Free public wi-fi is available at Bethesda library, and in a number of businesses throughout the town. There is a proposal to install free public wi-fi in partnership with Partneriaeth Ogwen and business located along the High St, then linking up to Zip World.

## **8 Consultation**

### **Previous Public Consultations**

A great deal of consultation has been undertaken in Bethesda over recent years: Partneriaeth Ogwen has undertaken extensive consultation in developing its regeneration Strategy; also relevant are the consultations undertaken to inform the refurbishment project of Bethesda Rugby Club's Clubhouse and the development of the Carneddau Landscape project, both of which have received national lottery funding.

#### **Bethesda Rugby Club Community Hub Clubhouse**

Extensive consultation with the local community across a wide range of age groups and potential users, on the type of facilities, pattern of use and future requirements for a community hub, in addition to the rugby club's provision of sports facilities, was undertaken by means of online discussion, paper questionnaires and drop in sessions, thus securing the £500, 000 required for new Community Hub Clubhouse.

#### **Carneddau Landscape Partnership Project**

In its Heritage Lottery Fund development phase the project ran a series of consultation of sessions with local farmers, residents and the general public; key findings included:

- Concern about the potential conflict between bringing more people to the area and maintaining it as a wild, natural and tranquil location;
- There is a lack of signage and information to bring people to Carneddau, however it was noted that the introduction of any signage should be carefully handled – it was clearly expressed that signage should be limited and not be on the landscape itself;
- The risk of overcrowding due to increased visitor numbers as a result of more promotion/ awareness of Carneddau; it is clear that local people are very protective of Carneddau.

#### Town Centre Improvement Scoping Study, 2013, Gwynedd Council

The aim of the study was to identify opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses of the town centre in its then current state in order to formulate an action plan.

A Local Survey meeting was held with representatives from local stakeholder groups: Partneriaeth Ogwen, Cyngor Cymuned Bethesda, Ogwen ward councillor, Dyffryn Ogwen, Pen y Bryn and Abercaseg schools; North Wales Police Authority, Balchder Bro Ogwen, local businesses.

In response to the SWOT analysis developed from the survey, key organisations were tasked with leading on various initiatives and a budget of £18,000 allocated for projects identified to improve the Town Centre.

#### Our consultation

There are several groupings working across different sectors in Bethesda, engaged in community development, which greatly helped our consultation work. Partneriaeth Ogwen has been extremely supportive in providing a focal point for those interested in future community regeneration in relation to the World Heritage Status Bid process.

We attended (and organised some of) the following events and activities at which we undertook community consultation:

**Inspiring and Enterprising Communities Conference, Bethesda:** this event was organised by Partneriaeth Ogwen and attended by representatives from all the main community enterprises in the area, local councillors, community leaders and entrepreneurs. (March 8)

**Marchnad Ogwen:** we took a stall at the monthly farmers' market held at Neuadd Ogwen, Bethesda; we explored the understanding/ perception of the Wales Slate bid; gauged the strength of community engagement; and discussed ideas for community/ townscape improvement. (March 9)

**Tu Hwnt i'r Chwarel:** we hosted the launch event at Bethesda Library of an exhibition that has been curated by Bangor University about the people who worked on the Penrhyn Estate; we explored the relationship with the town's industrial and social history; connections with Penrhyn Estate/ Quarry; engagement with heritage more widely; and contemporary social and cultural themes. (March 19)

**Mapping Pesda, Past and Present:** we organised and delivered a photowalk led by local artist Lisa Hudson around the town with the participation of Ogwen Camera Club members; we surveyed the footpaths/ quarrymen's routes, interpretation points, historic buildings and features, particularly slate art. (April 18)

The projects identified – those currently in development and new ones identified through the consultation process for potential development to the future – are listed in the accompanying Action Plan.

In addition to the general consultation events, we have consulted with the following **local stakeholders**:

- Clwb Rygbi Bethesda
- Cyd-Ynni
- Marchnad Ogwen
- Neuadd Ogwen/Cwmni Tabernacl
- National Trust/Penrhyn Castle
- Partneriaeth Ogwen (Cyngor Cymuned Bethesda/Llanllechid/Llandygai)
- Welsh Slate/Breedon
- Ynni Ogwen

#### The findings of our consultation

Here we summarise the principal issues in terms of community development that were identified as part of our consultations.

**Town centre/ High Street improvements:** the need to re-vitalise the High Street and attract more businesses and shops to the town is evident and consequently it is a major focus of the business support initiatives that are focused on the town. The limited parking and lack of shops have been cited as reasons for the low conversion rates of visitors from Zip World to the town centre.

The uptake of the Bethesda Town Centre Loan Fund, an interest free loan provided by Gwynedd Council to encourage business owners to improve their property has been very low. It would seem business owners are reluctant to commit their own funds; the scheme will close in October 2019 and any unspent funds will be returned to Welsh Government. Partneriaeth Ogwen's intervention has made new premises in the town available but as yet this has not been sufficiently widespread to invigorate the town centre.

Members of the recently formed Bethesda Business Forum (a group of small, local businesses which aims to promote Bethesda's town centre and its amenities) are actively developing the Wi-fi scheme in partnership with Partneriaeth Ogwen, which would link up businesses along the High Street with Zip World, underpinned by a marketing strategy.

It was also noted that there is currently a significant lack of visitor facilities and amenities available in the town centre; and a lack of restaurants, cafes, bars and accommodation, particularly mid – high end accommodation.

Several ways of **attracting visitors to the town and increasing footfall** were identified, namely:

- the proposed park and ride scheme (which would also alleviate traffic congestion at Ogwen Lake);
- the creation of a new installation space focussed on Slate Art (it has been suggested that this could be achieved by refurbishing Siop Ogwen and providing a new entrance/ box office facilities for Neuadd Ogwen); and
- directing visitors towards the River Ogwen and riverside park area, which would align with the Lôn Las Ogwen cycle route and provide a more attractive, natural focus for the town centre.

### **Interpretation and social and cultural identity**

There is strong understanding and ownership of the town's social history and cultural identity, primarily expressed through the medium of Welsh - the two local history societies Cymdeithas Hanes Dyffryn Ogwen and Clwb Hanes Rachub both hold meetings and publish their communications and historic findings in Welsh.

The [www.hanesdyffrynogwen.wordpress.com](http://www.hanesdyffrynogwen.wordpress.com) website is an invaluable resource for local history and historic buildings. In addition, several prominent local historians are proud guardians of private collections of photographs and memorabilia however there seems to be an unwillingness to make these widely available.

The history of Bethesda is inextricably linked with the Penrhyn Estate, owned by the Pennant family. The Great Strike of Penrhyn, 1900, which lasted three years, the longest dispute in British industrial history, resulted in years of hardship and sacrifice, scarring the community as rifts emerged between families. There is a memorial to the striking quarrymen in front of Jerusalem Chapel, where unionists from across Britain had gathered for a rally.

Whilst the requirement for an interpretation centre to document this particular and unique chapter of the town's history was expressed, there does not seem to be a general consensus amongst the organisations we consulted and the operation and long-term sustainability of an interpretation centre would need careful consideration.

Several mentioned that there should be more extensive interpretation of the quarry and the town's history at the Zip World site, which now occupies part of Penrhyn Quarry. There is currently little interpretation in the reception/café area; some background information is given during the ascent in the trucks to the Zip Wire stations.

Members of Côr Penrhyn, the local male voice choir, are actively seeking innovative ways of interpreting the history through the medium of music and digital projection. They wish to

commission a new work which would represent the town's heritage in a contemporary relevant way.

The choir's project is supported by the National Trust at Penrhyn Castle, built by the Pennant family who established the quarry at Bethesda. Despite the historical legacy of how the family built their fortune on slavery in Jamaica and labour of their quarrymen, the National Trust is actively engaged in challenging negative perceptions of Penrhyn Castle and the Estate's history.

Our consultation did highlight the importance of Slate Art and the craft of slate carving to the artistic and cultural identity of Bethesda. Whilst not unique to Bethesda, (slate objects would have been carved across all the slate quarry areas), the quality and amount of examples still to be found within the community is exceptional. Some of these have been documented in various publications : *The Carved Slates of Dyffryn Ogwen, Gwenno Caffell; Slate of Hand, Stone for Fine Art and Folk Art, Judy and Ted Buswick.*

Examples from Gwynedd Museum were exhibited in the first major British survey of Folk Art at Tate Britain in 2014. Further examples from the Gwynedd Museum collection, now renamed Storiell, are on permanent display at the gallery/museum in Bangor, but display space is limited.

A recent project, Aelwyd, organised by Partneriaeth Ogwen, delivered by artist Sian Owen, at Dyffryn Ogwen Library, demonstrated the increased interest in slate art. Several related workshops were held and the response to an open invitation to bring examples to be documented for the People's Collection was tremendous. The beautifully intricate examples were exhibited for a short period of time at the Library. Feedback from contributors, local folk art experts and admirers shows that there is a desire to establish a comprehensive research/archive documentation project in order for these artistic works to be properly acknowledged; also that there should be a permanent exhibition space on the High Street to provide a focus for further interpretation and draw visitors into the town.

(This is now being considered by Partneriaeth Ogwen as part of their plans for buying and revamping Siop Ogwen alongside the proposed re-development of facilities at Neuadd Ogwen by Cwmni Tabernacl).

**Historic built environment:** the significance that Bethesda's Chapels (particularly Jerusalem and Bethania) has played in terms of its social and cultural and identity was emphasised, for example the town itself is named after its first Chapel.

Other observations/ issues that were identified included:

- Ogwen Terrace in the town centre is an attractive Georgian terrace but several of its shop premises are empty and in disrepair, as a consequence many of its historic features have been lost, which warrant restoration.
- The buildings associated with the quarry (of which there are several, namely Turbine House and Felin Fawr Works) should be refurbished and interpreted or used for interpretation purposes;

- Options for safeguarding the future of the town's earlier significant buildings (that include Coetmor Farm and Caerberllan) should be explored.
- the town centre would benefit from a targeted grant scheme for key buildings and heritage-led environmental improvements, which could include Jerusalem Chapel, former Bank, and other 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings along the main high-street.

The projects prioritized in the Historic Built Environment Assessment are outlined in Section 11; see Appendix 3 for more detailed information.

**Visitor facilities, Transport and Infrastructure:** despite several initiatives over the years to promote Bethesda as a 'gateway to Snowdonia', it is widely felt that this has not happened. The main reasons cited are lack of parking, few shops/ dilapidated empty premises in the town centre; a lack of visitor facilities; and heavy industrial traffic through the town.

The Zip World experience at Penrhyn Quarry offers a panoramic viewing area with a cafe/ bar/ restaurant and encourages visitors to spend the whole day on site, which results in low visitor numbers in Bethesda itself, particularly given the lack of visitor amenities, such as food/ drink outlets and accommodation.

The accommodation providers that we consulted with reported that the lack of quality food outlets open in the evening is an issue for visitors, and as a result the majority travel to Bangor.

Some projects identified by the community which could address issues of infrastructure and orientation, include:

Electric bus/Park and Ride service for climbers/walkers from the town to the top of the Ogwen Valley which would help alleviate the congestion/parking issues at Ogwen Cottage at peak times.

Create a new pathway along the river bank to link the town with the quarry buildings at Felin Fawr, then up to Zip World/Penrhyn, thus encouraging re-orientation away from the busy High Street towards the natural beauty of the River Ogwen.

Partneriaeth Ogwen is the lead organisation in terms of community development and regeneration and its extensive consultation process within the communities of Dyffryn Ogwen, to identify priorities and inform the development its strategy is central to the regeneration opportunities which we consider in this Community Destination Plan and within the context of the UNESCO World Heritage Status Bid. These are detailed in Section 5: Regeneration Projects.

Through our consultation the **following priorities for development** were identified:

- Improve the High Street/ town centre, attract more businesses and provide more visitor amenities;

- Develop opportunities to attract visitors to the town – new interpretation/exhibition space; riverside walks, linking up quarry buildings and Zip World
- Explore the options for refurbishing historic buildings that are significant to the town's heritage;
- Explore the potential to interpret the town's social and cultural identity, particularly around Slate Art;
- Improve accessibility (where possible) to interpretive and information materials on the town's social, cultural and industrial history, promoting knowledge and understanding of Bethesda's heritage;
- Support and develop local businesses on the High Street and generate new and integrated marketing opportunities
- Improve the community/ public transport service to improve access to the town centre;
- Promote sustainable, renewable energy and protection of the natural environment through proposed regeneration projects;

## **9 Community Audit**

In order to better understand Bethesda's provision for its residents and its visitor offer we have carried out a community audit, by which we mean an external audit of Bethesda as a community.

### **Community Representation**

In this section we summarise the community facilities and organisations that operate in Bethesda, in order to provide an overview as to the provision for the local community.

**Dyffryn Ogwen Community Councils** –Bethesda, Llanllechid and Llandygai. The three community councils have combined resources to support Partneriaeth Ogwen, a social enterprise, which provides administrative support services for the three councils.

**Partneriaeth Ogwen:** social enterprise which aims to regenerate and support the economy and develop enterprise and innovation within the communities of the Ogwen Valley.

Partneriaeth Ogwen's activities and current projects are detailed in Section 4 : Regeneration Projects and its future schemes and initiatives, developed through the consultation process are detailed in the Action Plan.

The following community and social enterprise organisations are active in Bethesda:

- Caban Cysgu Gerlan/Canolfan Gymunedol Gerlan
- Caffi Coed y Brenin
- Fforwm Busnes Bethesda
- Merched y Wawr: Tregarth
- Pesda Positif
- WI: Bethesda

The following cultural and heritage organisations are active in the town:

- Atgofion Ogwen/Bethesda Memories
- Dyffryn Ogwen Camera Club
- Clwb Hanes Rachub History Club
- Côr y Penrhyn
- Crawia Drama Club
- Llechen Las Drama Club
- Dyffryn Ogwen History Society
- Gwyl Afon Ogwen River Festival
- Gwyl Mynyddda Ogwen Mountaineering Festival
- Llais Ogwan

The following cultural and arts venues operate in the town:

- Neuadd Ogwen - theatre, music venue and other events
- Dyffryn Ogwen Library – managed by Partneriaeth Ogwen; provides venue for small meetings/exhibitions/ arts workshops

## **10 Visitor assessment**

In this section we assess Bethesda's visitor offer in order to better understand the challenges and opportunities for the future development of the town.

### **Layout/Arrival**

The A5 (London to Holyhead road) forms the main thoroughfare, the High Street. It's an extremely busy road with heavy lorries going back and for to Penrhyn Quarry; pavements are narrow and there are a few paved public areas with seating : Llys Dafydd area; the area around the empty supermarket; and gardens in front of Capel Jerusalem. Generally, it's not conducive to stopping and strolling around to investigate further.

Running parallel to the main road is the River Ogwen, which is a beautiful, natural resource, but access within the town centre is limited: a bridge leads to Parc Meurig, the riverside park; this leads to Lon Las Ogwen, the national cycle route; a couple of cafes/pubs have riverside views/garden but generally this area could be made into a more attractive amenity for the visitor, and the local community.

As the town centre essentially consists of one long street, there is no obvious 'arrival' point in Bethesda: the bus stops in Bethesda but then continues in a loop via other villages returning to Bangor.

There are two car parks, off the High Street, but if unfamiliar with the town, the visitor could easily miss the signs for these, and then continue through the town, without finding any car



parking. There are limited short stay car parking spaces on the main street for quick access to shops/cafes

#### Visitor Information: orientation/ signage/ tourist information

There are interpretation panels in the Llys Dafydd public area which present a short history of the town's industrial, social and cultural heritage.

Town trail leaflets, produced by Partneriaeth Ogwen, are apparently available at shops and businesses along the High Street; but there does not seem to be any associated signage to direct the visitor around the town. Many interesting historical buildings, architectural and other features in the town centre are not interpreted.

There is little signage to direct you to the riverside and Parc Meurig. The Llyfr Mawr y Plant trail in the park is an attractive cultural feature, although may need to be refreshed. There is signage directing cyclists to Lon Las Ogwen

The Snowdonia Slate Trail goes through the centre of the town and there is some interpretation information on its website.

A new interpretation initiative, Mapping Pesda Past and Present, <https://mapiopesda.wordpress.com>, uses the Alpaca Travel content tool to introduce key features and points of historic interest, but would require further development.

There are interpretation panels at key quarry related buildings, and along the cycle route, but in some places there can be up to three different signs, erected by different agencies, but the interpretation information varies and so can be confusing.

Some empty shop fronts have display panels presenting the town's history - there is an interesting display of photos and memorabilia by Côr Penrhyn, the local male voice choir in Ogwen Terrace.

There is no tourist information centre, although Siop Ogwen functions as a local information centre for events, activities etc, but is not open daily.

#### Facilities

**Public conveniences:** public toilets situated on High Street

**Cafes/restaurants:** there are three cafes in the town centre, Caffi Coed y Brenin; Caffi Seren both of which close early afternoon. Patricks, a café for walkers/climbers, open from Thursday to Sunday, but opening times can be erratic.

There are four pubs on the High Street: Douglas Arms, Victoria, King's Head; and the Llangollen which serves food – average quality, pleasant décor.

At Zip World, there's Fforest Caffi and Blondin Restaurant, which are open seven days a week. Attractive location with panoramic view of the quarry.

Cwrw Ogwen, the local micro brewery has a shop/bar on the High Street.

Accommodation providers said that lack of good food outlets, open in the evening, was a real problem for visitors, and as a result, most would go to Bangor.

### Visitor Attractions and Activities

We have identified the following **visitor attractions** in the town and local area:

- **Penrhyn Castle** – mock castle and gardens at nearby Llandygai, National Trust property. The present building was commissioned by the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Penrhyn, who made his fortune from slavery in Jamaica and development of the slate quarry in Bethesda.
- **Zip World Penrhyn Quarry** – set within the quarry, the fastest zip wire in the World, Velocity 2, flies 500m above the quarry lake.
- **Snowdonia National Park:**
- **Cwm Idwal**, the first National Nature Reserve in Wales, a popular place for visitors interested in walking, climbing, fishing and geology. Managed by the National Trust, Snowdonia National Park Authority and Natural Resources Wales. National Trust has an information centre/cafe at Ogwen Cottage, which is an Outward Bound Centre.
- The **Carneddau** range include the largest contiguous areas of high ground (over 2,500 or 3,000) in Wales and England, as well as six or seven of the highest peaks in the country.
- **Snowdonia Slate Trail** – an 85 mile walking trail around the slate quarries. Starting at Port Penrhyn, from where the Penrhyn Quarry slate was shipped, it passes through some of the smaller quarry villages then into Bethesda. The trail was developed recently with the support of several local partners.

We have identified the following **cultural and heritage activities and sites** in the town and local area:

- **Neuadd Ogwen** – theatre, music venue and other events
- **Parc Meurig** – Llyfr Mawr Y Plant trail.

We have identified the following **events** that are delivered in the town and local area:

- Gŵyl Afon Ogwen River Festival, annual arts festival held in Parc Meurig and other venues in the town;

- Pesda Roc – annual indie music event;
- Gŵyl Mynydda Ogwen Mountaineering Festival – series of film screenings, talks and mountaineering related events;
- Zip World Rocks – annual music event held in June at Zip World;

#### Accommodation provision

Serviced accommodation in the town centre is very limited, primarily a bunkhouse (over the Victoria) and one pub with rooms, however accommodation provision in the local area is more substantial; there are eighteen self catering holiday homes within a one mile radius of the town centre, nine of which fall within half a mile.

There is a community run bunkhouse, Caban Cysgu Gerlan in Gerlan which has 16 beds and provides affordable accommodation. There has also been a recent increase in that amount of air bnb accommodation that is available in the area, in response to demand that has been generated by Zip World.

There is one permanent caravan park on the outskirts which has 68 static caravans and 34 lodges.

A bed stock survey is currently underway and this section will be updated once the findings are available.

#### Bethesda's Online Profile

There is no Bethesda town website or Facebook page.

Partneriaeth Ogwen's website [www.ogwen.org](http://www.ogwen.org) provides information about the organisation's activities.

Atgofion Bethesda is a Facebook group for sharing memories and local history information.

[www.hanesdyffrynogwen.wordpress.com](http://www.hanesdyffrynogwen.wordpress.com) is a local history resource, in Welsh only.

#### Visitor reviews

As well as providing a useful source of information for potential visitors (particularly online reviews), visitor reviews can provide constructive guidance for improvement. We have analysed a sample of positive, negative and mixed reviews of Bethesda and incorporated our findings in the SWOT analysis that follows. These reviews raise some valuable points for consideration and enable us to better understand how visitors and potential visitors perceive Bethesda; we provide a brief summary of the reviews:

Cwm Idwal walk has received unanimously positive reviews, with visitors describing it as 'amazing' 'brilliant' and 'breathtaking' and writing: 'a beautiful place for a walk... amazing scenery in every direction and parking nearby (April 2019) 'fabulous place... wonderful

landscape’ (March 2019) ‘a truly beautiful place to visit at any time of the year (November 2018) and ‘I don’t know how many times people can say this but it is a fantastic place to visit... it’s a beautiful walk and the reward at the top is fantastic (May 2019).’

One reviewer comments on the ‘unkempt gardens’ at the Jerusalem Chapel and that ‘a large amount of litter was strewn around the benches’; she went on to comment that ‘the imposing Church looked derelict and abandoned (May 2017).’

Hospitality reviews are mixed; the majority are positive citing “excellent food, service, atmosphere, décor and cleanliness”; however there are a few negative reviews that cite an “unfriendly atmosphere”, “poor levels of cleanliness, poor décor and lighting” and “limited availability of stock”. Reviews of the limited town centre accommodation offer are also mixed.

## **11 Buildings and Built Environment**

We have carried out **Historic Built Environment Assessments**, to which the following selection criteria have been applied:

### **Statutory protection:**

- Listed buildings (by grade, I, II\*, II).
- Scheduled Monuments.
- Buildings and features within Conservation Areas.

### **‘At risk status’:**

- As defined by Cadw’s buildings at risk register (BAR) for each individual area. Classifications as follows:
  - At Risk
  - Vulnerable
  - Not at Risk
- Based on a brief inspection from external (noting if uses are apparent whether the building or feature appears derelict or vulnerable).

### **Context in terms of slate industry heritage:**

- Importance in the context of the slate industry heritage of the area (albeit the scope of work does not allow for heritage assessments or research on individual buildings or sites).
- Feedback from the consultation process on the perceived local significance of a building, feature or site.
- Providing a representative selection of the buildings which supported the slate industry and their communities.

### **Regenerative and interpretive potential:**

- Potential of an individual building or site to contribute to the regeneration of the area, provide significant interpretive potential or other opportunity.

Our findings are set out in full in Appendix 3; here is a summary of prioritised built environment projects. These are not necessarily just the most significant sites, but those which balance significance (in the context of the slate industry) with the potential to provide significant community regeneration outcomes. The highest priority sites have been identified as:

1. **Ogwen Terrace**, a dominant and strong feature of the town, this curved early 19<sup>th</sup> century terrace comprises 22 houses, of which 6 are listed. The remainder have suffered from some poor alterations. It could hold strong regenerative potential, has the capacity to lift the high street and the river frontage. A grant programme either for Ogwen Terrace individually or as part of a wider town-centre package is suggested.
2. **Wider town centre improvements**. A targeted grant scheme for key buildings and heritage-led environmental improvements, which could include the Jerusalem Chapel (access, interpretation, conservation) former Bank, and other 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings along the main high-street, this should include making much greater connection with the river frontage, enhancing connections and enabling activity along the river.
3. **Capel Bethania**. A key building on the entrance to the town, listed Grade II. A distinctive and prominent building it retains much of its original internal detail. It presents a significant opportunity to bring activity to the entrance to the town, connecting to the two adjoining conservation areas of Rhes Gordon and Rhes Elfed. An options appraisal is recommended.
4. **Coetmor farmhouse and outbuildings**. A fine range of farm buildings and barn originally associated with Coetmor Hall and listed grade II, the farmhouse is currently vacant (we understand) and regarded as vulnerable on the Cadw Buildings at Risk register. It could potentially provide accommodation for visitors, which is somewhat limited given the proximity to key tourist destinations, or small-scale commercial space. An options appraisal is recommended. The later Hall (which was destroyed by fire in 1933) was the home of influential local businessman, politician W.J. Parry. An earlier mansion stood nearby, and the outbuildings at Coetmor date from this earlier period. An options appraisal is recommended.
5. **Cae'r berllan**. This fine early terrace of houses is listed grade II. One building, no. 5, is identified as being at risk. This needs to be addressed, and provides an opportunity either to interpret the building, if the ownership can be secured, as it once was, or as a unique place to stay in Bethesda (or indeed, both). The whole terrace needs to be interpreted and celebrated.
6. **The former turbine house**, Penrhyn Quarry. A non-listed building, the former turbine house is sited adjacent to the caravan site and Afon Ogwen, south of Bethesda on the approach to the quarry. Potential to reinvigorate as part of a hydro-electric project, or to conserve and interpret (with perhaps an adjoining use incorporated) on the Lon Las Ogwen cycle route. An options appraisal is recommended.
7. **Felin Fawr Workshops**, A group of fine listed buildings and a small scheduled monument. One of which, the water wheel, is considered to be at risk. Further risks to the site are posed by the departure of the former Penrhyn Quarry Heritage

railway. However it poses significant opportunities, being sited strategically on the Lon Las Ogwen cycle route, between the town and the quarry. An options appraisal is recommended.

## **12 Key Challenges and Opportunities**

It is evident from our consultation and research that there are some fundamental challenges facing Bethesda which must be addressed in order for the town to maximise the benefits that will arise from the World Heritage nomination; here we summarise the key challenges that we identify for the town and the opportunities that would enable the town to address these.

### SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT analysis assesses Bethesda from the perspectives of both visitors and community members and summarises the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of its visitor offer and provision for its residents:

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<b>COMMUNITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong sense of community, Welsh language, identity, and culture</li> <li>• Community Councils have joined together to create an effective social enterprise – Partneriaeth Ogwen</li> <li>• Sustainable energy and environment is key to several community regeneration initiatives</li> <li>• Lively community venues/ hubs that provide sport and cultural activities – Neuadd Ogwen and Bethesda Rugby Club</li> </ul>	<b>COMMUNITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The High Street has a significant proportion of empty retail units and many buildings are in a state of disrepair</li> <li>• Limited take up of the Town Centre Loan Fund.</li> <li>• A lack of community transport service to support older people/ disabled etc.</li> <li>• A lack of activities and social networks for older people</li> </ul>
<b>TOURISM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outstanding landscape and scenery in the surrounding area</li> <li>• It is the closest town to Cwm Idwal/ Ogwen Valley (popular destinations for mountaineers and walkers), which makes it a good base for walking breaks</li> <li>• Zip World is based at Penrhyn Quarry, which attracts high visitor numbers.</li> <li>• Easily accessible - located on A5 and close to the A55 Expressway</li> </ul>	<b>TOURISM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very limited choice of cafes/ restaurants/ shops in town centre and no cluster of distinctive shops – weak retail offer.</li> <li>• Very limited evening/ weekend food/ drink offer</li> <li>• Dependence on lower cost serviced accommodation in the town centre</li> <li>• Lack of facilities in the town centre for tourists – parking; shopping; cafes/ restaurants</li> <li>• Town has not capitalised on the</li> </ul>

<div></div> <p><b>BOTH TOURISM AND COMMUNITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited public transport infrastructure – bus to Bangor in daytime</li> <li>Well used cycle path by cyclists and pedestrians as an alternative to High Street.</li> <li>Unique historic features/ architecture</li> <li>Strong track record of festival/ events</li> <li>Neuadd Ogwen – a hub for cultural and social events</li> </ul>	<p>proximity of Zip World and its visitors – low level of marketing of High Street retail offer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heavy industrial traffic along the A5 and limited parking deters visitors from stopping in the town centre</li> <li>The riverside area is hidden behind the High Street – lack of signage to it.</li> </ul> <p><b>BOTH TOURISM AND COMMUNITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for better tourism/ public facilities</li> <li>Lack of available parking spaces is a barrier to visitors/ residents spending more time in the town itself.</li> <li>Status of the A5 (A roads have limitations) limits the interventions and opportunities for the town e.g. Christmas lights are not allowed.</li> <li>Poor evening/ night time economy</li> <li>Large number of vacant properties in the town centre</li> <li>Limited perception of the town's potential</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p><b>COMMUNITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The electric community bus initiative</li> <li>Creation of new parking areas to support businesses in the High Street</li> <li>Introduction of a community wifi scheme to support local businesses</li> <li>Increased footfall in the town centre and associated visitor spend</li> </ul> <p><b>TOURISM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Located on the A5 and close the A55 Expressway – good links to other tourist locations in Snowdonia/ North Wales mean it could be a stop off/ day trip for visitors staying elsewhere</li> <li>Wales Way: new family of three strategic routes – the Cambrian Way;</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS/ CHALLENGES</b></p> <p><b>COMMUNITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The town centre/ High Street is not improved and there is a continued lack of support from local businesses to engage with the improvement initiative</li> <li>Partneriaeth Ogwen is unable to secure sufficient funding for larger schemes</li> <li>The parking issues in the town centre remain unresolved</li> <li>Economic sustainability and general decline of towns in rural areas</li> <li>Uncertain economic and political climate</li> </ul> <p><b>TOURISM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town centre has not been improved – appears run down</li> <li>A lack of visitor facilities (particularly at weekends/ evenings) does not serve/ attract visitors.</li> <li>Risk of electric bus/ park and ride not going ahead, which will exacerbate</li> </ul>

<p>the Coastal Way; and the North Wales Way developed by Visit Wales – a significant opportunity to promote Bethesda as destination for walkers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snowdonia Slate Trail: enhanced marketing and promotional activity; opportunity to develop amenities for walkers in the area.</li> <li>• Electric bus park and ride service; riverside walking route could help alleviate traffic and attract visitors to the town</li> <li>• To create a new route connecting the town with Penrhyn Quarry</li> <li>• New interpretation/ exhibition space in Siop Neuadd/ Ogwen could add to the destination offer, provide visitor facilities and enhance the visitor offer</li> <li>• Develop quality accommodation offer for range of budgets</li> <li>• Create new parking areas/ spaces giving access to businesses in the High Street</li> </ul>	<p>parking/ traffic issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk that the town continues to fail to address the potential opportunities of Zip World's visitor flow, which will result in further separation between Zip World and the town centre.</li> </ul>
<p><b>BOTH TOURISM AND COMMUNITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World Heritage Site nomination</li> <li>• Explore uses for 'pop up' shops and activities in empty premises on High Street</li> <li>• Rejuvenate the town centre – encourage take up of the town centre loan fund and businesses to invest in their properties</li> <li>• Explore ways to extend opening hours of the town's food outlets and work to attract new food and beverage outlets</li> <li>• Explore potential to open up (the Riverside from the town centre and increase flow from town centre.</li> <li>• Identify individual access points along the River Ogwen to promote increased usage of the Riverside for wellbeing and activities</li> <li>• Increase the range of events</li> <li>• Explore ways for the town centre to align itself to benefit from Zip World's visitor numbers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>BOTH TOURISM AND COMMUNITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The operational and financial challenge of opening up the Riverside from the town centre</li> <li>• Risk of further shop units falling empty – increased dereliction of town centre</li> <li>• Resilience/ willingness/ capacity of small businesses to invest in their business– potential repercussions on the condition and perception of the town centre</li> <li>• Continuing decline of the quality of the public realm and town centre if no action is taken.</li> <li>• Competition from larger town centres, e.g. Betws y Coed, Llanberis and other rural/ outdoor tourism destinations</li> </ul>



### **13 Conclusion and recommendations**

Following our consultation and research, which includes our community audit and visitor assessment, together with our consideration of the challenges and opportunities for the town, we have identified the following themes as regeneration priorities for Bethesda:

- Town centre improvement
- Interpretation of town's social and cultural identity
- Historic built environment
- Visitor facilities and transport infrastructure
- Support and promotion of local businesses
- Environmental sustainability

We investigate in more detail below the challenges and opportunities identified in these themes, and our Action Plan sets out in more detail proposed and potential projects that address these challenges and respond to opportunities.

#### **Town centre improvement**

The need to improve the High Street/ town centre, attract more visitors and provide more visitor amenities is evident from our consultations and visitor audit; we set our recommendations for visitor facilities, alongside transport infrastructure below. The re-vitalisation of the High Street and attracting more businesses and shops onto the High Street has long been a priority, which has, in part been addressed by Partneriaeth Ogwen's acquisition and management of property and the recent business support initiatives.

Take up of the Bethesda Town Centre Loan Fund has been disappointingly low; the scheme expires in October 2019 and any unspent must be spent before the scheme's completion or it must be returned to the Welsh Government. Interventions to date have been limited in scope and in the case of the Town Centre Loan Fund, dependent on investment from individual businesses. The potential to deliver a larger, transformative town centre improvement scheme, and which addresses the regeneration and interpretation of historic buildings and features should be considered.

Partneriaeth Ogwen would be well positioned to lead the delivery of a more ambitious scheme, but may require support to develop a scheme and secure funding; this should be explored with Partneriaeth Ogwen.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that business owners are reluctant to invest their own funds in their properties and as a result improvements to the High Street have stalled; we recommend that the benefits of investment (including the time limitations of the Town Centre Loan) are made clear to business owners and other incentives to investment are explored. It may be prudent to undertake consultation to explore the reasons as to why

business owners have not taken up the loan so as to identify other ways to incentivise investment and offer support if required.

The potential to use empty shops as pop up shops for temporary activities/ events/ retail opportunities should be explored, particularly in the summer months to boost visitor numbers and rejuvenate the High Street.

The lack of visitor amenities contributes to the town centre's decline; diversifying the café and restaurant offer (there may be scope to introduce a mid - high end offer) and encouraging those already in operation to extend their opening hours to include evenings and weekends would attract/ retain visitors to/ in the town centre and improve the overall vibrancy.

#### Interpretation of the town's social and cultural identity

There is currently limited interpretation of the town's social, cultural and industrial history; the town centre presents opportunities for interpretation and consideration should be given as to which location is best suited to interpret the town's heritage. There may be an opportunity for more interpretation at Zip World, but there has been no indication that Zip World plans or aspires to expand its limited interpretive offer, but this should be considered as an option.

The requirement for an interpretation centre/ space in the town centre was expressed by some of our consultees, however there was no clear consensus overall. The operation and long-term sustainability of any interpretation centre or space would need careful consideration.

Furthermore it is evident that there is a great deal of interpretive material on the town's heritage that is not available or widely accessible; the two local history societies publish their historic content in Welsh, one of which manages its own website, which is furnished with extensive local history information ([www.hanesdyffrynogwen.wordpress.com](http://www.hanesdyffrynogwen.wordpress.com)) but is inaccessible to non Welsh speakers, which of course includes the majority of visitors. The addition of an option to translate the text into English would broaden access to this invaluable resource.

Innovative ways of interpreting the town's heritage, which are currently being explored, should be supported, where possible, as they will broaden engagement with Bethesda's heritage.

The need for comprehensive research on the town's slate art in order to understand the historic significance and extent of material available is clear, particularly given Bethesda's prominence as a historic and contemporary centre for slate art; in addition the possibility of carrying out an archive documentation project should be explored. The potential for a permanent exhibition space as part of Siop Ogwen/ Neuadd Ogwen is currently being explored as part of wider plans to redevelop facilities at Neuadd Ogwen by Cwmni Tabernacl.

These plans should be considered in the contexts of the significance of slate art to Bethesda's social and cultural identity, the widespread interest in Slate Art which has been substantiated by recent projects and high profile exhibitions and the potential for interpretation space to diversify the town centre's visitor offer.

### The historic built environment

There are many significant buildings and built features which merit further consideration in terms of renovation, re-use and regeneration potential. More information and an initial assessment, subject to further discussion with the relevant conservation organisations and officers, can be found in the accompanying Historic Built Environment Opportunities Study (Appendix 3)

Through a review of both protected (i.e. listed or scheduled) heritage sites and those not currently afforded that protection, a number of key potential projects have emerged. These are not necessarily just the most significant sites, but those which balance significance (in the context of the slate industry) with the potential to provide significant community regeneration outcomes. These are listed in Section 11/Historic Built Environment and in the attached Action Plan.

Options for safeguarding and reinstating/ conserving some of Ogwen Terrace's historic features, as well as the buildings themselves should be explored, with particular consideration given to its position on the riverbank and the potential to open up access points to the riverside. This should form part of a wider targeted grant scheme for improvement of key historic buildings along the High Street.

Capel Bethania is a key building on the entrance to the town, listed Grade II. It presents a significant opportunity to bring activity to the entrance to the town; an options appraisal is recommended.

We recommend that options for the refurbishment of former quarry buildings (Turbine House and Felin Fawr Works) should be explored through an options appraisal, with a view to interpreting the buildings to tell their stories and those of the quarry, or to use the buildings for more general interpretation purposes.

The options for safeguarding Coetmor Farm and Caerberllan should also be explored, with a view to identifying a sustainable long-term use; these buildings, as some of the town's earliest, have particular heritage significance.

### Visitor facilities and transport infrastructure

It is clearly felt that the delivery of various initiatives to promote Bethesda as a tourist destination have not been successful; a plethora of reasons have been cited, which include the decline of the town centre, empty premises and lack of parking.

There is a clear need to improve visitor facilities in the town centre; it is evident that visitors travel to Bangor for leisure and recreation, particularly in the evenings and at weekends and as a result Bethesda is missing income generating opportunities. This is evident from the visitor reviews and the lack of actual reviews on Bethesda itself.

There is of course competition from Zip World (which has a cafe/ bar with a panoramic viewing area) during the day, but evening food and drink provision in Bethesda would differentiate the offer for visitors. The opportunity to connect the town with Zip World has been identified via a riverside footpath and this would encourage visitors to Zip World to visit Bethesda, particularly if there was more provision for visitors in the town.

The potential to open up the Riverside and integrate the town with the river should be explored, which would open up an alternative route (to the High Street's heavy traffic) for pedestrians, highlight the architectural significance of Ogwen Terrace and integrate the natural environment with the town centre, improving its attractiveness and overall environment.

There are significant untapped opportunities to generate income from tourism, particularly with the prospect of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, and businesses in Bethesda must be encouraged to respond to, and capitalise on, these opportunities.

The public transport infrastructure is limited; buses are the only form of public transport to the town and the route is limited to Bangor, in day time hours only. Partneriaeth Ogwen is exploring the possibility of introducing a park and ride service for climbers/ walkers from the town to the top of the Ogwen Valley, operated by an electric bus. This would have the benefit of alleviating the congestion experienced at Ogwen Cottage at peak times and bring users into the town. The potential for the bus to be used to service community transport needs in the town, such as hospital transport has been identified and we recommend that this is planned carefully, to ensure expectations are realistic.

#### Support and promotion of local businesses

The Bethesda Business Forum is a relatively new initiative with the priority of developing a community wifi scheme to provide wifi to all visitors and customers of the High Street; this would also enable the development and delivery of a joint marketing strategy, interpretation resources; new online marketing and social media presence, to be coordinated by a marketing assistant.

A number of ways of attracting visitors to and increasing footfall in the town have been identified, which would support local business; these include the park and ride scheme, an interpretation/ exhibition space and the re-orientation of the town.

#### Environmental sustainability

Bethesda has a strong established track record of delivering environmentally sustainable projects and consequently it has a reputation for sustainability. This should be continued –

firstly it ensures that the town's community development and regeneration activity is underpinned by sustainability and secondly it elevates the town to 'good practice status' whereby it can be used as an exemplar for other towns.

#### **14 Potential sources of funding**

We have identified the following potential sources of funding; we set these out in more detail in the accompanying funding document (alongside other, smaller funding streams), to for consideration alongside the development of the proposed projects:

- North Wales Growth Bid
- Rural Community Development Fund
- Tourism Investment Support Scheme (TISS)/ Micro Small Business Fund (MSBF)
- Development of a Visitor Giving Scheme
  
- Lottery Funding:
  - National Lottery Awards for All
  - People and Places (Medium and Large Grants)
  - Rural Programme Round 2
  - The Heritage Fund (previously HLF)
  
- Rural Development Programme/ Arloesi Gwynedd Wledig (LEADER)
- The Architectural Heritage Fund
- The Empty Homes Programme
- Vacant Homes Assistance Grants
- Welsh Government Regeneration
- Communities Facilities Programme/Welsh Government
- Foundational Economy/Welsh Government
- Arts Council Wales
- Gwynedd Town Centre Loan Fund

The projects have been identified in consultation with the local community and stakeholders, however their implementation and prioritisation in the accompanying Action Plan will be subject to an appropriate lead body being identified and funding secured to undertake identified tasks. The Action Plan will be reviewed annually by Gwynedd Council and key stakeholders.

**Appendix 1 List of individuals/organisations consulted**

- Partneriaeth Ogwen
- Ynni Ogwen
- Friends of the Earth
- Fforwm Busnes Bethesda
- Cymdeithas Hanes Dyffryn Ogwen
- Gwynedd Council Area Regeneration Officer
- Cyd- Ynni
- Cwmni Tabernacl/Neuadd Ogwen
- Caban Cysgu Gerlan
- Marchnad Ogwen
- Welsh Slate/ Breedon
- Bethesda Rugby Club
- National Trust/Penrhyn Castle
- Dyffryn Ogwen Camera Club
- Gŵyl Afon Ogwen River Festival
- John Llywelyn, Historian
- Siân Owen, Artist
- Lisa Hudson, Artist

**Appendix 2: Employment by sector**

The following table (source: census data, 2011) shows the sectors in which the economically active members of the communities are employed; in the main part the proportions are similar across the sectors, however there are some notable differences. Employment is higher in mining, quarrying, energy and water in Ogwen than Gerlan, conversely employment in public administration and defence is higher in Gerlan than Ogwen.

The sectors that provide the highest proportions of employment (over 10%) are education, health and social work, wholesale and retail and construction; the lowest sectors (below 3%) are agriculture, forestry and fishing and professional, scientific and technical.

<b>Industry of employment</b>	<b>Gerlan</b>	<b>Ogwen</b>	<b>Average (of the two wards)</b>
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	2.2%	1.2%	1.7%
Mining, Quarrying, Energy & Water	2.8%	5.4%	4.1%
Manufacturing	5.9%	5.8%	5.9%
Construction	10.9%	10.3%	10.6%
Wholesale & Retail	11.6%	13.9%	12.75%
Transport & Storage	2.7%	3.7%	3.2%
Accommodation & Food Services	4.6%	5.6%	5.1%
Communication, Finance & Property	3.8%	3.7%	3.75%
Professional, Scientific & Technical	3.0%	2.8%	2.9%
Administrative & Support Services	3.3%	3.1%	3.2%
Public Administration & Defence	7.9%	5.1%	6.5%
Education	19.5%	17.9%	18.7%
Health & Social Work	15.8%	17.7%	16.75%
Other	6.0%	3.7%	4.85%

**Appendix 3 : Historic Built Environment Opportunities Study [Sheets 1 – 7]**