Stori Aberhonddu Brecon Story

Brecon Heritage and Culture Network
Rhwydwaith Treftadaeth a Diwylliant Aberhonddu

PILOT PROJECT

Brecon Heritage and Culture Network/Rhwydwaith Treftadaeth a Diwylliant Aberhonddu

1. Executive Summary

The Brecon Heritage and Culture Network is a local initiative to strengthen collaboration between the heritage, arts and cultural attractions and promote the destination in an exciting and innovative way using digital marketing.

The initiative, a first for Brecon and for Wales, has been supported by project funding from the Arwain programme between March 2019 and September 2020. A Steering Group of stakeholders was set up, with agreed terms of reference, chaired by Brecon Cathedral. Direction was provided by an Executive Team, with an appointed Project Manager and Administrator.

The project aims covered: creating the network, engaging with partners and volunteers (including in the delivery of training), creating dynamic marketing content, making this accessible for use by a range of bodies, and enabling digital marketing campaigns. The aims were reflected in a set of objectives with identified targets.

The project was executed in three phases:
- Planning: audit of heritage and cultural organisations and their digital activity; strategy and activity plan; recruitment of specialists in branding and digital marketing; local engagement.
- Development: brand direction, involving stakeholder workshops; identification and presentation of stories; portal development; production of a What's On leaflet.
- Delivery: storytelling activity; video and audio production; creative photography; portal access; social media development; workshops, community participation and publicity.

The first two phases were successfully completed. The timing for the third phase coincided with the Covid-19 lockdown, which had a very serious effect on all stakeholders and the community at large. Planned activity had to be revised and face-to-face meetings were cancelled. However, progress was made in access to the portal, creating video and audio materials and establishing social media activity, with some online training and workshops, so the project was able to meet its delivery aims.

Lessons from the project have pointed to the value of the new network in providing a platform and facilitating communication amongst stakeholders. The brand development and story identification generated much enthusiasm. At the outset, it had been found that levels of digital experience and use of social media were limited. Imagery lacked quality and creativity, with little use of video. The project has begun to address this, but more needs to be done through further upskilling.

The use of small working groups and the recruitment of specialists with skills closely aligned to the needs of the project contributed significantly to its success. Members of the Steering Group demonstrated considerable commitment to the project. However, wider outreach and the recruitment of additional volunteers from within the community has proved challenging, partly as a result of Covid-19 and the limitations placed on direct personal engagement.

Building on the experience from the project to date, a legacy group has set out proposals to sustain the network and develop its activities, with support coming from the community and elsewhere.

2. Background

Elizabeth Jeffreys a local resident with extensive cultural marketing experience, created the concept of the Network in 2018 and encouraged stakeholders to get involved by giving their time, expertise and knowledge. It was recognised that the strength of the heritage, culture and arts offer in Brecon is fragmented and constrained by a lack of marketing capacity and an uncoordinated approach. This presented an opportunity for Brecon's heritage, arts and cultural attractions to work together to raise its profile and strengthen Brecon's sense of identity and distinctiveness by utilising digital technology. Following consultation and an enthusiastic response from partners, the successful application enabled the formation of a collaborative partnership project for the community. It brought together Brecon's heritage and cultural attractions and activities, community organisations, Brecon Town Council/Visit Brecon, Brecon Beacons Tourism and Powys County Council's Tourism Unit. Stakeholders also included the wider tourism and business community. All were encouraged to get involved, share and support each other to progress the project, encouraging a 'bottom-up' infrastructure.

- A Steering Group representing a range of stakeholders was set up in June 2019 and a Chair was appointed. Terms of reference were agreed.
- Brecon Cathedral chaired the Steering Group, the Executive Team and provided banking and project administration facilities
- The Executive Team included two volunteer Directors who provided direction, guidance, monitoring and support. One covered marketing and project direction, the other finance, the Project Manager was also a member of the Executive Team. (The Director who covered finance had to leave the project in September 2019 and his areas of responsibility were re-allocated across the Executive Team).
- A Project Manager and Project Administrator were appointed, they started 1 April and 1 March 2019 respectively.

i) Small Town Big Community

This is a first for Brecon and a first for Wales. It is not only the development of a brand new Network for Brecon but also the pursuit of an innovative digital solution.

Brecon Heritage and Cultural Network (BHCN)'s aim is to reveal the heritage culture and arts attractors in Brecon through content and story development, distributing the stories via a digital network, to include a digital portal and the use of social media activity. BHCN also aims to encourage collaborative working and to create a stronger voice, calling on the community to commit their energy, passions and enthusiasm to put Brecon on the cultural map. This enthusiasm will be instrumental in taking the project forward

The new collaborative approach also aims to support those involved, who may not have the professional expertise or digital skills to communicate what they offer and to share stories. Some may be restricted by a lack of resources. Some may have staff or volunteering support who could benefit from learning new digital skills.

The development of a digital solution to communicate BHCN's assets, provides the community with an opportunity to get involved and provide volunteer or 'in kind' support, share and add to the story development and help to build local and wider audiences.

3. Project Planning Phase March-August 2019

i) Audit

- A product audit identified attractions and organisations in heritage, culture and arts in Brecon. Also a database of interested parties was established.

- A digital audit of providers of heritage culture and arts in Brecon using desk research included.

- Overview of websites, use of imagery and video.
- Overview of social media activity across all channels including regular postings, engaging messages, use of video and engaging imagery.

A Survey Monkey was sent to Steering Group members and 7 responded. Evidence of the responses is unavailable as the cost of £300 payable was not considered cost effective. Digital audits were carried out on social media activity quarterly. In brief both websites and social media channels were generally lacking in strategic messaging written in an engaging way. Social media channels used was generally facebook with some participating in twitter and a few using Instagram. Websites and social media channels generally lacked engaging imagery and video content. Messaging tended to be irregular.

ii) Project Strategy

Project aims and objectives were revisited; the Steering Group approved the strategic plan in May 2019. A vision was established for BHCN:

Vision - Internal

To create a heritage and cultural digital network for Brecon with a collaborative and sharing culture,

which embraces our local stakeholders, supports their activities and promotes the destination in an

exciting and innovative way using digital marketing.

Vision - External

To present the rich, distinctive heritage and cultural aspects of Brecon in a dynamic way which surprises and excites audiences and suggests a collaborative environment where creative and innovative ideas flourish.

Appendix 01: Activity plans, Planning Phases & Revised planning due to C19

iii) Recruitment of specialists

A rigorous recruitment process for branding and digital marketing, video production and workshops, was undertaken June-August 2019, to take the project forward in a way that would be innovative, relevant and endorsed by the local community. The selection of the successful companies was undertaken by the Working Group – Digital Marketing and ratified by the Steering Group.

iv) Engagement

With the support of members of the Steering Group, awareness of the new Network was beginning to be created, along with a call out via community groups and organisations to those with an interest in heritage and culture in Brecon, to get involved.

4. Project development phase September 2019 - February 2020

i) Development of brand direction September – November 2019

A series of three workshops was organised to develop a brand direction, led by Hoffi the successful digital marketing company. An invitation to attend was distributed to the database of 50 stakeholders. A total of 22 stakeholders attended 1 or more workshops alongside Steering Group members.

The working group - digital marketing - members were consulted throughout the process and there was a general consensus that the branding 'Brecon Story' reflected the discussions among workshop participants and it was the right direction for the project. This decision was ratified by the Steering Group.

ii) Story development November 2019 onwards

- A representative from the video production company was fully involved in all three workshops over and above the video contract, which helped enormously to develop portal story content incorporating the branding.
- The plan for development of interactive content showed that the use of audio was relevant and would sit well on the portal.
- Stories with potential for interesting content were identified through the product audit.
- Individuals, businesses and organisations were identified, who had a strong story to tell.
- Workshops were held to support individuals in telling their story, recording for audio and developing photography skills using a mobile phone 13 February and 13 March 2020.

iii) Portal development January-July 2020

Once branding had been agreed along with the structure of the portal, development commenced. Stages 1 and 2 were completed and circulated to Steering Group and working group - digital marketing - in February 2020. Stage 3 was completed July 2020. Training on a Content Management System was organised on 19 July with those who were taking the project forward

iv) What's on leaflet

The cover design of a brand new 'What's on' leaflet listing of heritage culture and arts events in Brecon, was produced featuring the branding Brecon Story. The digital leaflet covers carried the branding and this will be repeated on future editions. The leaflet was funded by Brecon Town Council and an individual donor.

5. Delivery Phase March-August 2020

i) The effect of Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 lockdown in mid-March 2020 had a serious effect on every business, organisation and resident in Brecon, alongside all communities across the UK. The culture, tourism and hospitality sectors were the first to be affected and drastically so. It affected directly all those in the Network – individuals and families, owners and managers, staff members and volunteers.

The project ethos has been to contribute help 'in kind' or volunteering to support the Network to progress its development. The re-opening and recovery phases will be challenging for all businesses and organisations. It has been recognised by many who are involved that the support of the Network will be critical to help to meet future challenges.

This period coincided with the delivery phase of the project. Planned activity had to be revised March-August 2020 to work within new parameters but bearing in mind that performance indicators had to be delivered on time.

ii) Revised activity due to Covid-19 pandemic

- Storytelling

Face to face meetings were cancelled to develop engagement and story content.

Contact continued by email but in many cases, contacts were on furlough, not working in their usual role, were shielding, schools were closed, community events cancelled etc.

Workshops to develop engagement and story development with young people (Brecon High School) Welsh speakers (Brecon High School and community groups) were cancelled due to Covid-19 and potential organisers not being available.

A particular disappointment was cancelling the planned meeting with Major Prembahadur Gurung MBE and interested parties to discuss the Ghurka community and their long association with Brecon.

- Video and audio production

Planned audio recordings for example with Rebound Books, The Muse, Brecon Folk and More were cancelled. Fortunately, much of the groundwork had been completed when lockdown happened and therefore the 12 audio recordings as per contract were delivered. Two videos were delivered but a third on the subject of heritage had to be rethought. The format had to be changed to allow for the restrictions on people and buildings. A much more creative format had to be developed depicting the multi-faceted heritage product using exteriors and townscapes, avoiding shots that would date the video and taking into account government restrictions.

Examples of audio and video can be found at Brecon Story and Stori Aberhonddu portal
http://breconstory.wales/ http://storiaberhonddu.cymru/

- Photography

New high quality, high resolution, creative and relevant photography was identified as critically important at the beginning of the project due to a lack of existing material available, free of charge, to illustrate and promote Brecon's heritage and culture. Images of townscapes were also needed. Portal photography was started in early March but had to be postponed until Week 2 July due to

lockdown and accompanying restrictions. Both photography and video recording could not begin until after the relaxation of the 5-mile rule and had to take into account government restrictions.

Appendix 02: Photography

- Portal

- Stages 1 and 2 were completed by lockdown and therefore engagement could begin by using the portal content to show stakeholders and the public how they could engage with Brecon Story.
- The fully bilingual portal Stage 3 was completed July 2020 as per contract.
- CMS training was held online and not face to face due to pandemic on July 15 with representatives who would be taking the Network forward to the next phase.

http://breconstory.wales/ http://storiaberhonddu.cymru/

Appendix 03: Branding and Portal

- Workshops on social media

- Originally two workshops were to be delivered face to face but these had to be organised online due to the pandemic
- 29 July Social media activity for beginners to provide confidence and improve skill level
- 30 July Social media activity for advanced aimed at those who manage websites and social media channels
- A workshop with key stakeholders to develop links to Brecon Story on their own websites, was cancelled on 19 March due to the pandemic. It was attempted to progress this work by email however staff/owners were not available or had other more pressing duties. A digital solution was created and circulated to key stakeholders at the end of the project.

- Social media channels

- Launched late July 2020 Facebook, Twitter, Instagram with bilingual channels
- A plan of posts was actioned also a call to action to share content and to tell stories.
- Photography was repurposed to be used on social media.
- Branding icons were created for social media channels.
- BHCN's own target to appoint 10 social media champions to support this activity was difficult in the circumstances. However 5 champions have been in support and BHCN is confident that the balance will be recruited in the coming months for English and Welsh speaking channels.

Social media insights showed an encouraging start to the launch of the channels and by week 4 there were good signs of engagement and sharing. Google Analytics showed that the majority of visits to the portal (83.6%) were referred by social media channels.

Appendix 04: Social media

Appendix 05: Portal analytics

- Engagement with community

The pandemic had a substantial effect on this phase of the project. All proactive engagement was cancelled on lockdown on advice of Welsh Government agencies and PR professionals and other methods of communication had to be assessed and actioned.

- The two staff members continued to work from home in a very flexible way. Email communication continued monthly with Steering Group members and database Empathetic e-comms informed stakeholders on what was going on and included details of online workshops. There was very little response to the e-comms reflecting the situation and the concern people felt for their own health and safety and that of their families.
- Face to face meetings and specific workshops were to be delivered during the delivery phase to recruit Welsh speakers and young people including two workshops with Brecon High School. All had to be cancelled due to the pandemic and lockdown.
- New ways of working were implemented and this included use of conference video. For example, this method was used for two online workshops replacing face to face contact and also a Steering Group meeting on 29 July.
- A presentation was made to a community group in February 2020 by the Project Director but the official launch and road-shows scheduled for late June, July and August had to be cancelled.

v) Print and Publicity

- Digital flier promoting workshops
- Banners introducing Network and Brecon Story
- Fliers and posters Introducing Brecon Story
- Official press launch cancelled due to pandemic, information released to local press early August 2020.

Appendix 06: Print and publicity

6. What we have learnt

The Arwain funding has been the catalyst to establish the Brecon Heritage & Cultural Network. It has provided the opportunity to raise awareness of the town's rich heritage and the vibrancy of its cultural & artistic life, through creating the Brecon Story digital platform and initiated a community culture of sharing stories, knowledge and information using digital assets.

i) Meeting the challenge of Covid-19

It has been recognised by those involved in BHCN that the Network is critical to support heritage, culture and arts businesses and organisations in Brecon in the re-opening and recovery period. What is also critical is to build upon the digital presentation of Brecon's assets and to use digital marketing to encourage new business to the town and to develop local people's sense of pride in Brecon's heritage, arts and culture.

The Arwain project has helped to provide a platform to enable the Network to go forward. A legacy plan is in place, supported initially by two small streams of external funding alongside support from Network members. There is enthusiasm and commitment from members to grow this support in future months.

ii) Volunteering hours

The ethos of volunteering of time for this project began with Elizabeth Jeffreys, a local and influential figure in the town, who created the concept of the Brecon Heritage and Cultural Network. Elizabeth encouraged support from key stakeholders to form a Steering Group, individuals who either gave personal volunteer time or trustees, managers or owners of attractions and organisations in Brecon who gave 'in kind' support. On the inception of the Arwain project, Elizabeth Jeffreys became Project Director and continued to invest a substantial number of volunteering hours into the project throughout the pandemic, to address what needed to be achieved and to ensure that PI targets were met.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a large influence on the project's ability to develop working relationships in the community and grow volunteering support from the community.

- The pandemic affected the delivery phase from mid-March 2020 and engagement with the local community and encourage interest and support.
- It affected the project being able to create awareness through digital activity, PR and publicity. The official launch was cancelled. Its purpose was to stimulate interest in the community and in the media.
- The two social media upskilling workshops were delayed until late July and held online due to pandemic restrictions, take up and interest was further impacted by the requirement for a basic level of digital skill.
- The project's target to encourage 10 volunteer Social Media Champions to get on board was affected – a total of 5 had come forward by the end of the Arwain project. Social media activity was delayed until late July/early August. However, the early reaction has been very positive and those taking the project forward are encouraged that the target number of Champions will be overtaken in the next phase of the Network.

iii) Project legacy

It was recognised from the start that the development of a forward legacy was critical to sustain the Network. All partners at the start of the project were asked to provide help-in-kind as their matched funding contribution but also to continue to do so at the end of the project to enable the Network to have a sustainable future. A legacy group was initiated as part of the Steering Group. At a meeting in January a plan was discussed to target sources of funding. To date in spite of the impact of the pandemic, two applications have been successful. Support has also been promised from the community and other applications are being explored.

Appendix 07: Legacy Project

iv) Participation in town consultation exercises

BHCN has been actively involved in key discussions that will affect the future of Brecon. It has been represented at the y Gaer Stakeholders Meetings and provided input into groups such as Brecon 20/20. BHCN participated in the working group preparing the Brecon Town Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance

v) BHCN Steering Group – working groups

The setting up of small working groups comprising of Steering Group members has greatly helped the development of brand direction and digital marketing but has also given legacy an impetus.

vi) Engagement with the community

The Brecon Story portal went live in March just before lockdown. This was a critical point as those in the community were unable to visualise the concept before they saw the format of the portal. Until they could see the portal content and social media activity, they found it difficult to see how they could get involved. This interruption and delay to engagement has of course affected the recruitment of volunteers to supplement the current cohort, however there is confidence that there will be interest from volunteers in future months.

The original plan was to organise a roadshow of presentations to engage with community groups. This plan was cancelled due to lockdown and people's attention being elsewhere with the pandemic.

The commitment of members of the Steering Group and related working groups led to the contribution of an extremely high number of volunteering hours or in the case of members who are paid by their own businesses and organisations extensive 'in kind' support and expertise.

vii) General lack of experience in digital marketing

The product and digital audit showed that the local heritage, cultural and arts stories are not strongly featured in destination and individual business websites. The potential storylines were not obvious.

Storytelling is at the heart of the project however content in the planning stages was often supplied in terms of historical text. It was not in the format required for digital distribution. It has therefore been identified that there is a need to provide training for the local community who wish to contribute to Brecon Story in a digital format.

viii) Use of workshops to engage and upskill

The general lack of digital knowledge and skills was apparent in the early stage of the project. Workshops on storytelling and photographic skills using a mobile phone and social media were piloted. It is recommended that such workshops are repeated along with new sessions on how to write for digital channels and improving content in your website. A support system for those interested in storytelling and sharing digital information would be helpful.

ix) Engaging with specific groups

Two groups were identified as needing support to get involved in the project: Welsh speakers and young people. Face to face meetings were organised and contacts made. However, it was not possible to take this interest further by developing dedicated workshops to help identify storylines and content and to encourage volunteer support, due to the pandemic and lockdown.

x) Recruitment of specialists

By going through a rigorous recruitment process for digital marketing brand direction and portal, video production and workshop delivery, the Steering Group was pleased that the companies selected delivered using innovative digital techniques that communicated the Network's ethos and

objectives in a creative, relevant and accessible way. The complementary team of specialists provided an excellent fit for delivery.

xi) Branding consultation

Much effort was invested in a series of 3 workshops to consult with local stakeholders and invite them to contribute to the conversation. The effort was rewarded when the feedback on Brecon Story was very positive with consultees believing that it reflected the conversations at the workshops. It provides an excellent platform to further build the Network and Brecon Story.

xii) Product and digital audit

The product and digital audit did not show a tremendous amount of collaboration between providers of heritage, culture and arts and key organisations, although some did work informally often on an ad hoc basis. However, by demonstrating through the development of a quality portal and social media channels, stakeholders can now see the opportunities.

xiii) Imagery and interactive output

At the start of the project it was recognised that there was a distinct lack of quality, creative and high-resolution imagery. The medium of video was not being generally used for websites and social media. Digital outputs depend upon exciting and creative imagery and interactive material and this project has begun to address this real issue. However much more needs to be done to increase output quickly to realise the Network's potential.

Appendices

Appendix 01: Activity Plans

Appendix 02: Photography

Appendix 03: Branding and Portal

Appendix 04: Social Media

Appendix 05: Portal Analytics

Appendix 06: Print and Publicity

Appendix 07: Legacy Project