

Destination Montgomery End of Project Report

1. Introduction

The overall aim of the Destination Montgomery project was to add to the sustainability of the town, which relies heavily on tourism for its income by:

- Increasing visitor footfall to the town
- Encouraging those who visit the town to stay, or stay for longer
- Developing Montgomery's offer to include structured activities, based on the natural and built heritage of the area
- Providing opportunities for SMEs within the town to develop
- Encouraging start-ups to meet currently unmet needs

In order to achieve these aims the project employed a Development Officer to co-ordinate activities encouraging increased tourism and promote awareness of what Montgomery offers as a destination. The development officer's remit included achievement of the following specific outcomes:

- Development of Town Hall offer
- Development of a programme of attractions and events
- Sustainable tourism project – 'The Montgomery Trails'
- Development of Montgomery as preferred wedding and celebration venue.

2. Planned Activities

Development of Town Hall Offer

The Georgian Town Hall dominates the centre of Montgomery and is a key part of the brand image. The building has traditionally been at the heart of community activity and cohesion since it was built in 1748. In addition to the existing uses of this venue, including weddings, there was scope for further development and the added value this would bring to the local economy was a key focus of the project.

The Town Hall provides an attractive facility in which to undertake a number of events. However, there was scope for significant improvement in its development as a successful performance venue by provision of better access and disabled toilet facilities, along with improved acoustics, in order to satisfy the standard of expectation of modern audiences. As well as an opportunity to develop the Town Hall further for use as a training / conference venue and this would offer an opportunity for local SMEs to offer hospitality and other services for such events.

Development of a Programme of attractions and events

Over recent years a programme of events has developed. Many of these community focussed events, such as the Summer Street Fair are run entirely by local volunteers and attract significant visitor numbers; others, including for example, musical performances of the highest international standard, encourage a different type of visitor to the town. However, these had developed in an ad hoc way, so that there may be a number of events held fairly closely together, and some significant periods where there are no events at all. The project would support the co-ordination of these events to ensure there was a more even spread throughout the year, and work on bringing in additional events which would attract different types of audiences / visitors and complement the other developments. This would include specialist walking / cycling festivals, and also at least one larger prestigious event, (e.g. a re-enactment of the Battle of Montgomery)

Sustainable Tourism Project - 'The Montgomery Trails'

This element built on work already begun and developed in a more cohesive and collaborative way to encourage active outdoor tourism. Some cycle trails, and walking trails were already in existence, having been developed by two separate groups and promoted separately. The project planned to co-ordinate existing information and

develop new trails branded for specialist interest, e.g. heritage walking trails around the town; environmental walking trails around the surrounding countryside linked to Offa's Dyke; family friendly walks and some for experienced hikers seeking a more challenging activity.

This would be repeated for the cycling trails, including, given Montgomery's hilly location, developing e-bike hire to complement the existing small scale bike hire. It is envisaged that eventually there would be a link to public transport, offering short (1 -2 hour) trails as well as longer ones.

The emphasis was on developing Montgomery as a place to stay, and extending the visitor profile (currently mainly adults in their middle years) to include more family visitors and older people. As well as improving the visitor offer, these trails provide activities for local residents, benefiting their health and well-being.

Development of Montgomery as a unique wedding venue

Weddings would provide an opportunity to increase day and overnight visitors as well as giving a number of existing and new local businesses a source of income. The Town and surrounding area provides a unique opportunity for those seeking a wedding that differs from the commercial and corporate packages on offer from hotels and conventional wedding venues, or something more than a "Community Centre" experience.

Early on it was agreed to hold the launch of the Town Hall Weddings until after the hall refurbishment was completed. In addition, it was possible that the management of the Town Hall would pass from the Town Council to the newly formed Town Hall Trust, a charitable body during the project period, making it difficult to firm up costs etc.

3. Initial Consultation

A public meeting was held in the Town Hall on 24th Oct 2018 to advise the community about the proposed project and funding. Key stakeholders were invited including local businesses and community groups. The meeting was chaired by the Mayor and assisted by Town Councillors' Mike Mills and Cerys Thomas.

A presentation was made to explain:

- Background and rationale of project with reference to research undertaken by Ian Skewis and justification of proposal
- Arwain fund and application
- Proposed project, covering objectives and specific proposals
- Development Officer's job specification
- Project Milestones and plan.

Also to provide the opportunity for people to make suggestions on the proposal and plans and establish a steering committee of maximum six people and recruit a Development Officer.

4. Project Management

The project was managed by a core Steering Group comprising of members of the Town Council, business owners and community group representatives. Stakeholders met on a monthly basis to review objectives, consider feedback and monitor progress; setting priorities and workload for the Development Officer; The post was held by Lesley Long from March 2017 to December 2018 but she had to move at that point and was replaced by Sarah Gilder.

5. Data Management

A contact management system, Really Simple Systems, was subscribed to in order to record beneficiary contact details and other relevant information in a central place. This not only provided a way of communicating with people as required but allowed easy analysis of local businesses such as accommodation providers, local events

committees and artisan makers. A spreadsheet was also set up to gather data to establish visitor numbers to various attractions and businesses throughout the duration of the project.

Each steering group member was given an @montgomery-wales.uk email address.

6. Branding

One of the things identified early on was the lack of a coherent 'look' on promotional materials, whether for the Town overall or individual events aimed at the public, making it difficult for people to recognise and identify something as from or taking place in Montgomery.

A professional graphic designer, who is based in Montgomery, was utilised to create an overall style that could be applied to a variety of promotional methods from print to social media. This meant that any and all promotion of the town as a whole, individual events or promotional items would be easily recognisable and consistent.

Examples can be found in appendix 1

7. Awareness Raising & Support

The Development Officer also made contact with local groups and committees who generally worked in isolation from each other, to encourage joint working and sharing of information as well as providing support and information, signposting to other organisations as required. 'Surgeries' were held on a weekly basis out of the Institute in Arthur Street, latterly reducing to fortnightly with the Development Officer doubling up as a volunteer library assistant.

PR and project updates were circulated via email, local press, social media and the Crier Newsletter Training - Facebook community training was suggested in Aug 2017 to help businesses and attractions with marketing resulting in workshops held in early 2018 which 15 people attended

A survey was sent to all contacts (1295) via the CRM system in February 2020 to support an application to lottery fund for improvements to the facilities in the Town Hall and Institute and asking for suggestions for activities people would be interested in.

8. Networks & Networking

It was envisaged that Destination Montgomery would be the overarching group with sub-groups established for Walking & Cycling, Weddings and Events. Whilst the News & Events team was created in June 2017, the other sub-groups did not formally come into being, although nominated steering group members took the lead on progressing the other elements; Jill Kibble being brought into the steering group as the contact for walking & cycling with Lesley Williams leading on weddings. However, another sub-group was formed to oversee the development of a new [website](#), for people to find out about all things Montgomery.

The Development officer(s) also made great strides in forming relationships with groups, committees, organisations and agencies both local and national such as:

Taste Montgomery - a group of local producers and hospitality businesses (Food Tourism), who LL first met with in March 2018 about working with DM. This led to connecting with Cywain and hosting a Meet the Producer Event in Montgomery.

Artisan/Crafters – LL met with a number of local artists and artisan craftspeople with the idea of forming a structured group with a view to holding exhibitions and sales events, as well as providing somewhere people could collaborate and support each other. In 2019 SG connected with Agora, a funded project which assisted with progressing this idea.

Committees operating in Montgomery putting on events including the Street Fair, Annual Show and Christmas Festival. This encouraged each group to work more closely, for example, sharing information such as stallholders who wanted to attend more than one event.

Cross Border working - Contact was made with organisations in Shropshire, both private businesses and public bodies in order to promote the Walking & Cycling Trails to a wider audience.

Tourism Groups – The project worked closely with the Tourism committee and advantage was taken of membership of Mid Wales Tourism (MWT) and Mid & North Powys Destination Network to promote Montgomery as a whole, the new trails and events that would attract people from further afield.

9. Activities Outcomes

Development of Town Hall Offer

One of the first improvements was installation of a broadband connection in the Town Hall in Aug 2017, which enabled the provision of free wifi to people visiting the town, providing instant access to information about Montgomery and the surrounding area.

Separate funding was secured to carry out a major refurbishment of the Town Hall during the project period, which included a number of improvements including better access, new gents' and ladies' toilets, and a complete overhaul of the ground floor. This took place over five months from January to June 2019, with the hall being closed for the duration of the works. Although this refurbishment meant the hall was a stronger proposition for hiring out to a wider range of users it also meant marketing was problematic prior to completion. Another complication was the planned handover of management from the Town Council to the recently formed Town Hall Trust (a charitable body) which is still in limbo.

However, progress was made in terms of researching potential users and carrying out a competitor analysis to ensure suitable hire rates were charged. Once the refurbishment was completed the Hall was listed on a number of websites and other online lists. Local groups and organisations were also made aware of the improvements with a grand re-opening where the changes were viewed extremely positively. A consultation event was held as part of the celebrations, asking people for ideas for events and activities that they would be interested in attending. (see supporting information)



Unfortunately, with the onset of lockdown meaning the hall has been closed since March, any other marketing has not been able to go ahead.

Development of a Programme of attractions and events

As mentioned in the section on networks and networking, the project worked with and supported event organisers to provide a more even spread of events throughout the year and ensure opportunities for promotion were maximised. Working closely with the Tourism committee was a big factor in making some additional events possible, for example hosting the Montgomeryshire Literary Festival which would have brought a very different audience to the town.

An early event showcasing Montgomery was a medieval themed celebration held over 2 days. Starting with a re-enactment of the 1267 signing of the Treaty of Montgomery at Rhydwhyman Ford on its 750th anniversary, a banquet served in the town hall was enjoyed by over 100 in the evening. The following day over 500 people visited the Castle to watch members of a re-enactment group demonstrate life, cooking, herbal lotions and potions and battle tactics from the 13th century.

Cllr. Mike Mills said; "This was a magnificent community event bringing residents and local businesses together and showcasing Montgomery at its best."

Proactive efforts were also made to bring new and different types of events to Montgomery with some success, despite the Town Hall being closed for a number of months. One of these was a valuation day, in partnership with a well known local auction house, where people could bring items for identification and valuation for a token cost. This proved to be popular with over £100 being raised for the Town Hall Trust and bringing in people

from a wide area, quite a few of whom hadn't been to Montgomery before. Another day was planned for this spring but had to be postponed and will hopefully go ahead soon. Another event was a circus skills workshop, run by a local hula-hoop and aerial performer. Again this proved very popular and led to the Town Hall being booked for a number of after school classes.

The relationship with Taste Montgomery has been beneficial and given opportunities for promoting food tourism. This is an ongoing process but has already proved fruitful as we were able to co-host a 'Meet The Producer' event with Cywain in the newly refurbished Town Hall in autumn 2019. The event showcased Welsh food producers with attendees from hospitality and other food related businesses interested in providing guests or customers with local Welsh produce. It was also a great opportunity to showcase the refurbished Town Hall as an event location.

Montgomery has a Charter, granted in 1227, which includes the right to hold a weekly market; this is usually in the Town hall but stalls are also able to be outside on Broad Street. The market, at the start of the project was effectively only four or so regular stalls and had no formal management or co-ordination. The steering group made the decision to put some time into revitalising the market offer, encouraging more and different stall holders to attend and promote it further afield, therefore attracting more visitors. With up to 16 stallholders, this has brought in extra income for the Town Hall, micro and small business owners, including cafes and hostelrys and provided somewhere for visitors and locals to source local produce and handcrafted items.

A community café area was piloted on a monthly basis, giving local groups and charities the opportunity to raise some funds, whilst encouraging customers to stay longer. We also tested holding a couple of taster workshops in the hall on market day, again to encourage more people to attend.

"Thank you so much for letting us have the use of the Montgomery Town Hall for the fund raising coffee morning for Hope House. On behalf of our members I would like to thank you for your help. We think that your Trust Team has done an excellent job in the refurbishment of the Town Hall and wish you every success in the future running of this Hall, the hub of this lovely Town."
 Margaret Pepper, President - Inner Wheel Club of Welshpool

The new Montgomery branding was particularly useful, enabling production of distinct and identifiable promotional materials, both in traditional print and for social media channels. These included a 'What's On' flyer giving an overview of the events which was distributed to local businesses, TI points and other outlets over a wider area with a version available for download on the Montgomery Wales website.

The news and events team were able to maximise PR opportunities via local press, such as the County Times and Shropshire Star, as well as utilising online platforms such as Visit Wales, Show Me Wales and more.

List of events and Examples of PR materials in appendices

Sustainable Tourism Project - 'The Montgomery Trails'

This element of the project has probably been the most far reaching in terms of spread and attracting new people to Montgomery. May 2018 saw the culmination of months of hard work with the launch of five walking trails, 4 cycle trails and two family friendly quiz trails in and around Montgomery. A Montgomery Town leaflet was also produced and launched in August 2018 providing an overview of the trails as well as events and general information along with adverts for local businesses. As well as the funding from Arwain the trails benefited from a grant from the Big Lottery Awards for All programme.

Working with the Walkers are Welcome, Montgomery and Llandysil walking groups, Montgomery Energy Group, and Countryside services volunteers resulted in the updated and expanded trails in existence today. In addition to the trails two quiz trails were set up, one aimed at a younger audience and the other focussing on the history and heritage of Montgomery; these were produced with assistance from Montgomery Civic Society and Cloverlands Car Museum.



The trails leaflets were, and still are, free but we found many people offered a donation so a number of donation boxes were purchased for this purpose in 2019. The quizzes are charged at £1.50, which includes a Montgomery pencil with dragon topper and a number of draws have been held with the winners receiving prizes. The Little Cars quiz winners receive a model car donated by Cloverlands, with prizes such as a swim voucher, donated by the Dragon Hotel, or a tour of Monty's brewery (depending on the age of the winner) for the heritage quiz! To date £260 has been collected and this money will be used for reprints and updates in the future.

In August 2018 a [Geocache](#) trail was launched with 12 cache sites (think treasure hunting), as an additional attraction to encourage people to explore the countryside and 441 finds have been logged since then. This was made possible by one of Montgomery's younger residents who took on the challenge as part of his Duke of Edinburgh award; with Penri going off to university this autumn, the local rangers group have taken up the baton of managing and monitoring the caches ensuring long term sustainability and giving members of the group an opportunity take individual responsibility as part of their DoE awards.

The Trails and quizzes have proved extremely popular with a diverse range of visitors and locals alike. The initial print run of 8k leaflets had been distributed by November 2018! A second print run has been distributed and another print is needed, which will incorporate some updates. The leaflets are also available for download from Montgomery Wales website in both English and Welsh. A number of large boards were commissioned and erected in suitable locations around town and posters have also been used in locations further afield, more recently with QR codes enabling immediate download to smartphones or devices.

One unexpected outcome has been the take up of free bikes available via Montgomery Energy Groups bike scheme. They take donated bikes, repair them as necessary, and give them to people who want or need them. This year has seen 470 bikes donated, 23 of which became donors for parts, and 379 given to new homes.

Whilst six bikes are available for anyone to hire from the Dragon Hotel, the idea of e-bike hire has not yet come to fruition.

It is worth mentioning the annual Montgomery Walking Festival, where the trails were launched, which has benefitted greatly from partnership working with the project. This has led to engagement with accommodation, hospitality and other businesses in town and further afield as well as being able to utilise the news-events team for assistance with promotion. Also the local walking groups have seen an increase in people taking part in their regular walks, from an average of 6 3 years ago to up to 34 now.

There are plans to produce one or more 'Taste Trails', which the project has been working on with Taste Montgomery members who are able to have visitors to their premises. This will bring a different audience with an interest in local food and it's production.

Another idea which has not yet come to fruition is to have an arts trail. It was hoped to trial this at this year's literary festival which unfortunately had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.

Trails & quizzes Promotional materials etc., in supporting documents.

Development of Montgomery as a unique wedding venue

As mentioned previously, it was decided to hold off launching the Town Hall weddings offer until after the re-opening and handover to the new trust as it was not feasible to properly promote the venture. During the period of the hall refurbishment discussions were held about how this element of the project would best function on a practical level and it became apparent that to ensure long term viability it would be better to operate it as a stand alone business. To this end Lesley Williams, who had been overseeing the management of

the Dragon Hotel wedding offer, along with her partner have established Montgomery Weddings as a separate entity. They are working closely with local suppliers of food, other associated wedding services and accommodation providers to ensure the enterprise supports local businesses as much as possible and give clients a real Montgomery experience.

10. Other Outcomes

Adding to the sustainability of Montgomery

In addition to the specific planned activities, a number of other elements have complemented these and contributed to the overall aims of the project. Some examples include:

Joining the nationwide water refill scheme www.refill.org.uk in 2018

A number of businesses have signed up as places where people can refill containers with drinking water for free, encouraging less use of single use plastic bottles. This has been well received, especially by many of the walkers and cyclists who visit Montgomery.

Supporting local attractions and businesses

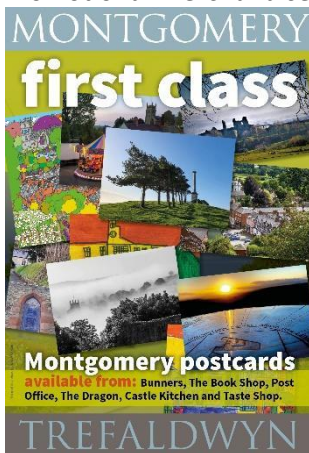
Both the two museums and a number of micro and small businesses have benefited from the project. Discussions on how Destination Montgomery could help promote and encourage joint working between The Old Bell and Cloverland's have been fruitful and both attractions have benefited from the introduction of the two town quizzes as well as a number of focussed PR activities.

The new website has an [online directory](#) where local community groups, various businesses and service providers are listed. There are currently 84 listings with new ones being added on an ongoing basis.

We have supported a number of businesses which have opened in town since the project began including: An independent bookshop was opened by two Montgomery residents in 2018 and has proved very popular with visitors. A newly refurbished building which opened in May 2019 as a B&B, which has already received rave reviews from guests and a good level of bookings. Another accommodation provider, based in Llandyssil just outside Montgomery opened their newly built holiday lodges in May and quickly received bookings for some months ahead. Both the accommodation providers are working with Taste Montgomery, providing produce for their guests. There is also the pop-up Taste shop mentioned earlier.

In addition, the market has provided a platform for small, local independent enterprises, providing food and hand crafted items for sale to visitors and locals.

Promotional Merchandise



It had been noted that a number of visitors ask for postcards of the town so early in 2020 the project ran a competition asking people to submit images, in any medium, of or representing Montgomery, that would be suitable for reproducing as postcards. Ten designs, from over fifty entries were chosen and 200 of each have been printed and will be for sale in a number of outlets in Town. The distribution of these has been delayed due to lockdown so there are no sales as yet. A series of Facebook posts is also planned, spotlighting each design and the story behind the image.

A number of reusable cotton bags were produced in 2019 printed with the new Town Market logo and these are available to purchase from market traders, the library and two other outlets in town. This raises the awareness of the market as well as providing an environmentally friendly alternative to plastic bags.

Food Tourism

The closer links forged with the local producer group Taste Montgomery have been very beneficial to the town and the group members. 16 new members have joined over the last year providing a wider range of locally sourced products and accommodation provision. There were plans to hold two 'Taste' events this year, one in

the form of a food fair in the Town Hall, both of which have unfortunately had to be postponed but will be rescheduled. However, during the pandemic the Taste Montgomery group has stall at the market each week and a 'pop-up' Taste deli and farm shop was run from what would have otherwise been empty premises selling produce from 12 producers. As mentioned previously, there are also plans to introduce bookable Taste Trails in the future.

11. Effect of Covid

Obviously the effect of the pandemic and lockdowns during 2020 has had a negative impact on all aspects of life and in the context of the project in relation to tourism and the local economy, with most planned events having to be cancelled, hospitality and other businesses closed for some months and still operating under restrictions.

However, Montgomery has risen to the challenge of making the best of the situation and there have been some positive aspects emerge. It has reinforced the feeling of community and people pulling together in the face of adversity, as seen with the revised VE day celebrations which morphed from plans for a large community gathering to individuals and families celebrating 'apart but together' with music broadcast from the town hall and people's gardens and using social media to share the experience.

The news and events team have worked extremely hard to keep people connected and promote virtual activities and events, from yoga to gardening to book readings organised by the literary festival committee.

Once lockdown had been lifted and the social distancing measures were brought in, a couple of Montgomery residents, not wanting ugly plastic sticky signs on the ground, had the idea of doing something a little different and more interesting to remind people to keep 2 metres apart. This took the form of a number of random facts painted outside businesses that were open, listing how many of a particular item measures 2m. This received a lot of media coverage with visitors and locals enjoying reading the signs.



Another positive outcome has been the ability to provide people with local produce at the market and via deliveries from local suppliers, most of whom are Taste Montgomery members. This has really highlighted the importance of local supply chains and availability of food at a local level.

12. Conclusion

Overall the Destination Montgomery has achieved most of what it set out to do, with this report focussing on 'highlights', but as with a lot of short term projects this can be built on going forward. For example, production of a video promoting Montgomery and what it has to offer visitors is in the pipeline as is a Georgian themed ball to showcase the refurbished Town Hall – both postponed until 2021. There are plans to secure more funding to build on other successes and strengthen what Montgomery has to offer going into the future.



Addendum – October 2021

Over the last twelve months the project committee and development officer have been doing what they can to continue promoting Montgomery as a destination and working towards getting events rolling again. The latter part of 2021 has seen some success on this front with those events that were able to go ahead in the Town Hall proving popular.

We were also able to stock local outlets with the postcards earlier in the year and these have sold well over the summer months.

Appendices & Supporting Evidence

- Branding**
- Events Lists**
- Promotional Materials**
- Baseline Data**
- Beneficiary Information**