# **Neath Port Talbot Cultural Strategy**

# **Initial Findings**

Counterculture Partnership LLP

## Neath Port Talbot Past and Present

Your borough is only 25 years old, but has a 6,000-year history of human culture with globally significant stories of innovation, energy, faith, industry, engineering, sport and performance.

Neath Port Talbot is a place where people have been creative for centuries, leaving a remarkable legacy of ideas, communities and buildings, which complement the astonishing natural beauty of your landscapes from coast to mountains.

The 2023 Cultural Strategy will capture the unique spirit of Neath Port Talbot, identify the themes that shape your cultural identity, and help you look to future opportunities with confidence that your story can appeal to and inspire every local resident and millions of visitors.

## Your Assets

* Neath Port Talbot boasts some of the most outstanding open spaces in the region including parks (Margam, Gnoll), forests and moorlands.
* You have outstanding buildings, many of them connected to your history as a pioneering part of the industrial revolution (Brunel’s dock, Margam Castle, Neath Abbey Ironworks, the canal system) but also stretching back much further (Aberdulais, Neath Abbey) with 44 Grade I and II\* listed buildings and over 400 Grade II.
* Our consultations show how proud local people are of your area and there are many groups of passionate, hard-working volunteers who help preserve and explain your arts, culture and heritage.
* The council, creative businesses, regional and national partners, educational institutions, and other stakeholders are keen to see a thriving culture in Neath Port Talbot and are committed to supporting the cultural strategy.
* You have a long history of producing outstanding talent in the performing arts and sport and your three main theatres and many sports pitches and other community venues provide opportunities to nurture future talent.
* Neath Town Centre has a growing creative quarter with independent galleries and studios.
* Neath Port Talbot is blessed with great natural assets for residents and visitors – you can walk the hills, mountain bike in the forests and swim in the sea.
* You are well connected with motorway and mainline rail links and nearby Cardiﬀ airport serving over 30 destinations directly

## What Are We Looking At?

The Neath Port Talbot cultural strategy will cover many aspects of culture including heritage, sport, and arts for both local residents and visitors.

## How Are We Developing The Strategy?

### Phase 1

September – October 2022

* Strategy commissioned from Counterculture by NPT Council.
* We read and reviewed all the relevant data and literature, including published and unpublished policies, plans, proposals, frameworks, strategies, research and data from the Council, Welsh Government, Arts Council, Sport Wales, National Lottery Heritage Fund and others.
* Mapping research to identify, map, classify and evaluate Neath Port Talbot’s creative, cultural and heritage assets and opportunities.

### Phase 2

November – December 2022

* Stakeholder engagement and consultation. We have talked to over fifty people and groups including councillors, artists, theatre managers, people who work in partner organisations (e.g., National Trust, Natural Resources Wales), and local volunteers.
* These people have helped us to understand the big issues and the questions we need to ask in Phase 3…

### Phase 3

February 2023

* Public consultation.   
  Opportunities for anybody to comment on our initial ideas online and through a series of events across the borough. All the feedback we receive will help us to deliver the final phase…

### Phase 4

March – April 2023

* Create the final Cultural Strategy document for adoption by the Council.

## Issues & Challenges

### Infrastructure

* Although transport to the borough is good, transport (especially public transport) around the borough is difficult, particularly in more rural areas.
* There is little dedicated gallery space in the borough.
* The collections from Cefn Coed and Neath Museum are not currently accredited or on public display.
* Cefn Coed is an underutilised asset that requires a financially sustainable solution.
* Some heritage sites have poor interpretation and wayfinding.
* There is a need for continued investment in green technology to reduce carbon emissions in arts, heritage and leisure facilities.

### Communities

* There are significant areas of deprivation across the borough and some communities face barriers to accessing arts, sport and heritage.
* In a geographically large borough, the diﬀerent assets and facilities are not evenly spread between communities so there’s a need to ensure everyone benefits.
* Much of your industrial heritage was built making profits from the working class and with impact on the Welsh language and culture. Care needs to be taken in telling those stories.

### Creativity

* There is a need to grow skills in areas such as conservation, heritage and collections care and management.
* Many of the people with memories of heavy industries in the borough are older and parts of this industrial heritage are moving away from “living memory”.

### Policy

* Need to develop more eﬀective structures for cross-sector collaborative working, both within and beyond the Council.
* Develop a clear decision-making framework for prioritization of projects to deliver a strategy with external partners.
* Work out how cultural activities can contribute to the growth of the Welsh language in a predominantly English-speaking borough.

## Strengths & Opportunities

### Infrastructure

* Excellent transport to the region by road and rail. Proximity and connectivity to Swansea, Cardiﬀ, Newport and Bristol.
* Wonderful range of natural assets – forests, beaches, moorland, rivers.
* Three main theatres (Princess Royal, Gwyn Hall, Pontardawe) of varying sizes.
* Major new library and leisure centre in Neath.
* Significant investment has been made in community leisure centres to ensure they meet the future needs of residents in NPT.
* Extensive range of heritage assets, many with opportunities for enhancement/expansion (e.g., Neath Abbey, Margam, Gnoll, Aberdulais, Brunel Dock, WAFERS museum).
* Major new visitor development planned in the Afan Valley (Wildfox).
* Aligned to the UNESCO Geopark who are keen to develop and grow a partnership.
* Successful Levelling Up Fund bid for Gnoll and Pontneddfechan - £17.7m.

### Communities

* Long history of inventive communities with pride
* and passion for their area.
* Understanding of the importance of arts, culture, sport and heritage for health and wellbeing across the public and voluntary sectors.
* Collective desire to succeed and a collaborative spirit.
* Priority area for National Lottery Heritage Fund.

### Creativity

* Many significant artists have come from Neath Port Talbot and inspire younger generations.
* Swansea University’s £450m Bay Campus provides both a great venue for creative endeavours and courses in several relevant specialisms.
* Opportunities to build on the Swansea Bay City of Culture bid 2017.

### Policy

* A bold new vision for culture will be developed through this cultural strategy with commitment from NPT Council to use the strategy to drive investment, growth and wellbeing.
* Enthusiasm from a range of national partners and funders for a more joined up approach ﬂowing from a new cultural strategy.
* New Curriculum for Wales with greater emphasis on local history and culture and developmental pathways focussed on belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and well-being.
* New Welsh Government Cultural Strategy due 2023.
* New Destination Management Plan being developed.
* “Dramatic Heart of Wales” brand an opportunity for the visitor economy.
* Planned improvements at Neath Abbey and an ‘in-development’ National Lottery Heritage Fund bid for Margam Castle.

## 2040 Vision

Neath Port Talbot has become a nationally recognised destination with a reputation for a high quality and varied oﬀer of arts, heritage and culture for visitors and residents.

The value of its two great historic parks – Gnoll and Margam – is internationally recognised and they host a wide range of high-quality major events as well as attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. Major restorations or development have taken place at Margam Castle, Neath Abbey, Briton Ferry Brunel Dock, Aberdulais and Cefn Coed. These venues, as well as Port Talbot and Neath town centres, have also been reanimated with ambitious programmes of events, significant public art commissions, new and growing creative businesses, and inclusive community projects.

New ways of working collaboratively have been invented and embraced by the public, private and voluntary sectors and there are passionate, committed groups ensuring arts, heritage and sport are accessed across the borough. Cultural activities are significantly improving people’s health and wellbeing.

Not only have tourist numbers grown, but the number of overnight stays is hugely increased, and local people enjoy towns and villages with a growing range of cafés, bars, restaurants, galleries, sports clubs and creative businesses providing high-quality jobs.

## Strategic Themes

### Theme: Innovation

About this theme: Neath Port Talbot is a place of great innovation. From Ulrich Frosse building ultramodern copper smelting in the 17th century to Brunel’s remarkable docks, to Richard Burton’s development of the actor’s craft. Our cultural strategy will celebrate past innovators, interrogate the more difficult parts of their stories, and inspire future, socially just, innovators.

### Theme: Power

About this theme: From black to green. The Afan, Neath and Tawe rivers used the power of water long before the world’s highest quality coal transformed the world. Today, wind and solar power can again transform Neath Port Talbot’s future, and your industrial buildings, canals and docks provide new opportunities for arts, culture and leisure.

### Theme: Nature and Wellbeing

About this theme: Few other places have Neath Port Talbot’s remarkable range of natural assets, from Aberavon beach, to Afan Forest Park. With canal towpaths, mountain bike trails and long distance walks Neath Port Talbot is perfectly placed to benefit from our increased understanding of the positive impact of nature on our health and wellbeing and the benefits of getting outdoors all year in all weathers!

### Theme: Active and Unhurried Travel

About this theme: We know we’re not the fastest place to get around. But that can be a virtue! Walking, cycling and local buses are sustainable and help you see so much more of our beautiful area. We will focus transport improvements on being green, reliable and inclusive for everyone, more than on getting everywhere at super speed.

### Theme: Welsh to our bones

About this theme: For 1,000 years the people of Neath Port Talbot communicated in Welsh. We want to bring the beauty and richness of our place names, songs, poetry and more to both Welsh and English speakers through brilliant interpretation and signage and nation leading use of incidental Welsh.

## Have Your Say

We want as many people as possible to contribute to the new Cultural Strategy. Please complete our online survey at:

<https://wh.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=167541607969>