

Building thriving
communities together

Bron Afon's contribution: 2011 - 2017

Introduction

Over 600 members, Board members, staff and partners of Bron Afon developed the priorities set out in this Plan. They took part in a series of facilitated workshops where they also identified a long list of ideas to help the priorities have the most effective impact. This Plan identifies the kind of organisation we want to be, provides a framework for the contribution that Bron Afon can make to building thriving communities and sets out the areas of work that we feel are the most important up until 2017.

We have established a Group structure and this Plan is intended to cover the whole group. References in here to “Bron Afon” are therefore to the Bron Afon Group.

Tamsin Stirling

chair of the board



Lyn Weaver

chair of the membership committee



Duncan Forbes

chief executive



What do we want to achieve together?

Bron Afon’s main aim is to improve the quality of life and life chances of people living in Torfaen and neighbouring communities with a particular focus on those who face disadvantage.

What kind of organisation do we want to be?

Bron Afon is set up and we work together as a mutual partnership between our membership, our staff and our Board. We want this to continue with all three groups of people contributing to our development, our policy making and to service improvement just as they have contributed to the development of this Plan. This genuine three-way partnership gives Bron Afon its status as a community mutual and supports the delivery of one of our values: that we will involve people in decisions that affect them, as well as supporting the delivery of one of our aims; to be an open and democratic organisation.

Bron Afon is a social enterprise not just a landlord; a social enterprise in which one of the important ways we achieve our aims is by providing high quality, affordable homes and excellent housing services. But as a dynamic social enterprise, we want to explore and take any other opportunities to achieve our aims which do not involve homes or housing services and which do not limit our services to tenants and leaseholders. The key aspect of this social enterprise

approach is that we may trade to produce profits, but these profits will always be reinvested in services or improvements to assets within the communities we serve.

When we say “social enterprise” we mean:

- we have a social purpose of improving quality of life and life chances.
- we will use enterprise and business methods to achieve that purpose including trading for profit within the Group.
- if we make money from trading we will reinvest those profits to help achieve our social purpose.

Our aims and values

Our aims and values were developed by tenants and staff in the period leading up to the stock transfer ballot in 2007 and were set out in the Offer Document that was given to every tenant

We made clear that we want our values to guide everything we do.

We reaffirm these aims and values in this Plan.

Our aims are:

Aim 1: To provide high-quality, energy efficient, affordable homes, high-quality communal areas, and excellent services to tenants and leaseholders in Torfaen.

Aim 2: To promote and support vibrant, safe, clean and healthy communities working in close partnership with residents and the Council.

Aim 3: To run an open and democratic organisation with high levels of community involvement.

Aim 4: To use the resources we have to best effect in maximising other benefits to the community, including creating and sustaining local jobs, increasing skills, and minimising negative impact on the environment.

Aim 5: To provide support for people who need it.

Our values are that Bron Afon:

- Cares about people and communities.
- Is passionate about excellent service delivery.
- Is innovative and creative and willing to take risks.
- Listens and learns.
- Respects and values diversity and promotes equality of opportunity.
- Is trustworthy, open and honest in all it does.
- Is accountable to the communities it serves.
- Welcomes constructive challenge.
- Involves people in decisions that affect them.
- Has sustainability at the heart of its thinking.
- Is proud to be a non-profit-making social business delivering a public service.

Our priorities

1

Ensuring Bron Afon is a sustainable business

To achieve any of our aims Bron Afon needs to be a sustainable business. We must ensure we have money coming in, not overspend on our budgets and provide services that are value for money.

Each year, we will carry out a self assessment of our Governance, Financial Viability and Organisational Health so we can develop a continuous programme for organisational improvement and development. This will also identify steps we need to take to improve the management of Bron Afon as a business.

As we develop new services under the other themes we will:

- Improve our communication and marketing so that our services are known, accessible and chosen by potential customers.
- Develop and make use of new ways to secure funding.
- Work effectively with partners so we all achieve our own aims and priorities and support theirs.



2

Meeting our existing commitments

While this Plan identifies new areas of work, we make clear in our values that being trustworthy, open and honest is fundamental. Before transfer, we made commitments in the Offer Documents for tenants, leaseholders and staff and a key priority must still remain the delivery of all these commitments. In particular, we made commitments to tenants about the improvement of their homes to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and we reaffirm that commitment. Our aims include providing energy efficient homes and high quality communal areas and these will remain a priority.

The principles later in this Plan make clear that any new initiatives must be tested against the impact they will have on the delivery of our original commitments.

Our annual self assessment will review how we are progressing on meeting our Offer Document commitments and identify the work still to be done.



3

Doing what we do already to an excellent standard

Our values include being passionate about excellent service delivery and our aims include providing excellent services to tenants and leaseholders.

Those using our current services deserve nothing less than excellent services. We will not let the temptation and excitement of new work and initiatives make us lose our focus on identifying the improvements we need to make to our existing services as we strive to achieve excellence.

This does not mean that our services will continue to be delivered as they are now. Far from it, as we develop more of a focus on outcomes for example, in terms of business sustainability or improved quality of life, we will want to identify ways to improve those outcomes. In some cases this may mean that services may change or stop.

The principles later in this Plan also make clear that any new initiatives must be tested against the impact they will have on the quality of existing services.

Our annual self assessment will include an honest review of the quality of our existing services and identify areas where we need to improve.



4

Generating and enabling new business opportunities

We want to support and foster new enterprise which develops people's skills, the creation of new jobs and new services to improve people's quality of life. This contributes to our second and fourth aims.

Securing a wider variety of sources of income will also help with improving our sustainability as a business in the current uncertain economic climate. We will:

- Seek to diversify our income through the development of trading activities within or outside Torfaen that generate income for the Bron Afon Group so that this money can be used to support our aims.
- Explore and evaluate new ways of funding existing and new services.
- Develop new self sustaining businesses and services using a social enterprise model either within the Bron Afon Group or as separate businesses where these support the delivery of our aims.
- Develop ways to support existing and new community groups and enterprises which exist or develop new ones in the communities we serve, where they are relevant to the needs of these communities.



5

Working with communities to deliver joint objectives

Our second aim is to promote and support vibrant, safe, clean and healthy communities. Over 1,900 of the 2,000 or so members, Board and staff who form the mutual partnership that is Bron Afon live in Torfaen and our work with communities forms a key element of a distinctive Bron Afon approach



We will:

- Support local communities and community groups in a wide variety of ways.
- Equip our staff for work which aids, assists and supports communities and encourage volunteering.
- Organise our services to align with communities as far as possible.
- Assist and support these communities in achieving solutions to the problems they have identified.

6

Providing support and advice to those who need it

Our fifth aim is to provide support to those who need it. We interpret the word “support” widely and it is not confined to housing support or the use of the word in the context of money. Tenants and residents need more support in the current economic climate due to the potential cuts in benefits and public services. We will:

- Seek to make people and their support needs a new focus of our services.
- Work to provide our services more proactively rather than reactively as we become better at understanding needs and supporting people.
- Target our services towards those in greatest need.



7

Building skills and capacity

Learning and development is a key element of improving quality of life and we want to assist individuals to flourish. This supports our fourth aim.

We will:

- Aim to set up a new social enterprise. This will be a skills academy providing a suite of learning opportunities for people of all ages.
- Encourage, expand and develop volunteering opportunities for work with individuals and communities.



8

Maximising the use of our assets for the benefit of the Torfaen community

We have substantial assets; not just homes that we rent and lease but also car parks, land, garages, some shops and even disused graveyards. Maximising their use will support other priorities and our fourth aim.

We will:

- Explore opportunities for energy generation and conservation.
- Develop new homes and ensure our homes are adapted to changing needs.
- Support the development of local community hubs and other community buildings.
- Ensure that community needs are incorporated into our plans for managing and improving our assets.



Delivery

This Plan provides a framework. It is deliberately not prescriptive about what we will do or how we will do it but it sets out our priorities. We will adapt our actions and develop innovative projects within this framework that take account of the rapidly changing external environment, our own annual self assessments and the business opportunities that arise. We will also use the ideas and proposals provided by our members, staff, partners and Board during the development of this plan, which we will review and update as a library of future possibilities. We will continue to work with our partners both to support the delivery of their priorities, but also to secure their support for the delivery of ours and test our support for partnership ventures using the criteria set out in the Appendix.

As this plan is a framework, we need some criteria that we will use to test any new initiatives. The Board have agreed the criteria attached as an Appendix to this plan that consist of questions we will ask ourselves when we consider new innovations or projects to support the priorities in this plan.

We will carry out work outside Torfaen where this will protect jobs, or where there are identified benefits for people within Torfaen; for example, through increased efficiency or extra income that can be reinvested. We will also compete with partners where this is appropriate because it gives greater scope for achieving our aims and priorities.

For many projects there will be stages in their development at which we will need to take stock and review the answer to the questions in the Appendix to determine whether to proceed to the next stage.

We have a huge number of ideas for taking the priorities in this plan forward and we will continue to involve members, Board, staff and partners in developing and implementing delivery plans.

In addition to monitoring progress and risks for each individual project, we will assess progress against the priorities in this Plan each year in our self assessment and use the self assessment as an opportunity for a review.

We are all conscious of the essential need for a balance between the development of exciting new projects with the importance of delivering high quality existing services and completing existing projects. Capacity will be a continuing key challenge. As always, there will be competing demands on time and resources and we will ensure we develop techniques that ensure effective oversight of the relative priorities within an overall work programme. We also plan to develop a method of evaluating the relative merit of different ideas so that we can use our resources wisely to achieve the best outcomes. Underpinning the framework of this Plan, we will ensure we have shorter term service and project plans to deliver our priorities.

Progress and Review

Progress checking is a standard part of project management arrangements and we will review the outcomes from individual projects as we complete them.

In addition, we will review progress against all our priorities within our annual self assessment and use this opportunity to carry out a short review of the external environment to check the continuing relevance of our priorities. We will explore how best to report on overall progress by measuring outcomes.

We will carry out a full review after three years with the intention of having a further overlapping Plan to replace this one from 2015.

Conclusion

Together, we have explored what we want the future of our communities in Torfaen to look and feel like and the contribution that Bron Afon can best make as a service provider, landowner and public service partner to secure that future.

This Plan sets out our consensus about the role we want Bron Afon to play in building thriving communities together.



The staff conference in April 2011.

Appendix

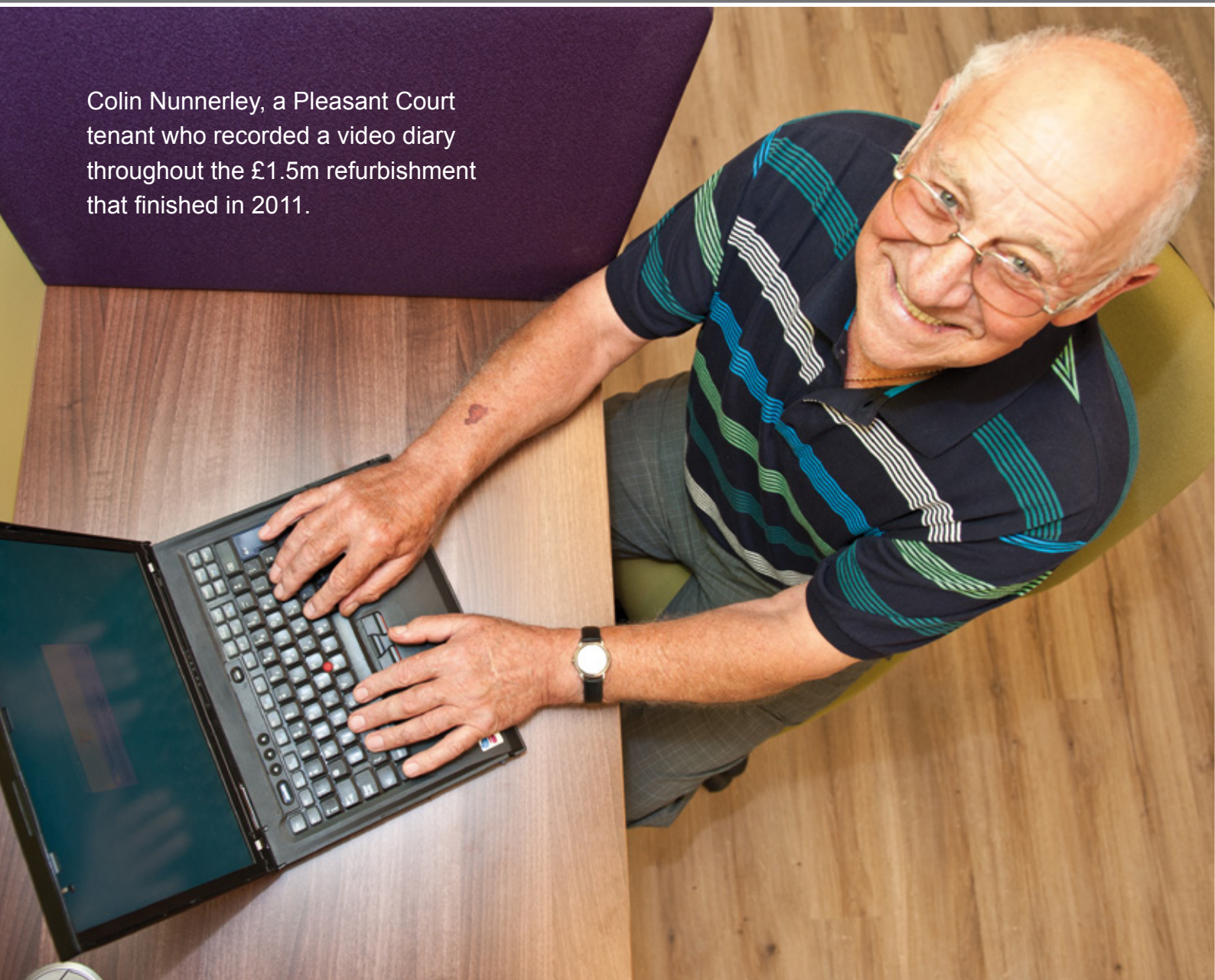
Our criteria for approving new projects consist of a series of questions we will ask when we consider new innovations or projects to support our Corporate Plan priorities. It is unlikely that any project will fulfil every criterion. Rather than set strict “pass” or “fail” requirements we will retain flexibility to judge whether a particular project should proceed on a case by case basis.

The questions are:

- Is the project and its proposed delivery consistent with our values?
- Will the project deliver clearly improved outcomes and are there going to be effective methods in place to measure and report on those outcomes?
- Does the project support the delivery of Bron Afon’s aims and the priorities identified in this Plan?
- Does the project compromise our ability to improve tenants’ homes to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard?
- Does the project require subsidy from rents for services that are for the wider public?
- Will the project compromise the quality of our existing services?
- Who benefits from the project and will the project improve the quality of life of those who are experiencing the greatest disadvantage?
- Is the project for the purpose of generating income which can be invested in services which benefit the most disadvantaged?
- Does the project create any additional risk to Bron Afon’s financial viability and can this risk be mitigated?
- Does the project create any reputational risk for Bron Afon and how can this be mitigated?
- Is the project delivery within our existing expertise or can we secure additional capacity to deliver the project to high standards?
- Will those affected by the project be involved in its development?
- Will the project increase our efficiency by securing economies of scale?
- Will the project protect jobs which would otherwise be lost?
- How best can priorities be delivered; by Bron Afon itself directly or through collaboration with a partner and who is best placed to lead delivery?
- Will the project be sustainable long term, or will it require new or additional longer term support and resources?
- Does the project promote environmental sustainability?



Colin Nunnerley, a Pleasant Court tenant who recorded a video diary throughout the £1.5m refurbishment that finished in 2011.



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