

# Confidential

## A Development Study for the Coleg Gwent Campus in Usk



## Final Report November 2017

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## Executive Summary

Coleg Gwent's Usk site is an underutilised asset and it is clear it has potential to add more value to learning, local tourism and recreation offer, community benefit, and provide a sustainable income stream to support the college's key activity. It received funding from the Vale of Usk Local Action Group existing to carry out an independent study carried out by Martin Price and Alex Bird, of Martin Price Associates, consulting key people and groups in and around Usk.

The aim of this study was to arrive at a set of proposals for the development of the Usk campus which would:

1. Be financially sustainable for the College.
2. Support teaching and learning delivered at the College.
3. Provide benefits to the town centre of Usk.
4. Consider the provision of additional facilities for the community/ local residents.

The following activities were identified and considered:

**Family Activity Centre Visitor Attraction**, which could include: A Play Barn; Play Area; Small Animal Attractions; Woodland craft; Ropes Course and climbing; BBQ and outdoor platform; Bird Hide Nature watch. This attraction which would bring more visitors to the area with strong consequentially benefits to the town of Usk and its cafés, restaurants, pubs, and accommodation providers.

**Equestrian activities** - Improving the facilities by improving parking and amenities for users, and eventually installing a Viewing Gallery to Ménage.

**Improved sports provision** - The facilities required for teaching purposes can be opened to the public, including a Commercial Gymnasium. This will go some way to meeting the desire of local residents for a local sports centre.

**The disused 1917 building** could be transformed into a "Made in Monmouthshire" Food shop, showcasing local produce, or possibly into a Rural Business Centre.

**Camping** can be introduced into some of the underused parts of the site.

**Community Garden** – this can be developed further, involving more local people in conjunction with educational activities and the 1917 Building shop.

Each of these is considered in the report with potential income and commercial returns. There would be the potential to tie in these activities with the existing educational offering at Coleg Gwent, by developing new relevant courses and providing workplace work experience.

Some of these activities can be developed incrementally from the existing resources. However, the Family Activity centre, Equestrian Centre and possibly the 1917 building would require considerable investment in time and money. We would strongly recommend involving a commercial partner with experience of developing visitor attractions of this sort.

These proposals provide an impetus for creating greater physical links between the town and the college campus. A major opportunity here is the Sustrans plan to turn the old railway track into a route that would be suitable for walkers and cyclists between the Island Car Park Usk and Little Mill.

Reaction to the activities outlined has been overwhelmingly positive. Respondents particularly welcome the idea of greater use of the campus, and see this as beneficial to the town of Usk and the general area.

# 1. Introduction

Coleg Gwent's Usk site is an underutilised asset and it is clear it has potential to add more value to learning, local tourism and recreation offer, community benefit, and provide a sustainable income stream to support the college's key activity.

Coleg Gwent have received funding from the Vale of Usk Local Action Group (LAG) to carry out an independent study into potential developments at the Usk Campus.

The aim of this study is to arrive at a set of proposals for the development of the Usk campus that will generate sustainable income sources for the college that are compatible and add value to its current uses and that could provide services or facilities to the local community. These can be summed up by the following aims, in that the proposals must:

1. Be financially sustainable for the College.
2. Support teaching and learning delivered at the College.
3. Provide benefits to the town centre of Usk
4. Consider the provision of additional facilities for the community/ local residents.

The study is being carried out by Martin Price and Alex Bird, of Martin Price Associates, consulting with key people and groups in and around Usk.

In an initial report Martin Price Associates assessed the various ideas put forward by the internal Usk Development Group, and classified them in terms of their potential economic viability.

This report looks in more detail at some of the options.

## 2. Activities for further work after first stage report

Following discussion of the First stage report, the following were identified for more in-depth study

### A. Catering facilities

These were agreed as fundamental to all other activities. They could be at three locations:

- Close to sports facilities
- At the 1917 building
- At the Arthur building or possibly in a revamped Ménage.

### B. Improved sports facilities on the north side of the A472

- Commercial Gymnasium
- Multi-Sport facility (Inflated dome) – although this could be part of a wider rationalisation of teaching facilities

### C. 1917 building

- A Rural Business Centre
- “Made in Monmouthshire” shop

There will need to be a judgement based on a business case as to whether the building and associated car-parking can accommodate both these activities as well as a café.

### D. Family Activities Centre

This will be a destination, which could offer any of the activities below.

- Play Barn
- Play Area
- Small Animal Attractions
- Woodland craft
- Ropes Course and climbing
- BBQ and outdoor platform
- Bird Hide Nature watch
- Sustrans Cycle route

### E. Equestrian activities

- Viewing Gallery to Ménage
- Other
- Pony rides and riding lessons – possibly as part of the Family Activities Centre

### F. Accommodation

- Camping
- Glamping

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### G. Community Garden projects

- Developments on the Incredible Edible garden
- Developments on the existing growing project for people with learning difficulties

### H. Other

- Car Parking is essential, possibly at all three locations in section 1 above.
- A path within the campus linking the Equestrian Centre and 1917 building to avoid walking along A472

### 3. Family Activity Centre

The Family Centre could cover these facilities:

- Play Barn
- Play Area
- Small Animal Attractions
- Woodland craft
- Ropes Course and climbing
- BBQ and outdoor platform
- Bird Hide Nature watch
- Sustrans Cycle route

Each of these requires capital and running costs, depending on how sophisticated and extensive they are. They will provide employment opportunities and training opportunities for students. They can be developed incrementally over an extended period or in one hit.

As well as the activities above, subject to agreement with the tenants it would be possible to extend to providing an experience of visiting a working farm. A good example of what is possible is Roves Farm near Swindon [www.rovesfarm.co.uk](http://www.rovesfarm.co.uk) which was featured recently on BBC Radio 4 Farming Today in a programme considering rural tourism - [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08xxdwx](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08xxdwx). This has taken thirty years to develop its facilities and now attracts 75,000 visitors a year.

There are many practical issues which need to be considered

- Ticketing
  - Setting the price
    - Making it all-inclusive or charging for individual activities
    - Charging for children and allowing adults free
    - Charging for adults with children at a lesser level depending on age
    - Providing family tickets.
    - Perceived overcharging is one of the major complaints on Tripadvisor. The public have a finely tuned eye for what they consider value for money.
    - Incentivising sustainable travel by offering discounts for cyclists.
  - Policing who has paid
    - Having only one or two entrances and fencing to prevent unauthorised entry
    - Using a wristband system to indicate payment.
- Wet Weather activities
  - Essential to have a reasonable-sized area under cover
  - Paths and approaches to buildings need to be mud-free
- Encouraging repeat business
  - This is the key to making the business sustainable financially
  - A strong programme of interesting, constantly changing events
  - Adjustments and additions to facilities in the light of customer feedback
- A substantial marketing budget
  - Advertising

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- A clear website
- Intelligent use of social media.
- The location on a busy main road lends itself to use of billboards.
- Health and Safety
  - Washing and disinfecting facilities. Children petting animals and playing in dirt
  - Fenced, safe areas for smaller children.

## Financials

It may be helpful to start by looking at the sort of income which could be generated in the first instance, and then work from that to the funding which would be required to set up the facilities.

Looking at admissions prices from similar facilities:

**Play Barns:** £4 to £8 per child. In some cases adults are free to encourage repeat business with income boosted from café usage.

In others, the fee for adults is higher than for a child.

**Larger attractions** like Noah's Ark in Bristol charge £17-£20 for adults – Children £10-£15

Roves Farm charges £9.50 for adults and children, with on-line discounts.

In most cases there are family tickets offering discounts and season tickets.

If we make some simple assumptions, we can get to the table below.

Possible income family facility									
Number of visitors	5,000	10,000	15,000	20,000	30,000	40,000	50,000	60,000	100,000
Of which Children 60%	3000	6000	9000	12000	18000	24000	30000	36000	60000
Adults (Children 60%)	£10	£10	£10	£10	£10	£10	£10	£10	£10
Gross Income level	£38,000	£76,000	£114,000	£152,000	£228,000	£304,000	£380,000	£456,000	£760,000
Café net profit per person	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2
Overall café net	£10,000	£20,000	£30,000	£40,000	£60,000	£80,000	£100,000	£120,000	£200,000
<b>Gate plus Café</b>	<b>£48,000</b>	<b>£96,000</b>	<b>£144,000</b>	<b>£192,000</b>	<b>£288,000</b>	<b>£384,000</b>	<b>£480,000</b>	<b>£576,000</b>	<b>£960,000</b>

For comparison, Roves Farm attracts 75,000 visitors a year. This is some 1,400 per week or 200 visitors per day, although it is likely these are skewed to weekends and the warmer, drier months of the year. A constantly changing programme of events would smooth out attendance.

The figures give an indication of the sort of income possible and the headroom for revenue costs and servicing investment in capital items. The major cost will be labour, say:

Manager	1	£30,000	£30,000
Deputy	1	£25,000	£25,000
Staff	20	£15,000	£300,000

**£355,000**

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This would suggest that there is little margin at less than 50,000 visitors. The net margin on this sort of activity is usually c 5%, which would indicate a profit of £24,000. This could, of course be increased by good management processes.

If facilities were such that a higher entry fee, say £15 rather than £10, might be possible then this scenario is feasible which gives more scope, but would incur greater costs. A 5% margin on 50,000 visitors is £35,000.

Possible income family facility									
Number of visitors	5,000	10,000	15,000	20,000	30,000	40,000	50,000	60,000	100,000
Of which Children 60%	3000	6000	9000	12000	18000	24000	30000	36000	60000
Adults (Children 60%)	£15	£15	£15	£15	£15	£15	£15	£15	£15
Gross Income level	£57,000	£114,000	£171,000	£228,000	£342,000	£456,000	£570,000	£684,000	£1,140,000
Café net profit per person	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2
Overall café net	£10,000	£20,000	£30,000	£40,000	£60,000	£80,000	£100,000	£120,000	£200,000
<b>Gate plus Café</b>	<b>£67,000</b>	<b>£134,000</b>	<b>£201,000</b>	<b>£268,000</b>	<b>£402,000</b>	<b>£536,000</b>	<b>£670,000</b>	<b>£804,000</b>	<b>£1,340,000</b>

## Other benefits

There would be other benefits to the college and consideration needs to be given as to how much these are worth

- Opportunities for student placements
- Adding appropriate new courses.
- Greater profile for the site and the College.

Benefits to the town:

- Increased take-up of local tourist accommodation
- A proportion of the visitors will wish to explore town facilities – cafés, pubs, restaurants etc and the Usk Rural Life Museum. This will be particularly true for repeat visitors.

## Key Issues

The targeting of the market is very important. Visitors will peak at weekends and during school holidays with greater numbers in better weather, but it is possible with judicious differentiation of events and activities to reduce some of this variation. For example, activities for pre-school children could increase during term time, and repeat visits encouraged with reduced fee offers.

To cater for large numbers of visitors, it is very likely that more land would be required from the tenanted farm, which would require negotiation and probably a reduction in rental income.

## Involving Partners

The College is a well-respected educational provider. It has no experience of running visitor attractions. It would be possible to reduce risk by working with a commercial partner with a track record in this field.

## 4. Equestrian Centre

### The Manège

The Manège is used extensively at weekends and in evenings, but is severely constrained by the lack of parking for horse boxes and trucks. The facilities are good and organised well – segregation of horses from people, and dedicated warm up areas, stables etc.

The fields immediately behind (to the north and west) are used for jumping and exercising, but could be adapted to accommodate horse boxes, trailers, and caravans if this was moved to the field further west beside the Glas Coed entrance road or to the “Cottage Patch”. Such adaptation would require electric hook up points around the field, and the opening of the Arthur Building with its new café on weekends.

However, there are currently very few events and significant long-term revenue can only be generated from better viewing facilities. It would be possible to add a viewing Gallery as an extra bay to the existing building and combine this with better toilets and catering facilities.

To develop events would require investment, and the co-operation of current course partners: -

- Ffrwd Uchaf Farm, Cefn Coed, Merthyr Tydfil
- [GHF Equestrian, Gwehelog](#)
- [Werngochlyn Stables, Llantilio Pertholy](#)
- [Talygarn Equestrian Centre, Pontyclun](#) (Indoor Arena + Outdoor Events)
- [Sunnybank Equestrian Centre, Caerphilly](#) (Outdoor Events)
- Pembrokeshire Riding, Pembroke
- Creigydd Farm, Ponthir
- [Liege, Bonvilston](#) (Outdoor Events)
- [Marros, Pendine](#) (Indoor School + Pony Trekking)

It has been suggested to us that the Equestrian course offering – based around the British Horse Society and City and Guilds qualifications are becoming outdated and not moving with the times. An example of what could be provided is the equestrian centre at Moulton College in Northampton. <http://equestrian.moulton.ac.uk>. They offer long and short courses including such items as three-day equine therapy sessions and therapy livery, as well as hosting events.

### Recommendation

Before investing in a viewing gallery, we would suggest improving the parking and providing basic catering, toilet and overnight provision, working in tandem with the ideas in Section 6 on camping.

An events programme can then be developed to maximise the use of the existing facilities, albeit with limited viewing facilities. It is possible to hire temporary staging if necessary for larger events. These events must be marketed and advertised well within the equestrian community. At the same time, the equestrian course offering should be reviewed and the events programme tailored to it should be developed. This is a long-term project and once sufficient demand has been created, then a business case can be made for the investment in the viewing gallery. Involving a specialist commercial partner would reduce the financial risk to the college.

## 5. Sports Facilities

### Commercial Gymnasium

Monmouth leisure Centre offers membership at £31.50 per month, which includes a free gym induction, a personalised fitness plan, a Technogym key and unlimited access to their fitness classes, swimming pools, gyms, saunas and steam rooms across all four centres (Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Monmouth)

The Cwrt Bleddyn offers gym only membership from £30 per month. The Celtic Manor and Coldra Hotel offers a range of memberships, but pricing is not transparent. Gym offers from local authorities and public bodies should be attractive as here has been so much publicity around aggressive contracting by a number of national fitness club and gym chains. The gym at the college is small, and lacks the hotel type facilities at Cwrt Bleddyn, and so a lower price bracket would be appropriate.

The current offer of membership needs to be examined, and fully costed to test commercial feasibility, but it would appear viable at first sight. More Monmouthshire County Council staff are being moved to the site, which may represent an opportunity to sell to a greater captive audience. The college is keen to make more facilities available for local people.

### Recommendation

The existing gymnasium is capable of commercial usage in addition to the existing college requirements, and some income could be developed from it.

Overheads need to be kept low, and permanent staffing would probably render it unviable. It therefore needs to be developed as an automatic, self-operated gymnasium. This at first appears to increase the risk of injury to users, but many commercial gyms operate in this way, with suitable induction and certification of users' capability. Also, insurance costs are reduced as the absence of college staff means they cannot be held responsible for any injuries from customers over-exerting themselves.

This could be managed by the college in-house, Monmouthshire County Council's Leisure Services, or a not for profit body such as the Torfaen Leisure Trust.<sup>1</sup>

### Research shows gym members do not attend a gymnasium every day<sup>2</sup>;

Attendance patterns at clubs across a week typically have the pattern (see the graph on the right below) relating to when members are most focused on achieving outcomes and have the least distractions; highest on Monday and Wednesday, Tuesday and Thursday slightly lower, Friday and the weekend the lowest. Again, this is a guide but it holds true for most clubs. At the start of the week, coming off a reflective weekend, members mentally prepare themselves to go to the club. By mid-week their motivation starts to 'waiver' and by week's end their focus is often elsewhere – Friday night drinks, the movies or planning for the weekend.

Attendance patterns across a membership will vary widely however research into large numbers of members has shown the following:-

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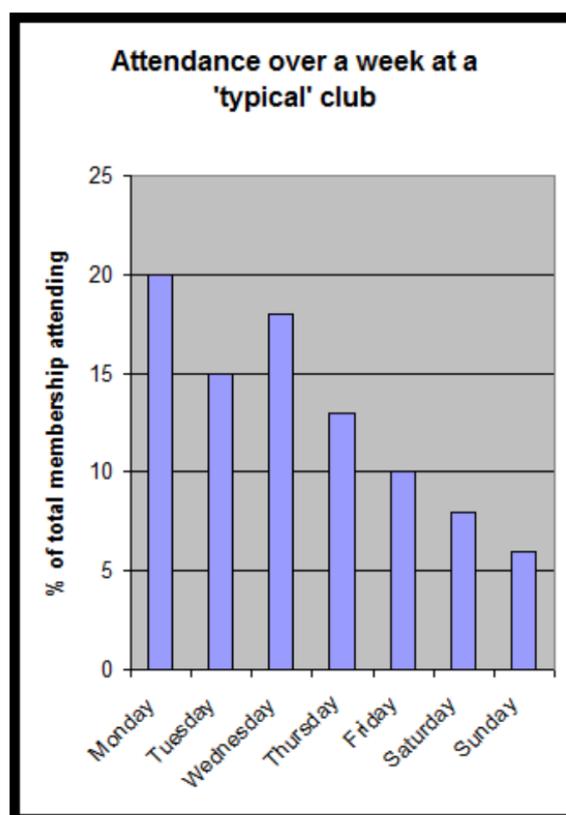
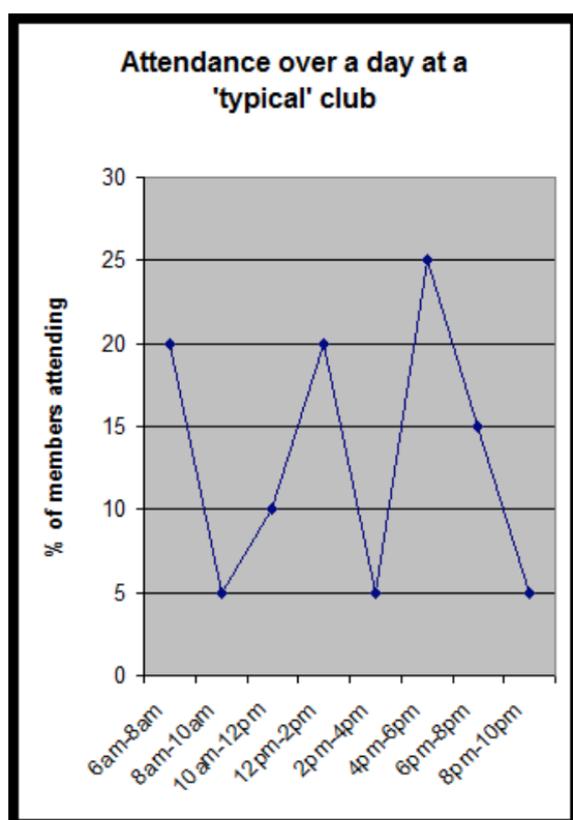
<sup>1</sup> A not for profit charitable company <http://torfaenleisuretrust.co.uk/en/about>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ptdirect.com/training-design/exercise-behaviour-and-adherence/attendance-adherence-drop-out-and-retention-patterns-of-gym-members>

Monthly Attendance

	After one month	After three months	After 6 months
Attended <4 times	28.7%	40.5%	43.7%
Attended 4-7 times	29.9%	28.8%	27.6%
Attended 8-11 times	20.6%	16.5%	15.3%
Attended 12+ times	20.9%	14.2%	13.4%

*Winning the retention battle, Fitness Industry Association, 2001*



The graphs show that maximum attendance is on a Monday, when 20% of members will attend, of whom approximately 25% will come to the 6pm slot – giving a peak attendance of 5% of membership. Thus, the existing gymnasium, which has space for up to around 12 participants at any one time, could reasonably build a paying membership of 240 based on these usage patterns.

If a membership charge of £25 per month were used, and 240 members recruited, this would give an annual income of £72,000. The major cost for gyms is staffing. Greatest profit would be generated from an unmanned card system but at least one attendant would be required at some parts of the day and for enrolment and familiarisation on equipment. Given that in term-time the college covers most costs, a greater margin of, say 10-15% may be possible – say £7,200 per annum.

## 6. Camping Facilities

### Glamping/Bunkhouse

Camping in pre-erected Yurts is gaining in popularity. The Bridge Inn<sup>3</sup> between Brecon and Hereford advertises a Yurt for £95 per night, but of course has the attraction of the pub next door.

Penhein<sup>4</sup> near Chepstow has a range of Yurts, also at similar prices. These are located on a farm, which also offers a range of massage treatments and visits around the farm

Usk Castle<sup>5</sup> also offers glamping in medieval style tents. There are no prices on the website which is out of date.

The nearest bunkhouses are near Abergavenny, and offer accommodation from £15 per night. Some, such as Middle Ninfa near Llanfoist offer other attractions such as coracle building courses<sup>6</sup>

It is essential, in order to develop Glamping and Bunkhouse accommodation to develop other attractions to make an interesting short break for visitors. It will also need capital investment in buildings and tents, as well as services to the site.

There are unlikely to be any planning objections, provided it is done tastefully. There are two planning applications in at the moment from farmers further along the A472 towards Little Mill for small numbers – under 20 each.

Whilst bunkhouse accommodation will almost always have washing and toilet facilities in the building, most glamping units have only a kitchen inside, or at most limited toilet facilities. The majority of Glamping developments take place near to facilities (e.g. behind a pub) or on an existing campsite. Therefore any Glamping development would be best done in combination with a campsite development.

### Campsite

There are very few campsites in the area, the nearest being Pont Kemys which is 5 miles away at Chainbridge <http://pontkemys.co.uk> . This site is very successful, and is generally full during the summer months.

Campsites generally need an area of 3 to 4 acres (1.2 to 1.6 hectares) as a minimum to be profitable, and locating suitable land on the campus may be the difficulty. Pont Kemys is 8 acres.

Caravan density is recommended not to exceed 30 per acre<sup>7</sup>, so a 3 acre site, plus space for office and facilities, would produce over 90 pitches, sufficient to generate up to £1,800 per night.

Planning consent will be needed if the site is to be open permanently, as well as finding a suitable flat field, but is unlikely to be refused unless there are particular negative indications.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pitchup.com/campsites/England/Central/Herefordshire/Hereford/bridge-inn-camping-site/?type=13>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.penhein.co.uk>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.uskcastle.com/Camping-Landing>

<sup>6</sup> [http://middlesinfa.co.uk/?page\\_id=58](http://middlesinfa.co.uk/?page_id=58)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/12052074/conditions-for-campsites.pdf>

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Other alternatives are a site that is open 28 days or less, and so needs no permission, or a site that is open only to Camping Club members with a maximum 5 caravans and 25 tents, which also needs no planning consent. Either of these can be commercially viable, but will produce only a limited income.

## Recommendation

There is only limited suitable land available on the site which is not subject to high risk of flooding.

These are:-

- The northernmost part of 1057, (4.3 hectares of the total 11.85) which is currently part of the Williams brothers' agricultural tenancy. This has a "low" flood risk. It is, however, located close to "Newlands" which has recently been sold by the college to private owners. It has the attraction of being closest to the town and having an existing road entrance, but planning may want improvements to this to cope with increased vehicle numbers.
- The fields beside the entrance road to Glascoed (western 4.7 hectares, eastern 2.47 hectares). These have no quantified flood risk, but may be subject to restrictions on grounds of security and explosion risk, particularly the westernmost field. This is slightly sloping (3%) whilst the eastern is flat.
- The rugby field (1.47 hectares), which has a "low" flood risk, is completely flat, and surrounded entirely by agricultural land. It is used by the local rugby club, but actual usage is low - there is no wear and tear on the grass (at the end of the season), no whitelines, and no padding on the posts. We have discussed the possibility of dual use with the club, and they see no problems with this as they only use the pitch for juniors from December to March, they don't need the posts to be in place, and any on-site facilities would be useful to them. They would particularly welcome facilities that were designed to be dual use – i.e. to have enough showers for up to 30 people as well as facilities for campers such as washing up and laundry.

In our view the most attractive location would be the rugby field, for the following reasons:-

- "Low" flood risk, so a suitably constructed toilet block and office should be able to gain planning consent, as should any glamping units.
- Shares existing road entrance with the college – so there should be no highway issues
- Completely level site with new and substantial bridge access
- Electricity on site
- Sewage and water connections nearby, across the river
- Tranquil
- No nearby housing to be disturbed
- At 3.63 acres it could accommodate 100 pitches

Clearly, the current usage by the club is an issue that needs to be taken on board before this can go ahead, but the demand for all year-round camping is small, and seasonal use is the norm.

Consultation with the Planning and Highways Departments is also required, and should be the first step to get their views on such a development.

Potential income Camping and Caravanning – 100 pitches @£10 per night for 100 nights - £100,000. Offset would be the need to build toilet / shower facilities and man the site for at least part of the time. Say £10,000 surplus.

## 7. 1917 Building



The 1917 building is valued by local people and the college is keen to see it brought back into good use.

### 'Made in Monmouthshire' Shop

Such a shop could feature a number of products, but local food is an obvious and increasingly sought-after commodity.

There are a number of small local producers in the area, and a small occasional outlet in the shape of Usk Farmers Market, which is open on alternate Saturday mornings, but no 7 day opening outlet:-

- **Usk Country Market**, The Memorial Hall, Maryport St, Usk, NP15 1RX Thursdays 10.00 to 12.00, 01291 691142
- **Usk Farmers Market**, The Conservative Club, Porthycarne Street, Usk, First and third Saturdays, 10.00 to 13.00, 01291 690313
- **Cefn Maen Farm**, (Turkeys) Raglan, NP15 2HR, 01291 690 428
- **Trealy Farm Charcuterie**, (Rare breed pork) Goytre, USK, NP4 0AL, 01495 785 090
- **Trumper's Turkeys**, Pant-Y-Beiliau, Llanfair Kilgeddin, Abergavenny, NP79BE, 01873 840 270
- **Whitebrook Organic Growers**, (Veg Box Scheme) Flat 2, Llanvaches, Newport, NP263AY, 01633 400406
- **Pen-Y-Lan Organic Farm**, (Beef, lamb, eggs) Dingestow, Monmouth, NP254DX, 01600 740 252
- **Oook's Kitchen**, (Jams) Penthouse, Llanwern Village, NP18 2DW, 0795 755 8390
- **Glenside Honey Farm**, Lower Leigh Road, Pontypool, NP4 8LG, 07789 980 000
- **Hallets Real Cider**, Blaengawney Farm, Mynydd Maen, Hafodyrynys, Crumlin, NP11 5AY, 01495 244691
- **Blaenafon Cheddar Company**, 80 Broad Street, Blaenafon, Torfaen, NP4 9NF, 01495 793123

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Such an outlet could prove popular with producers and customers alike and the college is already in discussion with Monmouthshire Council Council about whether the site could lend itself as a hub for local producers.

A successful example of a similar, although much larger venture, is the Ludlow Food Centre.<sup>8</sup> This is a £multimillion business on the A49, two miles north of Ludlow. It is owned and run by the Earl of Plymouth's Oakly Park Estate which extends to approximately 8,000 acres of Shropshire countryside. Unlike many farm shops they produce half the food they sell on the premises. The 8 production kitchens produce and prepare bread, cheese, meat, jams, pickles, chutneys, readymade meals and deli products. By sourcing produce locally and making half the food they sell, they are able to keep control over the quality and variety on offer. The Food Centre employs over 120 people including artisan producers, butchers, chefs, retail and operational staff.

Whilst any developments on this site would be considerably smaller, Ludlow is an interesting example of how a destination can be created from scratch, beside a main road.

In combination with a complementary catering facility, given the level of traffic on the A472, the scope for picking up hot drinks and sandwiches passing trade looks very good. But would this change of use be acceptable to the Planning authority?

## Rural Business Centre

The provision of small offices and workshops in a rural setting. These can be let on a licence, rather than a lease, to provide flexibility for both tenant and landlord. Licences can be on-going basis, for a room or a desk, or on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis for a “hot-desk”.

Indycube<sup>9</sup> is a Wales based, not for profit provider of such spaces, and is now working with Community trade union to expand its operations. They offer a partnership arrangement with landlords to market and administer the space, and share the rental income with the landlord. They have more than thirty sites at present.

Once established this arrangement can produce income to the landlord equivalent to local market rates without the effort of arranging tenancies themselves.

There are currently no small workshops or office space advertised for rent in Usk<sup>10</sup>, the only properties available are 5 miles away at Pontypool and Cwmbran. Current rents are up to £10 per ft<sup>2</sup> per annum for office space and £3 per ft<sup>2</sup> per annum for light industrial workshops. A service charge and commercial rates will be additional. Anecdotally there is some evidence demand, but this would need to be tested further.

The 1917 building extends to 114m<sup>2</sup> (1,204ft<sup>2</sup>) on the first floor and 1,021 m<sup>2</sup> (12,716 ft<sup>2</sup>) on the ground floor. Assuming a mixture of light industrial, retail and office space on the ground floor, and office space on the first floor, this could produce an income of up to a maximum of £91,760 per

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ludlowfoodcentre.co.uk/Content.aspx?ID=1>

<sup>9</sup> <http://indycube.cymru>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/commercial-property-to-let/find.html?locationIdentifier=REGION%5E1378&radius=3.0&priceType=pcm>

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annum.<sup>11</sup> Allowing for tenancy turnover and some vacancies, an income of £75,000 should be achievable.

Although there is little office space vacant at present in Usk, the Town Council and business community might view this a direct competition for space in the town. This concern has been expressed to the consultants.

## Recommendation

A combination of a food destination, café/restaurant and shop, could be developed alongside a small business unit and office development. Care would be needed to ensure any businesses were compatible with the food and retail usage (i.e. noise and smell issues).

The food and catering elements could be franchised out to local businesses, and local charities and organisations working with disabilities, rehabilitation or training could be involved.

Gloucester Services<sup>12</sup> on the M5 is an example of community engagement in catering and retail on a large scale. The Dunning family who have run Tebay Services on the M6 in Cumbria since the 70's working with local farmers and community organisations have formed a partnership with the Gloucestershire Gateway Trust<sup>13</sup> to run the new M5 services at Junction 11, employing local people and prioritising those with disabilities or other disadvantage. This could be the model for a local partnership at Usk.

In order to test the market, the 1917 building could be repaired to a basic standard, rather than completely refurbished to a high standard.

The studies conducted for the college by Rider Levett Bucknall indicate that Option 2 should cost £172,277. This includes repairs and closing of apertures in the back wall, as well as roof repairs, and should make it safe to use as a market hall, being weatherproof but unimproved. Whilst this is not a long-term option, it would weatherproof and stabilize the building.

A Farmer's Market type operation could then be test marketed, and we would recommend this be on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays each month to avoid clashing with the existing Usk Farmers Market run by Steve Sherman in the Memorial Hall

Assuming an average of 16 stalls rented out for an average of £25 each, which is a typical rate<sup>14</sup>, it would generate income of £4,800 for a monthly market, or £9,600 for a fortnightly market. In addition, a growing project would have an outlet for its produce, and this would increase the income further.

Local farmers and associated primary and secondary food producers would be invited to trade at the market, and in addition, produce from the Community Garden project could be sold there. It is important to ensure a reasonable level of choice to make visit to an out-of-town market worthwhile for its customers.

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<sup>11</sup> 5,000 @ £10 + 5,000 @ £6 + 3,920 @ £3 = £91,760

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.gloucesterservices.com/community>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.gloucestershiregatewaytrust.org.uk>

<sup>14</sup> Costings from Steve Garrett, founder of Riverside Market in Cardiff

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Catering facilities in the building would require considerable further investment to meet food hygiene requirements, but there are other options, for example pop-up restaurants by local caterers.

Rather than invest in establishing a permanent catering facility which might have limited use, and which requires regular maintenance and upgrading, inviting a range of “street” food retailers who could trade there on market days and for other events. They are usually self-contained mobile operations who sell out of vans or small trailers which could be brought into the building. They could bid for space and would be charged rental for the right to trade there.

This is a model that has been used successfully at Riverside market at other food-based events in Cardiff, and it is profitable for the host organisation and for the vendors. This approach removes the need for costly new catering facilities to be created, and for people to be employed, managed, and possibly trained to have the requisite catering skills

It also creates a guaranteed level of income for the host, and removes any responsibility for dealing with food waste, environmental health concerns and other issues, all of which become the responsibility of the vendor. In this way, it is also possible to provide variation in the cooked food made available on market and event days, which would make a more interesting experience for those who come. Public awareness of, and interest in street food has been growing exponentially for the past five years and is still at a high level. There is now a floating roster of street food retailers in and around Cardiff who are always looking for opportunities to trade, especially during the autumn and winter months.

It would be reasonable to expect to host up to six “food vans”, at a rental of £60 for the right to trade on a day, which, if the market was run on a fortnightly basis, would generate a net income of £7,200.

These activities could be tied in with the College’s educational requirements. Students on Tourism and Retail courses are currently taught at the Pontypool campus. There is great scope for work-experience or on-the-job training, and perhaps a transfer of teaching from Pontypool to Usk.

## 8. Community Garden projects

There is the potential to develop a vegetable growing project on the existing Incredible Edible garden, which is located on Monmouthshire CC land adjacent to the Filter Bed.

The Community Garden project is overseen by I.E.U<sup>15</sup>- (Incredible Edible Usk) on land owned by Monmouthshire County Council. Nigel Leaworthy is a contact for the project. He works for the Council, but looks after the garden on a voluntary basis as a part of his involvement with I.E.U.

The garden was originally established with a £35K grant from Welsh government and in his words “is intended to represent the principles of sustainability, to be an exemplar’,

In principle, the Garden is available for use by anyone in the community, but according to Nigel not many people currently go there, and those that do are often not keen to become directly involved with the work required to maintain it. In fine weather, the Garden is used by County Hall employees as a place to sit and eat lunch.

There is sufficient space to erect a number of poly tunnels, up to an area of 500m<sup>2</sup> on underused parts of the plot.

If they're well-managed, poly tunnels can generate an income, and also provide a convenient covered space where workshops and other educational activities can take place even in bad the weather.

To ensure maximum income generation from a tunnel, rotation of crops is essential. For example, Chinese and other winter greens sold in salad bags can be extremely profitable over winter months. Broad beans and green beans can also be grown earlier in the season. These then need to be replaced by hot weather crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers aubergines and peppers.

As a general rule, the larger the size of the tunnel, the more productivity per square metre. Larger tunnels are also easier to manage in terms of heat control, but require more efficient irrigation systems.

A successful social enterprise has been set up in Bristol growing salad for local restaurants in polytunnels on an urban site: <http://www.thesevernproject.org> A similar project is currently being established on a smaller scale in a council owned greenhouse in Bute Park in Cardiff.

### Polytunnel Crops – potential yields

Product	Area m <sup>2</sup>	Yield kg/m <sup>2</sup>	Yield/Year kg	Price/kg	Income/yr
Tomatoes	25	5.5	137.5	£5.00	£687.50
Cucumbers	60	3	180	£1.50	£270.00
Babyleaf salads	100	8	800	£9.00	£7,200.00
Herbs	25	3	75	£9.00	£675.00
Peppers, aubergines etc	75	2	150	£4.50	£675.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>				<b>£9,507.50</b>

As shown above, a 285m<sup>2</sup> polytunnel can produce a substantial income each year

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/incredible-edible-usk>

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There is also a demand for horticulture related courses and workshops, from both the general public and from people with a more specialized interest in food production. Such courses, when run by the college would be more highly regarded than other competing courses from non-educational establishments. However, experience has shown that in order to attract participants, it is necessary to keep the cost of courses relatively low, and this limits the profit that can be generated from such activities after other expenses, such as the cost of the trainer, are covered.

However, we feel it is realistic to plan for at least ten workshops per year hosting an average of 15 people, each of whom have paid around £20 to attend. This would generate a gross annual income of £3,000.

## 9. What does this mean for the town of Usk?

All the activities described will be based at the college's campus, but they have considerable positive implications for the town of Usk.

Improving the sports facilities and making them accessible to the public goes some way to meeting the long-held desire for a sports centre to serve the people of Usk. Similarly, enhancing the Community Garden will be an amenity for local people.

The reuse of the 1917 building for selling local food, in partnership with the farmers market will also appeal to local people.

Looking at the Family Centre, many visitors will arrive via Usk and will want to stop and visit the pubs, cafés, and shops in the town. This will also apply to those using the campsite facilities.

There is deliberately no provision for accommodation in the proposals, other than developing a camping site. Visitors from further afield will use the existing hotels, guest houses and self-catering accommodation in Usk and the surrounding area.

Creating a visitor attraction on the Usk campus will also provide an impetus for creating greater physical links between the town and the college campus. The major opportunity here is the proposed transformation of the old railway track into a cycle path.

In 2014 Monmouthshire County Council appointed Sustrans to develop the proposals for a route that would be suitable for all users including walkers, cyclists and horse riders that would comply with current access quality standards. The route would lie between The Island Car Park Usk and Little Mill. Consideration will also be given to the linking the route to National Cycle route 49 near Pontypool.

The scheme has struggled due to lack of funds and queries as to how much it would be used. Being able to reach the Family Centre without the use of motor vehicles in a safe way without using the A472 would make this a very attractive proposition. This would be in partnership with the Usk Trail Access Group (UTAG) , who have been consulted about these proposals.

## 10. Community reaction

We have consulted widely via face to face and telephone interviews with various organisations and individuals in Usk and wider Monmouthshire, see the Appendix for a full list.

Reaction to the activities outlined has been overwhelmingly positive. Respondents particularly welcome the idea of greater use of the campus, and see this as beneficial to the town of Usk and the general area.

Several people talked about a perception that over recent years, the college had become somehow separate from the town of Usk. The idea of developing services attractive to residents and drawing them on to the campus was seen as very positive.

There is particular affection for the 1917 building and everybody supported finding a viable use for it.

The only negative response was to the idea of turning the 1917 building into office space. It was felt this could detract in the long-term from the town offering.

Councillors and Monmouthshire's planners were sanguine about the need for more car parking on campus. The only caveat is that this must be done sensitively with good landscaping to reduce the visual impact.

## 11. Financial summary and what next?

Summarising the Financial Figures above:

	Income	Return
Family Activity Centre	480,000	24,000
Gymnasium	72,000	7,200
Camping/Caravan	100,000	10,000
Rural Business Centre	75,000	7,500
Community Garden	9,500	1,000

There would be the potential to tie in these activities with the educational offering at Coleg Gwent. This would be by developing relevant courses and providing workplace work experience

The College now needs to consider its priorities:

- A. How these enterprises fit in with the offer to students and how much these are worth to the college financially and educationally
  - a. Existing courses on the Usk campus
  - b. Existing courses elsewhere in Coleg Gwent's other campuses
  - c. New courses

The college is already seeking to bring new curriculum to the Usk campus and

- B. These enterprises will have a significant impact on the current site. Each of them proposes a significant increase in the number of people on site. This needs to be looked at holistically as they will impact on the feel and ethos of the campus, as well as requiring additional parking, toilets, catering etc.
- C. These potential developments would have implications for the farm tenancy. Land would be taken back and the current agreements for student placements etc. would need to be revised. This could have implications for existing agricultural courses.

Some of these activities can be developed incrementally from the existing resources. However, the Family Activity Centre, Equestrian Centre and possibly the 1917 building would require considerable investment in time and money. We would strongly recommend involving a business partner with experience of developing visitor attractions of this sort together with the personnel and financial resources necessary.

Such a partner could be a purely commercial operator, or a substantial and experienced social enterprise business, which may have a better fit with the college's ethos.

## Appendix 1 – People consulted

Usk Country Market, Ann Bowyer

Federation of City Farms, Emma /Williams

Rhadyr Farms

Owain Williams

Andrew Williams

Edward Williams

Usk Trail Access Group

Matthew Hamer

Calan Michael

Jon Robinson

Sustrans, Gwyn Smith,

Usk Farmers Market, Steve Sherman,

Trealy Farm, James Swift,

Football Association Wales, Ashley Thomas,

Usk Rugby Club

Neil Phillips,

Jeff Hawking

Vale of Usk LAG group, Alistair Robertson

Usk Town Council, Cllr Brian Strong

Llanbadoc Community Council, Cllr Mark Reardon

Others

Gay Coley

Emma Thomas

Monmouth CC

Cllr Val Smith

Mark Lloyd, Rural Programme Coordinator

Deserie Mansfield, Rural Programme Coordinator

Philip Thomas, Development Services Manager

Debbie McCarty, Whole Place Manager

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Matthew Lewis, Green Infrastructure and Countryside Manager

Coleg Gwent

Guy Lacey

Bob Bates

Lynda Astell

Angela Lewis

Dan Coles

Stephen Owen

Keith Backhouse

Alex Anderson

Helen Morgan

# Appendix 2 – Map

