CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**A Hybrid meeting of the CABINET will be held on
Wednesday, 28th June, 2023 at 1.30 pm**

Contact: Hannah Williams - Council Business Unit (Tel No. 07385401954)

Councillors and members of the public wishing to request the facility to address the Cabinet on any of the business as listed below, must request to do so by 5pm on the Monday, 26 June 2023 Councillors and Members of the public should stipulate if this address will be in the medium of English or Welsh.

It must be noted that the facility to address the Cabinet is at the discretion of the Chair and each request will be considered based on the agenda items being considered, the public interest/interest of the member in each matter and the demands of the business on that day. To make such a request please email:- ExecutiveandRegulatoryBusinessUnit@rctcbc.gov.uk

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

   To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

   Note:

   1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and
   2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

2. **MINUTES**

   To receive the minutes of the Cabinet Committee on the 15th May 2023 as an accurate record.

   (Pages 5 - 14)

3. **LEADERS SCHEME OF DELEGATION - FOR INFORMATION**

   To receive the Leader's Scheme of Delegation.

4. **APPROVAL OF RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM A REVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CWM TAF MORGANNWG REGION**

To receive the report of the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services, seeking approval for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) to transition to a new Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership covering the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT), Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend local authority areas, following a review of current arrangements.

(Pages 15 - 60)

5. **ABERDARE TOWN CENTRE - DRAFT STRATEGY**

To receive the report of the Director of Prosperity and Development, which provides an update on the work undertaken to date in the preparation of a Draft Strategy to focus and coordinate future investment in Aberdare Town Centre and to seek approval to commence a phase of formal public consultation.

(Pages 61 - 156)

6. **PROPOSED EXTENSION TO RHONDDA CYNON TAF CBC'S DOG CONTROL PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS**

To receive the Joint report, seeking Cabinet's approval, in principal, to the proposal to extend two Public Spaces Protection Orders related to dog controls (that are due to expire) and to authorise officers to publicise the proposed orders and to consult as required by the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

(Pages 157 - 176)

7. **PROPOSALS TO DEVELOP A NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

To receive the report of the Director of Education & Inclusion Services seeking formal approval to begin the relevant and required statutory consultation for the proposal to open a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, in respect of the catchment areas for Park Lane Special School, Ysgol Hen Felin and Ysgol Ty Coch.

(Pages 177 - 222)

8. **TO CONSIDER PASSING THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:**

"That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of the Schedule 12A of the Act".

9. **JOINT VENTURE AGREEMENT**

To receive the report of the Chief Executive containing exempt information, which provides an update on the Joint Venture Agreement.

(Pages 223 - 228)

10. **CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2018/23: FINAL UPDATE**

To receive the report of the Director of Corporate Estates, containing exempt information which provides details of the progress against the key themes of the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2018/23.

(Pages 229 - 280)

11. **URGENT ITEMS**

To consider any urgent business as the Chairman feels appropriate.

Service Director, Democratic Services and Communications

Circulation:-

Councillors: Councillor A Morgan (Chair)
Councillor M Webber (Deputy Chair)
Councillor G Caple
Councillor A Crimmings
Councillor R Lewis
Councillor C Leyshon
Councillor M Norris
Councillor B Harris

Officers: Paul Mee, Chief Executive
Barrie Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Andy Wilkins, Director of Legal Services and Democratic Services
David Powell, Director of Corporate Estates
Gaynor Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Louise Davies, Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services
Richard Evans, Director of Human Resources
Simon Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Roger Waters, Director – Frontline Services
Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Paul Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services
Derek James, Service Director – Prosperity & Development
Neil Elliott, Interim Director of Social Services

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL
CABINET**

Minutes of the Hybrid.meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 15 May 2023 at 10.30 am.

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed here

County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-

Councillor A Morgan (Chair)

Councillor G Caple	Councillor A Crimmings
Councillor R Lewis	Councillor C Leyshon
Councillor M Norris	Councillor B Harris

Non-Committee Members in attendance

Councillr C Lisles

Officers in attendance

Mr P Mee, Chief Executive
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services and Democratic Services
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms L Davies, Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Mr R Waters, Director – Frontline Services
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr D James, Service Director – Prosperity & Development
Mr N Elliott, Interim Director of Social Services
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Ms P McCarthy, Head of Legal Property and Estates
Ms A Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation

Apologies for absence

Councillor M Webber

1   **Declaration of Interest**

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services declared the following personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Item 6 of the agenda - Potential to create an additional event space at Ynysangharad Park: "I am a Trustee of Ynysangharad War Memorial Park"; and

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure declared the following personal

and prejudicial interest in respect of Item 6 of the agenda - Potential to create an additional event space at Ynysangharad Park: "I am a Trustee of Ynysangharad War Memorial Park".

N.B: Both Cabinet Members left the meeting whilst the item was discussed and voted upon.

2   **Minutes**

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 27th March 2023 as an accurate record.

3   **The Council's Office Accommodation Strategy Workspace Plan: Fit for the Future and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy**

The Chief Executive presented the report, which sought approval from Cabinet to agree the Council's Office Accommodation Strategy, Workspace Plan: Fit for the Future, for the period 2023-2030 and the Council's Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Service was pleased to note that the Accommodation Strategy before Members was in line with carbon footprint work of the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee. The Cabinet Member noted that the report recognises the importance of hybrid workings but that there was still a need for front facing staff for some services. As such, the Cabinet Member recognised the need to monitor the working arrangements and how it meets the needs of both the Council and the staff.

The Cabinet Member voiced her support of the proposals and commented that the relocation of the Council HQ would bring footfall to Pontypridd and would give staff greater opportunity to use public transport, which would support the green agenda.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity welcomed the proposals and the opportunity to explore the feasibility of releasing the site at the Pavilions, Clydach Vale for the redevelopment of the site for a new Special School. The Cabinet Member spoke of Welsh Government's policy through the Transforming Towns scheme to bring people and public services back into town centres so this would align well with Welsh Government's future plans.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank officers for the work undertaken to establish the proposals. The Leader noted that many of the offices aren't public facing and explained that although Committee meetings are held at Clydach Vale, it's current use is for Members, the Senior Leadership Team and different departments. The Leader was of the view that the move from Clydach Vale to Pontypridd town centre would be more central with better links to public transport and noted that the majority of the changes in the report would be more accessible for staff.

In terms of revenue savings, the Leader noted that it would be over £400,000 a year, which would benefit the budget going forward; and over £3M worth of capital savings. In terms of Llys Cadwyn, the Leader clarified that rental income on the model meant that there had been no cost to the Council and explained

that due to the increase in rental income, the Council were largely on course to cover the vast majority of the income figure with no detriment to the Council.

The Leader was in support of the recommendations and commented that it would be a positive for the taxpayer, staff and the environment. The Leader added that there was potential for future opportunities to enhance the existing buildings detailed within the report.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1.To approve the Office Accommodation Strategy (2023-2030), which includes:

    i.   Relocating the Council's headquarters into the heart of Pontypridd town centre, utilising vacant floor space at Llys Cadwyn;

    ii.   Exploring the feasibility of releasing the site at the Pavilions, Clydach Vale for the redevelopment of the site for a new Special School (n.b. Any proposal would be subject to the requirements set out in Welsh Government 's School Organisation Code (011/2018));

    iii.   Relocating services and staff currently at Ty Trevithick, Abercynon; Rhondda PSSO, Berw Road, Tonypandy; Municipal Offices Pentre and Rock Grounds, Aberdare, by either disposing of or repurposing the assets to generate capital receipts, reduce operating costs or secure community/social value and support regeneration within our communities;

    iv.   Relocating services and staff currently located at Ty Sardis, Pontypridd (excluding the Housing Solutions Services); and

    v.   Retaining Ty Sardis as the Council's Housing Advice and Support Centre and facilitating the co-location of other specialist support and transitional housing accommodation provision currently in Pontypridd at a single, improved location.

2. To authorise the Chief Executive to assign suitable and sufficient office accommodation to services and staff to meet service requirements and support the needs of staff.

3.To authorise the Head of Democratic Services to assign suitable and sufficient office accommodation and services to meet the resource and facility requirements of Elected Members.

4. To approve the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Operating Model and Working Arrangements Policy as detailed at Appendix II of the report.

5. To note the overall revenue savings of £0.435M generated as a result of this proposal plus the removal of a backlog maintenance liability of £2.9M.

4   **Cabinet Work Programme**

The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication presented, for

Cabinet Members' comment and approval, an update on the Cabinet Work Programme on the proposed list of matters requiring consideration by Cabinet over the 2023-2024 Municipal Year.

The Service Director emphasised the document before Members was a live document, which would be subject to change, dependent on business needs.

The Service Director advised the Cabinet that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the Cabinet Work Programme at its next meeting, to inform the wider Scrutiny Committee work programmes.

The Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure thanked the Service Director for the update and acknowledged that the content of the work programme would be flexible dependent on Council business and operational requirements. The Cabinet Member emphasised the importance of the engagement which takes place between Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs, which had positively developed through the years to allow for better opportunity for scrutiny.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1. To approve the Work Programme for the 2023-2024 Municipal Year (with appropriate amendment where necessary) and receive a further update on a 3 monthly basis.

5   Pre Scrutiny: Learning Disability Day Services Offer

The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication introduced the report and provided Cabinet with the feedback and comments of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee following its pre scrutiny of the Learning Disability Day Services Offer at its meeting on the 24th April 2023. The Service Director drew Members' attention to Section 5 of the covering report, which highlighted several key observations of the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

The Interim Director of Social Services then provided the Cabinet with an update on the engagement activity undertaken in the development of a new co-produced draft Day Services Strategy and operating model proposal for people with a learning disability and seeks approval to undertake targeted consultation on the proposals to enable the Cabinet to make informed decisions on the future of the Council's Day Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care spoke positive of the proposals to reform and transform the Council's Day Services offer for individuals with learning disabilities, in line with the Council's wider transformation agenda. The Cabinet Member commented that the offer would be transformed from a predominantly building based traditional day centre model, to a more innovative service, which would provide opportunity for individuals to improve independence, build relationships and avoid social isolation. The Cabinet Member took the opportunity to extend his gratitude to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee Members for their comments and observations.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1. To note the comments and observations of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee as advised within section 5 of the report; and

2. To endorse the recommendations outlined within the Learning Disability Day Services Offer as attached to the report as Appendix A, and for ease of

reference listed below:

- Considers the information provided in the report and, in particular, the feedback from the engagement activity undertaken in the development of a new co-produced Day Services Strategy and operating model proposal for people with a learning disability;
- Approves to undertake targeted consultation on a new co-produced draft learning disability Day Services Strategy and operating model proposal, as set out in Section 5 of the report, with people who use day services, their families and carers, staff and other associated stakeholders;
- Approves to undertake targeted consultation with service users, their families and carers, staff and other associated stakeholders on a proposal to permanently decommission Treforest Day Centre with the continuation of the existing current provision received by people who previously accessed the Centre prior to its temporary closure in February 2020, as set out in paragraph 5.7 of the report; and
- Agrees to receive a further report detailing the outcome of the proposed targeted consultation, including an updated full Equality Impact Assessment prior to any final decision being made in relation to the future of day services for people with a learning disability in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

6   Potential to create an additional event space at Ynysangharad Park

The Director of Prosperity and Development presented the report, which sought approval from the Cabinet on progressing the potential redevelopment opportunity for an event space within Ynysangharad War Memorial Park, which would support the delivery of major events; and to submit a formal application for funding to the Visit Wales Brilliant Basics Programme.

The Director drew Members attention to Section 5 of the report, where details of the proposal were outlined.

The Director advised Cabinet that the report had been considered by the Ynysangharad War Memorial Park Cabinet Sub-Committee at its meeting on 11th May 2023, whereby Trustees had supported the proposal.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity voiced his support in relation to the proposal and commented that it would add to the tourism offer in both the park and the town centre of Pontypridd, making it an even more vibrant place to visit. The Cabinet Member referred to the comments of the Trustees and reiterated that, if approved, the development area would be a grass public realm used for leisure and events only and not for vehicle parking or turning.

The Leader spoke of the fantastic event, Parti Ponty, which was held at the park over the weekend and reaffirmed the position that the proposal before Members was for soft landscaping.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1. To consider the concept design proposal presented in the report and to authorise officers to proceed with its further development and submit a formal application for funding to

the Visit Wales Brilliant Basics Programme.

N.B: The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services and the Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure left <u>before</u> this item was discussed and voted upon, having previously declared an interest (Minute No. 1). Following this item, both Cabinet Members returned to the meeting.

7   **Pontypridd Placemaking Plan - Southern Gateway Project Progress Update**

The Director of Prosperity and Development provided the Cabinet with an update on the development of projects within the Southern Gateway area of the Pontypridd Placemaking Plan; outlined the proposed next steps and sought Cabinet approval to move to the next development stages on the projects within the Southern Gateway area and to carry out publicity with the community and key stakeholders on the agreed next steps.

The Director outlined the proposals to put forward provide a high quality entrance to the town, enhancing the setting within the Conservation Area, and a clear and legible route from the top of the town, Sardis car park and train station through to the town centre itself. The proposals would also open up the town to the green, riverside area and provide a much more inviting access into Ynysangharad Park and the National Lido.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity commented that whilst he would have liked to have seen a large hotel as part of the rejuvenation of the town centre, it was clear from the private market responses received, that it would not be a viable venture at this time. The Cabinet Member was pleased with the revised proposals, commenting that it would open up the bottom end of the town centre, bring in light, integrate seating areas, open spaces and planting and make better pedestrian, disabled and transport access. In respect of the proposal to open the Marks & Spencer side of the town, the Cabinet Member commented that it would create an airy, modern square, whilst making it more resilient to flooding. The Cabinet Member concluded and stated that both ends of the town would have multiple retail and tourism offerings going forward.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services spoke positive of the report and reiterated the comments about the proposals improving access to the town, park and National Lido.

In terms of the funding package, the Leader was confident that between the funding already secured and ongoing conversations with Welsh Government, there would no issues securing the further package.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1.   To note the progress made on project development and delivery at the former M&S and Dorothy Perkins/Burtons buildings, the former Bingo Hall site;

2.   To endorse the design and redevelopment options for the Southern Gateway area, including the Bingo Hall Site and M&S and Dorothy Perkins/Burtons buildings; and

3.   To authorise Officers to progress implementation of the development
        options set out in this report, including the proposal to carry out
        publicity with the community and key stakeholders on the agreed
        next steps.

8   **Progress of the Authority's Review of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan**

The Service Director for Transportation, Enforcement and Strategic Investment provided the Cabinet with an update on progress of the Authority's review of the revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) and Action Plan (formerly known as a Flood Risk Management Plan), as required under Section 10 of the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010. The Service Director further advised Members of the revised programme of work required to deliver the review of the current LFRMS and Action Plan, in accordance with the updated statutory timeframe stipulated by Welsh Government.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank officers for their review of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. The Leader advised that a Member had questioned what support is available for businesses within the Pontypridd area in terms of flood risk and the potential for some businesses being unable to obtain insurance for their properties. The Leader advised that the Local Authority had provided grants to businesses in Pontypridd for flood measures; and that a post had been established to raise flood resilience and to engage with the community and businesses on how they can be more robust and where possible, to work with them to secure external funding. The Leader emphasised that it was vital to manage flood risk and to ensure the public recognise the flood risk authorities. The Leader advised that a future report would be presented to cabinet in respect of the progress of the flood recommendations, following Storm Dennis and reiterated that the risk of severe flooding had not gone away.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services recognised the amount of work undertaken to review the Strategy and Action Plan, particularly in terms of climate change. The Cabinet Member reiterated that the circumstances would never be eliminated but that the risk could be minimised.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1.   To note the results and review of the initial public engagement exercise on the revised LFRMS and Action Plan, which was presented to the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 22nd March 2023 as per the programme of work which was agreed by Cabinet on 29th November 2022; and

2.   To note the revised indicative timescales, actions and reports being brought to Cabinet and Scrutiny in Appendix 1 of the report.

9   **21st Century Schools Programme: Naming of the New Schools**

The Service Director for 21St Century Schools and Transformation provided the Cabinet with an opportunity to consider the recommendations made by the temporary governing bodies in relation to the names for the new schools being created as a part of the greater Pontypridd school organisation proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language took the opportunity to thank officers for undertaking the non-statutory consultation and working with governing bodies, teachers, pupils and wider communities associated with the new school developments. The Cabinet Member noted that the recommended school names had been developed with the views and opinions of the pupils at the heart of each school

With the agreement of the Leader, County Borough Councillor C. Lisles spoke on this item.

In response to the Non-Committee Member's comments, the Leader advised that officers would make note of the suggestions in terms of ensuring any future consultations are expanded to encourage more engagement but noted that there was a reasonable amount of engagement made. In terms of comments made around distinguishing whether adults or children made the comments, the Leader felt that the general figure showed that all views are recorded in the same way, regardless of who you are in the community.

The Leader informed the Cabinet that he had received an email from a Local Member who wished to support the new names for both the 3-16 school in Cilfynydd and the new Welsh Medium School in Rhydyfelin, as most of the teachers and pupils were in favour.

The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication informed Cabinet that due the previous deferment of this report at the February Cabinet Committee meeting, and the urgencies that had been created in terms of progressing these matters before the conclusion of the academic year in July, the approval of the Presiding Officer had been sought to exempt the item from call-in.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1. To agree to the name put forward by the temporary governing body of the new 3-16 School in Hawthorn, which is due to open in September 2024 – the name put forward is Ysgol Afon Wen;
2. To agree to the name put forward by the temporary governing body of the new 3-16 School in Pontypridd, which is due to open in September 2024 – the name put forward is Ysgol Bro Taf; and
3. To agree to the name put forward by the temporary governing body of the new Welsh Medium Primary School in Rhydyfelin, which is due to open in September 2024 – the name put forward is Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Awel Taf.

10   **Consultation on the Proposals to realign Additional Learning Needs Mainstream Learning Support Class Provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf**

The Head of Inclusion Services provided Cabinet Members with an opportunity to consider proposals for the realignment of mainstream Learning Support Class (LSC) provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT).

The Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language was in support of the recommendations contained within the report. The Cabinet Member noted that the proposals would continue the Council's work to adhere to the Welsh Government's legislation around the ALNET Act and would support the Council's ambitious WESP. The Cabinet Member emphasised the

importance of acting in best interest of learners, including minimising any disruption caused by a change of setting, ensuring pupils have best facilities and opportunities are afforded to learn and develop through both the mediums of English and Welsh.

The Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care echoed earlier comments and applauded the work of the Council in reviewing ALN provision and enhancing more effective main stream inclusion through reorganising learning support classes, in order to meet the needs of the communities and its availability through the medium of Welsh.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider the information contained within the report;

2. To consider the proposals for the realignment of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) mainstream LSC provision within the context of the School Organisation Code (2018), the 21st Century School Modernisation Programme and the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (ALNET) Act (Wales) 2018.

3. To consider formal approval to commence consultation on the following proposals:

    - To relocate the Observation and Assessment LSC at Penrhiwceiber Primary School to Abercynon Community Primary School taking effect from April 2024.

    - To transfer the LSC for pupils in Years 3-6 with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at Abercynon Community Primary School to create a through provision in the Primary Phase at Perthcelyn Primary School taking effect from April 2024.

    - To establish one Early Years Assessment and Intervention LSC for pupils under statutory school age with significant presenting needs at Abercynon Primary School. The proposal will take effect from April 2024.

    - To establish two Welsh medium primary phase LSCs at the new Welsh medium primary school in Rhydyfelin for pupils with significant ALN. The proposal will take effect from September 2024.

    - To establish one LSC for pupils in Years 7-11 with ASD at the new 3-16 school on the Hawthorn Primary/High School site taking effect from September 2024.

4. To receive a further report in 2023/24 (academic year) on proposals to establish three Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) LSCs provisions for pupils in Years 7-11, utilising funding already set aside following the suspension of a previous statutory consultation which was started prior to the pandemic. The earliest the provisions will be operational will be September 2024.

11   **Real Living Wage Accreditation**

The Director of Human Resources updated the Cabinet on the progress taken on the implementation of the Real Living Wage and sought approval to apply to become a Real Living Wage accredited employer.

The Leader thanked the Director for the report and explained that the Local Authority had been, in effect, a living wage employer for a number of years and before Welsh Government had asked Local Authorities. In terms of the accreditation, the Leader was pleased that the Local Authority were in a position to formally apply and spoke of the commitment to work with external contractors and partners to apply.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1. To note the content of the report;

2. To provide approval to proceed with an application for the Council to become a Real Living Wage accredited employer.

12   **To consider Passing the Following Resolution:**

It was **RESOLVED:** "That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraphs 14 and 18 of Part 4 of the Schedule 12A of the Act".

13   **Update in relation to the Children Looked After: Residential Care Strategy 2022-2027**

The Interim Director of Social Services provided the Cabinet with information about Children's Service's plans to reduce the number of children placed in 'Operating without Registration (OWR) settings' as part of the Children Looked After: Residential Care Transformation Strategy 2022-2027.

Following consideration of the exempt report, the Cabinet **RESOLVED:**
1. To consider the information contained within the report;

2. To acknowledge the current action being taken to reduce the number of young people in OWR settings and the financial and legal implications associated with this area of the Children: Services Residential Care Transformation Strategy that was approved by Cabinet on 28th February 2023; and

3. To receive future update reports on progress in delivering the Children Looked After Residential Care Transformation Strategy and the number of children/young people in OWR settings until such time as there are none.

This meeting closed at 11.44 am   **Councillor A Morgan**
                                                                                                      Chair.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

APPROVAL OF RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM A REVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CWM TAF MORGANNWG REGION

28TH JUNE 2023

REPORT OF DIRECTOR – PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Author(s): Louise Davies, Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Safety and Gary Black, Community Safety and Strategic Partnerships Manager

1.   PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1   The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval for the recommendations arising from a review of the Community Safety Partnership arrangements in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region, and specifically to seek approval for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) to transition to a new Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership covering the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT), Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend local authority areas.

2.   RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

2.1   Agrees that RCTCBC work with partners to form a new Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership covering the RCT, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend local authority areas, subject to consent being given by the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner and an appropriate transition and implementation plan being agreed.

2.2.   Approves the other recommendations arising from the Review, as set out in Section 4.12, paragraph I-1X of this report.

3.   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   There are currently two Community Safety Partnerships operating across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. The Cwm Taf Community Safety Partnership covers both RCT and Merthyr Tydfil, whilst the Bridgend Community Safety Partnership covers solely Bridgend.

3.2   Recent years have seen an increase in the adoption of regional footprints by Strategic Groups within the overall CSP framework, for example: The Area Planning Board for substance misuse, The Contest (counter terrorism) Board and the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

Steering Group. In addition, there is now a single Regional Safeguarding Board and Regional Partnership Board (RPB) for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region, and a single Public Services Board (PSB) for Cwm Taf Morgannwg has now been established.

3.3   As a result of the above, the population assessment and wellbeing assessments undertaken by the RPB and PSB respectively cover the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region as a whole and priorities identified in respect of community safety will be relevant to all local authorities and strategic partners across the region.

3.4   The three local authority Chief Executives and the Chief Superintendent of South Wales Police Mid Glamorgan BCU, agreed that a review of the Community Safety Partnership arrangements for Cwm Taf Morgannwg was required with the aim of consolidating the earlier amalgamation of strategic groups across the region.

4.   BACKGROUND

4.1   The review was commissioned by RCTCBC on behalf of its partners Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Bridgend County Borough Council and South Wales Police. The review was undertaken by an independent, external company on behalf of the Region.

4.2   The original aim of the review was to consider the opportunity to establish a single Community Safety Partnership for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region, the governance arrangements required, and any specific infrastructure and funding requirements that will ensure it can operate as a strategic and effective partnership for the benefit of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region.

4.3   The objectives of the review were:

- Understand and map the existing meeting and partnership landscape for the Bridgend Community Safety Partnership and Cwm Taf Community Safety Partnership respectively. Ensure the current relationship with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board structures are identified.
- Understand areas of current Community Safety Partnership joint delivery on a Cwm Taf Morgannwg basis and consider further collaborative opportunities to maximise capability and capacity of all partners.
- Develop a single Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership map considering current and emerging statutory functions, challenges, governance and accountability and business benefits. Ensure the new structure identifies the proposed relationship between the Community Safety Partnership and the Safeguarding Board structures.
- Identify appropriate representation for meetings / subgroups to deliver accountability across the partnership.
- As far as practicable, ensure any new Community Safety Partnership proposal considers the emerging recommendations from the Home Office review of Community safety Partnership requirements.
- Identify the strategic planning and delivery arrangements for the Community Safety Partnership and how this will align to the priorities of the Public Services Board and each respective organisations corporate / strategic priorities.

- Identify any opportunities for scrutiny and oversight of the work of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership that need to be established.
- Identify the infrastructure required to facilitate an effective, strategic Community Safety Partnership, specifically considering the costs / benefits / opportunities to provide dedicated analytical capacity and business support / co-ordination capacity.
- To ensure a value for money approach in the operation of a Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership.
- Ensure that any review and recommendations incorporate not just the serious violence and counter terrorism duties placed upon local authorities and policing, but also the new Welsh Government Strategic Plan in relation to preventing violence against women and girls and domestic violence and abuse.

4.4 The review was commissioned in August 2022 and the Consultants appointed produced their final report and recommendations in March 2023. The Review Report is attached as Appendix 1. The methodology for the review comprised of two stages:

(i) A desktop review which considered the national context and local arrangements, including governance and support capacity, along with progress made to date by the two current Community Safety Partnerships (Cwm Taf and Bridgend). The work at this stage included:

- Mapping existing structures in which both Community Safety Partnerships currently operate, including relationships with subgroups and wider partnerships.
- Consider the terms of reference and membership of each Community Safety Partnership and their subgroups.
- Look at the operation of the partnerships and how this supports strategic delivery.
- Assess the level of support available to facilitate delivery of Community Safety Partnership business.

(ii) Engagement and focus groups held with a wide range of individuals including key members of the respective Community Safety Partnership Boards and the local and regional sub-groups supporting the Partnerships.

4.5 During the discussions with stakeholders, issues were identified that were needed to be considered for any new proposed arrangements.

4.6 The National issues that inevitably affect the operations of a successful Community Safety Partnership are:

- Highly significant legislative and policy changes since commencement of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
- Further changes and duties are currently being developed that will fall under the responsibility of Community Safety Partnerships.
- UK and Wales policy and legislation is driving the agenda for greater collaboration between agencies and at a regional level.

- The specificity of what exactly a Community Safety Partnership is has become opaque as a result of the changes.
- Community Safety Partnerships complexities and priorities have increased but without additional funding or resources.

It was widely recognised that the request for a review and the potential restructure/merger of the Community Safety Partnerships is timely given the wider changes and anticipated new duties that will fall under the remit.

4.7   There was found to be an overlap between groups within the structure leading to a duplication of effort and unnecessary complexity. This identified the need for better integration of relevant strategic plans, and better connectivity between locality frameworks and active agencies.

4.8   The commitment and engagement of current staff was valued and appreciated. However, whilst enthusiasm by officers is driving the Community Safety Partnership agenda there is insufficient capacity and resource for evidence-based planning, needs analysis, monitoring of progress and assessment of data.

4.9   There appears to be widespread support for integration and alignment with other regional arrangements. It was felt that greater economies of scale and critical mass, using a combined and streamlined approach to funding bids, provides potential for more resources and more value for money.

4.10   There has been some concern that regionalisation will dominate and diminish local arrangements, with the potential dominance of some larger partners.

4.11   Issues were raised in relation to the lack of capacity for effective co-ordination. It was felt a merged business unit supporting regional bodies would deliver benefits, and the potential merger of the Regional Safeguarding Board business unit and adoption of equivalent funding formula.

4.12   The Review identified nine specific recommendations:

I.   Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend County Borough Councils should, together with their mutual responsible authorities, seek to establish a regional Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership Board, focusing on the delivery of strategic priorities agreed between responsible agencies and with appropriate delegated responsibility.

II.   In formulating the arrangements for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership, responsible agencies need to ensure, in collaboration with their legal departments and in collaboration with Welsh Government officials, that under the proposed arrangements the duties placed upon them by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, subsequently amended, continue to be fully met in line with the Act and its regulations.

III.   An agreed regional structure which effectively dovetails with the new Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board and the Safeguarding Board should

be established for the new Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership Board.

IV. Given the broad range of responsibilities placed upon Community Safety Partnerships the thematic subgroups that have emerged at a regional level should be reviewed, and where appropriate, incorporated within the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership.

V. Mechanisms need to be established by the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership Board, working with all responsible authorities, to engage with communities paying heed to citizens' voices.

VI. A business unit should be developed to serve the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership Board to fulfil, as a minimum, the functions set out in this report.

VII. Whether or not the business unit is stand alone for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership Board or integrated with that of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board, a funding formula should be developed to resource support arrangements.

VIII. In addition to the establishment of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership Board appropriate local arrangements should be in place to scrutinise regional activity and oversee delivery of activity extraneous to, but supportive of, the identified regional priorities.

IX. If the preceding recommendations are approved, a detailed plan for implementing the new arrangements should be developed, which would provide for:

- Further engagement with stakeholders.
- Co-production of governance and support arrangements.
- Agreeing terms of reference for and membership of groups within the regional arrangements.

4.13 The Review Report and its recommendations have been considered by the Cwm Taf Community Safety Partnership Board and the Bridgend Community Safety Partnership Board. Each Board has accepted the Report and its recommendations. The Review and its recommendations have been considered by the Regional Safeguarding Board and have been endorsed. The Review Recommendations are now subject to consideration and a decision by each individual local authority, as part of their statutory duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

5.1 An Equality and Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no Welsh Language implications arising from this report.

7.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1   There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any financial implications arising from a decision to implement the recommendations of the review will be subject to separate consideration by all agency members of the Community Safety Partnership.

8.   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS *OR* LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1   Community Safety Partnerships are a statutory function under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. There is a provision for Partnerships to be formed, with a strategic focus, on a regional basis. This relies on ensuring there remains a capability to deal with community safety issues on a local basis. Any decision to operate a Community Safety Partnership covering more than one local authority area is subject to approval by the relevant Police and Crime Commissioner.

9.   CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

9.1   During the course of the review, there was extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders involved in the community safety landscape. Stakeholders were invited to provide their perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of current arrangements, what is working well and not so well, aspects that they felt required improvement and the perceived opportunities and threats of the proposed merger.

9.2   Engagement took a number of forms including one to one interviews, meetings with small groups and attendance at meetings of relevant boards and other fora.

9.3   The process was overseen by a steering group consisting of representatives of all statutory members of a Community Safety Partnership.

9.4   RCTCBC's Community and Children's Services (Crime and Disorder) Committee considered and scrutinised the Review and its recommendations on 24th April 2023. Members welcomed the Review and the recommendations, in particular the recognition that citizens and residents should have a voice in determining the work of the new Partnership. Members wished to see further detail on the governance and structures of the new Partnership to ensure the work of a single, strategic CSP filters down to results and changes within the communities of RCT and members commented that the role of the RCTCBC's Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee would remain important going forward. Members commented that crime and disorder issues do not respect boundaries and endorsed the recommendation that RCTCBC should work with partners to form a new Cwm Taf Morgannwg

10.   LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

10.1   Community safety and the publics positive perception of safety are key in ensuring the Council achieves the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 "Making a Difference".

10.2 The work of the Community Safety Partnership Board is directly aligned to the "Places" priority within the Corporate Plan – ensuring the County Borough is one of the safest places in Wales, where people from all backgrounds get along with each other and feel safe.

10.3 As community safety, and the feeling of safety, is such an important element for communities to thrive in many ways, it is felt that the review and implementation of the recommendations will ensure effective, strategic co-ordination of action to tackle the community safety priorities for Cwm Taf Morgannwg and contribute to all of the seven goals of The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

11. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS *(please specify)*

11.1 This report relates to a strategic issue and is relevant to the whole of RCT.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 Highly significant and specifically relevant legislative and policy changes have been introduced in the 25 years since the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships which have subsequently become Community Safety Partnerships. The consequence of these changes has been the expansion of the number of authorities involved in the Community Safety Partnership agenda and an increase in the duties placed upon these authorities.

12.2 As a result of these changes the importance of community safety has been amplified and the complexity of the necessary partnerships, and priorities, has significantly increased. However, the resource available and targeted at community safety has not kept pace with these increasing demands.

12.3 The review of Community Safety Partnership arrangements in Cwm Taf Morgannwg is timely and the review team found a strong weight of support for the merger of both Community Safety Partnerships. Several strategic partnerships already operate on a Cwm Taf Morgannwg basis, including the Public Services Board, the Safeguarding Board and the Area Planning Board.

12.4 The potential benefits of merging the Community Safety Partnerships includes the pooling of resources. This may be both financial resources and the workforce capacity and capability existing within the three Local Authorities, which will assist the more effective and integrated delivery of community safety functions.

12.5 Finally, it's important that any review of structures must deliver not only a suitable integrated regional structure but one which ensures that arrangements for local accountability are comprehensive and precise. Therefore, the development of a regional strategic partnership should not impact adversely on those agencies successfully operating locally on community safety matters.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

REPORT OF DIRECTOR – PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES

APPROVAL OF RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM A REVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CWM TAF MORGANNWG REGION

Relevant Scrutiny Committee:

Community and Childrens Services - Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers

None

Officer to contact

Louise Davies, Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services

Review of Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region Community Safety Arrangements

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March 2023

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Executive Summary

Overarching aims and objectives of the review

The overarching aims of the review, as articulated in the tender documentation, were as follows:

'To consider the opportunity to establish a single Community Safety Partnership (CSP) for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) region, the governance arrangements required and any specific infrastructure and funding requirements that will ensure the CSP can operate as a strategic and effective partnership for the benefit of the CTM region'.

The following supporting objectives were identified:

- Understand and map the existing meeting and partnership landscape for the Bridgend and Cwm Taf (CT) CSPs respectively, ensuring the current relationship with the CTM Safeguarding Board (SB) structures are identified.
- Understand areas of current CSP joint delivery on a CTM basis and consider further collaborative opportunities to maximise capability and capacity of all partners, especially resources.
- Develop a single CTM CSP map considering current and emerging statutory functions/mandated areas and challenges/governance and accountability/ business benefits. Ensure the new structure identifies the proposed relationship between the CSP and the Safeguarding Board (SB) structures.
- Identify appropriate representation for meetings/subgroups to deliver accountability across the Partnership. As far as practicable, ensure any new CSP proposal considers the emerging recommendations from the Home Office review of CSP requirements.
- Identify the strategic planning and delivery arrangements for the CSP and how these will align to the priorities of the PSB and each respective organisation's corporate and strategic priorities, to ensure the CSP operates as a key strategic partnership. Identify any recommendations for scrutiny and oversight of the work of the CTM CSP that need to be established.
- Identify the infrastructure required to facilitate an effective, strategic CSP, specifically considering the cost/ benefits/ opportunities to provide dedicated analytical capacity and business support/ co-ordination capacity.
- Ensure a value for money approach in the operation of a CTM CSP.
- Ensure that any review and recommendations incorporate not just the serious violence and counter-terrorism duties placed upon local authorities and policing, but also the new Welsh Government Strategic Plan in relation to preventing violence against women and girls and domestic violence and abuse (VAWDASV).

Methodology

The review was conducted using a number of methods. A desktop review of relevant national and local literature was conducted, current arrangements were mapped, a series of one to one and group discussions were held to gather the views of stakeholders and staff supporting the operation of the existing CSPs. A steering group was established consisting of key managers representing many of the responsible authorities to guide the progress of the review and to support the review team in engaging local stakeholders.

Distinct stages of delivery were identified for the review. These included the development of proposals for terms of reference for, and membership of, groups within the recommended structure and more general governance. However, as the review progressed it became clear that the proposed merger of the existing CSPs into a single regional entity would require an incremental programme of managed change involving

significant structural adjustments within and across the statutory partners, or Responsible Authorities (RAs). The first step in that journey of change was agreed as obtaining RA approval in principle of the merger, based on evidence of shortcomings of the current arrangements and quantified opportunities of the proposed merger. Subsequent stages will involve detailed decisions on structures and support arrangements, which will need to take into account a number of considerations including Value for Money.

Highlights from the research and key conclusions

Our conclusions are summarised as follows:

1. Highly significant and specifically relevant legislative and policy changes have been introduced in the 24 years since the commencement of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the introduction of, what have become, Community Safety Partnerships (CSP).

2. The consequence of these changes has been an expansion in the number of RAs and an increase in the number of duties placed upon these authorities which have become somewhat confused and opaque.

3. Welsh Government has sought to increase the connectedness of the issues of community safety with those of wellbeing and health due to the overlaps between these issues.

4. The importance of community safety has been amplified and the complexity of the necessary partnerships has significantly increased with more agencies being held directly responsible and accountable for an expanded set of priorities. However, the resource available and targeted at community safety has not kept pace with these increasing demands.

5. Policy developments include a desire to see an increase in partnership between the RAs together with other partners in statutory and non-statutory services and a strengthening of the citizen voice.

6. Some of the growth and development both nationally and within the CTM region appears to have been ad hoc with piecemeal changes introduced in response to legislative and policy amendment. The resourcing of CSPs also appears piecemeal.

7. The Community Safety landscape is therefore confused, it is not streamlined and lacks the necessary infrastructure and sustainable resource to make community safety partnership evidence based, intelligence led and wholly supported at all levels by the necessary skills and knowledge.

8. The review concluded that in both Bridgend and CT the capacity to generate, collate and analyse data is insufficient. As a result, formulating the evidence to target action is difficult, as is the ability to evaluate the impact of CSP initiatives.

9. The strategic assessments and delivery plan are no longer in date and therefore accountability for actioning current priorities is extremely challenging.

10. The engagement of citizens is not comprehensive, and action taken to ensure prevention and early intervention in the CTM region is difficult to evidence due to the lack of data and an ability to evaluate outcomes and potential long-term benefits.

11. The evidence provided during the review suggests that the CSPs currently operate sub optimally, lacking the capacity to be as preventative as they should be, as evidence based as they should be, are not as accountable as they should be and are not currently sustainably funded to meet all their duties.

12. The governance frameworks currently operating within CTM and Bridgend CSPs lack clarity and connectedness to other partnerships operating at a CTM level. A robust communication process

designed to ensure that all RAs and other stakeholders are aware of work in train and outcomes achieved is essential for effective partnership working and accountability.

13. The existing CSPs have a relationship with the SB but these differ between the Bridgend and CT CSPs. These relationships together with those to the PSB should be strengthened and clarified.

14. In order to enhance performance, lines of accountability, a means of analysing outcomes and value for money need to be more fully established as do formal streamlined governance arrangements.

15. The review has therefore concluded that the vision for Community Safety Partnerships expressed by WG in its report 'Working Together for Safer Communities 2017' is not being fully realised within the current Bridgend and CT CSP arrangements.

16. The model adopted for the CTM SB is more rational than that for CSPs. It has an established funding stream with a formula applied to the various agencies engaged in its delivery. This funding allows for an administration and lead officers to support the Board, increasing its effectiveness, efficiency and accountability.

17. The review of CSP arrangements is extremely timely because further duties and responsibilities are soon to be placed upon them when the findings of the Home Office review of CSP requirements are published and the forthcoming Welsh Government Strategic Plan to prevent violence against women and girls and domestic violence and abuse is brought into being.

18. Whilst many people and organisations supported the potential merger many contributors, expressed concerns that there is potential for one or more LAs to dominate the partnership and that the focus on the local communities within individual LAs may be diminished or worse still lost.

19. In response to current shortcomings a strong weight of support exists for the merger of the Bridgend and CT CSPs. The benefits of merger are perceived to outweigh the potential negative impacts on localism.

20. An integrated CTM CSP will need to ensure a focus is established for both effective and targeted regional strategic planning which links the Police and Crime Commissioner Plan, Wellbeing assessment and delivery plan, together with local delivery and accountability. Partners have agreed a set of strategic priorities for a regional CSP moving forward which will assist in achieving the required integration.

21. Several strategic partnerships, most notably the SB, the PSB and the APB for substance Misuse already operate on a CTM basis and a number of the more recent developments to counter terror threats, and violence against women and girls, domestic violence and abuse have been established on this footprint.

22. To merge would offer a structural solution to simplify the partnership landscape and facilitate a unified strategy within which clear priorities can be actioned regionally, whilst allowing local interpretation and application of these integrated strategic plans to meet the needs of local communities and enable the pooling of resources.

23. The review of structures necessary to establish a regional CSP must deliver not only a suitable integrated regional structure but one which ensures that arrangements for local accountability are comprehensive and precise and should not impact adversely on those agencies successfully operating locally to deliver safety to the communities they serve.

Recommended future arrangements

1. It is recommended that a CTM regional structure has at its centre a triumvirate of the CTM Public Service Board (PSB), the CTM Safeguarding Board (SB) and the CTM Community Safety Partnership Board (CSPB). The PSB, having generic responsibilities would sit at the head, but work in partnership with, the two regional boards specifically responsible for community safety and safeguarding. These three Boards should work in close partnership with aligned strategic priorities and a formal communication strategy.

2. The existing governance issues are in part due to the ad hoc development of the partnership landscape which has emerged around CSPs and the lack of a business unit to support the operation of good governance by means of a fully functioning secretariat with analytical capability and capacity.

3. It is recommended therefore that CTM should establish a common business unit supporting regional arrangements and building on the work of the already established SB Business Unit. Opportunities for further amalgamation with support arrangements for the planned CTM PSB should also be considered.

4. Whilst dedicated support for the merged CSP is one option, there is clear potential for alignment between the work of the SB and a future regional CSP, which would optimise value for money, enable pooling of resources from a variety of sources, and facilitate joint working between the respective partnerships and alignment of their programmes. There is a similar argument for potential alignment with the PSB.

5. The business unit would deliver a communication and analytical function. This would ensure that all RAs receive informed updates from the CSP and its membership including reports on progress, outcomes, delays, or an inability to progress strategic priorities.

6. The VAWDASV sub-group and the APB would straddle the work of the regional CSP and the SB. This is beneficial given the interrelated nature of the work of these groups to both community safety and safeguarding.

7. The three local authorities, Cwm Taf UHB, Probation, Fire and Rescue services, South Wales Police (SWP) and the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner (SWPCC) should all be represented on, and feed into, the regional CSP.

8. Each LA should make arrangements for local overview and scrutiny which will be of central importance to ensuring effective governance and accountability of the regional CSP to the local authorities in the execution of statutory duties. Opportunities for joint scrutiny of regional activity should also be considered.

9. Other sub-groups operating at a regional level will also align with the regional CSP. This should include as a minimum the Serious Violence Subgroup and the Contest Board.

10. The Channel panels should continue to operate at local authority level together with other tactical and operational groups. However, the three panels should feed into the regional CSP via the CONTEST Board.

Recommendations

1. **Bridgend Merthyr Tydfil Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Councils should together with their mutual responsible authorities seek to establish a regional CTMICSPB (Cwm Taf Morgannwg Integrated Community Safety Partnership Board), focusing on the delivery of strategic priorities**

agreed between RAs and with appropriate delegated responsibility. Our recommendations in Section 6 should be used to shape the new arrangements.

2.   In formulating the arrangements for the CTMICSPB, RAs need to ensure, in collaboration with their legal departments and working collaboratively with WG officials, that under the proposed arrangements the duties placed upon them by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, subsequently amended, continue to be fully met in line with the Act and its regulations.

3.   When creating the regional arrangements, the role and functions of the CTMISCPB should be formally reviewed and agreed by the RAs.

4.   An agreed rational structure which effectively dovetails with the new CTM PSB and the SB should be established for the CTMICSPB.

5.   Given the broad range of responsibilities placed on CSPs the thematic sub-groups that have emerged at a regional level should be reviewed and, where appropriate, incorporated within the CTMICSPB.

6.   Mechanisms need to be established by the CTMICSP working with all responsible authorities to engage with communities, paying heed to citizens' voices.

7.   A business unit should be developed to serve the CTMICSPB to fulfil as a minimum the functions set out in this report.

8.   Whether or not the business unit is stand alone for the CTMICSPB or integrated with that for the SB, a funding formula should be developed to resource support arrangements.

9.   In addition to the establishment of the CTMICSPB appropriate local arrangements should be in place to scrutinise regional activity and oversee delivery of activity extraneous to, but supportive of, the identified regional priorities.

10. If the preceding recommendations are approved, a detailed plan for implementing the new arrangements should be developed, which would provide for:

- Further engagement with stakeholders
- Co-production of governance and support arrangements
- Agreeing terms of reference for and membership of groups within the regional arrangements

1. Introduction

This review was commissioned by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) on behalf of its statutory partners Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) and South Wales Police (SWP). The local authorities operate within the footprint of Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTMUHB). The report provides a review and analysis of current Community Safety Partnership (CSP) arrangements together with future options and proposals to be considered regarding future arrangements within the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) Region.

Overarching aim of the review

This was articulated in the tender documentation as follows:

'To consider the opportunity to establish a single CSP for the CTM region, the governance arrangements required and any specific infrastructure and funding requirements that will ensure the CSP can operate as a strategic and effective partnership for the benefit of the CTM region'.

The following supporting objectives were identified:

- Understand and map the existing meeting and partnership landscape for the Bridgend and Cwm Taf (CT) CSPs respectively, ensuring the current relationship with the CTM Safeguarding Board (SB) structures are identified.
- Understand areas of current CSP joint delivery on a CTM basis and consider further collaborative opportunities to maximise capability and capacity of all partners, especially resources.
- Develop a single CTM CSP map considering current and emerging statutory functions/mandated areas and challenges/governance and accountability/ business benefits. Ensure the new structure identifies the proposed relationship between the CSP and the SB structures.
- Identify appropriate representation for meetings/subgroups to deliver accountability across the Partnership. As far as practicable, ensure any new CSP proposal considers the emerging recommendations from the Home Office review of CSP requirements.
- Identify the strategic planning and delivery arrangements for the CSP and how these will align to the priorities of the Public Services Board (PSB) and each respective organisation's corporate and strategic priorities, to ensure the CSP operates as a key strategic partnership. Identify any recommendations for scrutiny and oversight of the work of the CTM CSP that need to be established.
- Identify the infrastructure required to facilitate an effective, strategic CSP, specifically considering the cost/ benefits/ opportunities to provide dedicated analytical capacity and business support/ co-ordination capacity.
- Ensure a value for money approach in the operation of a CTM CSP.
- Ensure that any review and recommendations incorporate not just the serious violence and counter-terrorism duties placed upon local authorities and policing, but also the new Welsh Government Strategic Plan in relation to preventing violence against women and girls and domestic violence and abuse (VAWDASV).

Distinct stages of delivery were identified for the review. These included the development of proposals for terms of reference for, and membership of, groups within the recommended structure and more general governance. However, as the review progressed it became clear that the proposed merger of the existing CSPs into a single regional entity would require an incremental programme of managed change involving significant structural adjustments within and across the statutory partners, or Responsible Authorities (RAs).

The first step in that journey of change was agreed as obtaining RA approval in principle of the merger, based on evidence of shortcomings of the current arrangements and quantified opportunities of the proposed merger. Subsequent stages will involve detailed decisions on structures and support arrangements, which will need to take into account a number of considerations including Value for Money.

2. Background and methodology

Current position

Two CSPs currently operate across the CTM region:

- Bridgend CSP (covering Bridgend County Borough)
- Cwm Taf (CT) CSP (covering RCT and MT)

Recent years have seen an increase in the adoption of regional footprints by Strategic Groups within the overall CSP framework, for example:

- The Area Planning Board (APB) for Substance Misuse
- The CONTEST (Counter Terrorism) Board
- The VAWDASV Steering Group

In addition, there is now a single Regional Safeguarding Board (RSB) and Regional Partnership Board (RPB) for the CTM Region and the establishment of a single PSB for CTM is scheduled to take effect from spring 2023. To that end, the Population Assessment and Wellbeing Assessments undertaken by the RPB and PSB respectively cover the CTM region as a whole and priorities identified in respect of community safety will be of relevance to all local authorities and strategic partners across the region.

The three local authority Chief Executives and Chief Superintendent of SWP (Northern Basic Command Unit) have agreed it is prudent to undertake a review of the CSP arrangements for CTM, given the context set out above, with the aim of consolidating the earlier amalgamation of arrangements across RCT and MT. In addition, it has been determined that the review should consider how any new, regional arrangements might support effective delivery of the new duties being placed on local authorities in terms of Counter Terrorism (Protect and Prevent requirements) and Serious Violence prevention duties.

The review was undertaken in a manner that recognises each organisation's independence and accountability for relevant operational and statutory duties, but that ensures that any future CSP arrangements are effective and efficient in supporting a strategic and cohesive approach to these matters across the CTM region.

Policy and legislative background

The Legislative Framework

All local authorities in Wales have a statutory duty to participate in a Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The Crime and Disorder Act 1998[1] enshrined the concept of these new statutory partnerships, which replaced the former Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) and were aimed at reducing crime and disorder in local communities.

Subsequent Home Office regulations and Acts, including the Police and Justice Act 2006[2], have broadened the original requirements to deliver outcomes which relate to the prevention and reduction of crime and reoffending, fear of crime, anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, and harm caused by substance misuse.

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[1] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/
[2] Police and Justice Act 2006 (legislation.gov.uk)

More recently duties to reduce the threat of terrorism, of serious violence and crime and VAWDASV have been added to the community safety agenda.

Section 5 of the Act specifies that the Authorities responsible for strategies are:

'(1) Subject to the provisions of this section, the functions conferred by or under section 6 shall be exercisable in relation to each local government area by the responsible authorities, that is to say—

(a) the council for the area and, where the area is a district and the council is not a unitary authority, the council for the county which includes the district;

(aa) every provider of probation services operating within the area in pursuance of arrangements under section 3 of the Offender Management Act 2007 which provide for it to be a responsible authority under this section;

(b) every chief officer of police any part of whose police area lies within the area.

(c). . . . .

(d) every fire and rescue authority any part of whose area so lies;

(e) if the local government area is in England, every integrated care board the whole or any part of whose area so lies; and

(f) if the local government area is in Wales, every Local Health Board the whole or any part of whose area so lies.'

Subsequent amendments to the Act provide for the following:

'(1A) The relevant local policing body in relation to two or more local government areas *in England* (our emphasis) may make a combination agreement with the responsible authorities in relation to those areas (the "combined area").

(1B) A combination agreement is an agreement for the functions conferred by or under section 6 or by section 7 to be carried out in relation to the combined area as if it constituted only one local government area.

(1BA) The responsible authorities in relation to a combined area are all the persons who are the responsible authorities in relation to each local government area that falls within the combined area.

Whilst the provisions covering combined areas are not extant in Wales, devolved legislation and supporting policy point very much in the direction of partnership working across local authority boundaries, and have encouraged partnerships to scale up and to maximise the benefits arising from economies of scale and critical mass, albeit not at the cost of local accountability and securing the citizen voice. Examples of such policy include the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014[3] and Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015[4], as well as the national plan for health and social care 'A Healthier Wales'[5].

The review has been conducted within a complex, and to some extent confusing, legislative and policy agenda. Within this context, the brief set for this review was to understand the shape of existing services

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[3] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/
[4] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/
[5] https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-09/a-healthier-wales-our-plan-for-health-and-social-care.pdf

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within Bridgend and CT and to identify the best means of delivering current, emerging and anticipated duties through fit-for-purpose, streamlined, efficient and cost-effective arrangements.

Working together for Safer Communities

In December 2017 Welsh Government published a review of CSPs in Wales entitled 'Working Together for Safer Communities'[6]. The diagram on the front cover of the report (Figure 1) served to illustrate the broad agenda facing CSPs, the ambition Welsh Government had for these partnerships and the complex landscape in which they operate.

Figure 1

Importantly, the document set out a clear vision for community safety but recognised the level of complexity facing the agencies and stakeholders involved in delivery, and the fact that the legislative framework is far from simple.

The review set a vision for safer communities in Wales marked by the following characteristics:

- Every community is strong, safe and confident in a manner that provides equality of opportunity and social justice, resilience and sustainability for all;
- The shared responsibility of government, public and third sector agencies is to work together with the communities they serve and the private sector to address activity or behaviour that is unlawful, anti-social, harmful to individuals and society and to the environment;
- Sharing knowledge and ensuring early intervention with prompt, positive action tackles local issues and addresses vulnerabilities.

This vision would be achieved through collaborative and integrated multi-agency activity that is:

- Evidence-based and intelligence-led

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[6] https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/working-together-for-safer-communities.pdf

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- Supported by appropriate skills & knowledge
- Sustainably resourced and locally appropriate
- Engaging and involving citizens
- Preventative and intervening as early as possible
- Focused on long-term improvements and benefits.

More recent Welsh Government and UK Government community safety developments

Since the inception of the CSPs superseding their predecessor Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), additional duties have been placed incrementally upon the responsible authorities. This expansion has reflected a broadening in the scope of the community safety agenda.

VAWDASV

The recent expansion includes a Welsh Government strategy[7] to reduce violence against women and girls, domestic violence and abuse and sexual violence. The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Increase awareness and challenge attitudes of VAWDASV
- Increased awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and health relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong
- Increased focus on holding perpetrators to account and provide opportunities to change their behaviour based around victim safety
- Make early intervention and prevention a priority
- Ensure relevant professionals are trained to provide timely and appropriate responses to victims
- Provide victims with equal access to appropriate resources, high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services
- Provide robust evidence to inform our work.

Serious violence

The UK Government has also introduced additional duties to tackle the risk of terrorism, serious violence, and organised crime. Following consultation in 2019 the Government announced it would bring forward a Serious Violence Duty requiring local authorities, the police, fire and rescue authorities, specified criminal justice agencies and health authorities to work together to formulate an evidence-based analysis of the problems associated with serious violence in an area and then produce and implement a strategy detailing how they will respond to those particular issues. Statutory Guidance for Wales and England was published in December 2022[8]. Incidents of serious violence are thankfully low across the CTM region compared with larger towns and cities in Wales, but the duty will still apply.

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[7] Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: strategy 2022 to 2026 | GOV.WALES
[8] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1125001/Final_Serious_Violence_Duty_Statutory_Guidance_-_December_2022.pdf

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Counter terrorism duties

In addition to serious violence further duties have been introduced to counter the threat of terrorism. This has seen the establishment of CONTEST Boards and CHANNEL Panels as required by the Prevent strategy[9].

The broadening of the scope of community safety has been welcomed because it addresses issues seen as important and reflects the changing pattern of threats to safety within communities. However, the expansion is leading to a greater range of potential actions to be taken by partners but without additional resource to increase the capacity and capability of CSPs to achieve this.

A regional Serious Violence and Organised Crime Board came into being in late summer 2022. Whilst further work will be required to fully establish systems to tackle serious violence, work has nevertheless commenced. One issue raised by colleagues is the fact that a definition of what constitutes serious violence has not been provided. Whilst this provides flexibility that recognises serious violence will vary between localities due to the nature of prevailing crime and cultural factors, it is felt that some guidance on this would be helpful.

Home Office Review of CSPs

It is also to be noted that a strategic review of CSPs by the Home Office has been in progress whilst we have been undertaking this review. We had hoped to reflect the outcomes of this in our work; however, delays in the Home Office work mean this was not possible. We would suggest that the opportunity is taken to feed our findings and recommendations and any resulting changes in arrangements within CTM into the national review as appropriate.

Methodology

Our methodology for the review was informed by the specification issued by RCTCBC during the procurement phase. This comprised two key stages:

1. A desktop review which considering the national context and local arrangements, including governance and support capacity, along with progress made to date by the two CSPs established within Bridgend and RCT/MT. At this stage we:

   - Mapped existing structures in which both CSPs currently operate, including relationships with subgroups and wider partnerships
   - Considered terms of reference and membership of each CSP and their sub groups
   - Looked at the operation of the partnerships and how this supports delivery of key objectives
   - Assessed the level of support available to facilitate delivery of CSP business

2. Engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, identified with the support of the Client and aimed at validating our early observations. Specifically, they were invited to provide their perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of current arrangements, what is working well and not so well, aspects they felt are ripe for improvement, and perceived opportunities and threats of the proposed merger. Engagement took a number of forms, including one to one interviews, meetings with small groups and attendance at meetings of relevant boards and other fora. Most of these conversations were online. In all, we met with the following:

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[9] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf

- VAWDASV Partnership Board
- CTM Contest Group
- CTM Prevent Delivery Group
- Bridgend Channel and Complex Case Panel
- CTM Exploitation Group
- Mid Glamorgan BCU Serious Violence and Organised Crime Group
- CTM Community Safety Board (CTMCSB)
- CT Offender Management Board
- CTM SB
- CTM Area Planning Board (CTMAPB)
- CTM Channel Group
- SWP
- South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner (SWPCC)
- CT Community Cohesion Board

Throughout the duration of the review, we met regularly with a multi-agency steering group to update partners on progress and test findings. We also met with a smaller group of representatives from the statutory partner agencies on a fortnightly basis to provide more detailed progress updates.

3. The current position

Existing structures

Current structures in the two areas differ markedly in numerous respects, both in terms of their inward structures and their relationship with separate partnerships such as the PSBs. In respect of the latter, the Bridgend CSP sits directly under the PSB, whereas in CT the CSP reports to a Strategic Partnership Board, which then reports to the PSB. This suggests the relationship is less direct than is the case in Bridgend.
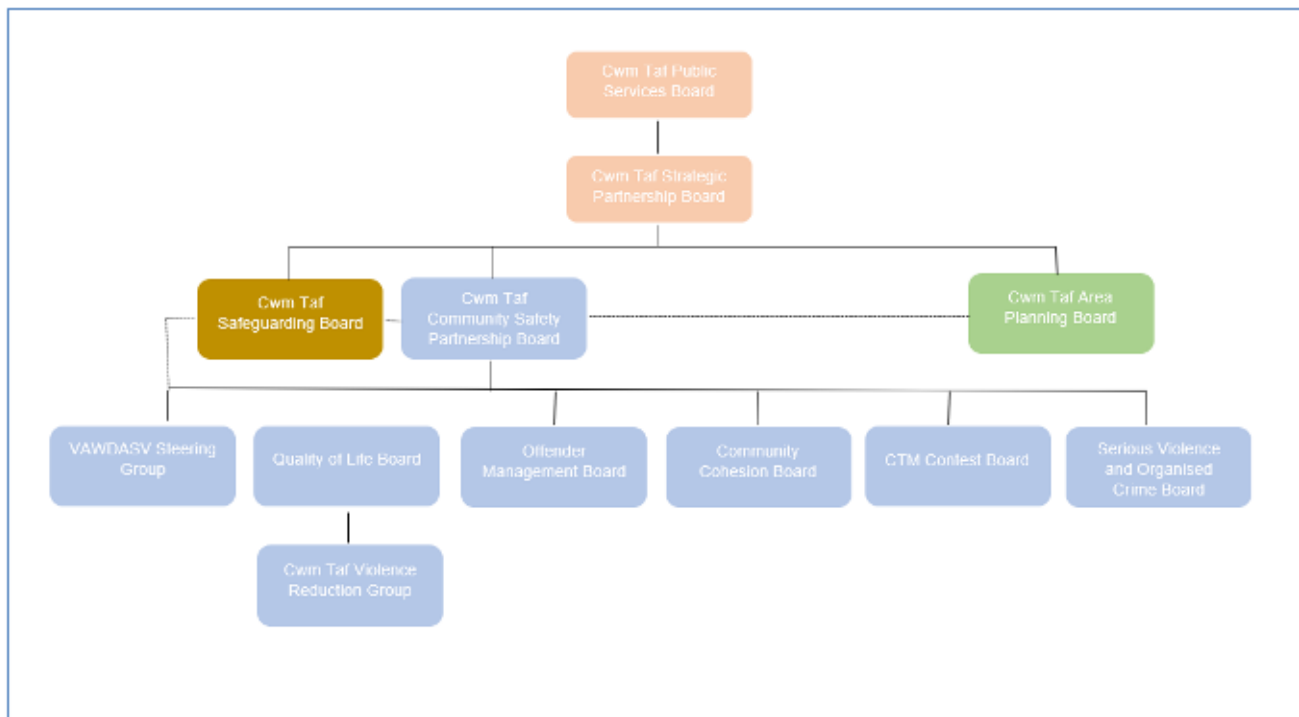
Figure 2

Bridgend CSP structure
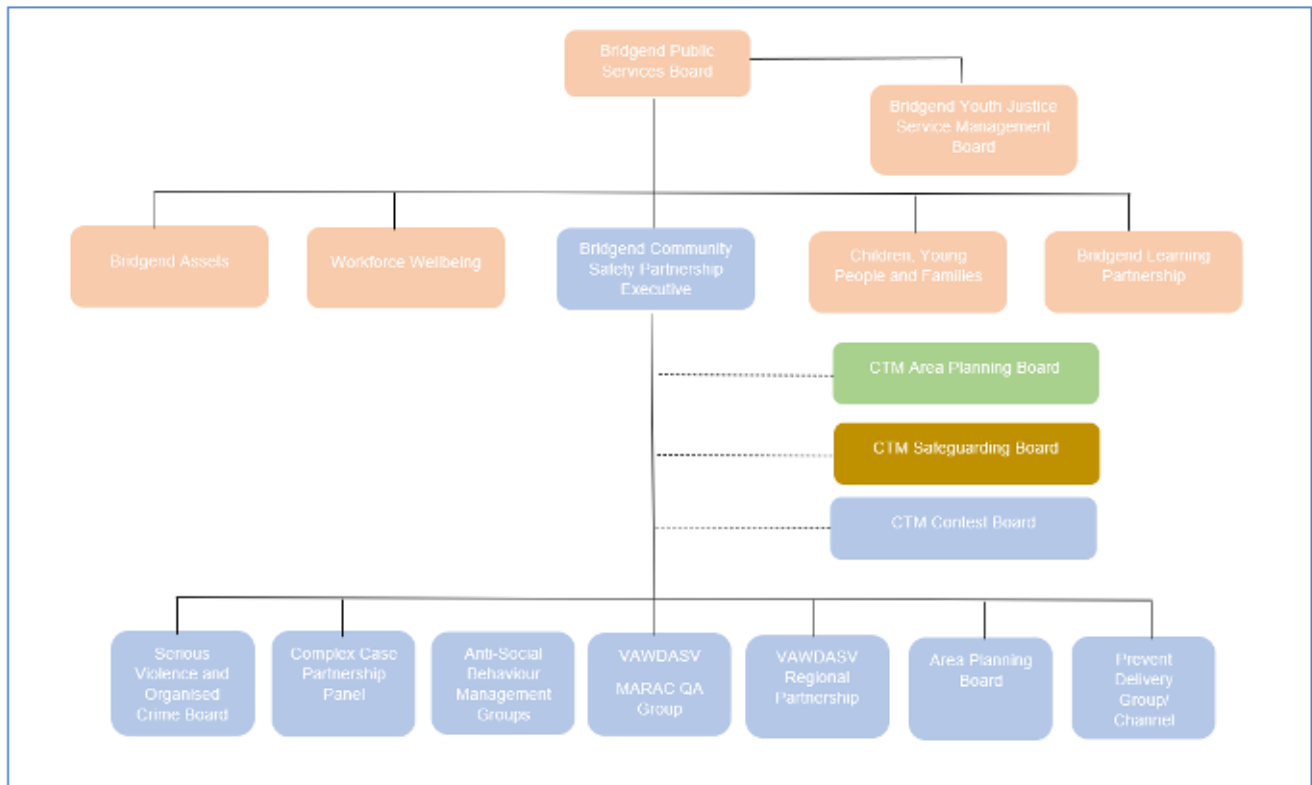
The chart above demonstrates that in Bridgend the CSP, sitting beneath the PSB, recognises the necessity to draw together a range of interrelated plans and strategies. Those identified specifically are the PCC Crime reduction plan, the Bridgend Wellbeing Plan, and the Community Cohesion Strategy. It also shows that some functions and duties are currently delivered both locally and at CTM level, for example, the Bridgend and CTM APBs. The former is depicted as having a solid line to the Bridgend CSP whilst the latter has a dotted line suggesting an indirect relationship. The relationship of the CSP to the Contest Board (CB), and the Safeguarding Board (SB) are also depicted by a dotted line. The accountability and reporting of the Contest Board, the Safeguarding Board and the CTMAPB are not therefore entirely clear, but the organogram does identify a necessity for the work of these boards to be recognised and addressed in some form by the Bridgend CSP.

The structure in the CT area is different in a number of respects, as illustrated below:

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Figure 3

CT CSP structure

The groups that feed into the respective CSPs in each area are listed below.

Figure 4

CT	Bridgend
The VAWDASV Steering Group	SVOC
The Quality of Life Board *	Complex Case Partnership Panel
The Community Cohesion Board *	ASB Management Groups
The Community Cohesion Board *	VAWDASV MARAC QA group
The Contest Board *	VAWDASV Regional partnership
The Serious Organised Crime Board	APB
APB *	Prevent Delivery Group/Channel

*   Sub-group chair sits on the CSP

A single Contest Board has also been established for CTM. Participants in the review believe that to be most effective this function should be established at a regional level. However, they take the view that, due to the necessity for local intelligence and the operational nature of CHANNEL, this should be established at a local authority area level with the operational arms of the CSP RAs feeding into the local CHANNEL Panels. These in turn should inform the contest Board with the three Panels feeding information to the Board. In England steps are being taken for CHANNEL to revert from regional structures to local structures because it is believed they are more effective within this arrangement.

Terms of reference and membership

Terms of reference for the CSPs and membership of each are markedly different in each area. Provisions within the terms of reference for each area are set out below.

Figure 5

CT	Bridgend
Purpose	Purpose
Membership	Responsibilities
Roles & responsibilities	Sustainable development
Principles of effective partnership delivery	Membership
Governance & management	Deputising arrangements
Accountability	Chairing
Working methods/ways of working	Task and finish groups
Constructive challenge	Frequency of meetings
Resolving disagreements	Review
Review	Co-ordination/support.

With respect to membership, arrangements appear in some cases to have evolved through historic and other local arrangements. The key differences between both areas appear to be as follows:

- Different organisations represented on the CSP itself. Bridgend has 16 representatives each of whom has a nominated deputy. CT has 18 members but they do not appear to have deputies.
- Variance in the number and roles of local authority representatives: Bridgend CSP has 6 Council representatives (including the relevant Cabinet Member who chairs the Partnership), whilst the number across the 2 authorities in CT is 4 and only includes officers. Unlike in Bridgend, the CT Partnership has Children's Services representatives.
- Third sector involvement: Bridgend's CSP has 1 representative from the sector, compared with 5 in CT
- Different membership of workstream groups
- Commonality of membership between the CSP and its sub groups: The CT CSP has representatives from some sub groups sitting on it whilst this is not the case in Bridgend

CSP membership in each area is summarised below:

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Figure 6

	RCT/MT	Bridgend
Local authority	2 reps (one each from MT and RCT). There are 2 others from children's services. 4 in total	6 reps
CTM UHB area planning board		1 rep
CTM UHB	2 reps (one of whom is chair of the area planning board)	1 rep
Bridgend College	No college reps	1 rep
DWP	No DWP reps	1 rep
National Probation Service	1 rep plus 1 HM Courts rep	1 rep
South Wales Police		1 rep
South Wales Police & Crime Commissioner	1 rep	1 rep
South Wales Fire & Rescue Service	1 rep	1 rep
Valleys to Coast		1 rep
WCADA (3rd sector – drug/alcohol)	Interlink/VAMT – 2 reps plus 1 from Learning Disability Wales, 1 from Community Rehabilitation Cymru and one other third sector rep.	1 rep

Our review has identified that for some partners the primary purpose for attending meetings is to receive information, and it is not always clear whether they have delegated strategic powers, whether they are there as formal members or to whom they report. This does need to be addressed to ensure those attending are able to take effective decisions, and are consistent in their attendance, ensuring the CSP accounts for its performance.

In RCT the work and activities of the CSP are reported into the Community Services (Crime and Disorder) Scrutiny Committee as required. In MT the Partnership currently reports to the Regeneration and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee. However, in Bridgend reporting is directly to the PSB.

CSP operation and delivery of objectives

It has not been possible within the scope of this review to assess fully the output and outcomes achieved by the sub-groups or workstreams. Whilst these groups have their own terms of reference setting out their roles and expectations, their future plans and anticipated outcomes are not clear. We found no clear evidence of consistent reporting on delivery by these groups or their impact.

The variance between the two CSPs is a consequence of local infrastructure alongside historical arrangements and priorities. This results in different forms of engagement by agencies committed to partnership working in relation to community safety, together with those organisations for whom the work of the CSP is fundamental.

The issue of membership is important. So too is the potential that those attending the CSP - whether as members, as observers or in attendance to report is not clear - may not have authority for executive decision making on the basis that they represent a senior officer within the organisation. Where this is the case, they will not be able to agree actions, or sign off strategic intent within a meeting of the CSP. They may be required to seek this sign off or authorisation from a senior manager following a meeting and this is likely to lead to delay and disrupt the work of the group. We believe that consideration should be given to the use of formally delegated powers to the CSP membership.

Level of support available to facilitate delivery of CSP business

The level of support available to CSPs to facilitate delivery of their business is critical. Adequate capacity in this area can be crucial in terms of:

- Horizon scanning and interpreting national policy drivers within the local context
- Developing strategies and plans and monitoring delivery against agreed outcomes and performance indicators
- Establishing performance frameworks in support of the above
- Producing formal reports
- Providing a secretariat for the Partnership (producing agendas, reports, meeting arrangement etc.)
- Financial monitoring and reporting
- Communications
- Representing the partnership in national groups and fora

Insufficient capacity, particularly with regard to intelligence and evidence, can be a major impediment in effective delivery by CSPs, including development of robust plans, assessing progress and impact, and communication and engagement. Currently neither CSP has a dedicated support team unlike other statutory strategic partnerships. Feedback received during our review suggested this is therefore a major area for improvement and investment.

In any future model as we set out in this report, it is clear to those with whom we engaged that adequate resources to support the business areas listed above would be essential in mobilising the work needed to develop the regional community safety strategies and work programmes. It was felt that this is not the case currently and that the deficit has been exacerbated by the growing expectations and responsibilities of CSPs over the recent period.

A core factor here is the level of financial resources available. In his 2022 – 2026 plan, the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner (SWPCC) committed to *"continuing to help fund Community Safety Partnerships to ensure they have the resources they require to meet local needs"*. In 2020-21 the Commissioner provided £82,300 via the CSPs to support a Safer RCT and £56,100 for a Safer Bridgend. However, the resource provided currently is directed toward and focused on project work which is operational in nature, supporting the wider strategic objectives of both the CSPs and the Commissioner. However, there is no explicit recognition of the need for a proportion of the resources to be allocated to the infrastructure required to support the running of the CSPs, and financial allocations to support local work will vary from year to year. It is also noted that current levels of resourcing are not guaranteed in the future and could conceivably be withdrawn.

In the current financial climate, statutory partners are clearly struggling to identify ringfenced funds for this purpose. A significant amount of work is therefore undertaken by officials employed by the local authorities and others, linked to their main roles within those statutory bodies that make up the CSPs.

There is a sense that the present system has to a significant extent relied on staff goodwill, and the juggling of priorities to provide the leadership, management, support and delivery of a range of work programmes that fall under the CSPs.

The proposed merger provides an opportunity to address this deficit. Any move to a new regional strategic partnership would be placed at risk if partner bodies failed to establish how such an arrangement could be appropriately supported. We set out possible solutions later in the report.

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4. Issues Raised by stakeholders concerning the Development of a CTM Strategic CSP

In our discussions with stakeholders, we asked for views on (1) those aspects of existing arrangements in both areas which were felt to be effective and which should therefore be built upon in any merged arrangements moving forward, and (2) areas that were not felt to be working well and in respect of which the proposed merger presented potential opportunities for remedial action. In this section we summarise themes that emerged under each of these categories.

Strengths of current arrangements

It is clear that there are positive elements in the current arrangements that participants in our discussions were anxious not to lose under new arrangements. The commitment and engagement of current staff was valued and appreciated, and there was a concern that those roles should not be devalued under any new arrangements.

It was striking that the CSP infrastructure in both areas is currently serviced by a small number of dedicated, well-informed staff. The limited dedicated resource available to progress this agenda has not prevented a comprehensive response to the growing expectations and requirements set out earlier in our report.

Whilst current arrangements may provide some benefits in terms of continuity and familiarity with the agenda, this situation also presents clear risks. Were one of the key staff to leave their role, there would be an immediate gap not just in resource but in accumulated intelligence, wider contacts etc. Whilst we commend the professionalism and commitment of individuals, we are clear that a more robust and sustainable support infrastructure is desirable.

Some believed that there was value in having a mixture of operational and strategic staff attending CSP meetings, feeling that this helped to keep the discussions grounded in operational practicalities. They also valued the opportunity to share information and intelligence. There was a clear view that, should the CSP itself move to a more clearly strategic membership, alternative mechanisms for information sharing would need to be developed.

The flexibility to respond to local priorities and concerns inherent in current arrangements was valued by some participants. They believed that there was a risk that taking a one size fits all, approach would reduce the effectiveness of community-based initiatives and reduce engagement. There was a view that any new regional arrangement for the CSP should focus on delivering what was best delivered regionally, allowing space and resources for more local work where appropriate, particularly where this would allow an effective response to local issues and encourage greater participation.

While most participants acknowledged the need for change and welcomed the opportunity for greater clarity and clearer lines of accountability, there was a concern that the positives of current arrangements should not be lost.

Areas for improvement identified within current arrangements

A wider range of issues emerged from our conversations in relation to areas for improvement and there was energy and enthusiasm for taking the opportunity presented by the proposed merger to address these issues. There were clear and consistent themes, as follows:

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Clarity of purpose

Community Safety is an enormous and growing agenda and the relationships required to enhance community safety are complex. To fully achieve its outcomes a CSP requires connectivity between the responsible authorities (RAs) together with relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, it necessitates an approach which recognises other strategic agendas being addressed by other partnerships because frequently responsibilities overlap.

CSPs should not function in isolation as this invariably leads to a siloed approach with the potential for duplication of effort.

We heard that papers taken to the CSPs, generally following considerable work to prepare them, are frequently received for information only. Furthermore, with a crowded agenda little scrutiny may be applied to the papers in terms of their detail and without decision making to action that which has been proposed. It was stated that exception reports submitted to CSPs may lead to action but that these tend to be related to issues such as resource and HR rather than the core outcomes of the CSP.

Whilst the current approach may meet the legal duties required by the Crime and Disorder Act it does not always deliver the spirit of the legislation or actively drive the delivery of intended outcomes.

Communication

Operating effective reporting and communication channels is not simple. For CSPs this is compounded by limited human and financial resource being available to manage these complex relationships. Much work falls to a limited number of people who are critical to sustaining the operation of the CSPs. These staff have delivered good work, but their efforts have frequently been hampered by a lack of resources.

One concern raised by some contributors was that some attendees of CSPs attend primarily to receive information and that in some instances they do not attend with executive authority related to their post or delegated to them by senior officers. It was considered that by enhancing communication in a more streamlined CSP system and an assurance that attendees have either assigned or delegated executive authority that far greater efficiency could be achieved and membership more effectively managed.

Accountability

We heard that, as a result of an expansion in the responsibilities of the CSPs and increased complexity of the system within which they operate, the lines of accountability and scrutiny have become unclear. This may be as a result of indirect reporting to some organisations within the system or a need to report to multiple boards and organisations. The lack of clarity in accountability impacts on both effective governance and in the measurement of achievement.

Adopting regional arrangements

There was a clear sense in many of our conversations that continuing to operate CSPs solely at the local authority level would be suboptimal. Since the Crime and Disorder Act was introduced, additional strategic partnerships have been established within Wales operating within similar arenas to CSPs but using the footprint of local health boards. This regional approach has led to improved integration between agencies and an ability to increase the sustainability of partnerships by realising the benefits emanating from greater economies of scale.

A merger of the existing CSPs within a regional structure would facilitate greater consistency in structures, membership and terms of reference and provide an opportunity to address existing inconsistencies. This would reduce confusion, clarify purpose and support joint working across the CS agenda and in relation to

broader agendas such as safeguarding and wellbeing due to enhanced co-terminosity and easier joint working with bodies such as the RSB and planned single CTMPSB.

The development of a regional CSP would facilitate working between the local authorities and CTMUHB as a key partner. Similarly South Wales Police, Probation Service and Fire and Rescue Services whilst covering other LAs beyond those in CTM region would benefit from a regional approach. It would enable shared challenges to be tackled more systematically and in a more streamlined manner.

However, it was clear that any regional arrangements should not compromise delivery at a local level, and that care should be taken to ensure that the needs and interests of all communities continue to be recognised and addressed. Broadly stakeholders felt that there was a clear role for a regional CSP in setting a high-level vision, priorities and supporting objectives. Tactical and collaborative working to address the needs and concerns of specific communities, and the oversight of operational delivery, sits better at local level.

A two-tiered structure of this nature would also safeguard against one partner becoming over-dominant and allow an appropriately 'federal' approach to the delivery of CSP responsibilities. Furthermore, it would accommodate the continuation of existing local groups where these add value and deliver objectives at a sub-regional level, and the continued involvement of relevant partners such as colleges in Bridgend (in response to suicide prevention work) and the courts in CT reflecting wider trends in offending. The need for this was expressed particularly by colleagues in Bridgend who have not to date been involved in the existing shared arrangements across CT but was also raised by stakeholders in the other areas.

It was also felt that a regional structure could provide a valuable mechanism for local groups to share practice, learning and intelligence.

Greater integration would enable the ability to apply more scrutiny to the achievement of community safety goals and to align the evaluation of the related strategies being delivered in CTM.

It would be important to ensure appropriate and robust scrutiny of activity and delivery by RAs at both regional and local levels. This would provide assurance to partners around delivery by a regional CSP of relevant statutory duties alongside a clear accountability for delivery at local level.

Careful consideration should be given to the membership of the regional partnership to ensure that the membership delivers effective leadership and decision making.

Fundamentally, and critically for this review, various stakeholders expressed concern over the lack of clarity regarding the lawfulness of a merger under the terms of the Act and secondary legislation. Whilst we discern a general congruence with the wider policy direction, we feel that further legal advice should be taken before proceeding with a merger and this is reflected in our recommendations.

CSP support

The lack of capacity to support the functioning of CSPs impacts upon their capability. Colleagues working within the CSP system described a lack of access to comprehensive and dependable data. This gap is exacerbated by limited capability to analyse data and feed it into meaningful planning and performance management. Services lack comprehensive data and analysis to determine what they should do and only limited ability to know how well they have done it.

Without adequate capacity to operationalise the CSP strategy there is potential for them to become 'talking shops' which may have clear ambitions but which lack the ability to realise them.

Reflecting the aforementioned concerns regarding the risks of limited support resource, many of those who commented on current arrangements recognised a need to 'scale up' and to resource a regional CSP adequately. A desire was expressed for a structure akin to the RSB with defined funding delivered through a clear resource formula applied to the agencies making up the CSP.

In addition, given the breadth of the CSP agenda an effective secretariat could organise the agenda focusing on themes where appropriate and inviting in additional membership where this would improve outcomes.

5. Conclusions

Highly significant and specifically relevant legislative and policy changes have been introduced in the 24 years since the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced the Crime and Disorder reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) which have subsequently become Community Safety Partnerships. Some of this change has been introduced by UK Government and since devolution much has been introduced by subsequent Welsh administrations.

The consequence of these changes has been an expansion in the number of RAs involved in the CSP agenda and an increase in the duties placed upon these authorities. The driver for much of the legislative and policy change has been a consequence of a perceived increase in the nature and range of threats to community safety and an increased focus on some longstanding threats such as violence to women and girls and domestic violence and abuse. Government has also sought to increase the connectedness of issues of safety with those of wellbeing and health due to the overlaps between these issues.

As a result of these changes the importance of community safety has been amplified and the complexity of the necessary partnerships has significantly increased with more agencies being held directly responsible and accountable for an expanded set of priorities. However, the resource available and targeted at community safety has not kept pace with these increasing demands.

One component of the policy drive has been a desire to see an increase in partnership working between the RAs together with other partners in statutory and non-statutory services together with a strengthening of the citizen voice in community safety matters. An increase in the effectiveness and sustainability of partnerships and the initiatives has been sought.

Some of the growth and development of partnership approaches appear to have been ad hoc with piecemeal changes introduced in response to legislative and policy amendments. The resourcing of CSPs also appears piecemeal with some limited funds committed to CSPs and some resource being directed at specific issues which in some instances is time limited. As a result, the Community Safety landscape is confused, it is not streamlined and lacks the necessary infrastructure and sustainable resource to make community safety partnership evidence based, intelligence led and wholly supported at all levels by the necessary skills and knowledge. The engagement of citizens is not comprehensive and action taken to ensure prevention and early intervention is difficult to evidence due to a lack of data and an ability to evaluate outcomes and potential long-term benefits. Whilst many of these issues are likely to exist in many if not all CSPs they were all in evidence within the Bridgend and CT CSPs.

One consequence of legislative reform is the fact that the duties placed upon strategic partnerships have become confused and opaque. This has made it challenging for agencies to reform partnership arrangements and in doing so to be satisfied that they are meeting their duties as required by the various legal frameworks that overlap.

The review has concluded that in both Bridgend and CT the capacity to generate, collate and analyse data is insufficient. As a result, formulating the evidence to target action is difficult, as is the ability to evaluate the impact of CSP initiatives. The evidence provided during the review has suggested that papers developed for the CSP are frequently treated as being for information only, they do not tend to generate a formal response or action on the part of the CSPs. This has led to a sense of frustration from many contributors and a sense that the CSPs operate in name only and lack the capacity to be as preventative and evidence-based as they should be. Furthermore, there is a sense that CSPs are not sufficiently accountable, nor are they adequately

funded to meet all their duties. Moreover, the funding is not currently sustainable and this is seen as a key risk.

The review has concluded that whilst CSPs have a relationship with the SB these differ between the Bridgend and CT CSPs. These relationships together with those to the Public Service Board should be strengthened and clarified. Lines of accountability, a means of analysing outcomes and value for money need to be established as do formal streamlined governance arrangements.

Many contributors to the review suggested that the model adopted for the CTM SB is more rational than that for CSPs. It has an established funding stream with a formula applied to the various agencies engaged in its delivery. This funding allows for an administration and lead officers to support the Board. This increases the effectiveness and efficiency of the Board and strengthens its accountability. It is reported to have a more streamlined infrastructure and benefits from increased critical mass and economies of scale by operating on a regional basis.

The review has therefore concluded that the vision for Community Safety Partnerships expressed by WG in its report 'Working Together for Safer Communities 2017' is not being fully realised within Bridgend and CT.

The request from the Bridgend and CT CSPs to conduct this current review is therefore extremely timely not least because the local "responsible authorities" in Wales await further duties and responsibilities to be placed upon them when the findings of the Home Office review of CSP requirements are published and the forthcoming Welsh Government Strategic Plan to prevent violence against women and girls and domestic violence and abuse is brought into being.

In response to these identified shortcomings the review team found a strong weight of support for the merger of the Bridgend and CT CSPs. The view held by many was that the benefits of merger outweigh the potential impacts on 'localism'. A number of strategic partnerships, most notably the SB, the Public Service Board and the Area Planning Board (substance Misuse) already operate on a CTM basis. Furthermore, a number of the more recent developments to counter terror threats, and violence against women and girls, domestic violence and abuse have established on this footprint. To merge would offer a structural solution to simplify the partnership landscape and facilitate a unified strategy within which clear priorities can be actioned regionally but importantly allowing local interpretation and application of these integrated strategic plans to meet the needs of their local communities.

The potential benefits of merging the CSPs, includes the pooling of resources. This may be both financial resources and the workforce capacity and capability existing within the three LAs. Pooling resources and workforce capacity will assist the more effective and integrated delivery of community safety functions. Duplication of effort and waste could be reduced and combined strategic endeavour could be more easily realised between the LAs, which operate within the boundaries of CMTUHB, and the Police Service, Fire and Rescue Service and Probation service all of which have boundaries wider even than those of the Health Board.

Whilst many individuals and organisations supported the potential merger, this was not without reservations. Many contributors, including those very much in favour of merger, expressed concerns that there is potential for one or more LAs to dominate the partnership. They were also concerned that by merging, the focus on the local communities within individual LAs may be diminished or worse still lost. In order to allay these concerns and retain local autonomy and accountability any review of structures must deliver not only a suitable integrated regional structure but one which ensures that arrangements for local accountability are comprehensive and precise. Furthermore, the development of a regional strategic

partnership should not impact adversely on those agencies successfully operating locally to deliver safety to the communities they serve.

If the decision is taken to establish an integrated CSP for CTM, it will be necessary to ensure a focus is established for both effective and targeted regional strategic planning which links the Police and Crime Commissioner Plan, Wellbeing assessment and delivery plan, together with local delivery and accountability.

6. Recommended future arrangements

Based on the findings of our desktop analysis (including considering arrangements in other areas), and the themes raised by stakeholders, we have developed a recommended structure which we suggest should underpin future arrangements. The added value of a regional approach across CTM is clear and our recommendations are framed accordingly.

Stakeholders who engaged in the review believe that it is necessary to rationalise strategic priorities to ensure that the new duties can be adequately addressed and core imperatives delivered, and that CSPs have clarity concerning their shared priorities. A clear view was also expressed by stakeholders that the boards and partnerships aligned to CSPs should take stock of the new and emerging responsibilities and priorities to determine the most appropriate body or bodies to lead in delivering them, rather than assuming automatically that the CSP should assume primary responsibility. This will mean accountability sits at the most appropriate level and that the CSP focuses on those areas to which it is best suited from a point of view of its agreed responsibilities and membership. For example, work is already in train within the CT area, with the two local authorities working together to build upon existing CSP partnership arrangements that have been in place for a number of years.. The view expressed by those contributing to the review is that due to the nature of this work, it would be best progressed at the CTM level rather than within individual localities.

During the review partners agreed a set of strategic priorities for a regional CSP moving forward. The arrangements we recommend are designed to facilitate effective regional oversight of delivery against these strategic priorities, with operational responsibility remaining at local level where appropriate, thereby enabling sub-regional imperatives to be addressed. The priorities are as follows:

- Tackling Violence against Women and Girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- Reducing the impact of alcohol and substance misuse on our communities
- Divert offenders and reduce re-offending
- Counter Terrorism- preparation and prevention duties including community cohesion.

What future arrangements might look like

In this section we set out a recommended regional structure, also clarifying the relationship between a merged regional CSP and local delivery arrangements. The structure is presented at a high level for in-principle approval. If accepted, it would form the basis for working through arrangements in more detail.

At the centre of the proposed CTM regional structure is a triumvirate of boards, consisting of the CTM PSB (due to come on stream in spring 2003), the CTM SB and a new CTM Integrated Community Safety Partnership Board (CTMICSPB). The PSB, having generic responsibilities would sit at the head, but work in partnership with, the other two boards specifically responsible for community safety and safeguarding. These three boards would work in close partnership with common strategic priorities and a formal communication strategy. This would align their work, avoid duplication, and clarify responsibilities. If a combined regional business unit were to be created, this alignment would assist the efficiency of the unit and the work of the three boards.

The VAWDASV sub-group and the APB would straddle the work of the CTMICSPB and the SB. This would be beneficial given the interrelated nature of the work of these groups to both community safety and safeguarding. As RAs, the three local authorities, CTMUHB, SWP, the SWPCC and Probation and Fire and Rescue services should all be represented on, and feed into, the CTMICSPB.

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Other sub-groups operating at a regional level would also align with the CTMICSPB. This would include as a minimum the Serious Violence sub-group and the CONTEST Board. These are illustrated as overlapping the CTMICSPB because whilst technically operating separately, they would be integral to the delivery of its regional functions.

The Channel panels should continue to operate at local authority level together with other tactical and operational groups. However, the three panels should feed into the CSPB via the CONTEST Board.

Figure 7

Recommended future structure

Potential Map for strategic Planning Fora Cwm Taf Morgannwg Partners
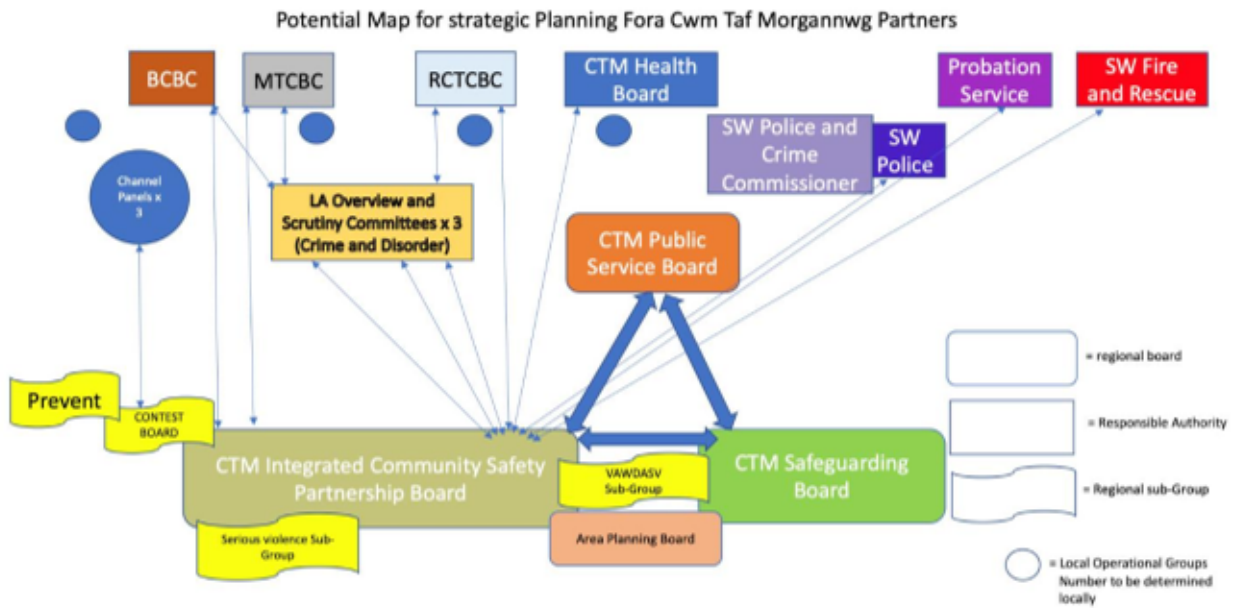
Concerning new and emerging strategic requirements, the regional CTMICSPB would need to engage with other regional partnerships in considering the following:

- What are the core responsibilities of the new Board referencing the identified priorities?
- How should other related responsibilities that do not come under the CMTICSPB be dealt with and where should accountability lie?
- What are the arrangements to ensure, where overlap in responsibility between boards and other strategic partnerships exists, that the RAs have defined the responsibilities of the various groups and have in place mechanisms to ensure effective communication and collaboration between these groups?

A communication framework would be required to ensure that developments and required actions are understood by all relevant stakeholders and by the public living within the communities served. This would have the effect of informing stakeholder bodies and the public and provide a basis for a co-productive approach. It would also avoid the necessity for some staff to attend meetings merely to remain up to date rather than acting as full participants.

An engagement framework designed by the CMTICSPB but delivered at a locality level would serve to reach and hear the citizen voice. This would need to use a dynamic approach reaching out at times to relevant cohorts of the population to gain views on specific topics and proposals as necessary.

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Governance and accountability to the CSP and to local leadership

A vital part of the review was to examine the existing governance arrangements within which the current Bridgend and CTM CSPs operate, in order to consider how the future governance arrangements could work within a merged CTMICSPB.

Effective accountability and governance arrangements within partnership bodies is essential. This is particularly important in statutory partnerships made up of multiple organisations. Governance ensures that the execution of statutory functions can be monitored, that organisations are not exposed to unnecessary risks and that an audit trail relating strategic intent to achieved outcomes is in place.

Clear structures and terms of reference which delineate roles and responsibilities can assist in avoiding the potential for duplication of effort and waste arising from membership overlap. This can increase the potential for greater synergy of the various partnerships within a given locality whilst enabling a managed interface with other strategic agendas and groups. The breadth of the potential CSP agenda is vast, it can include not just issues that relate to crime, disorder and violence, but aspects of public health and public mental health such as suicide prevention, personal harm from the misuse of substances and alcohol and addressing the specific safeguarding needs of vulnerable groups such as older people and care leavers.

The governance frameworks currently operating within CTM and Bridgend CSPs lack clarity and connectedness to other partnerships operating at a CTM level. A robust communication process designed to ensure that all RAs and other stakeholders are aware of work in train and outcomes achieved is essential for effective partnership working and accountability. The strategic assessments and delivery plan are no longer in date and therefore accountability for actioning current priorities is extremely challenging.

The existing governance issues are in part due to the ad hoc development of the partnership landscape which has emerged around CSPs and the lack of a business unit to support the operation of good governance by means of a fully functioning secretariat with analytical capability and capacity.

The map drawn up for a regional CSP identifies mechanisms for the governance of the regional partnership and for local accountability and assurance.

The CTMICSSPB, CTMSB and CTMPSB triumvirate structure would ensure close collaboration in strategic intent. They would routinely share information and align strategies to avoid the overlap and duplication described by current stakeholders. The business unit or business units would also work in close partnership to deliver a communication and analytical function. This would ensure that all RAs receive informed updates from the CSP and its membership including reports on progress, outcomes, delays or an inability to progress strategic priorities.

Where a number of sub-groups work in closely aligned spheres of interest, they should form affiliations to ensure co-ordination and collaboration and the achievement of maximum value for money. For example, the prevent CHANNEL and Contest Board could develop a specific affiliation working collaboratively and feeding issues into the Regional CSP.

This approach would ensure that both the CSP, its related partnerships and the accountable authorities are sighted on the work of the Regional CSP and related sub groups and can inform their work.

In addition to this relationship each local authority should put in place appropriate overview and scrutiny arrangements which will be of crucial importance in ensuring effective governance and accountability of the CTMICSPB in the execution of their statutory duties and that local imperatives are met. Opportunities for joint scrutiny of the regional function should also be explored.

A hypothetical example

For illustrative purposes, we provide below a hypothetical case example of governance and accountability arrangements for the regional CSP, its RAs and stakeholders. The hypothetical case relates to domestic violence and abuse.

The Welsh Government's National Strategy on VAWDASV highlighted the importance of addressing the issue of domestic violence and abuse. Intelligence gathered by a number of RAs has highlighted an emerging trend in an increased incidence of domestic abuse and serious violence related to substance misuse.

The CTMICSPB receives reports of these concerns from attending RA membership.

As an existing priority, the CTMICSPB identifies a need for action. It requires all RAs to submit data to the business support unit in order to identify the scale and nature of the issue. A request is also made to the regional partnership board and the regional safeguarding board for data in order that a comprehensive needs assessment can be conducted. Because of the relationship of the issue to substance misuse the APB is also requested to submit data and to participate in planning.

The membership from the RAs are required to feedback this action to local tactical and operational services to inform them of the action being taken and for them to participate in data submission. Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees are notified of the action.

The business unit receives data from local services, the RPB and SB and produces a report to the CTMICSPB on the nature and extent of demand and the current service capacity available within each locality to respond to the need.

An integrated action plan is devised by the CTMICSPB in partnership with the chairs of the RSB, the APB and the RPB. Tasks are assigned to tactical and operational groups. A communication strategy forms part of the action plan identifying individuals in each agency and service with an interest in resolving the priority action to form a distribution list. Key to this list are the named personnel responsible within each local authority to oversee action and other RAs to ensure that they are satisfied that suitable action is being taken.

The action plan is cascaded via the CTMICSPB, APB, SB and PSB using the distribution list to inform stakeholders of the actions required.

Monthly briefing reports are developed by agencies cited in the action plan. These are submitted to the business unit which compiles quarterly reports for the CTMICSPB membership.

Examples of positive practice identified within localities are highlighted and shared as are delays or failures to achieve necessary actions.

At year end a report on progress and any further action or adjustment to the plan is provided to the CTMICSPB and cascaded to all RAS.

This hypothetical example illustrates the means by which demand and capacity data can be shared to quantify the scale of a problem and the capability for organisations to respond. This would be significantly bolstered by a business unit integrated with the three regional boards. It also serves to illustrate the means by which action can be taken regionally, whilst local accountability is retained via the use of a communication strategy and the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Crime and Disorder). Importantly it illustrates the close relationship of Safeguarding and the work of the PSB and APB in support of strategic delivery. Of note technological advances such as the use of video conferencing can significantly enable enhanced communications in a scenario such as that used here, in support of the delivery of CSP business.

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CSP support

Earlier in the report we set out shortcomings and risks in relation to the level of support currently in place for both CSPs, and the opportunity presented by the merger to address this.

A solution to the current shortcomings could usefully draw on models in place for supporting other strategic partnerships. These include:

- Coordinating capacity for regional safeguarding boards across Wales is resourced through contributions from statutory partners, calculated using a statutory formula. In the CTM region, total expenditure exceeded £290,836 and individual agency contributions were as follows:

    - The three local authorities provide 60% of the total funding with RCTCBC providing 55%, Bridgend CBC 32%, and MTCBC 13% of that share
    - CTUHB UHB provides 25%
    - SWP provides 10%
    - Probation Services provide 5%

- Receipt by RPBs of core funding through the Welsh Government's Regional Integration Fund to support strategic and programme coordination, which in some areas is supplemented by additional financial contributions from partners. In addition, the legitimacy of top slicing project-specific funding to provide project management capacity is recognised.

- Coordination and support capacity for local PSBs, SBs and APBs and their sub-groups across the CTM area. This support includes the development of needs assessments and other areas of work in line with those listed above.

The following information published by the SB in its Annual Report for 2021/22 suggests an overlap between the strategic and operation work of both the SB and the CTCSP. There is a reliance on the activities of both organisations which affects the work of the other particularly in the areas of Anti-Social Behaviour Team, Prevent/Channel Panel, Licensing and Domestic Abuse Services. There is also a shared agenda around the coordination and delivery of responses to organised crime and sexual violence.

> 'In the past year, the Board and its partner agencies continued the drive to align and strengthen links with a range of other partnerships across the region. At an executive level, this has involved working with the Regional Partnership Board and its supporting governance structure.
>
> Good links have been maintained with the Community Safety Partnership at both a strategic and operational level. There are good collaborative working arrangements with the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, Prevent/Channel Panel, Licensing and Domestic Abuse Services that sit within the Community Safety Partnership.
>
> A Regional Prevent Delivery Group has been established and partner agencies have been involved in the testing of a new Prevent eLearning platform, designed to safeguard individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation. Board partner agencies also have representation on the Regional Serious and Organised Crime Board, the MAPPA Strategic and Operational Groups, and the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Steering Groups'.

Future options for support

Dedicated support for the merged CTMICSPB is one option. However, there is clear potential for alignment between the work of the SB, a future regional CSP. There are responsibilities and interests that overlap. We suggest this presents an opportunity for considering shared support arrangements, which would optimise

value for money, enable pooling of resources from a variety of sources, and facilitate joint working between the respective partnerships and alignment of their programmes. There is a similar argument for potential alignment with the PSB.

When discussing the relationship of the CSPs and the CTM SB colleagues identified various potential shared functions that would benefit both partnerships. Those specified included training and communications. We assess different options for future support in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8

Option	Cost considerations	Benefits	Challenges
Carry on as now	Approximately £138,000 is allocated from the PCC, although unclear what proportion if any would be used to resource the infrastructure, as this finance appears to support programme delivery. Resources largely in kind from partner bodies.	The potential for utilising the capacity of both current CSP arrangements together with financial support of the PCC.	There are limitations to the work that staff can undertake, in coordinating and delivering the CSP agendas, including the need for analytical and research support
A single business unit utilising support from the PCC and statutory partners	A dedicated business unit for the CSP, with roles similar to other arrangements with a unit Manager, Administrative support, and analytical/research capacity.	A unit would provide for specific support to enable the new CSP to function effectively with staff delivering the range of functions as set out above. This model would also allow staff to focus more attention to the work of the CSP and supporting partner agencies to engage.	To commence a new dedicated unit would require financial contributions from partner bodies potentially on a % allocation like the Safeguarding Board. This requires buy-in from each of the organisations for this to be effective. It would potentially duplicate work undertaken by those supporting the work of the Safeguarding Board The current financial support from the PCC is for programme delivery only and not guaranteed at previous levels.

Option	Cost considerations	Benefits	Challenges
A common business unit supporting regional arrangements across CTM	The SB has a business unit. The role could be extended through additional resources currently available to the CSPs and PSB and from statutory partners to widen the scope of the business unit role.	There is a clear alignment between the work of the SB and the CSPs, and in many ways their interests overlap. Augmenting the capacity and remit of the current SB arrangements could provide a significant strategic and operational boost to the regional CSP model, building on current experience of the other groups. Further amalgamation with support for the new regional PSB could also be considered. The approach may provide improved VFM reducing potential additional management costs and duplication inherent in individual business units.	Gaining agreement would be critical and would probably necessitate a review of the current SB, and potentially PSB, business unit functions. Commitment to financing, reporting, and accountability for the operation of the business unit would need to be shared between the SB and CSP, and possibly the PSB. This would need to be scoped out.

Having considered the range of responses during our engagement work, and working through the potential solutions, our recommendation would be that CTM should establish a common business unit supporting regional arrangements across the region and building on the work of the already established arrangements for SB. Given clear areas of overlap and the need for alignment in the respective programmes, there would be significant strategic value in pooling resources to provide core business unit support across the region through which boards would be jointly supported. This would enable further development of the synergy by sharing resources to advance the strategic and operational agendas of both. Whilst detailed arrangements would need to be worked through, we could envisage how CSP statutory partners could buy in to the current SB business unit, expanding the capacity and remit to support both organisations. There are further opportunities for amalgamation with the support function for the forthcoming regional PSB.

There is a risk if agreement is not sought from those CTMICSPB statutory partners to provide direct resourcing to this model, that the proposed alignment between the CSPB, SB and potentially PSB would not be realised. However, we believe anticipated benefits outweigh any potential challenges.

7. Recommendations

1. **Bridgend Merthyr Tydfil Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Councils should together with their mutual responsible authorities seek to establish a regional CTMICSPB, focusing on the delivery of strategic priorities agreed between Responsible Agencies and with appropriate delegated responsibility. Our recommendations in Section 6 should be used to shape the new arrangements.**

   The CTMICSB should serve the communities represented by these local authorities and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board

   To avoid the bureaucracy and delays associated with RAs having to sign off or ratify CSP decisions, we recommend that consideration be given to the use of formally delegated powers to the CSP membership.

   Consideration should also be given to the chairing of the CTMICSBP. Rotation between the representatives of the RAs can help to spread the responsibility placed upon each organisation and has the potential to strengthen the engagement and participation of the various RAs in the CTMICSPB. It would also guard against the domination of one partner in the arrangements.

2. **In formulating the arrangements for the CTMICSPB, RAs need to ensure, in collaboration with their legal departments and working collaboratively with WG officials, that under the proposed arrangements the duties placed upon them by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, subsequently amended, continue to be fully met in line with the Act and its regulations.**

   When creating the regional arrangements the role and functions of the CTMISCPB should be formally reviewed and agreed by the RAs.

   Consideration should be given during this review to:

   - *Defining the responsibilities of the new Board and the local tactical and operational groups*
   - *Where specific related responsibilities would lie if not with the CTMICSPB*
   - *How tactical and operational groups might continue to deliver strategic intent locally, escalating issues to the CTMICSPB as required.*
   - *Relevant arrangements to ensure, where overlap in responsibility exists between boards and other strategic partnerships, that the responsible authorities have defined the responsibilities of the various groups and have in place mechanisms to ensure effective communication and collaboration between these groups*

3. **An agreed rational structure which effectively dovetails with the new CTM PSB and the SB should be established for the CTMICSPB.**

   The structure should set out arrangements for regional integration and local delivery and scrutiny. It should be signed off by all partners and forwarded to the National Board. In formulating this structure, it will be necessary to clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of each Board to ensure that responsibility for the range of actions necessary to deliver community safety is vested in the most appropriate body. This may be achieved by means of a review of the terms of reference of each relevant body.

4. **Given the broad range of responsibilities placed on CSPs the thematic sub-groups that have emerged at a regional level should be reviewed and, where appropriate, incorporated within the CTMICSPB.**

Those groups not incorporated within the CTMICSPB should define explicitly within their terms of reference to which board or strategic partnership they are accountable and whether their function is strategic, tactical or operational. These should be mapped against other strategic partnerships where responsibility overlaps. In their relationship to the CTMICSPB, relevant groups should not act in silos but report in unison to the Board wherever practicable. For example, the groups established to counter extremism and terrorism should collaborate in their relationship to the board. Any new groups established should be established applying the principles of clarity of function and accountability.

5. **Mechanisms need to be established by the CTMSCSP working with all responsible authorities to engage with communities, paying heed to citizens' voices.**

   This engagement should not be homogeneous, but dynamic, providing an approach which is able to capture the various themes relating to community safety and community cohesion, by engaging with subsets of local communities as required. Extant groups successfully engaging subsets of the CTM communities could be expanded or replicated as necessary.

6. **A business unit should be developed to serve the CTMICSPB to fulfil as a minimum the functions set out in this report.**

   The unit could serve the CSP alone or could be an integrated unit serving the CTMICSPB, and SB. The feasibility of extending arrangements across the new PSB should also be considered. As a minimum it would serve to provide a functioning secretariat to the board/s, act as a repository for local and regionally aggregated data, provide analytical capacity to the board/s, address new and emerging responsibilities, formulate funding bids where appropriate on behalf of the CTMICSPB, manage and co-ordinate the workforce dedicated to CSP activity and ensure that intelligence led reports are developed to satisfy the need for scrutiny of each board. To fulfil these functions the business unit would need to be adequately resourced with dedicated funding and personnel.

7. **Whether or not the business unit is stand alone for the CTMICSPB or integrated with that for the SB, a funding formula should be developed to resource support arrangements.**

   If an integrated approach is to be taken this could be pooled with the statutory funding of the SB with integrated functions.

8. **In addition to the establishment of the CTMICSPB appropriate local arrangements should be in place to scrutinise regional activity and oversee delivery of activity extraneous to, but supportive of, the identified regional priorities.**

   This will ensure that the regional Board is adequately informed of local activity, that local scrutiny can be applied and services operating in the delivery of services at a local level are adequately informed about regional intent and action by means of a formal communication and promotion strategy.

   Appropriate arrangements should be put in place for overview and scrutiny at regional and local levels.

9. **If the preceding recommendations are approved, a detailed plan for implementing the new arrangements should be developed, which would provide for:**

   - **Further engagement with stakeholders**
   - **Co-production of governance and support arrangements**
   - **Agreeing terms of reference for and membership of groups within the regional arrangements**

   The implementation plan should be overseen by an appropriately constituted steering group comprising representatives each of the RAs.

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28 JUNE 2023

ABERDARE TOWN CENTRE – DRAFT STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR FOR PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER (COUNCILLOR MARK NORRIS)

Author: Emma Halford, Project Officer

1.0   PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1   The purpose of the report is to:

- Advise Cabinet of work undertaken to date in the preparation of a Draft Strategy to focus and coordinate future investment in Aberdare Town Centre.
- Seek approval to commence a phase of formal, public consultation in respect of the Draft Strategy, and to receive a further report detailing the results from the consultation.

2.0   RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

2.1   Considers the attached Draft Aberdare Town Centre Strategy, which has been informed by the outcomes of a phase of early engagement, the findings of which are at **Appendix 1** of the Draft Strategy.

2.2   Agree to commence a formal, public consultation exercise on the Draft Strategy, to be conducted over a 6 week period utilising online and in-person methods of engagement to capture a wide range of stakeholder's thoughts on the Draft Strategy as set out in the engagement plan at **Appendix 2**.

3.0   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   Town centres continue to face unprecedented challenges following the global COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. Aberdare Town Centre is no exception and whilst it benefits from the activities of its strong independent business community it nonetheless has suffered from the departure of important local service providers, including banks and large retail operations.

3.2   The town has been the recipient of significant investment over the last decade including the redevelopment of several prominent town centre buildings, the creation of high quality secondary and higher education facilities, new industrial floorspace and 'state-of-the-art' leisure and recreational provision. This investment has assisted Aberdare in repositioning itself in the context of significant local and regional opportunities including those associated with the Cardiff Capital Region, the South Wales Metro and the emerging adventure tourism economy.

3.3   The Draft Strategy seeks to build upon this investment momentum, providing a focused and coordinated investment framework which seeks to establish Aberdare Town Centre as a vibrant, dynamic and attractive destination for both local residents and visitors to the area.

4.0   BACKGROUND

4.1   The Council's Corporate Plan, 'Making A Difference' 2020-2024, commits the authority to investing in town centres, increasing jobs and homes, to create vibrant, thriving places in which people wish to live, work and socialise. To this end, the Council has committed to the creation of a series of town centre strategies/plans to guide future investment in RCT towns, drawing on each town's unique characteristics. Such documents have already been produced for Mountain Ash, Porth and Pontypridd.

4.2   Aberdare has been the recipient of in excess of £100m in investment since 2010 with key investments including:

- New modern industrial units in Robertstown.
- Upgraded facilities at Dare Valley Country Park.
- The Coleg Y Cymoedd Campus.
- Aberdare Community School.
- Aberdare Town Centre Regeneration Project.

4.3   Additionally, several prominent town centre properties have been redeveloped and brought back into use, through a combination of public grant funding and significant private investment, such as the Boot, Old Town Hall and Black Lion. These have delivered a mixture of residential and commercial outcomes, bringing new homes and high-quality hospitality businesses to Aberdare, improving the town's overall offer.

4.4   If the town is to fulfil its potential whilst simultaneously addressing the significant challenges it faces following the COVID 19 pandemic and the current economic downturn, it is vital that a strong strategic approach to future investment is identified and adopted. Future investment needs to be focused and coordinated if the town is to take full advantage of emerging opportunities, such as the South Wales Metro and growing nearby tourism offer, in order to strengthen its regional identity as a great place to visit, work, explore and invest. It is therefore proposed that the Strategy for Aberdare Town Centre will provide an investment framework that builds on Aberdare's considerable strengths and opportunities, whilst acknowledging the challenges it faces.

5.0   Early Engagement

5.1   In preparing the Draft Strategy, a phase of 'Early Engagement' was undertaken by Regeneration officers, between November 2022 and February 2023, to ensure that the Draft Strategy under consideration is suitably focused and appropriate in its content.

5.2   Evidence confirms that early engagement and involvement of stakeholders in identifying and defining a town's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities considerably strengthens the production of town centre strategies. In addition to drawing upon local knowledge, such engagement ensures that local people have an opportunity to shape and focus interventions aimed at addressing issues affecting them most. Early involvement also helps to foster a sense of local ownership and commitment to the successful implementation of the strategy.

5.3   Key objectives for the early engagement exercise included:

- Ensuring that engagement exercises, facilitated by Regeneration officers, were fully accessible to all and promoted an inclusive environment within which stakeholders felt comfortable to share their views and opinions.
- Gaining a better understanding of how stakeholders perceive the town's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- Drawing upon local knowledge to ensure that the new strategy is relevant, deliverable and informed.

- Fostering a sense of local ownership and commitment to the successful implementation of the strategy.
- Identifying opportunities to collaborate with existing and current projects within the town to prevent duplication.
- Strengthening existing networks and creating new stakeholder relationships.
- Understanding how the Welsh Language is currently promoted within the town and what stakeholders think could be done to improve this.

5.4   A variety of engagement tools and techniques were used, including:

- **An online survey** titled, "Aberdare Town Centre: What do you think" was publicly accessible on the Council's Let's Talk online platform, between the 16th November 2022 and 9th January 2023. The survey focused on key themes such as:

  - o   Identification and prioritisation of the Town's key strengths and challenges (including accessibility etc).
  - o   Creation of key investment themes to help focus and coordinate future investment in the town.
  - o   The town's current hospitality offering.
  - o   Promotion and integration of the Welsh Language.

- **In-person 'workshops'** at Sobell Leisure Centre were delivered, with internal and external stakeholders, at which stakeholders were asked to work collaboratively to undertake a SWOT analysis of the town centre and prioritise a series of 'Investment Themes'. Questions about the promotion of the Welsh Language and Accessibility were also discussed.
- **Focused in-person meetings** with key stakeholders to discuss specific themes, such as funding and business community / wider community concerns.
- **Scrutiny** – consideration by the Council's Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee 15th February, 2023

5.5   The findings from this phase of early engagement are set out in detail in **Appendix 1**.

6.0   DRAFT ABERDARE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

6.1   The Draft Strategy takes account of and responds to a range of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with Aberdare Town Centre and identified through the early engagement process. It is set within the context of the Council's Corporate Plan and reflects the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Welsh Government's

National Plan 2040 which identified the need to adopt a placemaking approach when considering the creation of such strategies and plans.

6.2 It is apparent from the early engagement exercise that a consensus exists around the need for Aberdare Town Centre to improve its overall 'offer' if it is to capitalise upon the opportunities that currently present themselves and through that to fulfil its true potential as a principle town within northern RCT.

6.3 The primary focus of the Draft Strategy is that of the Town Centre area of Aberdare, broadly coterminous with the Town Centre Conservation Area, reflecting the Welsh Government's Town Centres First Principle. However, the strategy recognises the inter-relationship between investments within the town centre itself and those within its hinterland as both being of key significance to the town's future.

6.4 Work undertaken to date has culminated in the identification of a set of priority challenges and opportunities which have been captured under the following broad headings:

- Overall Appearance and Identity
- Sustainable Towns and Communities
- Tourism and Visitor Economy
- Built Environment
- Business Development

6.5 Analysis and discussion around these priority challenges and opportunities informed the creation of an overall vision and corresponding set of strategic objectives for the strategy. The Draft Strategy sets out the vision as: "***To build upon Aberdare's unique heritage and strategic location to create a more vibrant, dynamic and attractive destination for both local residents and visitors to the area***". The strategic objectives seek to:

- Improve the sustainability of Aberdare town centre through increasing visitor footfall and capturing a greater share of visitor spend.
- Maximise the utilisation of sites and premises within the town centre to diversify and intensify the range of services and amenities available to local people and visitors.
- Improve utilisation and safe use of public spaces and amenities trough enhancing street-level activity and the provision of better connections with nearby destinations.
- Support the development of a greater variety of businesses within the town that satisfy emerging opportunities from both growing visitor demands and local needs.
- Enhance Aberdare Town Centre's overall appearance and identity as a great place to live, work and visit.

6.6   The strategy then proposes six investment themes focused upon the realisation of these strategic objectives.

7.0   INVESTMENT THEMES

7.1   These include:

1. The redevelopment and re-use of existing under-utilised, vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre to accommodate high quality restaurants, visitor accommodation, workspaces and a unique retail offering.
2. Working with Aberdare's local businesses and wider community to bring the story of Aberdare to life, making the town's heritage and offering more visible and strengthening its conservation area.
3. Strengthening Aberdare town centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit through enhancing the visitor experience, building on the existing and growing tourism offer and enhancing marketing and promotion.
4. Improvement and promotion of active travel routes, including provision of enhanced wayfinding signage, within the town centre and to nearby destinations, such as Dare Valley Country Park, Aberdare Park and Cynon Valley Museum.
5. Further enhancement of public open spaces in the town centre, including supporting bio-diversity, to create high quality outdoor spaces capable of supporting new business and leisure opportunities and hosting events to animate the town.
6. Exploration of partnerships between public, private, educational and community actors, building on the good work of the 'Our Aberdare' Bid to establish new initiatives to support local businesses to make the best of emerging opportunities, such as the growing tourism and visitor economy.

8.0   FORMAL PUBLIC CONSULTATION

8.1   It is proposed to further test the draft vision, objectives and investment themes with stakeholders during a phase of formal, public consultation.

8.2   As part of this consultation, an online survey will be made available on the RCT Let's Talk website (for a 6-week period) with links to the Draft Strategy and all supporting documentation. The purpose of the survey is to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to share their thoughts on the Draft Strategy and to gain suggestions for how it could be improved further. It is also an opportunity for stakeholders to see how their input, via the 'early engagement' exercise undertaken, has informed the Draft Strategy.

8.3 The survey will be promoted via a press release, social media campaign and via posters/flyers distributed within the town centre. Physical copies of the survey will also be made available at Aberdare Library and other public buildings.

8.4 In addition to the online survey, a series of targeted 'drop in' sessions will be delivered at key locations within Aberdare and its surrounding communities. These sessions will be open to all and will be promoted via the press release, social media campaign and physical posters/flyers. The Draft Strategy and findings from the early engagement exercise will be presented at these sessions.

8.5 As part of this formal consultation phase, it is proposed to invite the public to engage in identifying potential actions, projects or sites for intervention that could be pursued in order to realise the strategies objectives.

8.6 Following completion of the formal consultation, a findings report will be produced and submitted to cabinet for consideration.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

9.1 The Council must satisfy its public sector duties under the Equalities Act 2010 (including specific Welsh public sector duties). Pursuant to these legal duties, Council's must in making decisions, have due regard to the need to (1) eliminate unlawful discrimination, (2) advance equality of opportunity and (3) foster good relations based on protected characteristics.

9.2 An initial, draft Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment is being prepared, informed by the findings from the early engagement and will be made available as part of the supporting documentation to be published on the RCT Let's Talk website, as part of the formal consultation. Subject to Cabinet agreeing to initiate such a phase of formal consultation, in relation to the Draft Strategy, the impact assessment will continue to be developed and a final version will be submitted to Cabinet following the formal consultation phase.

10.0 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPACT ASSESMENT

10.1 An initial, draft Welsh Language Impact Assessment is being prepared, informed by the findings from the early engagement, and will be made available as part of the supporting documentation to be published on the RCT Let's Talk website, as part of the formal consultation. Subject to Cabinet agreeing to initiate a phase of formal consultation, in relation to the Draft Strategy, the impact assessment will continue to be developed and a final version will be submitted to Cabinet following the formal consultation phase.

11.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no financial implications in respect of the development of the draft Aberdare Town Centre Strategy but as actions/projects are developed, the financial implications will be fully assessed and reported as appropriate.

12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

12.1 There are no current legal implications, but as the opportunities are developed, the legal implications will be fully assessed.

13.0 THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

13.1 The development of a Draft Town Centre Strategy for Aberdare greatly contributes to achieving the Council's corporate commitment, as outlined within the Council's Corporate Plan 'Making A Difference' 2020-2024.This includes developing town centre strategies for all principal town centres, within RCT, which value the uniqueness of each town whilst optimising potential benefits from emerging opportunities. Therefore, the series of proposed investment themes, contained within the Draft Strategy, have been developed to help focus and coordinate future investment within the town centre. This ensures that corporate priorities including supporting new and existing businesses to expand, tackling empty or rundown sites/premises and enhancing visitor infrastructure to support a growing local tourism offer are realised.

13.2 The Draft Strategy also strongly supports the realisation of the Council's key objective of 'Making Rhondda Cynon Taf Carbon Neutral by 2030', as outlined within the RCTCBC Think Climate Strategy (2022-2025) through:

- Supporting the diversification and expansion of the range of facilities and amenities available within the town centre to increase the town's self-sufficiency and to reduce the need for people to travel elsewhere.
- Enhancement of active travel connectivity to and from the town centre to make it easier for people to choose sustainable modes of transport.
- Working with local and wider community groups to develop local sustainable solutions to global problems, such as climate change.
- Raising awareness of the Council's Net Zero ambition via local-level action planning with a focus on the role that the younger generation may play in championing sustainable initiatives.

- Ensuring that all new physical developments utilise energy-efficient technologies whilst working with existing local business and property owners to retrofit energy-efficient technologies to reduce the town centre's reliance on non-renewable energy sources.

13.3   Such a focus on town centres is also strongly supported by the Welsh Government's 'Town Centre First' policy within its Future Wales National Plan 2040. The policy advocates for a town centre first approach via which the health and vibrancy of town centres is the starting point of locational decision-making. The policy also highlights the important multi-functional role that town centres are increasingly playing within communities, providing a diverse range of facilities and amenities, and therefore the growth and regeneration of such centres is a key national priority.

13.4   Additionally, the Draft Strategy is synonymous with the principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) as evidenced by a thorough evaluation of the proposed investment themes against the Act's 'Severn Social Wellbeing Goals' (see page 36 and 37 of the Draft Strategy). Importantly, the younger generation have been involved in the development of the Draft Strategy, via early engagement, and therefore the focus of the draft strategy reflects the views and ideas of future generations. Importantly, the design and development of local level projects will be subject to further comprehensive evaluation to ensure that the potential contribution of all future investment, within the town centre, to realisation of the Act's Seven Social Wellbeing Goals is maximised.

13.5   Finally, the Draft Strategy strongly supports the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development approach and the way in which the Draft Strategy has been developed reflects the 'five ways of working' which include:

- ***Involvement***: As outlined in section 5 of this report, a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, including local residents, organisations and businesses, have been involved in the development of the Draft Strategy, strengthening the relevance and quality of the Draft Strategy and supporting the development of a sense of local ownership.
- ***Long-term:*** The Draft Strategy provides a long-term sustainable vision for the future, more diverse role that Aberdare Town Centre can play for local and wider communities and outlines how this will be achieved via a series of strategic objectives and corresponding investment themes.

- *Prevention:* The Draft Strategy aims to help prevent any further decline of the Town Centre by providing a framework via which targeted future investment can be focused and coordinated to address existing and future challenges combined with optimising potential benefits from taking full advantage of existing and emerging opportunities. The diversification of the town centre's offer is critical to further strengthening the multi-faceted role that the town centre can play as a focal point for local and wider communities.
- *Integration:* The Draft Strategy is synonymous with corporate and national priorities including those associated with town centre first approaches, tourism and sustainability. It is important to note that the Draft Town Centre Strategy provides a framework via which achievement of corporate and national priorities can be achieved at a 'local-level'.
- *Collaboration:* The Draft strategy promotes a collaborative way of working and the way in which the Draft Strategy has been developed reflects the Council's commitment to working with public, private and third sector partners to ensure that future investment, within the town centre, maximises benefits for all. Partnership working is a key priority, within the draft strategy, and is the focus of Investment Theme Six which promotes the development of new initiatives via working with the local actors, for example the BID, social enterprises, Aberdare market company.
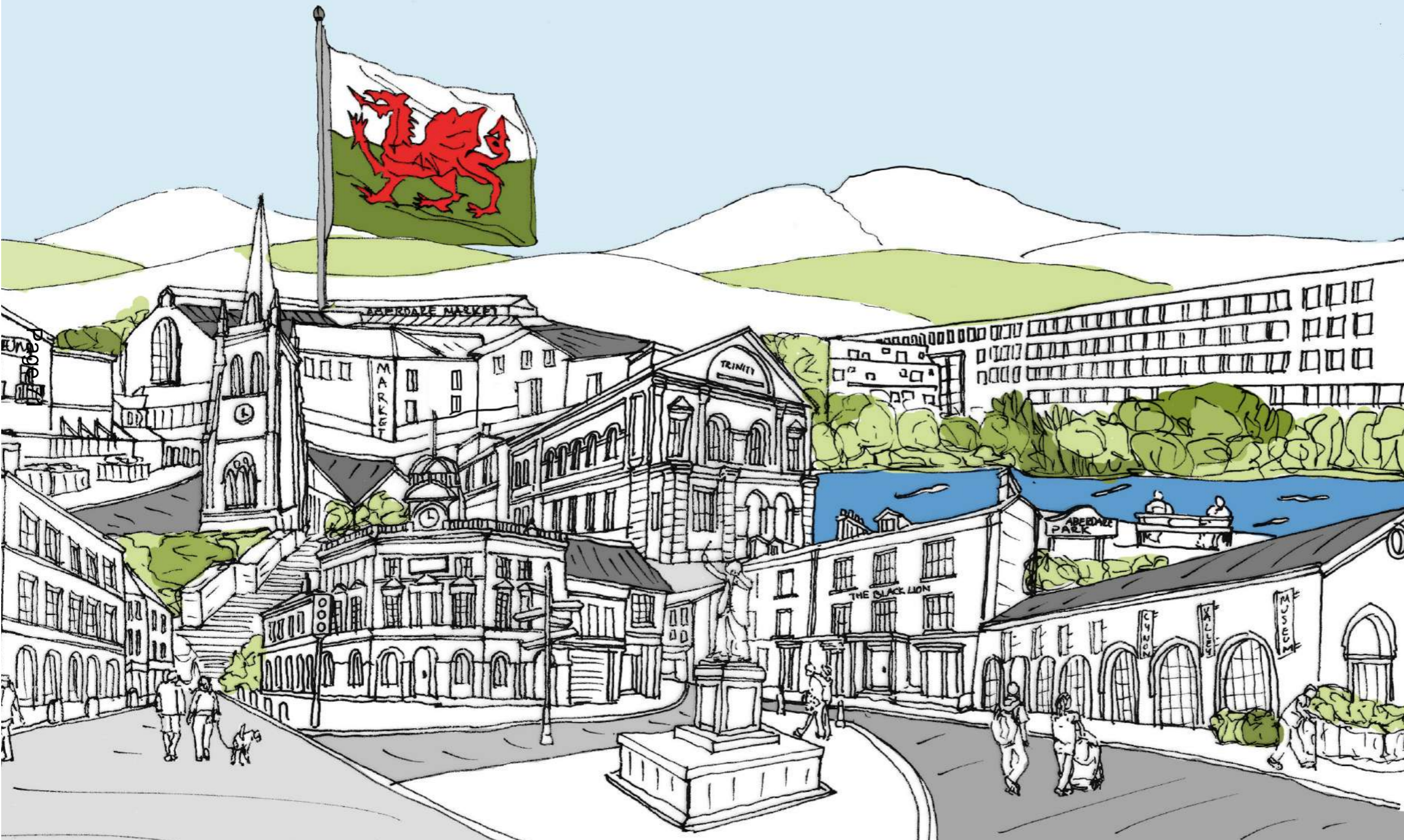
14   CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

14.1   The Draft Aberdare Town Centre Strategy proposes a vision, strategic objectives and investment themes to guide future investment in the town. The formal public consultation phase will further test the appropriateness of these. Following this the Draft Strategy will be reviewed and updated, and a final version of the Strategy will be presented to Cabinet later in 2023.

***

Enabling vibrant and enticing town centres, at the heart of our communities.

Aberdare Town Centre

DRAFT

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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Appendix 2: Engagement Plan

Appendix 3: Spatial Analysis

Produced by:

RCTCBC Regeneration Department

Version 3.0

June 2023

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Section I:

Introduction, Context & Background

This section provides an overview of the local and wider contexts within which Aberdare Town Centre exists, as well as the potential opportunities that such contexts present. It takes account of Aberdare's unique heritage and history, as well as the range of transformational investments that have already been delivered in conjunction with those currently being explored.

Introduction

Town centres are the heart of RCT communities but, post COVID-19, they continue to face significant challenges. It is therefore vital that further coordinated investment and support is provided if town centres are to be sustainable and develop to fulfil their potential.

In its 2020-2024 Corporate Plan 'Making a Difference', Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council commits to continued town centre investment to create vibrant, thriving places where people wish to live, work and socialise. Realisation of these goals will be dependent upon harnessing the collective commitment, energy and determination of public bodies, local businesses, third sector partners and local communities. Additionally, more than ever before, it will be essential that town centre interventions are conceived holistically and implemented in an integrated manner.

This strategy sets out a framework to guide future investment in Aberdare Town Centre, taking account of its role in supporting local communities through the provision of public services, regional transport connections, employment opportunities and retail, leisure and cultural experiences.

Aberdare lies in the upper Cynon Valley, on the River Dare, with good connectivity via half-hourly rail services to Cardiff in the south and via the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road to Swansea/Neath to the west and Abergavenny/Hereford to the east. Aberdare's close proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park, located to the north, provides easy access to an outstanding natural landscape. Existing connectivity will be strengthened further by plans to improve links to the Heads of the Valleys and via delivery of the South Wales Metro, with faster and more frequent services to destinations throughout the region.

Previous investments in both Aberdare and the wider Cynon Valley Strategic Opportunity Area (SOA) have provided a firm foundation upon which to take forward an ambitious agenda to capitalise on emerging opportunities. This strategy builds upon the momentum generated through previous regeneration efforts in Aberdare Town Centre where the Council, its partners and investors have demonstrated that, by acting together in pursuit of shared goals, redefinition of the town centre's role is both possible and achievable.

Regional Location Plan

Key

RCT Boundary
Railway
City / Town
Water
Park

Brecon Beacons National Park

Brecon Beacons National Park

A465

MERTHYR TYDFIL

HIRWAUN

PONTARDAWE

Aberdare

A4059

Afan Forest Park

MOUNTAIN ASH

CWMBRAN

NEATH

SWANSEA

MAESTEG

TONYPANDY

PONTYPRIDD

A470

CAERPHILLY

NEWPORT

M4

BRIDGEND

PORTHCAWL

CARDIFF

BARRY

Working Together:

As the Cynon Valley emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic it continues to face challenges including those associated with climate change, energy and the cost of living. This strategy responds to these challenges together with more long-term issues faced by the town of Aberdare.

In doing so it acknowledges the formal policy landscape, including the RCTCBC Corporate Plan 'Making a Difference' and the Local Development Plan. It also takes into account analysis and recommendations contained within a range of existing studies.

It is clear that for Aberdare to fulfil its true potential it will be necessary for the partnership working, already evident in the Cynon Valley, to be built upon in delivering innovative, context-specific and sustainable solutions to both short and long-term challenges.

Strategy Context & Scope:

This strategy has been prepared in accordance with the following Town Centres First principle:

"Ensuring a thriving future for our town/city centre[s] must be a key driver. We can increase footfall and accessibility and make a vital contribution to the vibrancy and sustainability of our town centres by locating public bodies, partner organisations and associated services/facilities in them. This should be the default option for any new investment and decisions to locate elsewhere should only be made where there is compelling evidence that this is necessary/justified. Proportionate and best value decision making regarding location should include consideration of the impact on town centres, social cohesion, accessibility by public transport, the environment and climate change."

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040, Welsh Government.

Therefore, the primary focus of this strategy is the Town Centre Area of Aberdare, broadly identified as the area within the Town Centre Conservation Area boundary. However, its objectives and corresponding investment themes are not constrained solely to the town centre area. Instead, a more flexible approach has been adopted which acknowledges inter-relationships between the town centre and surrounding areas and responds to associated opportunities accordingly.

Importantly, the strategy does not prescribe a defined time-scale for realisation of the proposed overall vision for the town's future. Instead it is felt to be more appropriate, given recent and ongoing economic, social and environment challenges, for progress to be monitored on an incremental basis, e.g. every 3yrs. This will allow the strategy to respond to dynamic external factors, to identify new and emerging opportunities and ensure that progress continues to be measured against achievable outcomes.

In addition to responding to national policy, the strategy also reflects the local development and regeneration policy context, giving voice to the Council's Corporate Plan, 'Making A Difference 2020-2024' at a local level.

Regional Potential:

In responding to contemporary challenges Aberdare Town Centre, at the heart of the principal town within northern RCT, can build upon its locational advantages within the ever more vibrant Cardiff Capital Region and upon the extensive efforts and investments already made to strengthen its identity as a regional destination. Recent investments, such as the creation of 'ZIP World' at Tower Colliery illustrate the potential to build a tourism offer reflecting the area's unique industrial and social history, outstanding natural landscape and easily accessible location which will be enhanced further by the arrival of the South Wales Metro.
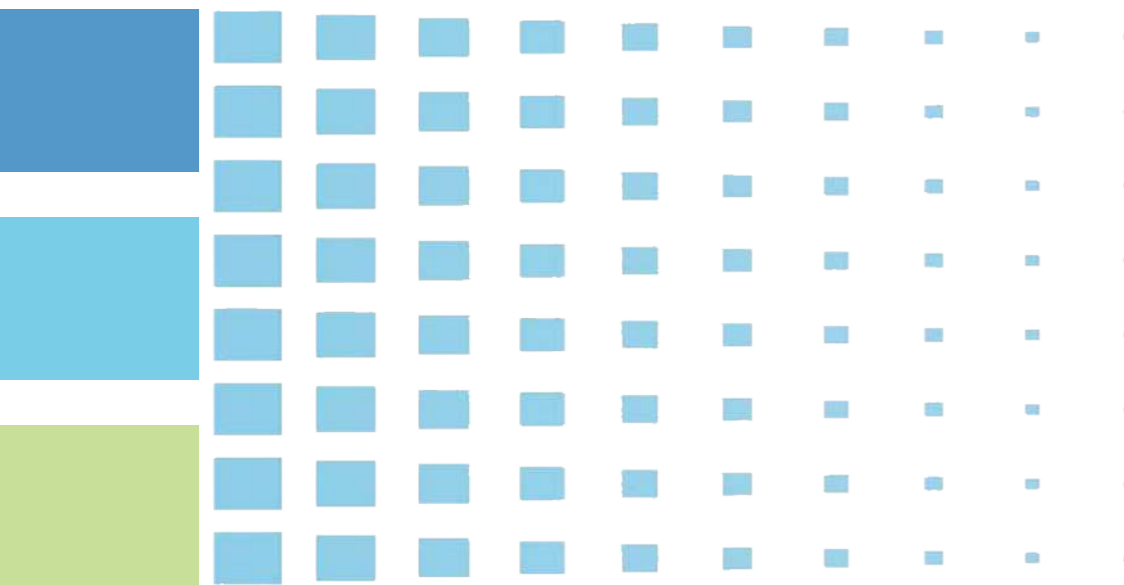
Aberdare Town Centre's role in satisfying the needs of local people has the potential to be built upon through strengthening its identity as a sustainable place to live, work and visit. Central to achieving this, will be effective collaboration between public, private and community groups.

Zip World at Tower Colliery
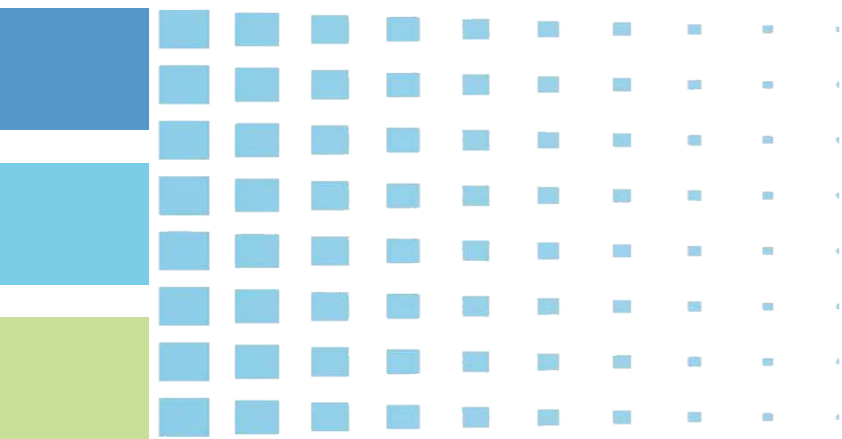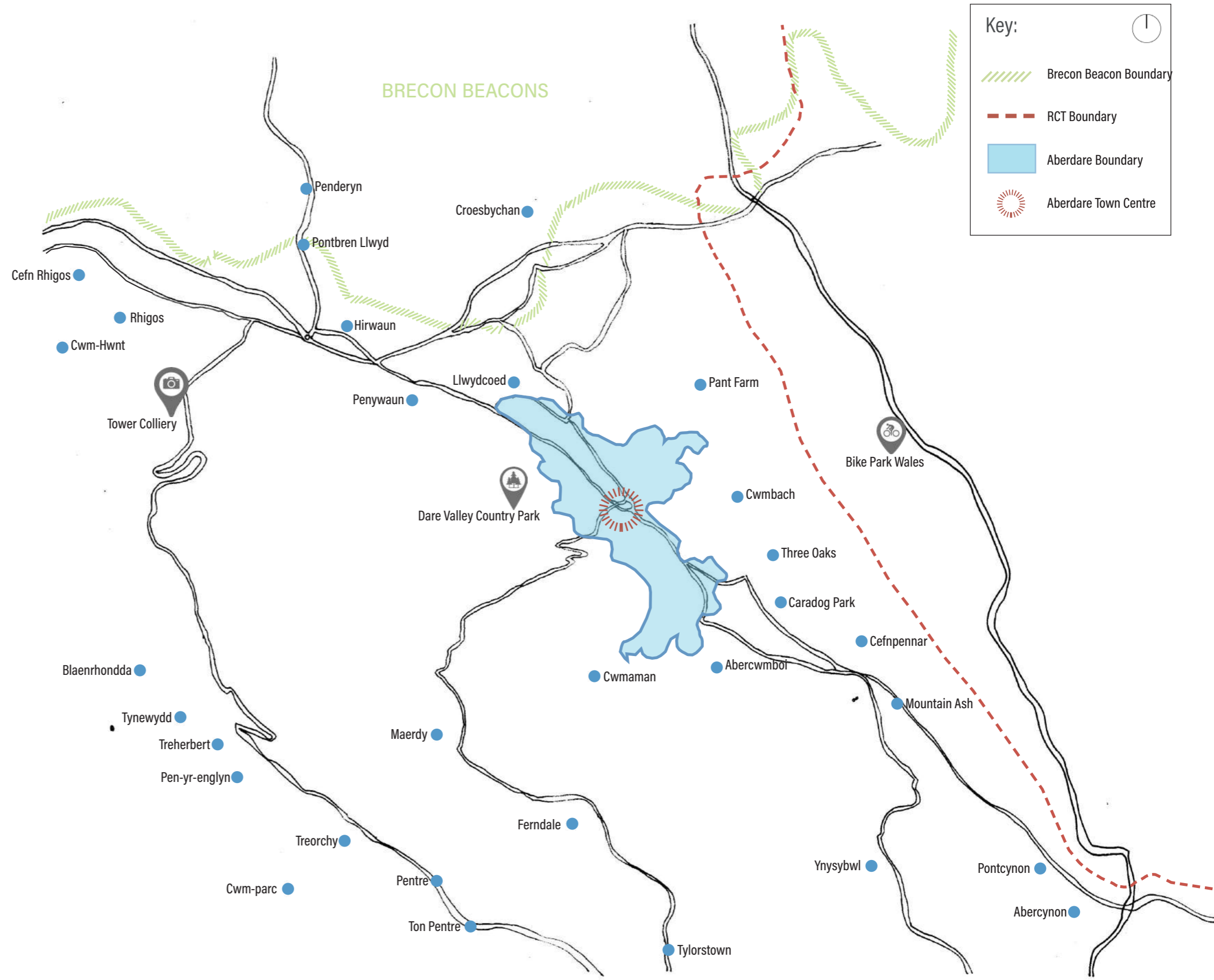

Aberdare Festival 2022

Local Context:

The principal town of Aberdare supports an abundance of local communities, located centrally within northern RCT. Aberdare Town Centre acts as a natural focal point for this northern area, with principal road and rail networks converging in the town.

In this context, it is essential that the town adequately serves the needs of nearby communities, as well as its own population of circa 32, 000 (as of 2022), via the provision of a diverse range of services and amenities.

Aberdare's location, surrounded by outstanding natural landscape and in close proximity to key tourist destinations, including Zip World at Tower Colliery and Bike Park Wales, also presents key opportunities to grow its supporting role in the growing adventure-based tourism economy through provision of improved visitor infrastructure and connections to nearby sites.

BRECON BEACONS

Penderyn
Croesbychan
Pontbren Llwyd
Cefn Rhigos
Rhigos
Hirwaun
Cwm-Hwnt
Llwydcoed
Pant Farm
Penywaun
Tower Colliery
Bike Park Wales
Cwmbach
Dare Valley Country Park
Three Oaks
Caradog Park
Cefnpennar
Blaenrhondda
Abercwmboi
Cwmaman
Mountain Ash
Tynewydd
Maerdy
Treherbert
Pen-yr-englyn
Ferndale
Treorchy
Ynysybwl
Pontcynon
Cwm-parc
Pentre
Ton Pentre
Abercynon
Tylorstown

Key:

- /////// Brecon Beacon Boundary
- --- RCT Boundary
- ▢ Aberdare Boundary
- ⊚ Aberdare Town Centre

History & Heritage:

Aberdare began as a small agricultural settlement with a concentration of farmhouses at the confluence of the rivers Cynon and Dare. The village appears to have always provided a focus point for the surrounding communities, with an array of amenities such as St John the Baptist church, a smithy and watermill.

The character of the village changed dramatically when in 1799 iron ore was found in the area and a furnace was constructed in Llywdcoed, just north of Aberdare. As workers moved to the town to take up employment, the requirement for accommodation dramatically increased, leading to significant growth of the town.

The construction of the Aberdare branch of the Glamorgan Canal in 1811 allowed for better transport of the iron ore towards the coast. The large Gadlys Ironworks was established in 1827 in the centre of Aberdare, with further ironworks built at Aberaman in 1847. With four ironworks then established in the town, further growth followed.

During the 1830s the discovery of high quality coal in the area led to the establishment of further industries in and around Aberdare. While coal had previously been used locally, it was now exported and the town's population grew further. A number of pits were sunk in the area and the coal trade expanded. Other industries in Aberdare at the time included brickworks and breweries. The population figures below highlight the impact of this industrial development:

1831	809 People
1841	9,322 People
1851	15,774 People
1861	37,487 People
1911	50, 844 People
2022	circa 32, 000 People

Ongoing growth saw Aberdare town centre turn into an important business and trading centre. Commercial Street became the focus for trade as the town turned into a popular destination with its wealth of churches, chapels, hotels, inns and shops. However, towards the end of the 19th Century, Aberdare's population began to decline due to the closure of it's 4 ironworks as a result of reductions in the cost of importing iron ore. Coal then became the area's chief export and after the First World War Aberdare experienced a further boom with the extraction of steam coal . This was unfortunately followed by the great 1920's depression which led to significant population decline.

Victoria Square c1960

Cafe Mona, Cardiff Street c1934.

Canon Street. Trams came to Aberdare in 1913 & ceased running in 1935.

Cardiff Street c1930s.

The Black Lion Brewery & Empire Music Hall (back right), c1890s.

Cycle Racing at Aberdare Park c1960s

History & Heritage:

Aberdare's unique history and heritage is represented today by the abundance of listed and high quality buildings located within and around its Town Centre Conservation Area.

Large parts of the town were built in a single period of time, with most of these buildings built by 1870. It's Victorian architecture is a dominant feature of the town and has in the large part been retained, with over 20 listed buildings/structures of the period located in and around the Town Centre Conversation Area. Many of these buildings occupy prominent sites, often at key junctions within the town, and act as key landmarks within principle views and vistas.
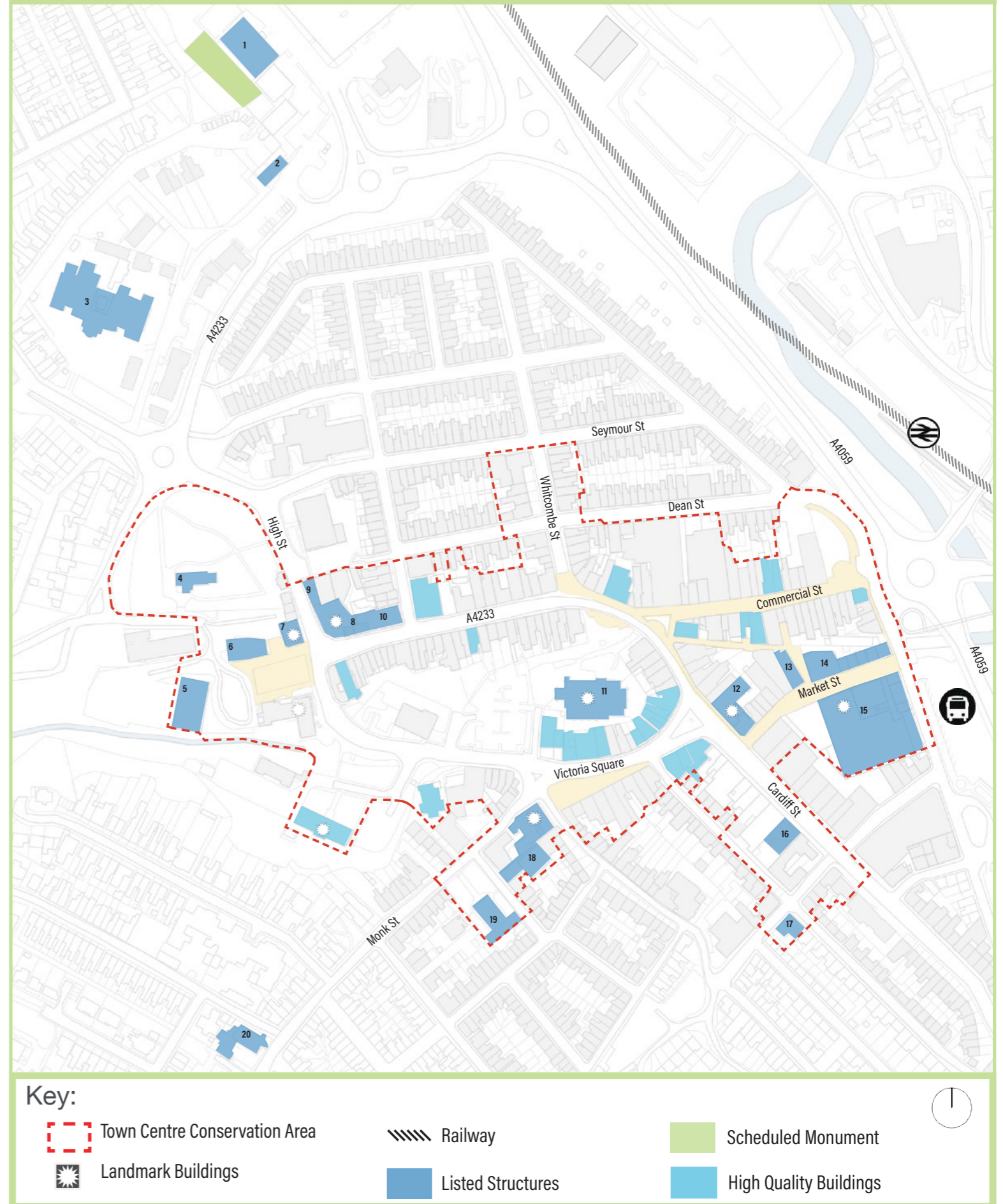
The architectural quality of such buildings contribute strongly to Aberdare's overall identity and act as physical reminders of the town's unique history and heritage. Extensive work has already been undertaken to restore and re-purpose many of these listed buildings but opportunities remain for further conservation efforts. This includes securing improvement of all building frontages to further strengthen the Conservation Area's identity.

Interestingly, Aberdare's layout takes a unique oval shape due to two factors. The mound of St. Elvan's provides the natural centre and focal point to the town whilst the location of important buildings, like chapels and hotels, together with the links between them, served to shape the town's characteristic layout.

Listed Buildings:

1. Cynon Valley Main Store Building at Gadly's Ironworks
2. Blast Engine House at former Gadly's Ironworks
3. Gadlys Higher Standard School
4. St John the Baptist Parish
5. Siloa Capel Y Annibynwyr
6. English Methodist Chapel
7. Town Hall
8. Constitutional Club
9. No 42 & 43 High Street
10. Trinity Presbyterian Church of Wales
11. St Elvan's Church
12. Caradog Arms Hotel & Radio Rentals
13. The Old Courthouse
14. Market Shopping Centre
15. Aberdare Market & The New Market Tavern.
16. Midland Bank
17. Bute Chambers
18. The Black Lion Hotel & Bethania Chapel
19. Calfaria Chapel
20. Catholic church of St Joseph

Aberdare Town Centre: Listed & High Quality Buildings

Key:

- ⬚ (red dashed) Town Centre Conservation Area
- ✳ Landmark Buildings
- ▨ Railway
- ▮ (dark blue) Listed Structures
- ▮ (green) Scheduled Monument
- ▮ (light blue) High Quality Buildings

Pivotal Investments:

As outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan, 'Making a Difference' 2020-2024, the Council is committed to investing in its town centres, increasing jobs and homes, to create vibrant, thriving places in which people wish to live, work and socalise. In this context, Aberdare has already been the recipient of in excess of £100m in pivotal investment via the delivery of a variety of key projects including:

- **Dare Valley Country Park (DVCP):** In 2019, as part of the Valleys Regional Park Programme, £1.1m of grant funding was secured to deliver a high-quality user and visitor experience, through provision of new facilities and activities, together with the refurbishment, expansion and enhancement of existing facilities on site. These works are now complete and the transformed site's offering now includes: a hotel, extended and refurbished shower block, upgraded play area, new family friendly cycling trails and pump tracks and a bike workshop and hire facility. Located less than a mile from Aberdare Town Centre, DVCP is a considerable asset to the town.

- **Coleg Y Comedd**: The opening of a £22 million campus, located centrally in Aberdare, provides an outstanding educational facility that delivers over 400 courses across 22 subject areas with a key focus on vocational and practical skills.

- **Aberdare Community School:** The £67 million Aberdare Community School and Sobel Leisure development, officially opened in 2014, comprises a new 1600 pupil secondary school, linked to a new leisure centre and complemented by a new skate park and all-weather pitch with 3G artificial grass. The school, which also boasts a recording studio, an open area with a giant projector, a gym and a dance area, is a landmark project for the 21st Century schools programme in Wales.

- **Aberdare Town Centre Regeneration Project:** In 2010, a £7.8 million programme of physical improvements was undertaken in Aberdare Town Centre supported by the European Regional Development Fund and National Lottery Heritage Fund. The programme consisted of two elements:
    - Aberdare Townscape Enhancement Programme (TEP): a packaged programme of physical improvements to the town's core retail area. These included significant public realm enhancements (at Library Square, Victoria Square, Canon Street and Commercial Street) and the renovation of building frontages and envelopes.
    - Aberdare Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI): An initiative to bring several vacant properties back into economic use, supported by the restoration of historic features and finishes of significant town centre buildings within the Aberdare Town Centre Conservation Area, including the Old Town Hall.
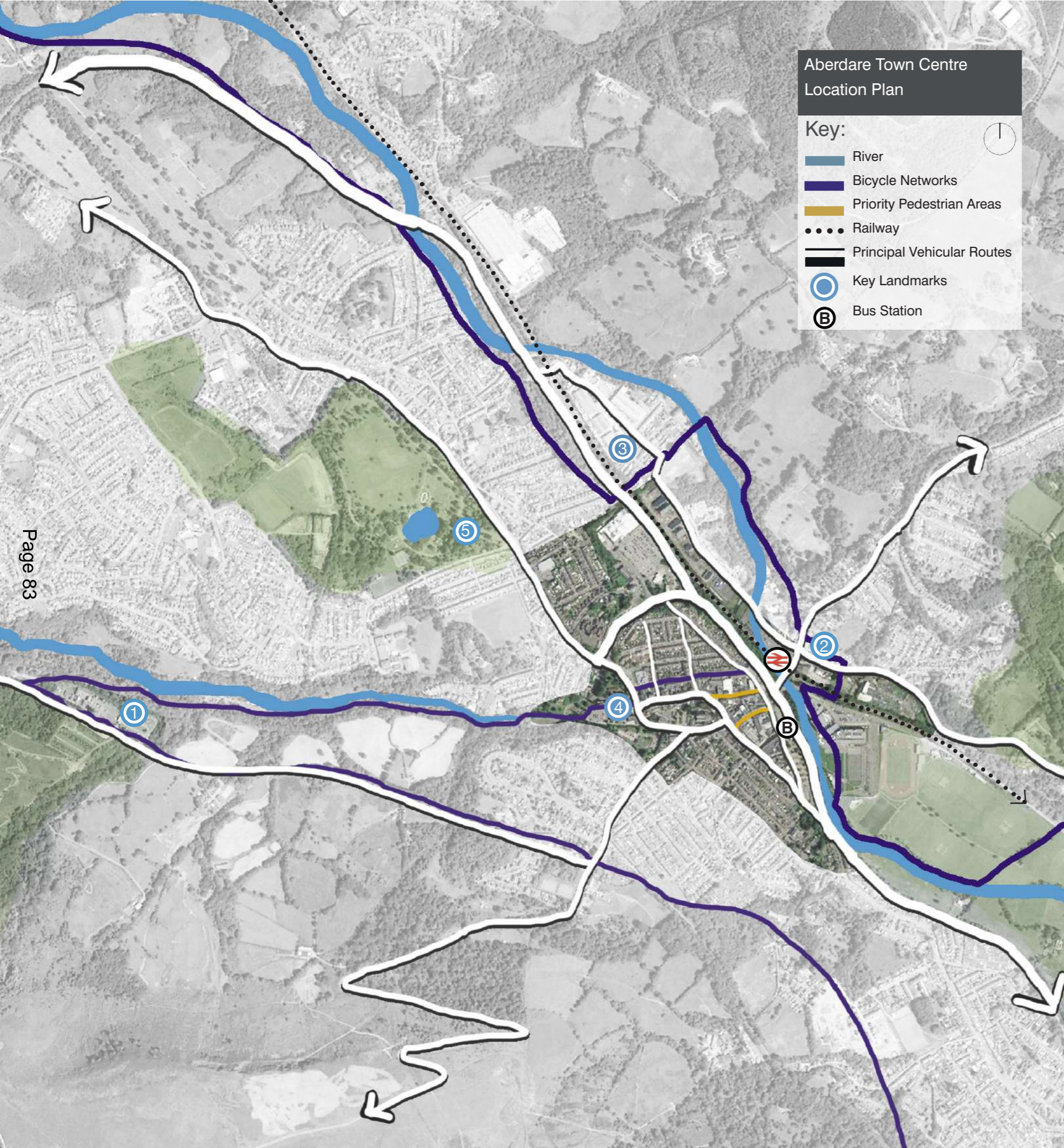

Dare Valley Country Park ①

Aberdare Community School ②

Aberdare Town Centre Location Plan

Key:

- ▬ River
- ▬ Bicycle Networks
- ▬ Priority Pedestrian Areas
- ⋯ Railway
- ▬ Principal Vehicular Routes
- ◉ Key Landmarks
- Ⓑ Bus Station

③ Cynon Valley Museum

④ Library Square

⑤ Aberdare Park

Current Momentum:

In recent years, a growing number of properties have been brought back into use, through a combination of public grant funding and significant private investment. These include properties such as the Old Town Hall, former Black Lion Hotel and the former Boot Hotel. Such projects have delivered a mixture of residential and commercial outcomes, bringing new homes and high-quality hospitality businesses to Aberdare and improving the town's overall offer.

A recent increase in private sector acquisition of key properties within the town centre signals growing interest in the town and taking opportunities to work in partnership with private and third sector actors will be fundamental to the successful delivery of this strategy.

As shown on the adjacent map, considerable work has already been undertaken, or is currently underway, by public and private sector actors, in bringing numerous key buildings back into use. Buildings highlighted in green represent potential future projects with the potential to further enhance the town. Building on this momentum will be a key driver of realisation of the vision set out in this strategy.

Aberdare Town Centre: Past, Present and Potential Future Projects
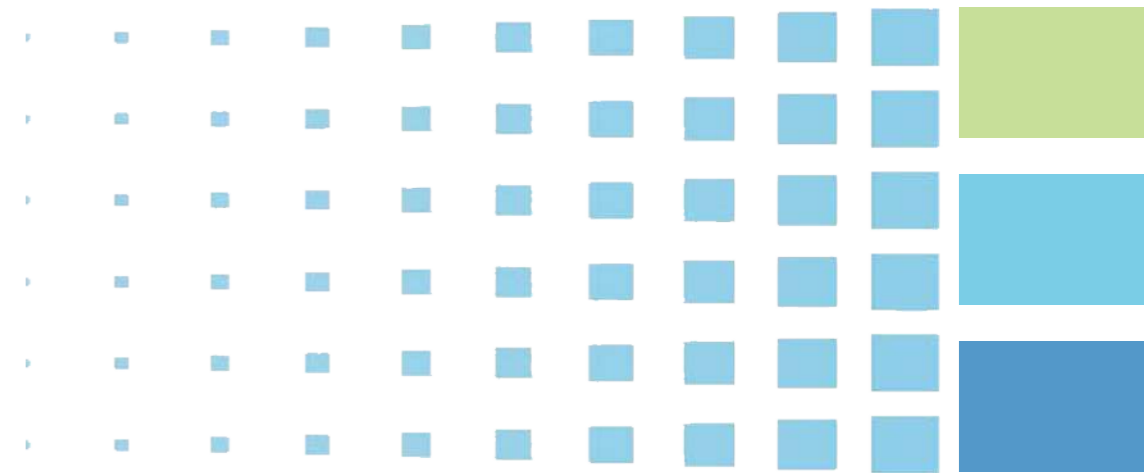

New Industrial Units
Robertstown

St Elvans Church
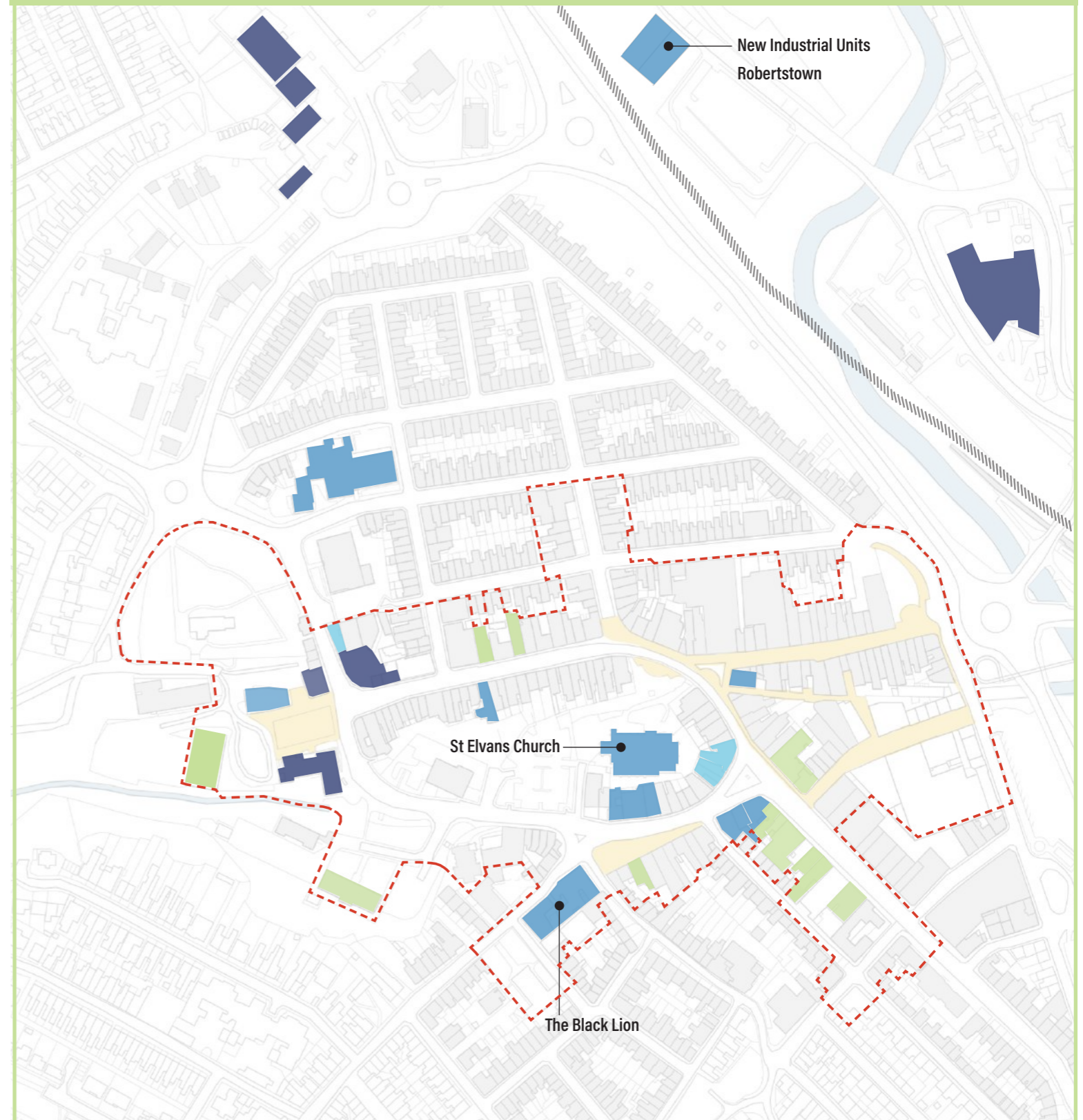
The Black Lion

Key:

- ▢ Conservation Area
- ■ Past projects (5-10+ yrs ago)
- ■ Potential Future Projects
- ■ Recently Completed Project (0-3yrs ago)
- ■ Present (Ongoing)
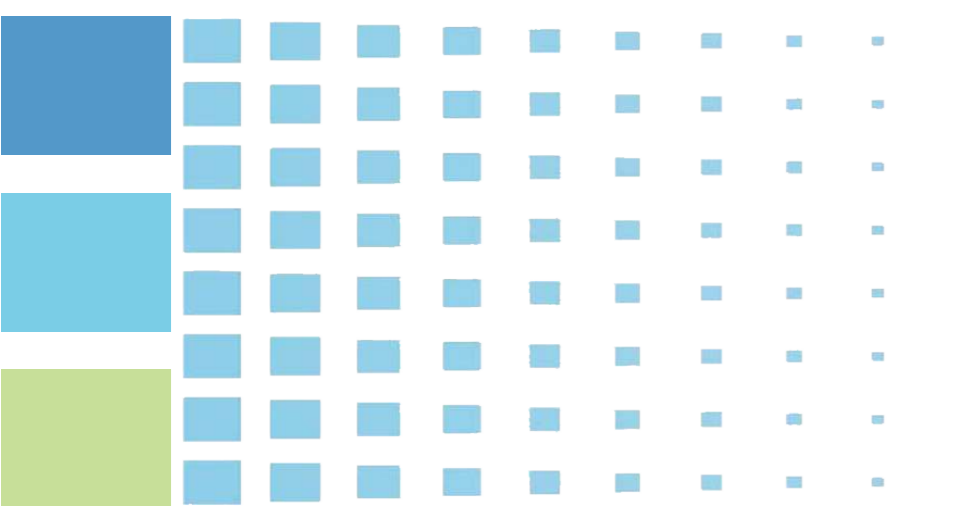
Current Momentum:

The Black Lion

This prominent, listed former hotel has recently undergone an extensive refurbishment, completed in summer 2022. The redevelopment, supported by the Welsh Government Transforming Towns Placemaking Grant, has created 11 affordable housing units on the upper floors, and sizable new commercial accommodation on the ground floor, now occupied by a high-quality Italian restaurant.

St Elvan's Church

St. Elvan's Church is an iconic building in the heart of the town which has recently undergone a significant £1.5m refurbishment package of works, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Cadw, National Churches Trust and Pen Y Cmoedd, to re-invent itself for the 21st century and beyond. The project has created space for a cafe area inside the church, an arts and crafts area, an exhibition area, additional rooms on a mezzanine levels for community use and the provision of interactive history facilities.

Robertstown Industrial Units

A new development of high-quality modern industrial units recently completed on a site located on the edge of Aberdare Town Centre in Roberstown. The development consists of a variety of both traditional and hybrid units and once complete will house a diverse range of enterprises providing new local employment opportunities.

Section 2:

Placemaking, Engagement & SWOT Analysis

The next section provides an overview of placemaking and how the values of placemaking have been considered during preparation of this strategy. Additionally, a summary of the engagement process undertaken to inform development of the draft strategy is outlined. The findings from early engagement have helped shape the strategy's focus, enabling the Council to understand better the full range of challenges and opportunities affecting local businesses, residents and visitors.

2

What is Placemaking?

Placemaking involves working collaboratively across sectors and disciplines in considering, comprehensively, the future development of distinctive and vibrant places. Placemaking requires a place to be viewed in its entirety, rather than focus being placed on isolated components. In this way, it is essential to consider the multiple aspects that contribute to a 'sense of a place' and a place's identity, which may include physical, social, cultural and historical influences.

In Wales placemaking is critical in planning for development and places, with Planning Policy Wales identifying it as the process for creating sustainable places and maximising Well-being.

"Placemaking" is a holistic approach to the planning and design of development and spaces, focused on positive outcomes. It draws upon an area's potential to create high quality development and public spaces that promote people's prosperity, health, happiness and well being in the widest sense."
Planning Policy Wales, Edition 11

Wales' Placemaking Charter sets out six principles to promote thorough placemaking. These include: people and community; location; movement; mix of uses; public realm and identity.

How has Placemaking informed this Strategy?

This strategy fully embraces the policy approach of Planning Policy Wales and the Placemaking Charter and its development has been informed by an on-going dialogue with the Design Commission for Wales. The Placemaking principles, outlined in the Placemaking Charter, have therefore informed and helped shape the range of interventions/actions proposed.

Importantly, this strategy has been developed in partnership with Aberdare's local and wider communities. A well defined programme of early engagement, with a diverse range of key stakeholder groups, has provided a valuable 'local' insight into the key challenges and opportunities that currently face the town. A full overview of the findings from this engagement can be found in Appendix 1. However, a summary is provided on the following pages.

Careful consideration has been given to Aberdare's unique, place-based qualities including the town's identity, community, sociability, uses/activities and access/linkages, analysis of which can be found in Appendix 3.

What makes a GREAT PLACE?

Place

Sociability

Uses & Activities

Access & Linkages

Comfort & Image

Image taken from research undertaken by 'Project for Public Spaces'.

Engagement Process:

1. Discussion

Step 1 of the engagement plan has involved meeting with a diverse range of internal and external stakeholders to discuss their initial thoughts regarding future investment in Aberdare Town Centre. Tasks during this stage included relationship building, hosting discussions internally and externally and seeking opportunities to find out about good work already being undertaken in the town.

2. Early Engagement

Stage 1 and Stage 2 were undertaken in parallel. Stage 2 involved the capturing and consolidation of internal and external stakeholders' views and ideas via a simple online survey. The online survey was made available on the Council's online platform, between late November 2022 and early January 2023. and flyers/posters were distributed within the town to promote the survey. A series of in-person workshops were also delivered with key stakeholders.

3. Findings

The findings from the early engagement work and early discussions have been collated in a 'findings report', seen in Appendix 1. The report provides an overview of the range of issues discussed and the prioritisation of a series of investment themes all of which have informed the development of this draft strategy.

4. Draft Strategy

Stage 4 involved the creation of a Draft Strategy for Aberdare Town Centre which provides an overview of the investment themes within which future investment in Aberdare Town Centre will be coordinated. The development of the draft strategy has been informed by the findings of stages 1-3 of the engagement plan.

5. Cabinet & Scrutiny

The Draft Strategy is to be submitted to the RCTCBC Cabinet committee for consideration. Approval will be sought to commence formal consultation on the Draft Strategy.

6. Formal Consultation

The Draft Strategy will be made available on the Council's website, along with all other relevant documentation, and a series of 'in-person' consultation events will be held to gain peoples' thoughts on the strategy. These events will be complemented by an online survey which will be promoted via a social media campaign throughout the 6 week consultation period.

7. Feedback

Feedback from the formal consultation exercise will be consolidated and reviewed. Recommendations for amendments to the Draft Strategy will be made and agreed upon. Final revisions to the Draft Strategy will be undertaken.

8. Final Strategy

The Final Strategy will be once again submitted to Cabinet with recommendation for approval and adoption. Implementation plans will be developed during this stage and delivery mechanisms explored.
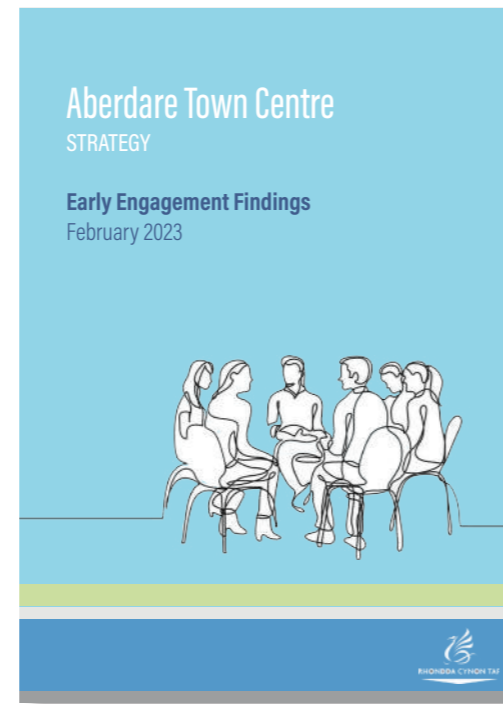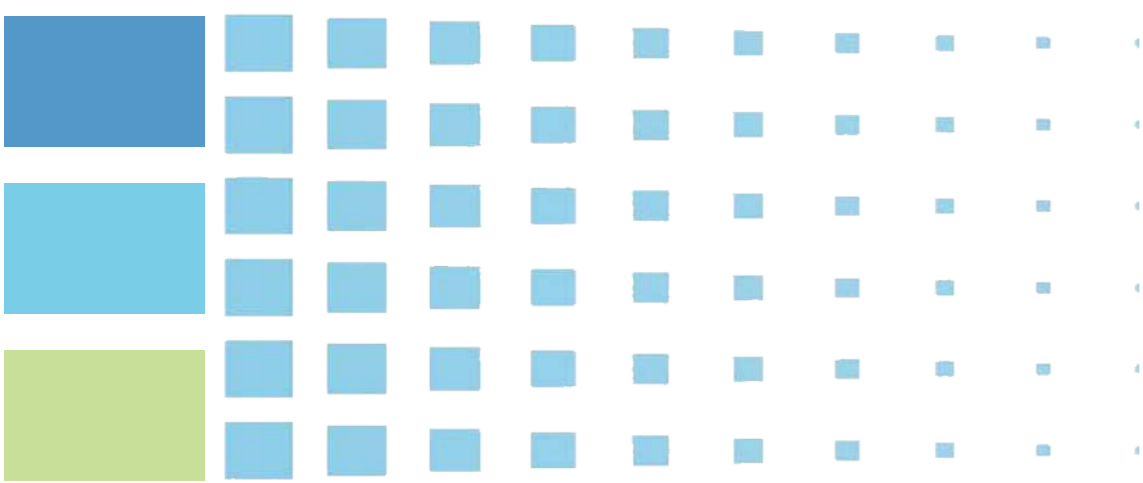
Early Engagement:

Prior to the commencement of a programme of early engagement, delivered by RCTCBC's Regeneration Department, a full engagement plan was produced (details of which can be seen in Appendix 2) within which stakeholder mapping was undertaken. The diagram on this page shows the range of stakeholders considered when undertaking the engagement.

The findings from the programme of early engagement, conducted between November 2022 and January 2023, have been collated into a 'findings report', details of which can be found in Appendix 1.

A wide range of engagement techniques were utilised including: an online survey and series of in-person workshops and meetings. With over 600 responses to the online survey and a further 45 stakeholders attending the in-person workshops and meetings, this programme of early engagement has provided a valuable local insight into the key challenges and opportunities most evident within the town centre.

Aberdare Town Centre
STRATEGY

Early Engagement Findings
February 2023

External

Visitors to Nearby Attractions

University of South Wales

Local MP/AM

Coleg Y Comedd

St Elvans Church Group

'Our Aberdare' BID

Cynon Linc

Friends of Aberdare Park

RCTCBC Neighbourhood Networks

Pen Y Cymoedd

Coliseum Theatre

Designing Out Crime Officers

Zip World / Bike Park Wales

Internal

Corporate Estates Department

Local Members

Tourism Department

Countryside Department

Arts & Library Department

RCTCBC Regeneration Department

Planning Department

Community Development Department

Leisure & Parks Department

Housing Department

Highways Department

Aberdare Market Company

Local Schools/ Colleges

Youth Groups

Local WI Group

Over 50s Groups

Business Owners

Conservation & Wildlife Groups

Local Developers

Stakeholder Mapping

Early Engagement:

Group of students aged 15/16 from Aberdare Secondary School taking part in an engagement workshop.

Photo showing how engagement boards were used to deliver workshop exercise.

Comments collected from attendees at 'Funding Fair' event at Abercwmboi Rugby Club.

Officers from different Internal RCTCBC Departments came together to take part in an engagement workshop at Sobell Leisure

RCTCBC Regeneration Officers facilitate engagement session at Abercwmboi Rugby Club.

Local Councillors attend engagement workshop at Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare.
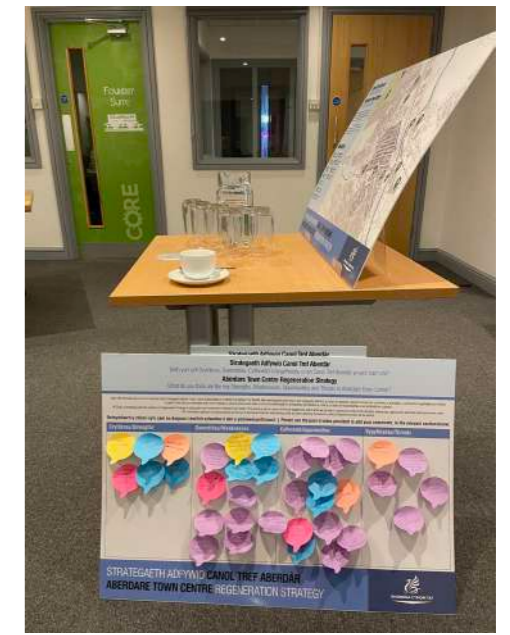
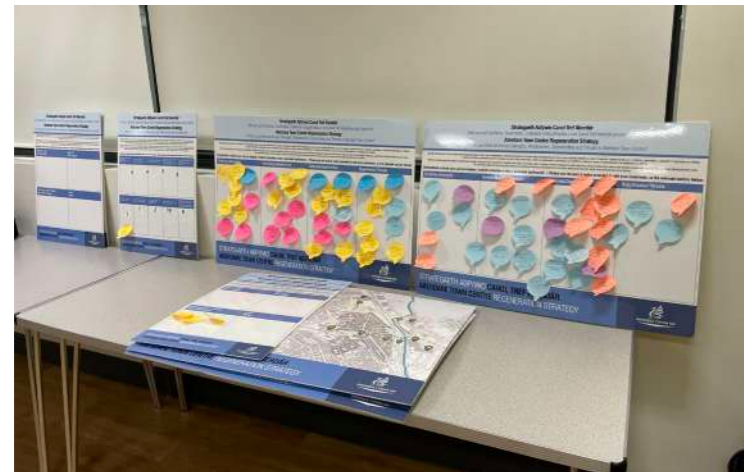Photo of SWOT analysis produced during meeting with the Our Aberdare BID board members.

Group of students aged 10 and 11 from Aberdare Park Primary and Aberdar Primary taking part in an engagement workshop.

Aberdare Town Centre:
SWOT Analysis

The 'Word Clouds' below have been produced using the findings from an extensive period of early engagement. The larger the words, within the images, the more frequent that particular aspect was mentioned during the early engagement.

Strengths

Indoor Market
Outside Seating
New Restaurants Opening
Events Walking & Cycling Routes
High Quality Buildings
Planters
Dare Valley Country Park
Public Realm
History & Heritage
Green Town Cynon Linc
Natural Landscape
Strong Community
Accessible Green Spaces Growing Hospitality Offer
High Quality Nearby Schools
Parking Listed Buildings
Aberdare Park St Elvan's Church
Central Library

Weaknesses

Large Retail Properties
Poor Parking on Pavements
Lack of Activities/Things To Do
Lack of mix of residents in town center
Conservation Area Rules Not Enforced Bus Connections
Links to Tourist Attractions - walking/cycling
Small number of businesses securing funding No Free Parking
Enforcement of Conservation Area Requirements
Lack of Understanding of Accessibility Challenges
Overall Town's Appearance
Weak Identity Negative Perception Vacant Buildings
Anti-Social Behavior Parking Charges
Theatre Physical Connections between Town Centre and nearby sites - DVCP, Museum
Lack of Variety of Shops Poor Signage
Advertising What's Going On
Poor Accessibility Visitor Information Disabled Access
Same Type of Shops Poor Shop Frontages
Absent Landlords Lack of Offer Derelict Buildings
Empty Shops Weak Connections between Organisations
Poor Connections to Wider Communities
No Cycle Hire Promotion of Community Activities
Public Transport Not Connected
Weak Partnership Working
Nothing for Young People

ABERDARE TOWN CENTRE:
SWOT Analysis

Opportunities

Strengthen routes to and from the town
Involve Young People More
Tourism/Visitor Opportunity Urdd - will drive footfall to RCT
Attract more independent businesses
Improve Directional Signage Market positive points of sale
Diversify the Offer Introduce Unique Offering
Cynon Gateway Cynon Valley Development Trust Bike Hire/Promote Active Travel
Identify land for food growing
South Wales Metro - Improved Connectivity
Localised Business Support Build on 'Green Town' Credentials Visitor Accommodation
Visit Wales 2023-2025 'Year of the Trails' Events
Temporary Uses
Promote Funding Opportunities
St Elvan's Enhance Pedestrian Routes Pop-Up Shops
Repurpose Large Vacant Properties Green Infrastructure
Enhance the Theatre Enhance Biodiversity Utilise Upper Floors of Building Make links stronger with nearby sites
Creative Industries/Arts Make it easier for people to access DVCP, Aberdare Park Electric Charging Points
Digitalisation Strong Tourism Opportunities
Aberdare BID Promote Natural Landscape Gateway Signage
Outdoor Dining
Health and Well-being Foster Inclusive Business Environment
Temporarily Closing Streets
Create an 'Aberdare' Brand Outdoor Market
Promote the Town's Heritage Improve Visitor Information Caradog Fest
Energy Efficiency Improvements Required CORE Business Hub
Introduce uses that respond to local needs First Floors of Shops
Strengthen links with Education Institutions Small-Scale Enterprise Units
Circular Economy - Reuse/Repair Initiatives
Could become 'destination town' Sustainable Initiatives to connect town to natural landscape
Keep Money in the Town Work with existing strong network of community groups
Encourage and Support Businesses to Move to the Town
Utilise Empty Houses + Town Centre Buildings
Listed buildings create strong character
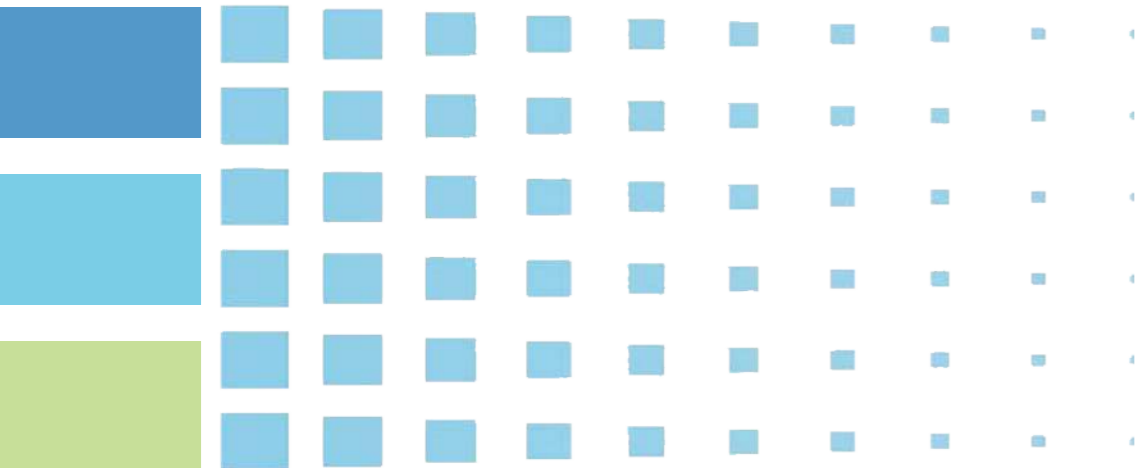Town serves several communities

Threats

Potential Bypassing of Town
Need for Balanced Housing Provision
Weak Partnership Working
Metro improvements could have adverse effects - commuter hub
Transition to electric cars Other Nearby Towns
Need for a Stronger Identity
Digitalisation - How Business Adopt New Technologies
Poor Bus Services
Changing Consumer Trends
Rise of Online Shopping
Lack of Funding Barriers for Local Business Growth & Innovation
Prioritisation of Economic outcomes over social and environmental
Rising Cost of Energy - Need to retrofit/improve energy efficiency
Market Restrictions Empty shops creating negative impression
Ongoing Impact of Covid-19
Decline of High Street Local Lettings Policies
Rising Poverty
Rent and Rates on Buildings
Community vs Commercial Cost of Living Crisis Ageing Population
Poor Health and Well-being Absent Landlords
Poor First Impressions Addressing of Accessibility Challenges
Weak Connections with Communities
Unique Place-Based Challenges

Strategy Development Process:

The diagram on this page illustrates the development process adopted by the Council in producing this Strategy. This process has been designed to ensure that proposed actions are targeted and achievable and that potential benefits are maximised. Previous pages have shown the range of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that have been identified from the programme of early engagement combined with comprehensive town analysis.

From this 'collaborative analysis' a series of priority challenges and opportunities have been identified. These have been grouped under the following headings:

- Overall Appearance & Town Identity
- Sustainable Towns & Communities
- Tourism & Visitor Economy
- Built Environment
- Business Development

Collaborative Analysis

Analysis of current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, informed by early engagement program and comprehensive analysis of principle factors such as the town's history and heritage, access/movement, built environment and existing amenities/facilities.

Priority Challenges & Opportunities

From the combined 'collaborative analysis' undertaken, a series of priority challenges and corresponding opportunities are to be identified in order to ensure that proposed interventions/initiatives are targeted.

Definition of Vision & Strategic Objectives

Once a series of 'Priority Challenges and Objectives' are identified, an overall vision for the future of Aberdare Town Centre is generated, along with corresponding strategic objectives, and is informed by the findings from the early engagement work.

Investment Themes

In order to achieve the vision/strategic objectives, a series of 'Investment Themes' are generated, informed by early engagement findings, to ensure future investment is focused and coordinated.

Actions

Within the proposed investment themes a series of deliverable actions, with corresponding implementation time-scales, are outlined.

Vision Realisation

Realisation of the strategies vision will be achieved upon the successful delivery of the proposed actions.

Strategy Process

Overall Appearance & Identity

A positive local, regional and national identity can significantly contribute to improving a town's overall attractiveness to perspective new businesses, residents and visitors. Aberdare Town Centre already has a pleasant and inviting appearance. However, more can be done to strengthen its local and regional identity as a great place to live, work and visit. The town's strong heritage, abundance of high quality buildings and proximity to outstanding natural landscapes place Aberdare in a strong position to establish itself as a regional destination.

Challenges:

Increasingly, in the context of increasing online consumerism, the role of town centres is being called into question with many starting to diversify their range of services and facilities to respond to changing circumstances. In parallel to this, the rise of online marketing platforms, including social media, has meant that more and more town centres are able to promote their offering, attracting visitors from further afield whilst establishing a strong identity.

Findings from the programme of early engagement undertaken show that stakeholders felt that, currently, Aberdare Town Centre does not have a strong, cohesive identity, with many insisting that Aberdare has lost its identity as a town with a 'quality offering' due to the relocation of several major retailers/banks from the town. Opportunities were also identified to further strengthen the town's overall appearance, building on recent invesment.

Many felt that the existence of poor shop frontages distributed within the town served to detract from the town's apperance. Concerns were also raised about comeptition from nearby towns and retail parks offering a diverse range of shops/amenities. Many felt that it is important for Aberdare Town Centre's unique selling points to be built upon if it is to be successful in attracting both shoppers and visitors in greater numbers.

At the other end of the spectrum, opportunities to improve several key locations within the town centre, associated with incidents of anti-social behaviour, were also identified.

Opportunities:

Opportunities exist to improve signage throughout the town centre. Way-finding signage was highlighted as one of the town's key weaknesses, during early engagement, with improvements could be made to directional signage to make it easier for people to find things within and around the town centre. Additionally, it was felt that the Welsh language could be better integrated into signage within the town. Opportunities also exisxt to enhance existing on-street activity, such as where Prince's Bakery faces onto the public realm at the top of Commercial Street, to bring more vibrancy to the town's street scene, increasing activity and providing new opportunities for on-street dining etc.

Clear opportunities also exist to strengthen Aberdare Town Centre's local and regional identity by investing in more innovative and engaging digital and physical marketing activities. This could better promote the range of activities, groups and events already ongoing within the town as well as inform people about new things. Feedback from a focus group of 15-16 year old residents highlighted the fact that the current promotion of the town's offering is not being received by the younger generation and therefore it is important that appropriate platforms are used to ensure that all generations are engaged. Critically, Aberdare Town Centre must establish and promote its 'unique selling point' / a reason for people to visit as well as providing a more diverse range of services and amenities for local and wider communities.

There are also clear opportunities, given the town centre's proximity to outstanding natural landscapes, nearby tourism attractions and walking/cycling trails, to establish Aberdare as a destination for visitors interested in active/adventure tourism. In this context, more could be done to increase the quality of visitor infrastructure within the town. This would support enhanced footfall as well as establishing/promoting a locally specific 'visit Aberdare brand.'
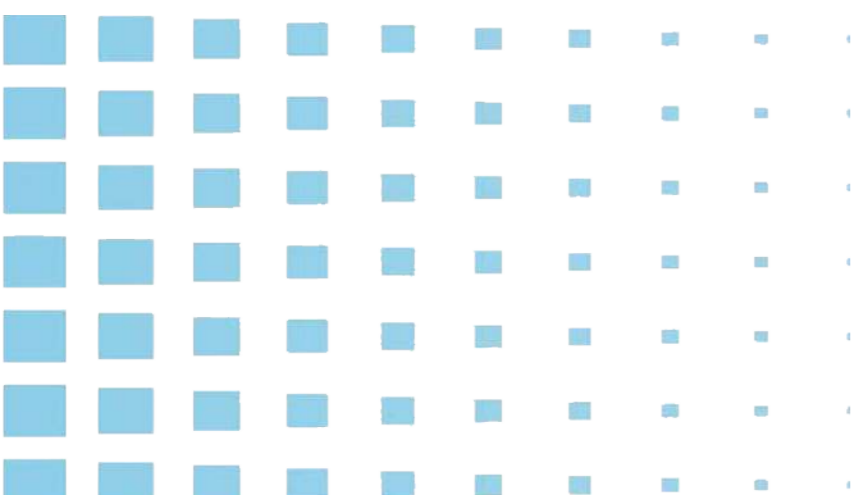
Sustainable Towns & Communities

In order for a town and its neighbouring communities to remain sustainable, actions are required to secure its economic, environmental and social security. The relationship of a local community with its town centre impacts its long-term economic sustainability and local communities are also vital actors in the fight against climate change: collective local endeavour having significant potential to reduce carbon emissions whilst delivering tangible social benefits.

Challenges:

The principal town of Aberdare serves several local communities in the upper Cynon Valley, providing essential services. Pressure on local health services will undoubtedly continue to rise, due in-part to RCT's ageing population, and it is vital that they remain readily accessible. Action is also needed to reduce overall demand on those services through encouraging healthier lifestyles and well-being, for example through encouragement of active travel options. Significant levels of 'out-commuting' by residents to employment opportunities outside of the borough is a key challenge, with most journeys made by car. Whilst the arrival of the South Wales Metro has potential to transform this, positive change could be slow to be realised unless safe and convenient arrangements are put in place to allow people to 'join-up' active travel and public transport modes.

Aberdare, like most other towns, is facing a cost-of-living crisis that brings with it clear challenges. Escalating energy prices are a key challenge: the poorest in society now facing unimaginable choices between paying for either energy or food. It is therefore essential that the town's future sustainability is secured if it is to continue to provide affordable services and local employment opportunities to the communities it supports.

The world continues to face a climate crisis which constitutes the greatest risk to future generations. Global action is clearly required to address this, but local level initiatives also have an important role to play in changing behaviours and, through that, to minimise adverse impacts upon local eco-systems and biodiversity. Aberdare's local communities have demonstrated their resourcefulness and resilience in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic: the ongoing challenge now is how best to harness and co-ordinate that powerful community spirit in generating implementable local solutions to global problems.

Opportunities:

Opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable lifestyles in Aberdare could take many forms. Improvement of key active travel routes between the town and nearby destinations such as Dare Valley Country Park, combined with enhanced cycle hire provision and storage facilities at key transport nodes, e.g. train station, would make it easier for people to reduce their carbon footprint. Access to sources of affordable food, supportive of a healthy diet, is also a key requirement. Local food production, orchestrated at sufficient scale, could help address the needs of the poorest in society whilst also supplying local businesses, thereby reducing their reliance on large retailers whilst helping retain money within the local economy. If supported by a targeted promotional initiative, linked to the RCTCBC Tourism Strategy, the town might also establish a reputation as a sustainable food destination.

Opportunities exist to build on the strong voluntary effort of the local community, evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, to engage local people directly in efforts aimed at enhancing the town centre 'offer.' Examples might include the introduction of free walking tours, led by local volunteers, to help connect visitors with the town's heritage. Reuse and repair initiatives also present opportunities for communities to work together to establish a stronger circular economy, supported by existing close-knit communities. Reducing the town centre's reliance on non-renewable energy sources is essential to increase the towns environmental sustainability and resilience. The Cynon Valley has already been the focus of considerable investment in renewable energy generation. In the context of cost-of-living pressures, potential exists to enhance the sustainability of both households and businesses through exploration of 'locally-owned' renewable energy generation schemes, together with the introduction of energy efficiency measures for existing and proposed developments. Such measures would make a positive contribution to achievement of the RCTCBC target of achieving 'net zero' by 2030.

Looking forward, it will be essential that local businesses continue to be supported by the Authority and by the local community if they are to recover and flourish. Partnerships between the public and private sectors and community groups have proved vital during the pandemic and need to be built upon to address the challenges and opportunities that now lie ahead.
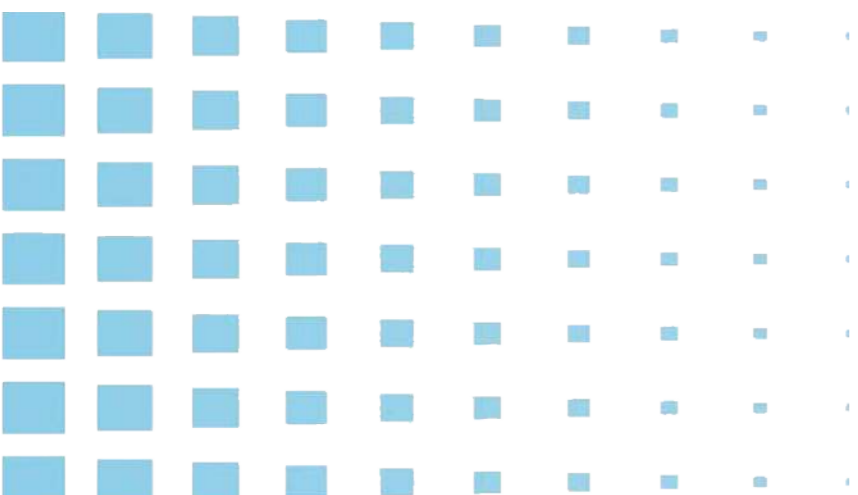
Tourism & Visitor Economy

Tourism and the wider visitor economy has significant potential to improve the sustainability of towns through generating enhanced footfall and increased income generation. Aberdare's rich history and heritage, together with its close proximity to neighbouring visitor attractions and outstanding natural landscape offer clear opportunities to strengthen its regional and local identity as a great place to visit and stay!

Challenges:

People are drawn to areas by virtue of their history and heritage, with the industrial and social legacy of the South Wales Coalfield providing a solid platform upon which to construct an outstanding heritage tourism offer. Aberdare has a number of interesting heritage attractions including the Coliseum Theatre, Aberdare Market and Cynon Valley Museum around which an enhanced tourism offer could be developed.

However, the town's heritage in many ways remains hidden, with interpretation and visitor information needing to be improved if the town's story is to be brought to life. The lack of a clear point of focus for visitors to find out key information, such as a 'visitor information point', makes it difficult for visitors to engage fully with attractions, activities and events in the town. Additionally, it is evident that more could be done to notify visitors and local residents of the diverse, existing offering contained within Aberdare Market.

Additional quality visitor accommodation is also required to convert day visitors to overnight stays on any meaningful scale. Similarly, if the town is to attract and retain additional visitor income, expansion of both the range and quality of dining, cultural and leisure opportunities will be required.

Opportunities:

As a principal town, Aberdare plays an important supporting role to nearby visitor attractions and has potential to become a strong visitor destination in its own right. Key, unique facilities such as the historic Aberdare Market have the potential to contribute greatly to establishing Aberdare Town Centre as a great place to visit. However, opportunities exist to enhance several key facilities within the Town Centre to increase their 'presence' and contribution to the creation of a stronger identity for the town.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, greater numbers of people are choosing to explore tourism and leisure opportunities closer to home. Recent investments in adventure tourism attractions, such as Dare Valley Country park and Zip World at Tower Colliery and Bike Park Wales, are bringing new visitors to the area. These visitors add to the numbers that already visit the Brecon Beacons National Park and there is clear potential for Aberdare to capture a greater share of associated tourism spend through which to bolster its financial sustainability.

However, continued investment in essential visitor facilities is required if overnight stays and repeat visits are to be generated, with the local business community having a key role to play in enhancing and diversifying the visitor offer. Greater tourism-related activity and investment offers the prospect of additional local employment opportunities and achievement of a quality tourism offer can be supported through partnerships between businesses and local educational institutions ensuring availability of sufficient, properly trained staff.

Opportunities also exist to strengthen and diversify the existing programme of activities and events in the town which, supported by enhanced marketing, would help to bring the town centre to life, highlighting its unique character and heritage and helping to increase footfall. The implementation of a joined-up approach to the tourism and leisure offer, as outlined in the RCTCBC Tourism Strategy, would further help integrate town centre activities with nearby attractions.
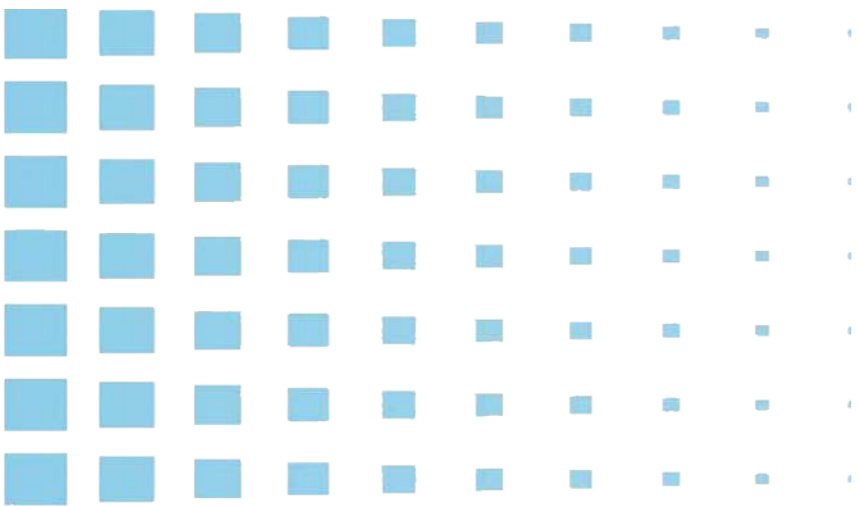
Built Environment

The quality of a town's built environment contributes greatly to its unique character, defines its physical identity and helps determine its attractiveness to residents, visitors, businesses and investors. Aberdare has an abundance of high-quality listed buildings, many of which are concentrated within the Town Centre Conservation Area and which contribute to the attractive townscape environment focused around the central St Elvan's church.

Challenges:

Aberdare town centre, unlike many Valley's towns, is not linear but rather 'oval' in form with St Elvan's church acting as a central focal point. This 'inward-looking' form unfortunately causes the town to 'turn its back' on approaching visitors resulting in critical interfaces at a number of key gateways to the town which need careful management. Although some improvements have been made at these key gateways, more could be done to create a positive welcome and to communicate the town's full offering.

Between 2010-2015, significant regeneration efforts under the Townscape Enhancement Programme brought many former vacant/derelict buildings back into use. These included the former Town Hall and highlighted how the regeneration of such buildings can help to re-vitalise an area through provision of additional residential and commercial accommodation. However, challenges associated with vacant properties are still evident within the town.

Additionally, prominent under-utilised sites currently punctuate and weaken the town's built form. Many upper floors of town centre properties remain vacant/underutilised yet are capable of being brought back into beneficial use. Further action therefore needs to be taken to address vacant properties, underutilised sites and upper floors of shops in the town centre as these continue to detract from both the street scene and visitor experience.

Considerable efforts have already been made to preserve and enhance the appearance of the Aberdare Town Centre Conservation Area through targeted support for shop frontage and signage upgrades. However, some shop frontages remain in a poor state and detract from the street scene in what is otherwise a high-quality built environment. More needs to be done to enforce the conservation area requirements and to establish a stronger, more cohesive overall aesthetic.

Opportunities:

Density of the built form within town centres contributes to perceptions of vibrancy and activity. In this context, every effort should be made to maximise the use of existing buildings, including through the re-purposing of underutilised sites and premises.

There is considerable potential to build on current momentum, evident in the ongoing redevelopment of key buildings such as the Black Lion Hotel and the former Boot Hotel, to secure successful mixed-use redevelopment of vacant and/or under-utilised properties.

Opportunities also exist to re-purpose larger vacant retail units to provide smaller scale, more marketable accommodation, suitable for a range of new local business ventures. This would help to optimise the town centre offer through provision of a wider range of services and amenities. Further opportunities exist to diversify and intensify activity in the town centre through utilisation of vacant upper floors to create new accommodation for businesses, visitors and local people.

Potential to further enhance the appearance of key gateways to the Town Centre to ensure visitors are greeted with a warm welcome and provided with clear information about what to see and do in the town.
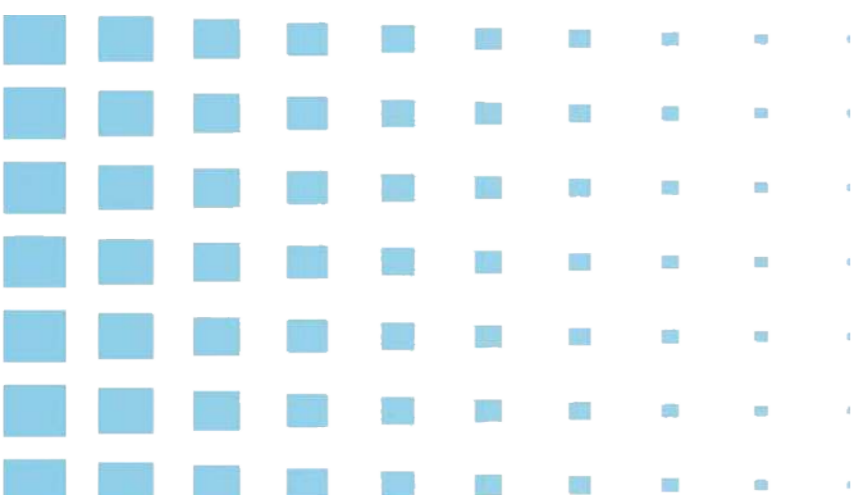
Business Development

Businesses are the 'lifeblood' of the town centre and have shown remarkable resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they now face further challenges as the cost of living soars, along with economic and business uncertainty. Aberdare's strong independent businesses, as represented in the 'Our Aberdare' Business Improvement District (BID), established in 2020, have a critical role to play in shaping the town's continued success.

Definitions

Smart Towns: New digital infrastructure, supported by Welsh Government, that will allow the town to collect more sophisticated data about itself which can enable town centre stakeholders to make better business decisions, based on this data.

Challenges:

Long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the effect of the more recent cost of living crisis are clear challenges that continue to face Aberdare's business community. However, whilst such events have and continue to have great influence on consumer habits, such as clear growth in online shopping, the resultant outcomes also offer new opportunities for local businesses. Newly vacant premises, within the town centre, have the potential to be re-purposed to made suitable for smaller, more local enterprises.

The rise of ecommerce and changes in consumer demands therefore continue to represent a key challenge with the adoption and integration of digital technology in the delivery of goods and services essential if the town's businesses are to remain competitive.

Aberdare's business community continues to show strong resilience in the face of adversity. This is a unique asset which can be built upon and sustained resilience will depend, in part, on the diversity of town centre businesses, the uniqueness of their offering and the quality and range of goods and services they provide. This in turn necessitates availability of suitable business accommodation together with skilled staff and access to appropriate financial assistance. To create a more diverse business base, it will be necessary to continue to support existing business, attract and retain new businesses to the town and support the creation of locally owned business ventures.

There is also a need to address the development of more visitor accommodation and increase opportunities for businesses to improve their offer.

Opportunities:

Aberdare's existing network of independent businesses is a huge asset and contributes significantly to the town's 'sense of place'. The 'Our Aberdare' BID, established in 2020, plays a key role in facilitating and coordinating local business efforts in shaping the towns' future. Opportunities exist to work further with the BID to support the diversification of existing businesses, including via the adoption of a Digital Business Agenda. The use of digital technology within town centres, especially via the 'Smart Towns' initiative, presents a clear opportunity for towns to operate more efficiently, resulting in local businesses being able to generate competitive advantages. Additionally, opportunities exist to enhance 'wrap around' business support, to ensure that local businesses know where, who and how to get support.

The new South Wales Metro and the growing nearby adventure tourism-based offering also has the potential to significantly increase visitor numbers and therefore it is essential that the town develops a stronger offer to satisfy potential demand. Opportunities exist to build upon the resilience and collective spirit shown by the Aberdare business community throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to create local-level learning and innovation networks to support local business growth and diversification. The existing strong network of local businesses also presents an opportunity for the exploration of 'buy local' initiatives to capture spend within the town centre and to generate and retain value within the wider community. Partnership approaches to business development provide opportunities to maximise benefits from future investments.

To attract and retain new enterprises, the diversification of the town centre's business premises offering will be essential. Vacant upper floors of shops provide opportunities to create additional business and business-linked residential accommodation. Vacant retail units can provide opportunities for temporary pop-up shops and events that provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to test new ventures and for arts/culture to have a stronger presence on the high street. In addition, the growing percentage of people 'working from home' has potential to support the creation of central shared workspaces.
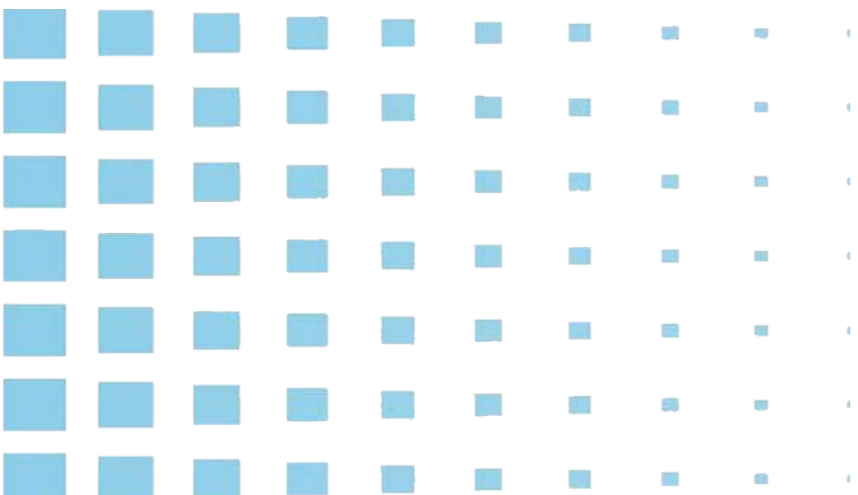
Section 3:

Vision, Objectives & Implementation

This section sets out our collective vision of the role that Aberdare Town Centre will play in the future and the steps that need to be taken for that to happen.

3

Vision & Objectives

The purpose of this section is to set out a vision for the continued improvement of Aberdare Town Centre. The strategy aims to provide a framework to help effectively co-ordinate regeneration efforts, whilst positively harnessing the town's assets to strengthen its local and regional identity.

"To build upon Aberdare's unique heritage and strategic location to create a more vibrant, dynamic and attractive destination for both local residents and visitors to the area."

Central to realisation of the vision is the ability to create a sense of place by boosting perceptions and experiences of the town, through generating a positive environment in which to live, work, visit and invest. The vision aims to rejuvenate and sustain the town centre, grow the local economy, increase job opportunities and provide for town centre living. The development of new sites and refurbishment of existing properties across the town will be a catalyst for change.

Strategic Objectives

To achieve this vision and to address some of the challenges identified in section 2, this strategy is supported by a series of strategic objectives that will drive its delivery and translate directly into a series of investment themes:

1 To improve the sustainability of Aberdare town centre through increasing visitor footfall and capturing a greater share of visitor spend. This includes:

- Developing a variety of high-quality visitor accommodation offerings.
- Enhancing the night-time economy through the introduction of a more diverse range of dining, leisure and cultural experiences.
- Enhancing existing heritage assets, within the town, to create a stronger identity of Aberdare attractions.
- Supporting independent businesses to respond to the tourism opportunity.
- Ensuring local people have the skills to obtain work in the tourism sector, working in partnership with local educational establishments.
- Creating an visitor information and welcome point within the town.
- Improving interpretation of the town's heritage assets.
- Effectively marketing an enhanced programme of town centre events and activities.

2 To maximise the utilisation of sites and premises within the town centre to diversify and intensify the range of services and amenities available to local people and visitors to the town. This includes:

- Re-purposing existing buildings and underutilised sites including for mixed-use developments where appropriate, combined with the integration of energy efficiency measures.
- Subdivision of vacant, large premises to optimise opportunities for smaller enterprises to make better use of such accomodation.
- Exploring ways through which vacant upper floors of buildings might be used to support the creation of new businesses or to provide tourist accommodation that can help breathe new life into the town.
- Protecting and enhancing the architectural quality of the town centre conservation area thereby maximising the contribution of historic buildings to the towns unique character and attractiveness.
- Enhancing visitors' arrival experiences through targeted investment in key gateways to the town centre.

Strategic Objectives

3 To improve utilisation and safe use of public spaces and amenities through enhancing street-level activity and the provision of better connections with nearby destinations. This includes:

- Developing an annual dynamic programme of activities and events aimed at both residents and visitors which utilise high quality public spaces.
- Supporting the development of enhanced outdoor café/dining culture in and around the Market.
- Opening up vistas and accessibility to the Dare River to provide opportunities for increased wellbeing.
- Promoting active travel to the town through improving facilities for cycling and walking so that is safe and attractive for shorter journeys. This includes physical improvements to routes where necessary.
- Explore options to enhance street lighting on key pathways/streets etc.

4 To support the development of a greater variety of businesses within the town that satisfy emerging opportunities from both growing visitor demands and local needs. This includes:

- Ensuring that business accommodation is fit for purpose.
- Supporting partnership approaches to business and community development, with a particular focus on social enterprise.
- Taking steps to support a 'buy local initiative' with the aim of keeping money within the local economy.
- Creating more innovative mean-while uses within the town centre to increase the variety of the town's offer and encourage repeat visits.
- Working with local businesses to increase their capacity to utilise digital technology to maximise potential benefits from a growing visitor economy and tourism industry.
- Exploring how the 'SMART Towns' initiative can increase efficiency of services within the town. *(See definition of SMART Towns on page 27).*
- Introducing more diverse amenities to the high-street, including the night-time economy, to support a wider range of activities that contribute to the town centres sustainability and resilience.
- Working with local communities to promote waste reduction (including reuse as part of circular economy initiatives).

5 To enhance Aberdare Town Centre's overall appearance and identity as a great place to live, work and visit. This includes:

- Improving the visitor arrival experience at key gateways to the town via targeted investment.
- Improving street level way finding signage to ensure that visitors can easily find businesses and local attractions.
- Enhancing provision for the speaking of the Welsh Language within the town.
- Protection of green spaces and enhancement of local biodiversity in key areas within the town.
- Involvement of the local community, particularly the younger generation, to explore ideas around boosting Aberdare's profile within the region utilising digital technologies.
- Improved promotion of the diverse range of existing activities/events already and establish a coordinated approach to the promotion of future activities and events.
- Work with the local and wider communities to explore ways in which Aberdare Town Centre's identity can be strengthened as a great place to live, work and visit.
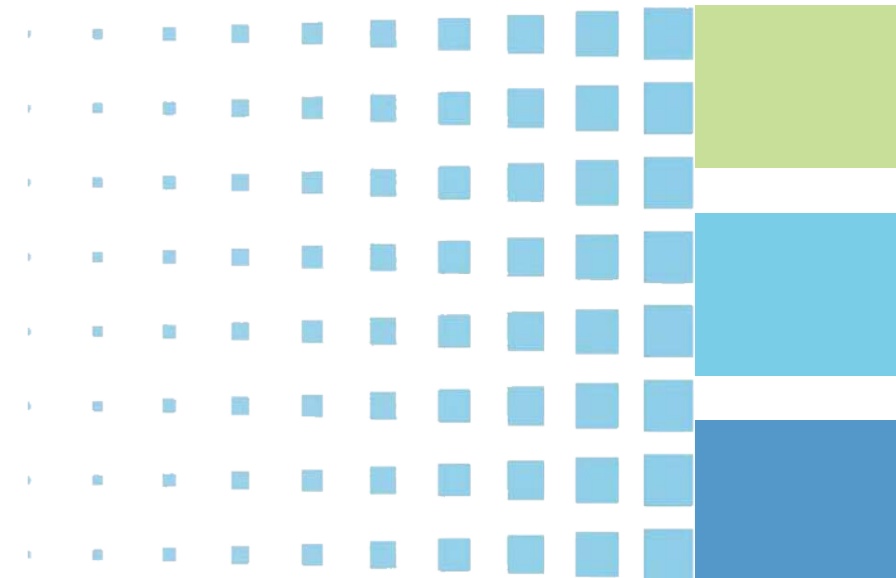
Making It Happen: The Key Themes

This Aberdare Town Centre Strategy is both ambitious and realistic in its approach. The strategies vision and objectives for the town cannot be achieved via one simple scheme. Instead, it demands the implementation of a range of co-ordinated and integrated development themes.

The following themes have therefore been identified that, if delivered, will be the most effective at bringing about the desired change in Aberdare Town Centre for future generations. It is important to note, that the theme of **Sustainability** will be a key consideration for the successful realisation of all themes.

Theme One

The redevelopment and re-use of existing under-utilised, vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre to accommodate high quality restaurants, visitor accommodation, workspaces and a unique retail offering.

There are several vacant or underutilised properties within Aberdare Town Centre, particularly along Cardiff Street and at other key locations, such as those looking out onto Victoria Square. These properties provide opportunities to explore mixed-used developments, incorporating energy efficiency measures and sustainable construction processes, that combine commercial and retail offerings on the ground floor with reuse of vacant floor space at upper levels, potentially for workspace or tourism / residential use. Prominent sites, such as 'Rock Grounds', provide further opportunities to explore the creation of new high-quality visitor accommodation, dining experiences and cultural/leisure offerings.

A 'mixed-use' approach to redevelopment of such properties has the potential to strengthen and diversify the existing business base and visitor offering. Resultant reduced dependency on predominantly retail activities will increase the town's resilience to external shock, increasing the town's future sustainability. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the vitality of the town, increasing footfall due to a larger offering and creating new local employment opportunities. Additionally, temporary or 'mean-while' use of vacant properties will be explored to make the high street more dynamic.

Approximate implementation times scales:
Short to medium term (0-6 years)

Theme Two

Working with Aberdare's local business and wider community to bring the story of Aberdare to life, making the town's heritage and offering more visible and strengthening its Conservation Area. The project will consist of enhanced interpretation, creative story-telling and physical improvements to key elements of the townscape.

Aberdare has a unique history, represented today through its numerous listed buildings, chapels and historical sites which offer visitors an insight into its past. These assets have potential to help differentiate Aberdare as a high-quality destination for local people and visitors alike. New financial support and increased enforcement of conservation area requirements will ensure that property owners undertake physical and aesthetic improvements that positively contribute to the town's overall appearance. As part of a coordinated programme, individual projects will contribute to celebrating the town's historic industries and long-standing businesses using creative, visual, storytelling techniques that bring the town's history and heritage to life. The programme will also support enhancement of key gateways to the town to improve the visitor arrival experience. Opportunities will be explored to engage with local arts and creative groups and organisations as part of this theme.

Approximate implementation times scales:
Short term (0-3 years)

Theme Three

Strengthening Aberdare Town Centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit through enhancing the visitor experience, building on the existing and growing tourism offer and enhancing marketing and promotion.

This theme aims to provide enhanced visitor infrastructure within and around Aberdare town centre coupled with enhanced marketing and promotion to ensure that local people and potential visitors are made aware of the attractions and activities on offer. This will encourage and enable visitors to engage with the full range of existing and new experiences in Aberdare and its surrounding area. Exploration of enhanced of opportunities to learn and speak the Welsh Language within the town through a 'have a go' approach, will aim to draw on this unique asset. The Council will work with groups and organisations, including those representing the younger generation, to explore ideas through which to boost Aberdare's profile within the region taking full advantage of digital technology to engage with new opportunities and users.

Approximate implementation times scales:
Short/Medium term (2-4 years)

Theme Four

Improvement and promotion of active travel routes and provision of enhanced wayfinding signage within the town centre and to nearby destinations, such as Dare Valley Country Park, Cynon Valley Museum, Coliseum Theatre and Aberdare Park, along with enhancement of facilities for those choosing to take sustainable modes of transport, i.e. electric vehicles, cycling, park and ride etc.

Improvement and promotion of existing and new active travel routes between the town centre and nearby destinations will improve both visitor and residents' awareness of what the town has to offer. The enhancement of facilities to support sustainable modes of travel, such as additional electrical charging and bike storage facilities in the town, will encourage and enable people to utilise active travel routes more easily, contributing to reducing visitors carbon footprint. Improved physical links between the town centre and Aberdare's existing and developing tourism offer, combined with new signage and promotion of such connections, will help to get visitors to spend longer in the area and help to convert day visits to overnight stays.

Enhanced active travel routes will also utilise the local outstanding natural environment to provide opportunities for increased well-being and learning experiences regarding the biodiversity along such routes. Residents in nearby communities will be encouraged to use Aberdare as a hub for inter-modal travel through improvements to connections between travel modes, e.g. park and ride, reducing car usage and carbon emissions.

Approximate implementation times scales:
Short/Medium term (3-6 years)

Theme Five

Further enhancement of public open space in the town centre, including via landscape improvements aimed at increasing bio-diversity and creating high quality areas capable of supporting new business activities, leisure opportunities and hosting programmes of events through which to animate the town.

This theme will support the creation of outside dining options and café culture in targeted locations, such as around the Market, to increase on-street activity. Opportunities will be provided to engage the local community in supporting the town centre, for example through integrating community gardening initiatives within landscape improvement proposals the town centre. Proposals will be explored for the enhancement of underutilised public spaces to improve their role in supporting the town's annual programme of events and contributing to a unique streetscape. Increased access and visibility to the Dare River will also provide additional high-quality public realm. Work will be undertaken with Aberdare's communities, particularly the younger generation, to generate local solutions to global challenges (such as climate change). This will include for example protection of green spaces and enhancement of local biodiversity in key areas within the town.

Approximate implementation times scales:
Medium term (4-6 years)

Theme Six

Exploration of partnerships between public, private, educational and community actors, building on the existing good work of the 'Our Aberdare' BID to support new initiatives such as those associated with social enterprise together with those aimed at supporting local businesses to make the best of emerging opportunities, such tourism and the visitor economy.

Innovative partnerships between existing local businesses, the public sector and community groups will be needed if the integrated aims of this strategy are to be realised. This will require leadership, sustained effort and the allocation of appropriate resources. This project will aim to increase involvement with and ownership of the town's regeneration efforts through supporting and building on the work of the 'Our Aberdare BID'. Partnership approaches will be supported that look to connect the strong existing network of independent businesses with high-quality education institutions and targeted community development initiatives. Opportunities to support social enterprise initiatives will be identified as part of this partnership approach together with exploration of a 'buy local initiative' with the aim of keeping money within the local economy.
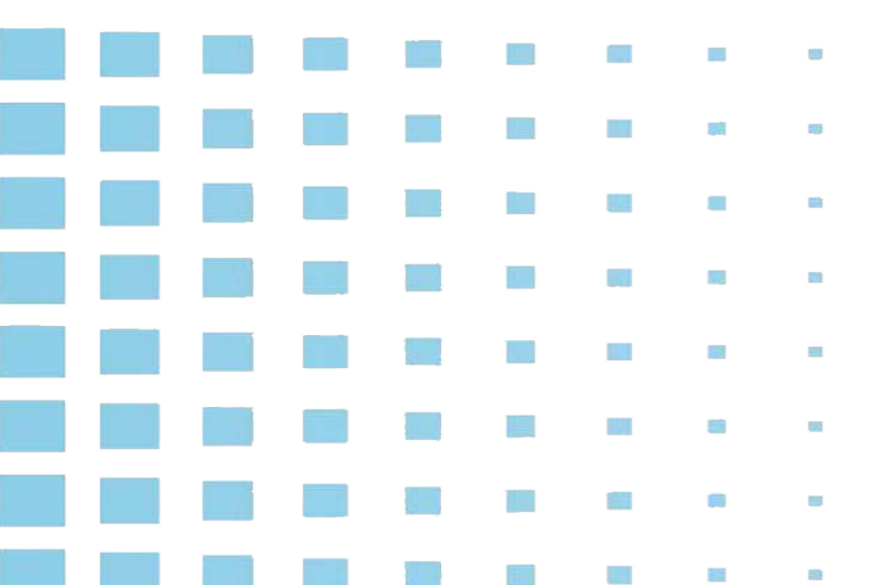
Opportunities to provide increased support to independent businesses will be explored to enable them to respond and maximise benefits from emerging opportunities, such as tourism. This will include identification of opportunities to help Aberdare's businesses adopt and implement a 'Digital Business Agenda.' Such initiatives may involve businesses learning from each other and the creation of new 'home grown' enterprises that respond to changing consumer demands. In conjunction, it will be essential that local people have the skills to engage with growing employment opportunities in emerging sectors. Therefore, partnerships may be explored with local educational establishments to identify and address skills needs and shortages.

Approximate implementation times scales:
Short/Medium term (2-4 years)

Implementation Plan

The implementation plan sets out each theme, along with an indication of the delivery time-scales and which strategic objectives the theme supports.
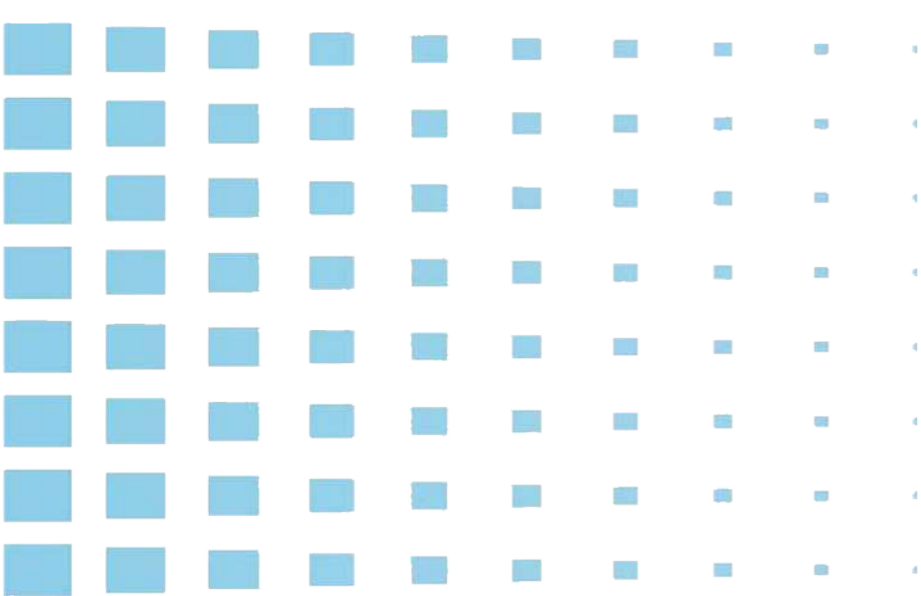
THEME		DESCRIPTION	CONTRIBUTIONS TO OBJECTIVES					SHORT TERM 0-3 yrs			MEDIUM TERM 4-6 yrs			LONG TERM 7+ yrs		
			1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
ONE	The redevelopment and re-use of existing under-utilised, vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre to accommodate high quality restaurants, visitor accommodation, workspaces and a unique retail offering.	There are several vacant and/or underutilised properties/sites in Aberdare Town centre which have the potential to be redeveloped into mixed-use developments that will help to diversify amenities within the town.	✔	✔		✔	✔									
TWO	Working with Aberdare's local business and wider community to bring the story of Aberdare to life, making the town's heritage more visible and strengthening its Conservation Area. The project will consist of enhanced interpretation, creative story-telling and physical improvements to key elements of the townscape combined with enforcement of conservation principles.	Working with Aberdare's local business and wider community Aberdare's unique story will be brought to life through enhanced interpretation, creative story-telling and physical improvements to key elements of the townscape.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔									
THREE	Strengthening Aberdare Town Centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit through enhancing the visitor experience, building on the existing and growing tourism offer and enhancing marketing and promotion.	The project will provide enhanced visitor infrastructure within and around Aberdare town centre to ensure that visitors are aware of the attractions and activities on offer. This will encourage and enable visitors to engage with the full range of existing and new experiences in Aberdare and its surrounding area.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔									

Implementation Plan

	PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	CONTRIBUTIONS TO OBJECTIVES					SHORT TERM 0-3 yrs			MEDIUM TERM 4-6 yrs			LONG TERM 7+ yrs
			1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
FOUR	Improvement and promotion of active travel routes and provision of enhanced wayfinding signage within the town centre and to nearby destinations, including Dare Valley Country Park, Cynon Valley Museum, Coliseum Theatre and Aberdare Park, along with enhancement of facilities for those choosing to take sustainable modes of transport, i.e. electric vehicles, cycling, park and ride etc.	Improvement/promotion of existing and new key routes between the town centre and nearby destinations will encourage visitors and residents to explore what Aberdare has to offer! This project will aim to make it easier for visitors/residents to use sustainable modes of transport to travel in and around Aberdare which will reduce visitors/residents carbon footprint.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔				●	●	●	
FIVE	Further enhancement of existing public open space in the town centre, including via landscape improvements aimed at increasing bio-diversity and creating high quality areas capable of supporting new business activities, leisure opportunities and hosting programmes of events through which to animate the town.	This project will support the creation of outside dining options and café culture in targeted locations to increase on-street activity. Proposals will be explored for the enhancement of underutilised public spaces to improve their role in supporting the town's annual programme of events and contributing to a unique streetscape. Increased access and visibility to the Dare River will also provide additional high-quality public realm.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔				●	●	●	
SIX	Exploration of partnerships between public, private, educational and community actors, building on the existing good work of the 'Our Aberdare' BID to support new initiatives such as those associated with social enterprise together with those aimed at supporting local businesses to make the best of emerging opportunities, such tourism and the visitor economy.	New initiatives, established via partnership approaches, will aim to support local businesses to make the best of existing and emerging opportunities, such as social enterprise, tourism, the visitor economy and the 'Digital Business Agenda.'	✔	✔		✔	✔				●	●	●	

Evaluation

Each theme has been evaluated against the Well-being of Future Generations Act's (2015) 'Severn Social Well-being goals'. This evaluation illustrates how the proposed investment themes ensure that future investment within Aberdare Town Centre will contribute to the Well-being of Future Generations.

Themes	1. A Prosperous Wales	2. A Resilient Wales	3. A More Equal Wales	4. A Healthier Wales	5. A Wales of Cohesive Communities	6. A Wales of Vibrant Culture & A Thriving Welsh Language	7. A Globally Responsible Wales
ONE The redevelopment and re-use of existing under-utilised, vacant or derelict buildings within the town centre to accommodate high quality restaurants, visitor accommodation, workspaces and a unique retail offering.	Capital investment will stimulate local employment and training opportunities whilst respecting sustainable development principles through the reuse of existing structures and local materials wherever possible.	Enhancing the town's 'offer' through the creation of a more diverse portfolio of accommodation and activities will serve to bolster its resilience in the face of economic, social and environmental challenges.	Enhanced provision of a great variety of commercial accommodation will enable a great variety of enterprises to test and develop commercial concepts within the town. Attraction of new businesses will also stimulate enhancement local employment opportunities.	Redevelopment of key, vacant properties within the town will create new, high quality workspaces/commercial accommodation which are centrally located and easily accessible. This will in turn support occupiers physical and mental well-being.	Enhancing the town's 'offer' via provision of a greater variety of commercial accommodation will enhance the town's attractiveness due to increased activity and vibrancy. Increased occupancy will improve the town's financial sustainability.	Diversification of the towns 'offer' via improved commercial accommodation will generate opportunities to protect and promote the town's unique culture and heritage as well as enhanced promotion of the Welsh Language.	Redevelopment and re-use of existing buildings and structures within the town centre will ensure that global resource limits are respected. Every effort will be made to use locally sourced materials and labour.
TWO Working with Aberdare's local business and wider community to bring the story of Aberdare to life, making the town's heritage more visible and strengthening its Conservation Area. The project will consist of enhanced interpretation, creative story-telling and physical improvements to key elements of the townscape combined with enforcement of conservation principles.	Related actions will stimulate growth in the visitor and tourism economy and contribute to the economic success of the town and its people. An emphasis on conservation of the town's historic built fabric will be consistent with sustainability objectives.	Recognition of the town's heritage will play a fundamental role in creating its future USP. This will be supported by targeted investment aimed at conserving important structures within the town that embody its heritage. Through becoming more attractive as a destination the town will in turn become more resilient.	Related actions to the enhancement and promotion of Aberdare's history and heritage will generate opportunities for local residents to gain new skills. Projects to support the theme's objectives will be developed in collaboration with the local and wider communities of Aberdare.	Increased visibility of the town's unique heritage and historical significance will stimulate greater connections between different generations within the town. Storytelling will be used as a key method to support local people's well-being and metal health to address the town's past whilst also exploring future aspirations.	Enhancement of the town's unique conservation area will strongly improve the attractiveness of the town whilst also ensuring that all buildings are safe and secure. The creative storytelling of Aberdare's history and heritage will present opportunities to connect local communities with shared histories.	The celebration of the town's unique history and heritage will strongly contribute to the establishment of a vibrant streetscene, celebrating welsh culture. Creative storytelling methods will look to integrate the Welsh Language more strongly in various locations within the town to encourage residents and visitors to 'have a go' at learning and speaking Welsh.	These activities, aimed at celebrating Aberdare and Wales' unique history and heritage will not impact negatively from a global perspective.
THREE Strengthening Aberdare Town Centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit through enhancing the visitor experience, building on the existing and growing tourism offer and enhancing marketing and promotion.	A stronger and more vibrant tourism economy offers the prospect of more secure and varied employment and training opportunities for local residents. Achievement of this goal rests in part upon the successful enhancement, protection, promotion and utilisation of Aberdare's natural assets.	For Aberdare Town Centre to become more resilient it has to address and reverse current trends that negatively effect it. Considerable opportunities exist within the Cardiff Capital Region for the town to reposition itself as an accessible and desirable place to live, work and visit.	Increased awareness of the town centre and surrounding area's offer will stimulate increased visitor numbers, in turn attracting new enterprises to the town. Such new enterprise will generate local employment opportunities for which local people will be supported to take full advantage of.	An enhanced activity and adventure based tourism offer will provide opportunities to support peoples mental health and well-being, utilising the outstanding natural landscape surrounding the town centre. Promotion of trails, bicycle routes and green spaces in and around the town will also be explored.	Establishing Aberdare Town Centre as a key destination within visitor's itineraries will increase the economic sustainability of the town via a reduced reliance on retail trade. Increased activity, including via an enhanced night time economy, will increase 'eyes on the street' reducing opportunities for anti-social behaviour.	In order to strengthen Aberdare Town Centre's identity as a desirable place to live, work and visit promotion of the town's unique heritage and culture will be essential. Capitalising on regional and local opportunities, such as the National Eisteddfod in 2024, to promote the town's culture and identity will be fully explored.	Improved indigenous tourism facilities will help offset international travel particularly in the context of the 'staycation' trend following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Evaluation

Theme	1. A Prosperous Wales	2. A Resilient Wales	3. A More Equal Wales	4. A Healthier Wales	5. A Wales of Cohesive Communities	6. A Wales of Vibrant Culture & A Thriving Welsh Language	7. A Globally Responsible Wales
FOUR Improvement and promotion of active travel routes and provision of enhanced wayfinding signage within the town centre and to nearby destinations, including Dare Valley Country Park, Cynon Valley Museum, Coliseum Theatre and Aberdare Park, along with enhancement of facilities for those choosing to take sustainable modes of transport, i.e. electric vehicles, cycling, park and ride etc.	Enhancing the ease with which local journeys can be made via sustainable travel options will have the affect of improving the health of local residents and contribute to reduction of carbon emissions. Related investments will provide business and employment opportunities.	An emphasis on sustainable and active travel will benefit local people and visitors alike in terms of improving air quality, health and well-being and making local travel more affordable and accessible.	Improved connection in and around the town centre will make it easier for people, without access to a car, to travel to local and further afield employment opportunities. Targeted investments to improve the quality of active travel routes will also ensure that they are fully accessible to all.	Better pedestrian and cycle connection between the town centre and nearby sites such as DVCP and Aberdare Park will make it easier for people to access high quality green spaces which are proven to support enhanced mental health and well-being.	Targeted investments to improve the quality of pedestrian and cycle routes to and from the town centre will ensure that such routes are safe to use at all times of day. Improved connectivity between the town and surrounding communities will help to ensure that the town centre is accessible to all.	Enhancement of active travel routes in and around the town centre will encourage residents and visitors to take part in sports and recreational activities. Aberdare's outstanding natural landscape and high quality green spaces will also support outdoor recreational activities. New improved signage will also make it easier for both English and Welsh speakers to navigate the town centre.	Investment in coordinated active travel routes will help to reduce carbon emission and contribute to the global response to climate change.
FIVE Further enhancement of existing public open space in the town centre, including via landscape improvements aimed at increasing bio-diversity and creating high quality areas capable of supporting new business activities, leisure opportunities and hosting programmes of events through which to animate the town.	Community ownership and action will be stimulated through engagement in a variety of sustainably driven collaborative projects aimed enhancing and supporting the town's biodiversity. Together with a program of events, this will enhance the town's attractiveness to visitors and help underpin the local economy.	The strategy will build upon earlier public realm investments in further enhancing the town's biodiversity through local level sustainability initiatives. Events programs will add to the town's attractiveness and 'offer' and help underpin its retail, leisure and visitor economy.	The delivery of town centre based sustainable projects, such as the enhancements of biodiversity/planting, will ensure that such projects are accessible to all due to the town's accessible location. Events will also provide enhanced opportunities for local people to learn new skills.	Integration of greenery and landscaping within the town centre will positively contribute to increasing the overall quality of the town's built environment. This will make the town a more pleasant place to spend time and encourage visitors to utilise outdoor spaces for interaction and activities.	Enhanced public open spaces within the town will enable a dynamic changing programme of events to be delivered. Such events will establish strong connections with nearby communities to reinforce Aberdare Town Centre's role as the principle town within northern RCT.	The enhancement of public open spaces within the town centre will provide increased opportunities for annual events that celebrate the town and wider area's history, heritage and culture. Welsh language events will also be incorporated into the annual program. Local sustainable projects will also explore the integration of the Welsh Language more prominently within the town.	Promotion of opportunities for people and communities to engage with local level sustainable initiatives will help support a change in behaviours and in turn contribute to the global response to climate change.
SIX Exploration of partnerships between public, private, educational and community actors, building on the existing good work of the 'Our Aberdare' BID to support new initiatives such as those associated with social enterprise together with those aimed at supporting local businesses to make the best of emerging opportunities, such tourism and the visitor economy.	Effective partnership working will help ensure the most appropriate and effective use of local skills and resources in pursuit of economic development objectives.	Outcomes that benefit all groups in the local/wider community will be targeted through identification of aspirations and needs via effective partnership working.	By working with the array of existing organisations within the town, interventions can be tailored to specific place-based challenges. This will ensure that local business support is effective in addressing the barriers that prevent local people from fulfilling their potential.	Supporting partnerships between all existing and new actors within the town will foster a sense of collective ownership over the town's development. This may in turn result in more effective outcomes from investment due to the 'buy in' of local people who have great influence.	Strengthening partnership approaches to the development and delivery of intervention will ensure successful outcomes for all. Such approaches will also draw on local knowledge, brining complimentary organisations together, to coordinate investment in and around the town centre.	Partnership working will enable opportunities to integrate the welsh language into projects to be identified more effectively. Sharing of knowledge, skills and lessons from past projects will inform approaches to future initiatives. Support will be provided to local business to enable better integration of the Welsh Language and information about the town's culture on the high street.	Collective action, based on an improved and shared understanding of common needs and aspirations will assist in the realisation of outcomes for the common good.

Next Steps

To realise these opportunities the Council will:

Consult the right people at the right time....
to achieve the best results we will talk to the appropriate people and organisations to benefit the project development. Involvement of stakeholders and our residents is vital in ensuring that our regeneration projects deliver the best possible outcomes. We will be continuing to work with local businesses, education institutions, training providers, the housing sector, individuals and communities to shape and support projects for the benefit of everyone.

Work in partnership...
with the right people and organisations at the right time. This will include all relevant public and private sector bodies.

Put in place the best delivery arrangements..
that will make sure that we work with partners to project manage delivery effectively, ensuring that we drive the most successful outcomes.

Monitor and evaluate...
so that we ensure that we are able to improve delivery by understanding and learning from good practice and challenges experienced.

Review and consider...
new opportunities often arise and some identified now may become more difficult to achieve. We will review and appraise the portfolio of projects regularly.

Source funding and investment...
in a timely and creative way so that we can develop the most effective financial packages to ensure projects can go ahead.

Develop effective business cases...
for individual projects and initiatives to ensure that they are viable and cost effective, deliver the optimum benefits and outcomes and are sustainable into the future.

Aberdare
Town Centre
STRATEGY 2023/24

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Aberdare Town Centre
STRATEGY

Early Engagement Findings
February 2023

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Executive Summary

- This report details the main findings from an early engagement exercise conducted, between November 2022 and January 2023, to inform development of a Draft Aberdare Town Centre Regeneration Strategy.

- A wide range of approaches was used to engage with stakeholders including: an online survey; a series of in-person workshops and meetings; leaflets and posters were distributed within the town and displayed in key buildings; face-to-face meetings with businesses and organisations in the town centre; social media posts shared a link to the online survey and email invitations to access the survey were sent to key stakeholders.

- 614 survey responses were received and a further 45 stakeholders engaged in in-person workshops and meetings.

- No phone calls were received in relation to the engagement exercise. However, 3 emails were received.

- In total, over 650 people were engaged.

- Of those respondents that input their postcode, over 453 where from the Aberdare area, 32 from Mountain Ash, 4 from Treherbet, 7 from Ferndale and 2 from Pontypridd (as shown on the map below).
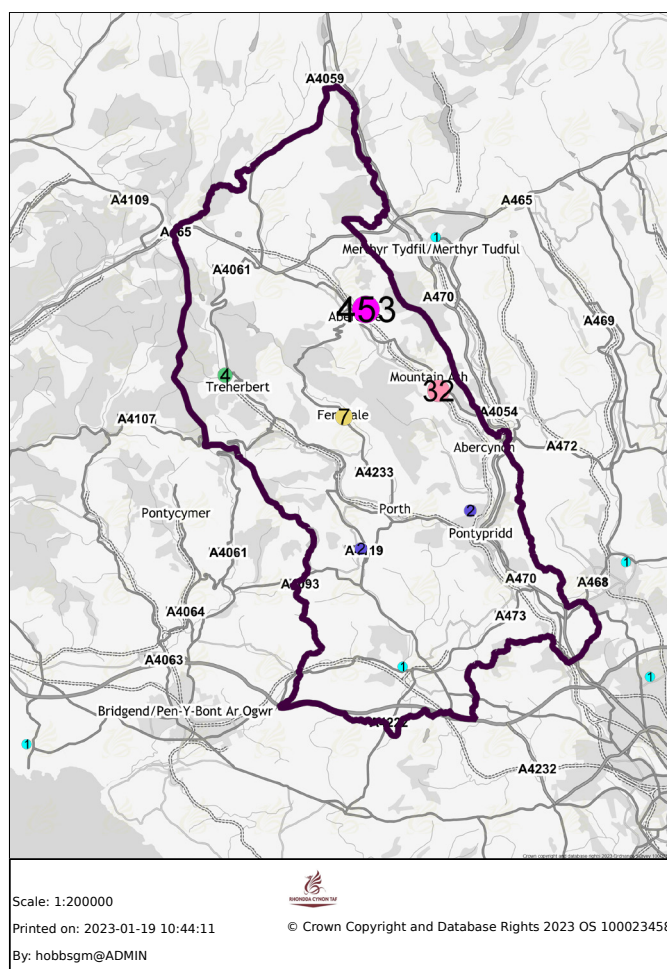
Fig. 1. Distribution of Respondents (Online Survey)

Executive Summary

- Demographic information collated from the online survey shows that less people aged between 16-24 years old and 75 years + responded to the survey. The engagement from under-represented groups was monitored closely and in response to these findings, RCTCBC have organised additional in-person workshops with these age groups, to be delivered in February 2023.

- The engagement exercise has assisted with identifying and prioritising the Town's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. A summary of these findings is provided below for both the online survey and in-person workshops/meetings.

- Online survey respondents strongly agreed that Aberdare Town Centre has the following key strengths:

    1. Proximity to nearby tourism destinations (e.g DVCP/Zip world)

    2. Readily available parking

    3. Accessible active leisure facilities

    4. Good public transport links

    5. Strong community spirit within the town

- Online survey respondents strongly agreed that Aberdare Town Centre has the following key challenges:

    1. Decline of the high street (e.g. vacant shops)

    2. Impact of Internet Shopping

    3. Cost of Living Crisis

    4. Economic Downturn

    5. Competition from other towns

Executive Summary

Attendees of workshops and meetings further identified Aberdare Town Centre's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as follows:

Key Strengths:	Key Weaknesses:
- History and heritage - Strong community - Natural landscape - High quality educational institutions nearby - Enough parking - High quality buildings - Ongoing programme of events - Public realm - Green spaces - Aberdare park/ Dare Valley Country Park - Growing hospitality offer - Indoor market	- Overall town's appearance - Lack of variety of shops - Poor advertising of what's going on - Visitor information - Lack of offer - Negative perception - Large vacant retail premises - Same type of shops - Nothing for young people to do - Lack of leisure offer, cinema/bowling etc - Derelict Buildings - Poor shop frontages - Anti-social behaviour
Key Opportunities:	**Key Threats:**
- Strong Tourism Opportunities - Repurpose large vacant properties - Utilise first floors of shops - Promote natural landscape - Enhance pedestrian routes in and around the town - Visit Wales 2023-2025 'Year of the Trails' - Build on the towns 'green credentials' - Foster an inclusive business environment - Support business growth and innovation - Circular economy initiatives - Aberdare BID - Diversify the offer - Improve signage - Keep money in Aberdare - Pop-up shops/temporary uses - South Wales Metro	- Changing consumer trends - Ongoing impact of COVID-19 - Decline of the high street - Rent and rates on buildings - Current cost of living crisis - Absent landlords - Need for a stronger identity - Competition from other towns - Weak partnerships working - Digitalisation - Rising cost of energy - Local lettings policies - Poor health and well-being of residents - Potential rising unemployment - Poor first impressions - Lack of advertising/promotion - Potential for Aberdare to become a 'commuter town' - Prioritisation of economic outcomes over social and environmental concerns.

Fig. 2. Overall Summary SWOT Analysis

Executive Summary

Based upon the outcomes of the SWOT analysis undertaken, the following investment themes were identified and agreed as priorities by participants in the engagement exercise:

Top 10 Priority Investment Themes (Online Survey)
1. Bringing empty buildings back into use
2. Attracting new businesses/facilities into the town
3. Investing in the Town's appearance
4. Creating vibrant streets with lots of activity
5. Diversifying and developing the 'offer' within the town
6. Providing support to local businesses
7. Making it easier to travel to and within the town
8. Making the most of Aberdare's important historic buildings
9. Improving physical connections between the town centre and attractions
10. Improving provision for sustainable modes of transport

Top 10 Priority Investment Themes (Workshops & Meetings)
1. Enhancement and diversification of the town's offer
2. Redevelopment and re-use of vacant/derelict buildings
3. Strengthen overall town's appearance/brand - live, work & visit
4. Physical connections between key sites, via active travel
5. Tourism and visitor offer
6. Partnerships and local level innovation
7. Sustainability and biodiversity
8. Aberdare's history and heritage
9. Hospitality and evening Offer
10. Further enhancement of public realm

It became clear, from the discussions during the workshops and responses to the online survey, that the theme of 'Sustainability' should not be differentiated as a stand alone 'investment theme'. Instead, it was felt that it was more appropriate to incorporate it as a key consideration within all investment themes due to its importance and strategic influence.

These investment themes, together with the broader conclusions from the engagement exercise, will now help inform and shape the development of a Draft Regeneration Strategy for Aberdare Town Centre.

1.0: Overview & Objectives

1.1 The Council's Corporate Plan, 'Making A Difference' 2020-2024, commits the authority to investing in town centres, increasing jobs and homes, to create vibrant, thriving places in which people wish to live, work and socialise. To this end, the Council has committed to the creation of a series of regeneration strategies/ plans to guide future investment in RCT towns, drawing on each town's unique characteristics, with such documents having already been produced for Mountain Ash, Porth and Pontypridd.

1.2 In this context, RCTCBC has begun to develop a Regeneration Strategy for Aberdare Town Centre, which will act as the focal point of the Principal Town in northern RCT. Building on Aberdare's considerable existing strengths and opportunities, whilst acknowledging the unique challenges that the town faces, the strategy will act as a key guiding document to focus and coordinate future investment.

1.3 For each existing strategy, a context-specific approach and bespoke strategy development process was adopted, with resultant lessons learned including the need for early, open and inclusive engagement of stakeholders in the development process. In this context, in November 2022, the Council initiated an early phase of 'Early Engagement' to provide a wide range of stakeholders with an initial opportunity to inform, shape and focus interventions at an early stage, aimed at addressing issues that affect them most. Key objectives for this early engagement included:

- Gaining a better understanding of the how stakeholders perceive the town's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- Drawing upon local knowledge to ensure that the new strategy is relevant, deliverable and informed.
- Fostering a sense of local ownership and commitment to the successful implementation of the strategy.
- Identifying opportunities to collaborate with existing, current projects within the town, to prevent duplication.
- Strengthening existing networks and creating new stakeholder relationships.
- Understanding how the Welsh Language is currently promoted within the town and what stakeholders think could be done to improve this.

2.0: Engagement Methodology & Response

2.1 The 'Early Engagement' phase was conducted 'in-house' between November 2022 and early January 2023. This report presents the findings from all engagement exercises undertaken as part of this work and will subsequently be presented to Officers and Cabinet to enable the feedback received to be considered and to reach agreement upon how this will be integrated into the development of a draft strategy.

2.2 A variety of engagement tools and techniques were used with stakeholders, including:

- **An online survey** titled, 'Aberdare Town Centre: What do you think?', was

publicly accessible on the Let's Talk online engagement platform, between the 16th November 2022 and 9th January 2023, and provided a user friendly and interactive form of engagement. The survey focused on key themes such as:

- Identification and prioritisation of the Town's key strengths and challenges (including accessibility etc).
- Creation of key investment themes to help focus and coordinate future investment in the town.
- Current hospitality offering.
- Promotion and integration of the Welsh Language.

- **In-person 'workshop'** style sessions at Sobell Leisure Centre, with internal and external stakeholders, in which stakeholders were asked to work collaboratively to undertake a SWOT analysis of the town and prioritise a series of 'Investment Themes'. Questions about the promotion of the Welsh Language and Accessibility were also discussed.

- **Focused in-person meetings,** with key stakeholders to discuss specific themes, such as funding and business community/wider community concerns.

2.3 Social media was used to communicate key messages to residents and service users and to encourage engagement with the online survey.

2.4 Hard-copy leaflets and posters, with a QR code to access the online survey, were distributed to numerous businesses and organisation in Aberdare Town Centre and displayed in key buildings such as Aberdare Library, Cynon Valley Museum, St Elvan's Church and Sobell Leisure Centre.

2.5 An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the online survey.

2.6 Local Councillors and the Our Aberdare BID (Business Improvement District) shared the link to the online survey via social media.

2.7 RCTCBC Regeneration Officers attended a local Neighbourhood Network meeting to inform the community stakeholders about the engagement exercise and to share leaflets.

2.8 As with previous years' "digital by default approach" we continued to consider those having reduced or no access to the Internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods:

- A telephone consultation option is now in place for all Council consultations, through the Council's Contact Centre. The option allows people to discuss their views or as a minimum to request consultation materials.
- Individual call backs on request.
- Consultation free post address for postal responses.

2.9 614 survey responses were received, with a further 45 external stakeholders engaged via in-person sessions. No telephone calls were received regarding the online survey. However, 3 emails were received.

2.10 Additionally, over 15 internal stakeholders across 10 different council Departments were engaged as part of this work.
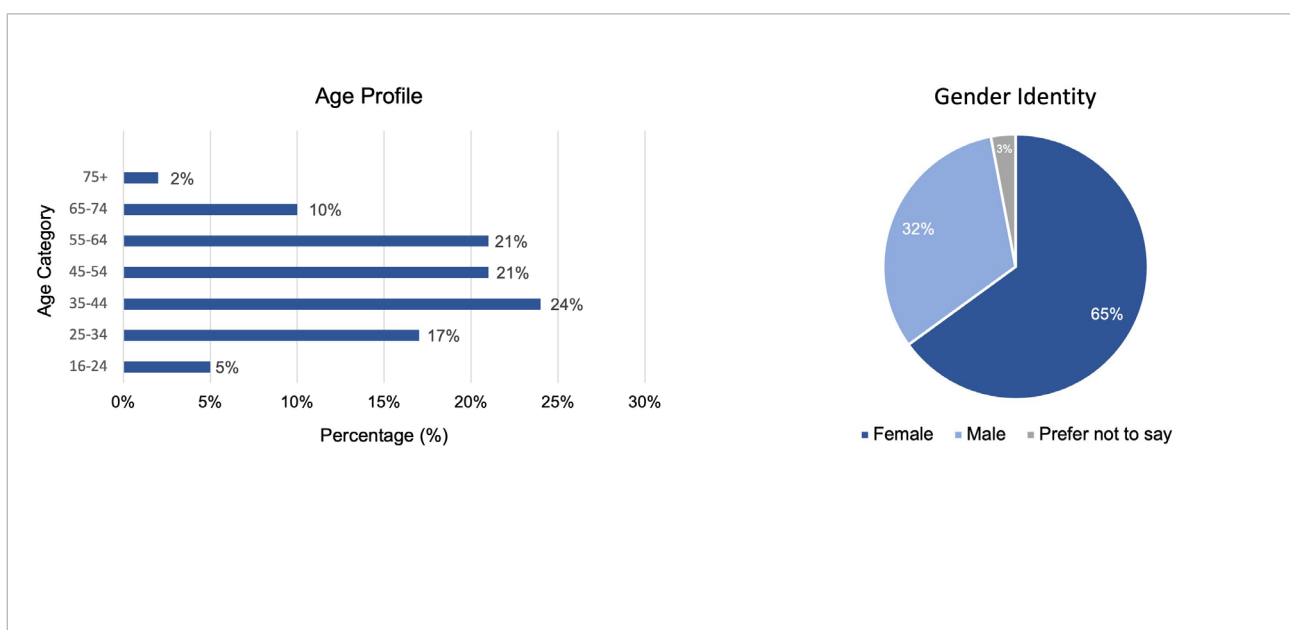
3.0: Overview of Stakeholders Engaged

3.1 Careful consideration was given to the demographic profile of people engaged with as part of the exercise and to the approach adopted with the aim of ensuring that a wide range of people were involved with this phase of work. Please see below a summary of the demographic information for those engaged via the different methods:
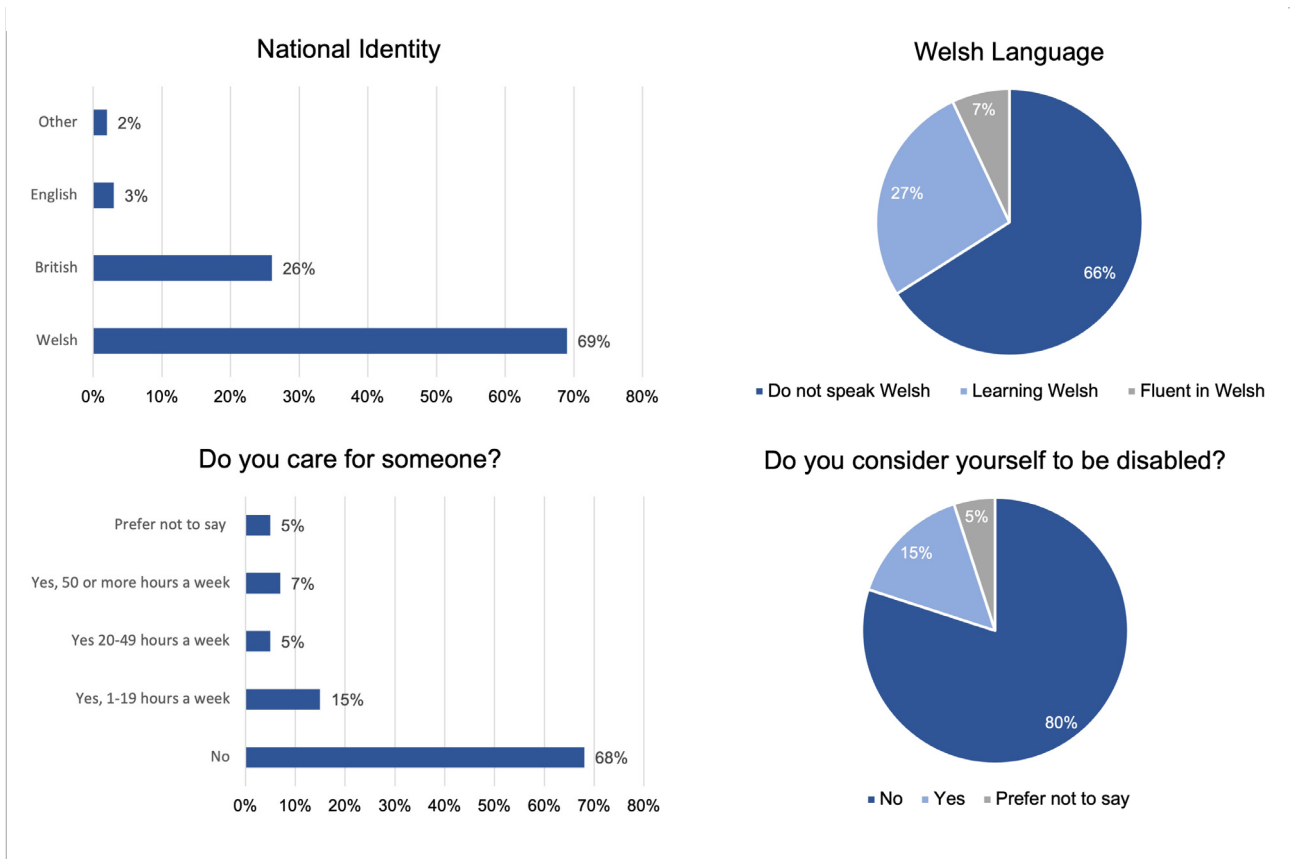
3.2 **Online Survey**

Of the 614 responses to the online survey "Aberdare town Centre: What do you think?" 605 respondents chose to provide personal information including age, gender and national identity. A summary of this information is provided below (Fig.3):

- Age: There was broadly even representation amongst most of the various age categories. This suggests that the engagement methods/techniques implemented were appropriate for the majority of age groups. However, there was a more limited response from those in the 16-24 and 75+ age groups. Additional workshops will be delivered, during February 2023 to address this.
- Gender: Considerably more women than men engaged with the survey.
- National Identity: The majority of those that engaged with the survey identify as having a Welsh National Identity, which reflects the strong local identity.
- Welsh Language: Whilst the majority of those that responded do not speak Welsh, 27% said that they are learning welsh, with 7% being fluent.
- Caring Responsibilities: The majority of respondents do not have any caring responsibilities. However, a fair number of respondents did care for someone, with most caring for between 1-19 hours per week.
- Disabilities: The majority of respondents did not identify as having a disability (80%). However, 15% of respondents identified as disabled in some way.

Fig.3. Online Survey: Summary Demographic Profile of Respondents

National Identity

- Other: 2%
- English: 3%
- British: 26%
- Welsh: 69%

(0% – 80%)

Welsh Language

- Do not speak Welsh: 66%
- Learning Welsh: 27%
- Fluent in Welsh: 7%

Do you care for someone?

- Prefer not to say: 5%
- Yes, 50 or more hours a week: 7%
- Yes 20-49 hours a week: 5%
- Yes, 1-19 hours a week: 15%
- No: 68%

(0% – 80%)

Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

- No: 80%
- Yes: 15%
- Prefer not to say: 5%

3.3 **Stakeholder Mapping:** Prior to the commencement of a series of in-person workshops and meetings, comprehensive stakeholder mapping was undertaken. This exercise was produced collaboratively by the RCTCBC Regeneration Department and other internal departments and the subsequent diagram, seen in Fig.4, has been added to over the period of the 'Early Engagement' Phase as more stakeholders have been identified.

External

- Visitors to Nearby Attractions
- University of South Wales
- Local MP/AM
- Local Members
- Coleg Y Comedd
- Aberdare Market Company
- St Elvans Church Group
- Local Schools/Colleges
- 'Our Aberdare' BID
- Cynon Linc
- Youth Groups
- Friends of Aberdare Park
- Local WI Group
- RCTCBC Neighbourhood Networks?
- Over 50s Groups
- Pen Y Cymoedd
- Business Owners
- Coliseum Theatre
- Conservation & Wildlife Groups
- Designing Out Crime Officers
- Local Developers
- Zip World / Bike Park Wales

Internal

- Corporate Estates Department
- Tourism Department
- Countryside Department
- Arts & Library Department
- Planning Department
- Community Development Department
- Leisure & Parks Department
- Housing Department
- Highways Department

RCTCBC Regeneration Department

Fig.4. Stakeholder Mapping

3.4 **In-Person Workshops & Meetings**

Whilst specific demographic information was not collected at in-person workshops and meetings, a wide-variety of stakeholders were engaged including: Local Councillors, Local Community Groups, Funding Organisations, the 'Our Aberdare' BID and Internal Council Officials. Because this phase of engagement will be followed up with a formal phase of statutory consultation, it was felt that the 6 workshops/meetings conducted provided a sufficient early insight for key stakeholders.

As mentioned above, it was felt that more could be done to hear from the younger generation and subsequent workshop sessions have been undertaken to engage with this age group specifically.

3.5 **Fig.5.** Provides a time line of the workshops and meetings held during this phase of 'Early Engagement' and shows the range of stakeholders engaged with.

Fig.5. Workshop & Meetings Time line

Timescales: November 2022 - January 2023	
Details:	**Key Stakeholders:**
RCTCBC Regeneration Officers met with the local MP and AM to inform them about the development of a Regeneration Strategy for Aberdare Town Centre and to discuss key challenges and opportunities within the town.	• Local MP • Local AM
RCTCBC Regeneration Officers attended a **Community Group Funding Advice Surgery,** organised by Vikki Howells, at Abercwmboi Rugby Club in Aberdare.	• Llwydcoed Community Action Group • University of South Wales • Cwmbach Community Wetlands • Accessible Wales • Friends of Aberdare Park • Cynon Valley History Society • Aberdare Town Church Primary School
Local Member Workshops: RCTCBC Regeneration officers facilitated two workshops, at Sobell Leisure Centre Aberdare, for Aberdare Town Centre and surrounding area councillors to identify, discuss and agree a series of priority investment themes which will inform the development of the Regeneration Strategy.	• Aberdare Town Centre Councillors • Aberaman Councillors • Aberdare West / Llwydcoed Ward Councillors • Cwmbach Councillors • Penywaun Councillors

NOVEMBER 2022

North Cynon Neighbourhood Network: An RCTCBC Regeneration Officer attended a North Cynon Neighbourhood Network meeting, on 17th November to inform local and wider community groups about the development of a Regeneration Strategy for Aberdare Town Centre and to provide information about how the local community can engage with the online survey. Leaflets were handed out to all attendees.	• RCT Together • Coalfields Regeneration Trust • Cwmaman OAP Group • Signposted Cymru • Abercwmboi Group • Penywaun Forward Together • C4W+ • ASD Rainbows • Snapshot Camera Club • Over 50's Forum • Cynon Taf Housing Group • Friends of Aberdare Park • Hirwaun YMCA • ACM • Interlink RCT • Penderyn Community Centre
'Our Aberdare BID' : RCTCBC Regeneration officers met with the Our Aberdare, Business Improvement District Board members to discuss what they consider to be the key strengths, opportunities, challenges and weaknesses in Aberdare Town Centre.	• 'Our Aberdare' BID Board Members
Internal Stakeholder Workshop: An internal stakeholder workshop was delivered, by RCTCBC Regeneration Officers, in person at Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare. Attendees were asked to identify, discuss and agree on a series of priority investment themes which will inform the development of the Regeneration Strategy.	Representatives from the following RCTCBC departments attended the workshop: • Corporate Estates Department • Countryside Department • Planning Department • Leisure & Parks Department • Highways Department • Housing Department • Community Development Department • Arts & Library Department • Tourism Department • Regeneration Department
Pen Y Cymoedd: A meeting with Pen Y Cymoedd representatives was held in early December 2022, to inform them of the development of a Regeneration Strategy for Aberdare Town Centre and to discuss their thoughts on the key challenges, strengths, opportunities and threats evident within the town centre.	• Pen Y Cymoedd
Accessibility Wales: RCTCBC Regeneration Officers met with a representative from Accessibility Wales to understand what are the key issues regarding accessibility within the town centre and to hear suggestion as to how these could be overcome.	• Accessibility Wales
Young Generation Workshops: Arrangements have been made to deliver a series of workshops (in Feb 2023), at Sobell Leisure Centre, with different groups of primary and secondary school children from both welsh speaking and English speaking schools.	• Aberdare Park Primary • YGG Aberdar • Aberdare Community School

DECEMBER 2022

FEBRUARY 2023

4.0: Overview of Findings

4.1 Online Survey

The following section provides a summary of the findings from the main engagement activities, including the online survey hosted on the 'Let's Talk' website and in-person workshops and meetings.

Fig.6. Online Survey Overview & Leaflet

4.2   A total of 614 completed surveys were received. For the purposes of this report, any blank responses to individual questions have been discounted. Due to the nature of this type of early engagement, the questions in the survey were designed to enable users to respond to suggested answers and also input their own thoughts and ideas. This was important due the purpose of this work to provide increased opportunities for stakeholders to inform and shape the development of a draft Regeneration Strategy for Aberdare Town Centre.

4.3   Therefore, the findings from each question have been considered individually with careful consideration given to the information input in the 'other' boxes at the end of the answer option lists.

4.4   The first two questions focused on identifying key strengths and challenges within the town centre and provided respondents with a list of 'suggested' answers from which they could choose to agree, or not, and an 'other' box' within which respondents could input their own ideas. The findings from questions 1 and 2 are shown below in (fig.7 and fig.8) and are expressed in terms of 'number of people that agreed' with each suggested answer. For example, for question 1, 319 out of 614 respondents agreed that 'Proximity to nearby tourism destinations' is a key strength for Aberdare Town Centre.

4.5 **Question 1: What do you consider to be Aberdare Town Centre's key strengths?**

From the responses to question 1 (What do you consider to be Aberdare Town Centre's key strengths), five key 'suggested strengths' were agreed with more strongly than the other 'suggested strengths'.

4.6 These include:
1. Proximity to nearby tourism destinations (e.g DVCP/Zip world), 319 agreed
2. Readily available parking, 259 agreed
3. Accessible active leisure facilities, 248 agreed
4. Good public transport links, 230 agreed
5. Community spirit within the town, 163 agreed

4.7 There were also 39 responses input into the 'other box', with several respondents stating that 'Aberdare's History & Heritage' is a key strength. Other responses included:
"Friendly people"
"Existing volunteer initiatives"
"St Elvan's Church"
"Location near key cities such as Cardiff and Swansea"
"Aberdare Market"
"Strong history & heritage"

4.8 However, over half of the entries in the 'other box' insisted that Aberdare has no strengths at all, and that the town is experiencing significant decline. This was a theme that was also identified during the 'In-Person Workshops/Meetings', in that respondents found it difficult to identify strengths within the town centre because of an overriding negative perception of the town.
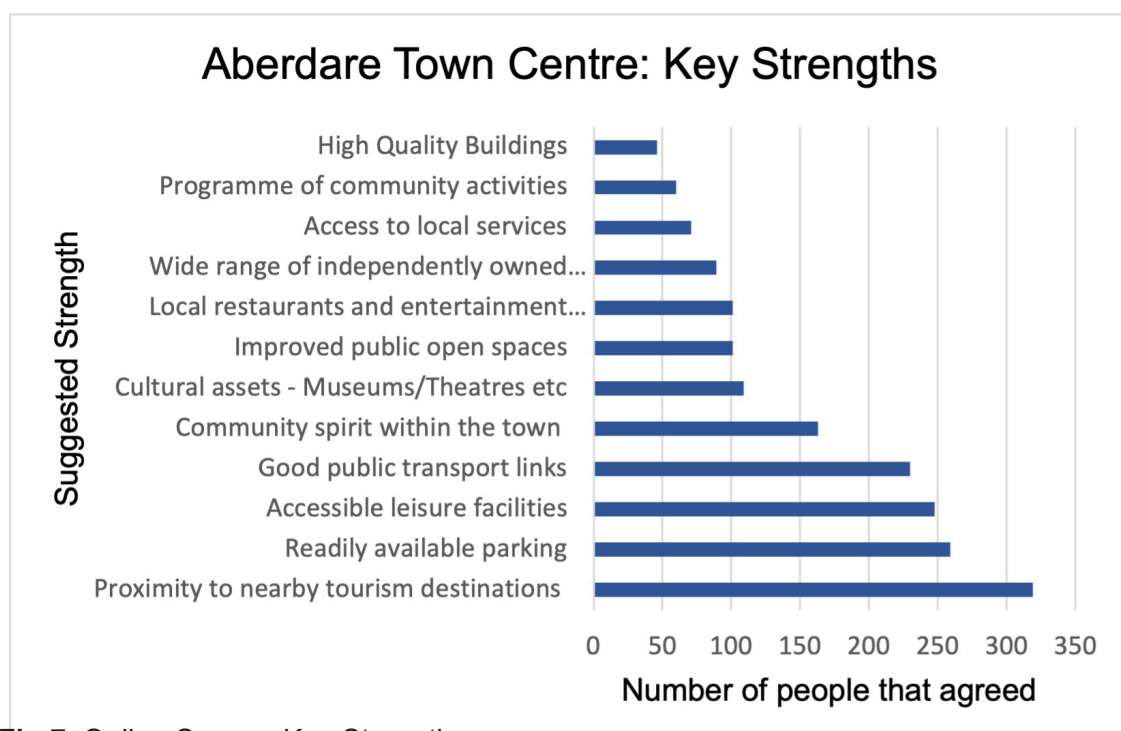
4.9

Fig.7. Online Survey: Key Strengths

4.10 **Question 2: What do you think are the key challenges that face Aberdare Town Centre?**

4.11 The responses to question 2 clearly show that most respondents felt that the "decline of the high street (e.g vacant shops)" is a principal key challenge that the town centre faces, with 572 of 614 respondents agreeing. Another 4 key challenges were agreed with more strongly than the others, and these included:

1. Decline of the high street (e.g. vacant shops), 572 agreed
2. Impact of Internet Shopping, 403 agreed
3. Cost of Living Crisis, 398 agreed
4. Economic Downturn, 356 agreed
5. Competition from other towns, 282 agreed

4.12 83 respondents input 'other suggestions' with a number of themes of concern emerging, including:

"Business Rates"
"Lack of different shops"
"Nothing for people to do"
"Poor condition of buildings"
"Anti-Social Behaviour"
"Lack of investment"
"Negative attitude towards the town"
"Buildings not fit for purpose"
"Lack of Free Parking"
"Current law restricting outdoor markets/events"
"Large supermarkets on the outskirts of the town"
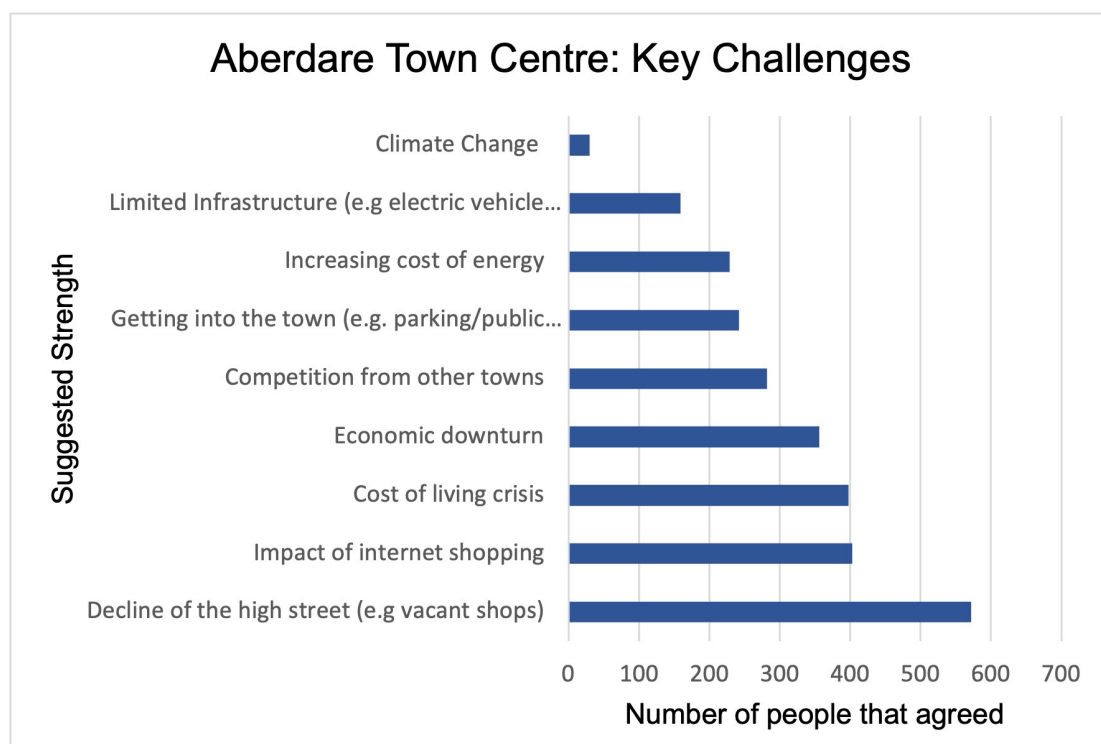*"Too many buildings no longer fit for purpose"*

4.13

Fig.8. Online Survey: Key Challenges

4.14 Several of the responses stated that the town hasn't seen any significant investment for several years, even though over £100m has been invested in new leisure, education and public realm facilities over the last decade. This may suggest that there is limited awareness/understanding of the investment already made and ongoing within the town.

4.15 **Question 3: Thinking about the issues identified above, which of the following themes do you think our Regeneration Strategy might best focus on?**

4.16 For this question, respondents were given a set of 20 potential 'Investment Themes' to prioritise from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least. The overall prioritisation of the themes can be seen below, in Fig.9. To evaluate the findings from this question, the 'Investment Themes' have been categorised into 5 priority groups, with a value assigned to each theme.

4.17 These values have been derived using the following scoring criteria.

4.18 **Scoring Criteria:**

Step 1: For each theme, the total number of people that prioritised it as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th was collated (see table below as an illustrative example)

Proposed Investment Theme	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Parking Provision	58	20	17	16	25

Step 2: A weighted scoring system was then used to provide an overall value for each theme. 10 points was awarded if the theme was prioritised as first, 8 if 2nd, 6 if 3rd, 4 if 4th and 2 if 5th. Please see table below for an example of how the weighted scores were arrived at.

Proposed Investment Theme	1st (10 points)	2nd (8 Points)	3rd (6 Points)	4th (4 Points)	5th (2 Points)
Parking Provision	58 x (10)	20 x (8)	17 x (6)	16 x (4)	25 x (2)
Weighted Scores	540	160	102	64	50
Total weighted score = 540 + 160 + 102+ 64 +50 = 956					

4.19 Following this, the total weighted scores were ranked from highest to lowest, with the higher scores illustrating that the investment theme is of greater importance overall. The findings show that the top 5 priority themes that emerged from this question are as follows:

1. Bringing empty buildings back into use
2. Attracting new businesses/facilities into the town
3. Investing in the Town's appearance
4. Creating vibrant streets with lots of activity
5. Diversifying and developing the 'offer' within the town

Please see Fig.9. for the complete list of prioritised themes with corresponding weighted scores.

Fig.9. Prioritised Investment Theme Table

Proposed Investment Theme	Weighted Score
Priority Group 1	
Bringing empty buildings back into use	3466
Attracting new businesses/facilities into the town	3428
Investing in the Town's appearance	3136
Creating vibrant streets with lots of activity	2524
Priority Group 2	
Diversifying and developing the 'offer' within the town	2498
Providing support to local businesses	2446
Making it easier to travel to and within the town centre	2346
Making the most of Aberdare's important historic buildings	2204
Priority Group 3	
Improving physical connections between the town centre and attractions	2186
Improving provision for sustainable modes of transport	1848
Enhancing the range of 'on street' activities and events	1832
Strengthening Aberdare's role as a visitor/tourism destination	1826
Priority Group 4	
Celebrating the town's history and heritage	1808
Expanding the range and availability of business accommodation	1682
Enhancing the range of visitor facilities	1678
Diversifying the range of local services available	1616
Priority Group 5	
Parking Provision	1536
Increasing the town's sustainability through sustainable initiatives	1490
Enhancing natural habitats and biodiversity sites	1330
Reducing the town's carbon footprint	1122

4.20 **Question 4: What do you think about the current hospitality offering within the town centre?**

4.21 220 responses were received to this question, with an overwhelming majority of respondents stating that the town needs more high-quality restaurants. Many respondents referred to the recently opened restaurants in the town, such as the Black Lion, and stated that they would like to see this continue. Several respondents commented on the opportunity to increase outside dining, utilising available squares/ outside areas around the core town centre area and some referred for the need to consider a mix of dining options to respond to affordability concerns.

4.22 Responses included:

"More places to eat/high-end restaurants"
"Too many takeaways"
"Less charity shops"
"More outside seating areas"
"Make more of the market, street-food, pop-up shops"
"Better options for a sit-down evening meal"
"Opportunity to create unique dining experiences"

4.23 **Question 5: How well do you think the Welsh Language is currently promoted within the town centre?**

4.24 251 respondents felt that the Welsh Language was promoted 'Well Enough' within the town centre. However, 185 respondents felt that 'More Could Be Done' to improve the promotion of the Welsh Language.

4.25 Over 100 respondents input suggestions as to how the Welsh Language could be better promoted within the town and these include:

"Capitalising on the 2024 Eisteddfod to raise the profile of the Welsh Language"
"Encourage shop staff to converse in simple Welsh"
"Provide business with bilingual orientation signs"
"Create a Welsh speaking area/zone within the town where people can go to practice their Welsh"
"Offer free course in the town centre"
"More Welsh Themed Days/Events"
"Build on the strong Welsh history"

4.26 However, it is important to note that a large percentage of those that responded felt the promotion of the Welsh Language was not a priority, given the considerable economic challenges and uncertain future that the town faces. Many also commented on the need to prevent businesses from incurring additional costs, to promote the language, when they are already struggling.

Fig.10. Welsh Language Question: Findings

How well do you think the Welsh Language is promoted in Aberdare Town Centre?

4.27 **In Person Workshops & Meetings**

Several in-person workshops with key stakeholders were delivered by the RCTCBC Regeneration Department, during November 2022 to January 2023, at Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare.

A key objective for the workshops was to provide an opportunity to discuss collaboratively, with and between stakeholders, the range of challenges and opportunities that exist within the town centre. It was also an opportunity to build existing relationships and establish new connections which will hopefully prove valuable during the delivery of the strategy.

Fig.11. Engagement Boards

Fig.12. Photos of Engagement

Local Councillors attend engagement workshop at Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare.
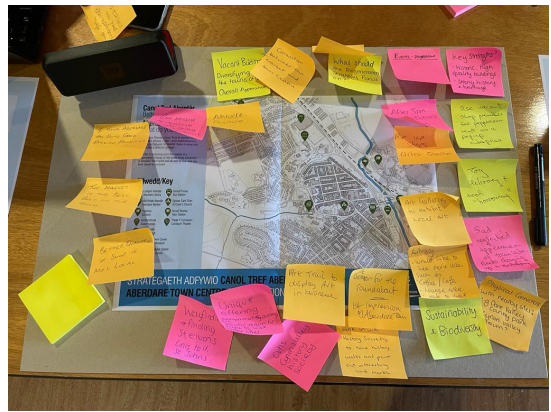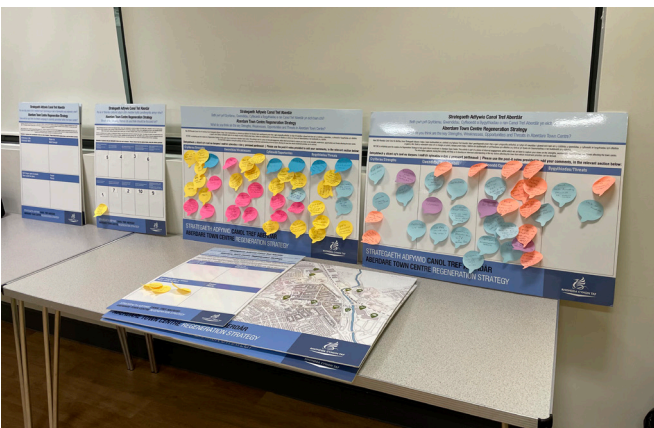
Photo showing how engagement boards were used to deliver workshop exercise.

RCTCBC staff members, Darren Notley (Regeneration Team Leader) and Emma Halford (Regeneration Project Officer) attended event at Abercwmboi Rugby Club.

Comments collected from attendees at 'Funding Fair' event at Abercwmboi Rugby Club.

Officers from different Internal RCTCBC Departments came together to take part in an engagement workshop at Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare.
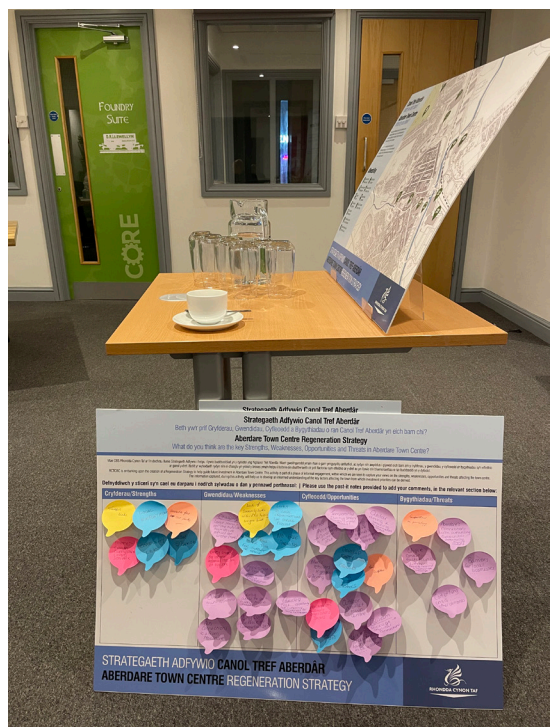
Photo of SWOT analysis produced during meeting with the Our Aberdare BID board members.

4.28 The workshops followed the following format:

1. Introduction to the project and rationale behind early engagement.
2. Overview of objectives for the session.
3. Exercise 1: Work together to create a SWOT analysis of Aberdare Town Centre, using post-it notes to add comments to an A1 board. This exercise acted as an 'conversation starter' with attendees being given the opportunity to add their thoughts individually.
4. Exercise 2: For this exercise, attendees were asked to discuss and collectively agree on the prioritisation of a set of 'Proposed Investment Themes'. Numbered stickers were used to rank the proposed themes from 1 to 10, with one being the most important and 10 the least.
5. Exercise 3: How well do you think the Welsh Language is promoted within the town centre? For this exercise, an open discussion was held with the attendees around the integration and promotion within the town centre and potential ways this could be improved. Attendees were asked to collectively choose 1 of 4 answers which included 'extremely well', 'well enough', 'more could be done' or 'poorly'. However, comprehensive notes were also taken to capture the detail of the conversation.
6. Feedback: RCTCBC Regeneration Officers presented the findings, from the session, back to the attendees to ensure all stakeholders were happy with the outcome and to provide a final opportunity for any more comments.

4.29 Photos of some of the workshops can be seen in Fig.12.

4.30 Positive feedback was received from a several attendees who felt that this additional engagement had provided a valuable opportunity for them to input into the development of the strategy at an early stage. Subsequently, many of the attendees shared the online survey with their communities to support this engagement work.

4.31 **Exercise 1: SWOT Analysis**

4.32 The information added by attendees to the SWOT analysis boards, during the separate workshops, has been combined to create a single SWOT analysis of the town centre. All comments, made via post-it notes, have been collated and transformed into a series of word clouds that illustrate the range of ideas discussed (see fig.14-17). It is important to note, that the larger the words are shown in the word cloud the more often that theme was discussed during the workshops.

4.33 It is clear, from these word clouds, that several themes were a priority for many attendees at the various workshops and these have been summarised below.

Fig.13 Overall Summary SWOT Analysis

Key Strengths:	Key Weaknesses:
- History and heritage - Strong community - Natural landscape - High quality educational institutions nearby - Enough parking - High quality buildings - Ongoing programme of events - Public realm - Green spaces - Aberdare park/ Dare Valley Country Park - Growing hospitality offer - Indoor market	- Overall town's appearance - Lack of variety of shops - Poor advertising of what's going on - Visitor information - Lack of offer - Negative perception - Large vacant retail premises - Same type of shops - Nothing for young people to do - Lack of leisure offer, cinema/bowling etc - Derelict Buildings - Poor shop frontages - Anti-social behaviour
Key Opportunities:	**Key Threats:**
- Strong Tourism Opportunities - Repurpose large vacant properties - Utilise first floors of shops - Promote natural landscape - Enhance pedestrian routes in and around the town - Visit Wales 2023-2025 'Year of the Trails' - Build on the towns 'green credentials' - Foster an inclusive business environment - Support business growth and innovation - Circular economy initiatives - Aberdare BID - Diversify the offer - Improve signage - Keep money in Aberdare - Pop-up shops/temporary uses - South Wales Metro	- Changing consumer trends - Ongoing impact of COVID-19 - Decline of the high street - Rent and rates on buildings - Current cost of living crisis - Absent landlords - Need for a stronger identity - Competition from other towns - Weak partnerships working - Digitalisation - Rising cost of energy - Local lettings policies - Poor health and well-being of residents - Potential rising unemployment - Poor first impressions - Lack of advertising/promotion - Potential for Aberdare to become a 'commuter town' - Prioritisation of economic outcomes over social and environmental concerns.

4.34   Having compared and contrasted the findings from the in-person workshops and online survey, it is clear that the majority of themes have recurred in both engagement exercises. The combining of the findings has presented a comprehensive analyses of the current challenges and opportunities, evident within the town. These findings will help to ensure that the draft strategy is relevant, deliverable and maximises potential benefits for all.

Fig.14. Workshops: Summary of Strengths

Indoor Market
Outside Seating
New Restaurants Opening
Events Walking & Cycling Routes
Planters High Quality Buildings
Dare Valley Country Park
Public Realm
History & Heritage
Green Town Cynon Linc
Natural Landscape
Strong Community
Accessible Green Spaces Growing Hospitality Offer
High Quality Nearby Schools
Parking Listed Buildings
Aberdare Park St Elvan's Church
Central Library

Fig.15. Workshops: Summary of Weaknesses

Large Retail Properties
Poor Parking on Pavements
Lack of Activities/Things To Do
Lack of mix of residents in town center
Conservation Area Rules Not Enforced Bus Connections
Links to Tourist Attractions - walking/cycling
Small number of businesses securing funding No Free Parking
Enforcement of Conservation Area Requirements
Lack of Understanding of Accessibility Challenges
Overall Town's Appearance
Weak Identity Negative Perception Vacant Buildings
Anti-Social Behavior Parking Charges
Physical Connections between Town Centre and nearby sites - DVCP, Museum
Theatre
Lack of Variety of Shops Poor Signage
Advertising What's Going On
Poor Accessibility Visitor Information Disabled Access
Same Type of Shops Poor Shop Frontages
Absent Landlords Lack of Offer Derelict Buildings
Empty Shops Weak Connections between Organisations
Poor Connections to Wider Communities
No Cycle Hire Promotion of Community Activities
Public Transport Not Connected
Weak Partnership Working
Nothing for Young People

Fig.16. Workshops: Summary of Opportunities

Fig.17 Workshops: Summary of Threats

4.35 **Exercise 2:** Prioritisation of Proposed 'Investment Themes'

4.36 Attendees were asked to prioritise a set of 10 proposed 'investment themes', using numbered stickers, with 1 being the most important and 10 the least. It was made clear to all attendees, that the proposed themes were only suggestions and that attendees could add additional themes if they wished using post-it notes. However, no additional themes were added due to all attendees feeling that the themes suggested captured the full range of potential categories.

4.37 Some groups found it easy to come to an agreement regarding the prioritisation of the themes, whilst others found some of the themes difficult to prioritise over others. It became clear, even in early workshops, that a number of the themes are inter-related with some attendees asking whether they could be incorporated to create a reduced list. For example, in order to 'Strengthen the Overall Appearance of the town' it was felt that the 'Redevelopment and Re-use of vacant/derelict buildings' was required. Additionally, many felt that the 'Visitor and Tourism offer' was inextricably linked to 'Enhancement and Diversification of the Town's Offer' and 'Aberdare's History and Heritage'. The integration of themes will be carefully considered during the development of a draft strategy.

4.38 Many attendees felt that 'Sustainability and Biodiversity' should not be a separate theme but instead be considered a priority within all themes due to the climate crisis. This was mostly agreed upon. The findings from each workshop were collated and a weighted scoring system was used to provide an overall ranking of the themes from 1 to 10, divided into two priority groups.

4.39 **Scoring Criteria:**

Step 1: For each theme, the total number of groups that prioritised it as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th (and so on) was collated, see example below. From the example below, you can see that for the 'Tourism and Visitor Offer' theme, 1 group prioritised it 4th and 3 groups prioritised it as 5th.

Proposed Investment Theme	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
Tourism and Visitor Offer	0	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0

Step 2: This step involves applying a weighted scoring system to each individual score, to create an overall weighted score. Please see the table below for an example of how this was done for the 'Tourism and Visitor Offer' theme.

Proposed Investment Theme	1st (10 Points)	2nd (9 Points)	3rd (8 Points)	4th (7 Points)	5th (6 Points)	6th (5 Points)	7th (4 Points)	8th (3 Points)	9th (2 Points)	10th (1 Point)
Tourism and Visitor Offer (Weighted Scores)	0	0	0	7	18	0	4	0	0	0
Overall Weighted Score = 7 +18 + 4= 29										

Fig.18. Prioritised Investment Theme Table: Workshops

Proposed Investment Theme	Weighted Score
Priority Group 1	
Enhancement and Diversification of the Town's Offer	39
Redevelopment and Re-use of Vacant/Derelict Buildings	39
Strengthen Overall Town's Appearance/Brand - Live, Work & Visit.	36
Physical connections between key sites, via active travel	33
Tourism and Visitor Offer	29
Priority Group 2	
Partnerships and Local Level Innovation	27
Sustainability and Biodiversity	23
Aberdare's History and Heritage	20
Hospitality and Evening Offer	14
Further Enhancement of Public Realm	11

4.40 **Exercise 3:** How well do you think the Welsh Language is promoted within the Town centre?

4.41 For this exercise attendees disused, between themselves and with RCTCBC Regeneration Officers, how well they think the Welsh Language is currently promoted within the town centre. The aim of the discussion was to come to a collective conclusion regarding whether 'more could be done' to promote the welsh language or whether it is sufficient. All attendees, from all workshops, agreed that 'more could be done' to promote the Welsh Language within the town centre. Suggestion for how this might be achieved included:

> *"Encouraging basic Welsh sign-age in shops/facilities within the town to integrate the language into everyday life."*

> *"Address negativity around not speaking Welsh 'correctly' and try to foster a more inclusive environment within with Welsh is spoken."*

> *"Introduce more 'give it a go' activities in the town that provide accessible opportunities for people to learn small amounts of Welsh, frequently."*

> *"Signage throughout the town could be improved."*

> *"Could small amount of funding be provided to businesses to integrate welsh words/phrases into shops."*

> *"Younger generation are key to promote the Welsh Language and thought should be given to how they can be integrated more into activities within the town."*

> *"Could the BID support promotion of the Welsh Language in the town?"*

> *"Must ensure that businesses aren't pressured or at a dis-advantage if having to purchase new bilingual signage etc."*

5.0: Younger Generation Workshops

5.1 Having identified a reduced amount of representation from the younger generation within the online survey findings, the Council decided to host two in-person 'young generation' workshops.

5.2 The workshops took the same format as those undertaken with other stakeholder groups but the exercises were adapted to be more informal and discussion based, to enable attendees to have the opportunity to share their thoughts about the town.

5.3 Both workshops took place at Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare on Thursday 16th February 2023 and involved a mix of students from both English and Welsh speaking schools.

5.4 A group of around 10-15 students from Aberdare Park Primary and YGG Aberdar, aged between 10 and 11 years old, attended the morning workshop and a smaller group of 5 students, aged between 15 and 16 years old, from Aberdare Community School attended the afternoon workshop. Photos of the workshops can be seen in Fig.19.

5.5 A key objective of these workshops was to understand, from the younger generation's perspective, what are the key strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities that they perceive to be most prominent within the town.

5.6 At the beginning of each session, RCTCBC Regeneration Officers provided the students with a high-level overview of the context within which the Town Centre Strategy is being developed and gave students an idea of the range of themes that had been identified by other stakeholders in previous sessions. Findings from each exercise can be found below.

5.7 **Exercise 1: SWOT Analysis**
The information added by attendees to the SWOT analysis boards, during the separate workshops, has been combined to create a single SWOT analysis of the town centre. All comments, made via post-it notes, have been collated and added to a 'younger generation' SWOT analysis table (fig.20).

5.8 Interestingly, the younger generation's responses to exercise one had a much stronger focus on sustainability and biodiversity than other stakeholder groups. They also identified considerably more opportunities for improvement in the town centre with a clear focus on more places for young people to go to reduce anti-social behaviour and vandalism. Many commented on the abundance of green spaces nearby the town but some felt more could be done to improve greenery within the town centre.

5.9 RCTCBC Regeneration Officers also talked to the 15/16yr old age group about work experience and local employment opportunities, for which they felt more could be done to provide young people with the practical skills to gain jobs and that there is a lack of local employment opportunities.
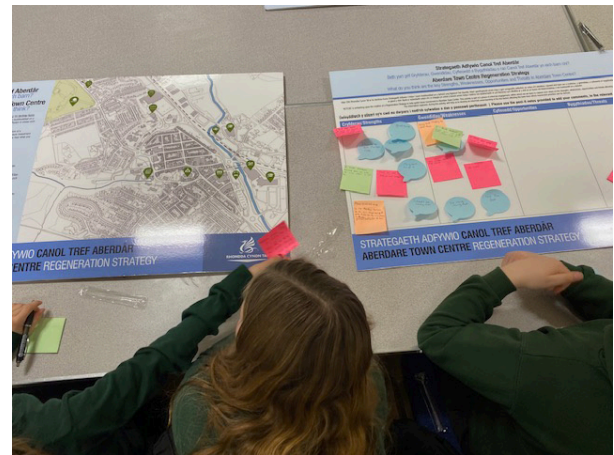
Fig.19. Photos of Younger Generation Workshops.

Discussions with students from Aberdare Park Primary and YGG Aberdar.

Students worked with RCTCBC Regeneration Officers in smaller groups to prioritise investment themes.

Maps of Aberdare Town Centre were used to help students to orientate themselves within the town.

Students from Aberdare Community School discussed ideas with each other before adding them to the SWOT analysis board.

Fig.20. Younger Generation SWOT Analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Great bike tracks up to Dare Valley Country Park • Really good parks and green spaces • "Thinking space" - outdoor parks • Easy to go and see nature/wildlife • Good shops like Wilko's & B&M • Fairs/events in Aberdare Park • Local shops • Some nice buildings • Aberdare market - can go and get lots of things in one place • Local news agent • Dare Valley Country Park • Comic book shop • Nice streets with lots of shops • Antique Shop • "Lots of places for learning - schools, library's and the museum". • "I like buying things from the charity shops". • Good trains • Quite safe • Places to eat - "especially in the market". • Central library • "Kind people to talk to" • Places to eat - Subway & Greggs • "It's good that there is a swimming pool near the centre of town" • Forest nearby • Easy to get around, not as overwhelming as Cardiff/Merthyr (smaller scale) • Country Park • Lots of biodiversity / tree coverage • Convenient	• "People could be nicer to each other" • Lots of teenagers wandering around at night • Feeling of being unsafe, especially at night • "If it is raining there is very little shelter in the town". • Vehicles in the town can be dangerous to people crossing the road (need to give the pedestrian more priority). • Need more of a balanced offering in the town, can't just be shops • Poor lighting on key routes to and from town where anti-social behaviour is • Poor road safety • "Too many smokers" • "Too many people are going to MacDonalds and getting overweight" • More nature and greenery is needed in the actual town centre • YEPS clubs and activities are for younger children, nothing for the 15/16 yr old age group • "Some buildings are out of place" • "If your not from Aberdare it can be hard to find places". • "It is hard to get to the park because you have to cross many roads". • "We can't get to Merthyr because we don't have a car but if there was a cinema in Aberdare we could go!" • "Too much of the same thing!" • No recycling bins in the town centre • No lighting on the fields • Not enough advertisement • You have to spend money to stay in town all day • Run down buildings • No pet shops • Too many charity shops

Fig.20. Younger Generation SWOT Analysis.

Opportunities	Threats
• Introduce new species of animals/ support biodiversity • Use digital technologies to show people what's available in the town • New gaming shops & places for young people to meet/socialise (off the streets) • Help to introduce renewable energies into the town and electric cars etc • "We need more local youth clubs so children aren't wandering the streets on their bikes and scooters". • Promote the use of electric cars/buses • Green spaces on rooftops - local plant ecosystems • Make opportunities for young people to gain practical work experience • Community gardens - meet people and learn new skills • Night-time events to bring more activity to the streets • Increase peoples well-being by utilising the good green spaces better • "More local cinemas because they are mostly based in Merthyr and Cardiff". • More zebra crossings • "Support people in need and charities for homeless people". • "Help animals more". • Promote walking as a well-being activity • New arcade • Incentives to encourage people to pick up litter and keep the streets clean. • "We should have more homeless shelters because there are people getting kicked out of their houses". • Planting of more trees • Create another comic shop • Put more bins around the town • Create more free things for people to do • Make a community building • "Change the abandoned buildings to cinemas, theatres, homeless shelters and apartments". • More little shops • More places for teens to go - escape rooms	• "People could be nicer to each other" • Lots of teenagers wandering around at night • More trouble around the world, e.g in Ukraine • Loss of community feeling • "Places are more attractive in Merthyr" (competition from nearby towns) • Climate change • "People aren't very nice to homeless people" • Online shopping • Peoples mental health and well-being has suffered since the pandemic • Ageing population • Poor connections to nearby communities causing residents to go elsewhere • "Climate Change - stop making new roads". • Vandalism by the younger generation • Shops closing down because people weren't using them • "Young people stop buying from local businesses and going to the supermarket, out of town, so businesses can't stay open" • "People are buying too much online" • A worse virus than COVID-19

Exercise 2: Prioritisation of Proposed Investment Themes

5.10 Following completion of the SWOT analysis exercise, students were asked to get into smaller groups to discuss and collectively agree the prioritisation of a series of investment themes. A RCTCBC Regeneration Officer was assigned to each groups to ensure that the students understand what each theme meant and to facilitate discussion. Students enjoyed the challenge of trying to convince each other of their own argument and developed strong negotiation skills in the process!

5.11 The results from each group have been collated into a single, prioritised list of investment themes (see fig.21) using the same weighted system as shown for other stakeholder groups.

Fig.21. Younger Generation: Prioritised Investment Themes.

Proposed Investment Theme	Weighted Score
Priority Group 1	
Overall town's appearance/brand - live, work & visit.	25
Redevelopment and re-use of vacant or derelict buildings	24
Enhancement and diversification of the town's offer	20
Sustainability and biodiversity	18
Tourism and visitor offer	17
Priority Group 2	
Physical connections between key sites	15
Partnerships and local level innovation	14
Hospitality and evening offer	12
Aberdare's history and heritage	11
Further enhancement of public realm and green spaces	9

Exercise 3: Discussion about the Welsh Language

5.12 An open discussion was held with both groups of students, within which students were asked to answer the following question: "how well do you think the Welsh Language is currently promoted and what do you think could be done to improve promotion of the Welsh Language?".

5.13 All groups felt that more could be done to promote the Welsh Language. Students from the welsh speaking school explained that they tend to speak English outside of school because Welsh is generally not spoken. However, they would welcome more opportunities to speak welsh within the town and students from the non-welsh speaking schools explained that they are all learning Welsh but would not attempt to speak it outside of school. Suggestions for improvements included making a more friendly atmosphere around 'having a go' at speaking welsh which may include younger people acting as champions for the language within the town.

6.0: Conclusions & Next Steps

This 'early engagement' exercise was successful in engaging over 650 people in an initial conversation on the key issues facing Aberdare town centre. Their valuable input will now assist the development of a Draft Regeneration Strategy for the town which will propose a series of 'Investment Themes' to help focus and coordinate future investment within the town.

The Draft Strategy will be the subject of a formal consultation exercise, during spring/ summer 2023, which will further 'test' whether the strategic direction and investment themes proposed are consistent with the views of the widest possible audience. That objective will be pursued through utilisation of the full range of online and face-to-face engagement techniques.

Aberdare Town Centre Strategy

Engagement Plan

Produced November 2022

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Engagement Plan

In order to develop and deliver a town centre strategy that can initiate positive change within the town, it is vital that the view of the local and wider communities are considered and to achieve this the Council will:

- Seek to engage with a diverse cross-section of Aberdare's community to better understand local needs and opportunities;
- Have a co-ordinated but flexible approach that meets the needs of all our services and ensures a consistent approach across the Council;
- Work in partnership with others where appropriate to ensure effective joined-up engagement activities;
- Undertake engagement activities in line with clear standards and good practice;
- Ensure our consultation and engagement is open, accessible and inclusive.

Stage 1: Early Engagement (Pre-Cabinet)

PURPOSE:	To establish relationships and connections with Aberdare's local communities to develop a shared understanding of local needs, challenges, opportunities and priorities for investment in the area.

STAKEHOLDER:	APPROACH:	METHOD:	KEY OBJECTIVES:	TIME FRAME:
Internal Stakeholders	Face-to-Face Communication either in person or via Microsoft Teams.	Arrangement of workshop style session in which internal stakeholders are asked to prioritise potential 'Investment Themes', discuss challenges/opportunities and identify potential crossovers with current live projects.	To inform internal stakeholders of the development of a Regeneration Strategy for Aberdare. To understand the type and scale of live projects currently in Aberdare and to learn about internal stakeholders' thoughts about prioritisation of investment in Aberdare.	Commenced late October 2022 and concluded in February 2023.
External Stakeholders	Face-to-Face Communication either in person or via Microsoft Teams. Online Consultation & Communication	Initial meetings with key external stakeholders. Creation of an online 'Snap Survey' which is circulated via email to residents and online via the Council's Social Media/Websites and in person via circulation of printed copies. and QR code.	To inform external stakeholders of the development of a Regeneration Strategy for Aberdare. To understand what is most important to the local community and to generate ideas for improvements.	Commenced late October 2022 and concluded in February 2023. Online survey was live for 6 weeks between December 2022 and January 2023.

Stage 2: Consideration of Findings from Early Engagement

PURPOSE:	To analyse the information collected during the phase of early engagement and present the findings in a clear 'Findings Report' for internal consideration. Following which a draft strategy will be prepared, informed by the findings.

STAKEHOLDER:	APPROACH:	METHOD:	KEY OBJECTIVES:	TIME FRAME:
Internal Stakeholders	Present early engagement findings report internally at a Senior Leadership Team Meeting and to the Scrutiny	In-person presentation of the findings report to the RCTCBC Scrutiny committee.	To share the findings from the phase of early engagement and to ask councillors to consider the findings and share their own thoughts regarding the town centre.	Undertaken late January and early February 2023.

Engagement Plan

Stage 3: Formal Consultation (Post Submission of Strategy to Cabinet)

PURPOSE: To share the Draft Strategy to the public and gain feedback.

STAKEHOLDER:	APPROACH:	METHOD:	KEY OBJECTIVES:	TIME FRAME:
All Stakeholders	Online Consultation	▪ Snap Survey. ▪ Web page online text and links to all documents/plans/maps. ▪ Web logo Box.	To find out what people think about the Draft Aberdare Regeneration Strategy and to gain suggestions for how the strategy can be improved.	Formal consultation to begin Summer 2023 and conducted over a 6-8 week period.
	Communication	▪ Promotion via press release. ▪ Social media campaign throughout 6 weeks. ▪ Poster/flyer to be placed in key buildings where events taking place, all businesses in Aberdare, Public Library, Community Buildings, GP Surgery, Council Offices (for staff information) ▪ Bilingual email to all Councillors ▪ Letter/email to local businesses/others that will be impacted	To ensure that as many people as possible are informed about the consultation events and how they can share their thoughts about the strategy.	Formal consultation to begin Summer 2023 and conducted over a 6-8 week period.
	Face-to-Face Consultation	▪ 2 x Public Events held within Aberdare ▪ 4 x Outreach Events at locations in nearby communities to Aberdare	To learn, first-hand, what people think about the strategy and how it can be improved.	Formal consultation to begin Summer 2023 and conducted over a 6-8 week period.

Stage 4: Review & Reflection
TIME FRAME:

PURPOSE:		
	▪ To review and reflect on the findings from the formal consultation and to make any amendments to the draft strategy. ▪ The final strategy, along with the findings from the early engagement, will be presented to Scrutiny and then Cabinet for sign off.	To be undertaken in September 2023.

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Aberdare Town Centre Strategy

Spatial Analysis

Produced November 2022
*By RCTCBC Regeneration Department*

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Movement

Weaknesses & Constraints:

- Poor pedestrian/cycling route from town centre area to Cynon Valley Museum.
- Enhanced lighting to alleyways, located between Commercial Street and Market Street, may reduce potential for anti-social behaviour.
- Pedestrian route from town centre to Aberdare park not clearly signposted.
- High Street car park, although convenient, does contribute to congesting movement around the town centre.
- Lack of electric vehicle charging provision.

Key:
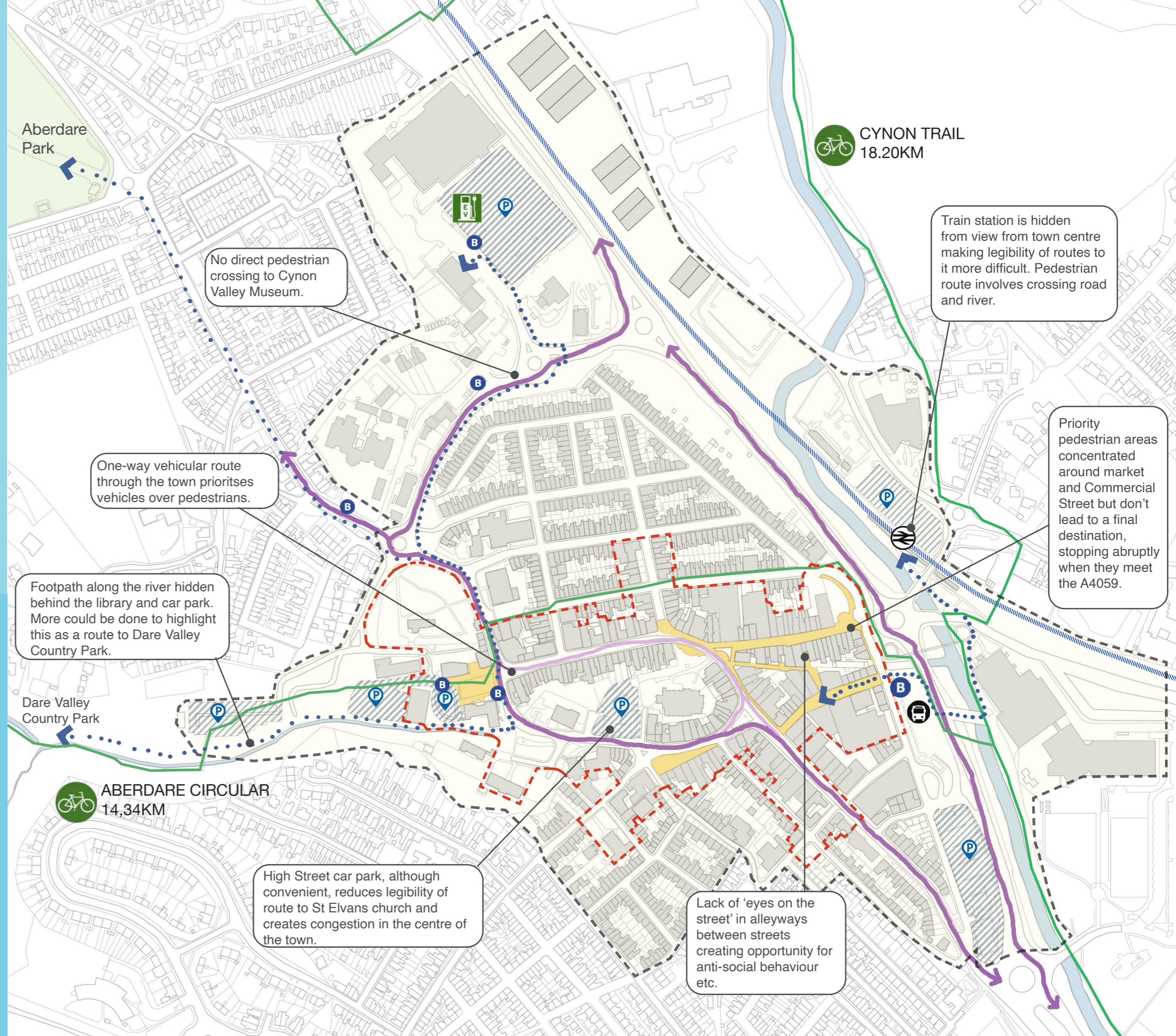
- ⬛ Study Area
- 🟥 Conservation Area
- 🟩 National Cycle Routes
- 🟪 Primary Vehicular Routes
- 🟨 Primary Pedestrian Areas
- 〰 Railway
- ⋯ Key Pedestrian Routes
- Ⓟ Car parks
- 🚌 Bus Station
- 🚉 Train Station
- EV Electric Vehicle Charging
- Ⓑ Bus Stops

Plan not to scale at A3 & information accurate as of November 2022.

Aberdare Park

CYNON TRAIL
18.20KM

No direct pedestrian crossing to Cynon Valley Museum.

Train station is hidden from view from town centre making legibility of routes to it more difficult. Pedestrian route involves crossing road and river.

One-way vehicular route through the town prioritses vehicles over pedestrians.

Priority pedestrian areas concentrated around market and Commercial Street but don't lead to a final destination, stopping abruptly when they meet the A4059.

Footpath along the river hidden behind the library and car park. More could be done to highlight this as a route to Dare Valley Country Park.

Dare Valley Country Park

ABERDARE CIRCULAR
14,34KM

High Street car park, although convenient, reduces legibility of route to St Elvans church and creates congestion in the centre of the town.

Lack of 'eyes on the street' in alleyways between streets creating opportunity for anti-social behaviour etc.

Movement
Strengths & Opportunities

- Abundance of car parking within the town centre area.
- Principal vehicular routes encircle town centre providing easy access to key parking facilities.
- Strong circular movement with St Elvans acting as focal point.
- Enhanced pedestrian links between town centre and bus station/train station via the recently completed, new active travel route.
- Key nodes where multiple pedestrian routes intersect provide opportunities for congregation points.
- Good bicycle/pedestrian routes to nearby towns and to Dare Valley Country Park. These could be better signposted.

Key:
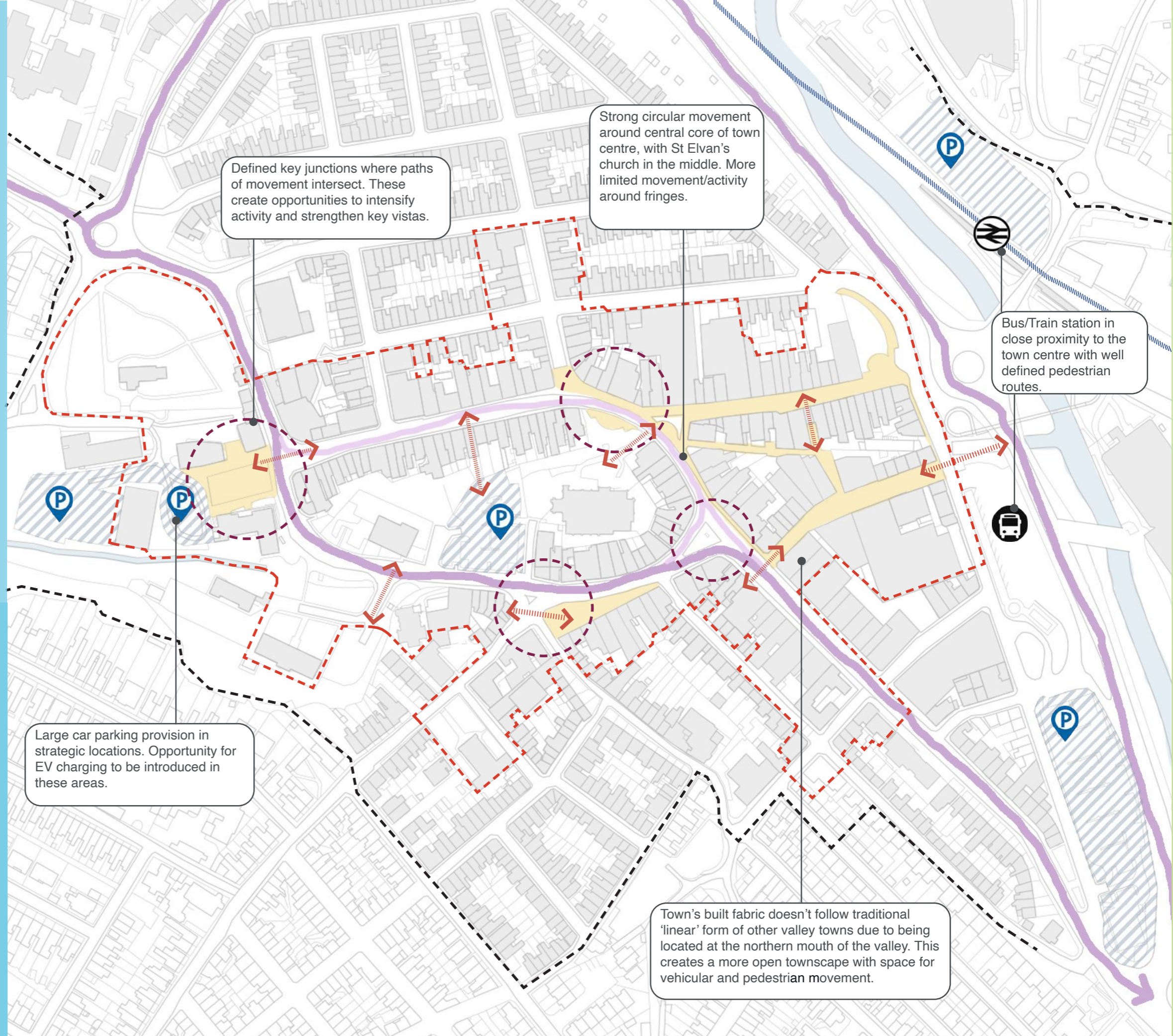
- ▫️ Study Area
- ▫️ Conservation Area
- Ⓟ Car parks
- 🚌 Bus Station
- 🚉 Train Station
- ⚪ Key Movement Intersects
- ⟷ Key Connections

Plan not to scale at A3 & information accurate as of November 2022.

Defined key junctions where paths of movement intersect. These create opportunities to intensify activity and strengthen key vistas.

Strong circular movement around central core of town centre, with St Elvan's church in the middle. More limited movement/activity around fringes.

Bus/Train station in close proximity to the town centre with well defined pedestrian routes.

Large car parking provision in strategic locations. Opportunity for EV charging to be introduced in these areas.

Town's built fabric doesn't follow traditional 'linear' form of other valley towns due to being located at the northern mouth of the valley. This creates a more open townscape with space for vehicular and pedestrian movement.

Built Envrionment & Public Realm
Weaknesses & Constraints

- Poor quality shop frontages in some places within the conservation area, detract from overall appearance of the town.
- Clearly defined, compact, town centre core (identified by conservation area boundary) with limited availability of sites to introduce new facilities.
- Key frontage facing A4059 lacks vibrancy/ activity. Acts as first impression to visitors arriving by train/rail. Shop windows could be enhanced to provide information about the towns offering.
- Legibility of access to St Elvans church is limited.
- Vacant buildings on key corners of high-street.

Key:

- ▮▯▯ **Study Area**
- ▮▮▮ **Conservation Area**
- ▭ **Listed Structures**
- ▮ **Poor Condition**
- ▭ **Poor Quality Structure**
- ⧄ **Vacant**
- ‖‖‖‖ **Inactive Frontage**

Plan not to scale at A3 & information accurate as of November 2022.

Quality of building frontages/signage within the conservation area is poor in places detracting from the overall appearance of the town.

Alley-ways between buildings not overlooked. Rear facades of buildings have a lack of activity contributing to a less attractive streetscape.

Frontage onto Duke St less active than others. This is the visitor's first impression when arriving by bus or train.

Surface level car park next to market fragments historic urban fabric.

Block of vacant/poor quality buildings on principle route through the town.

Car park/open site reduces strength of townscape. Provides views of poor rear facades of High Street.

Poor quality corner buildings framing key views.

Buildings on corners of Victoria Square vacant/lack of activity.

Built Envrionment & Public Realm

Strengths & Opportunities

- Abundance of high quality and/or listed buildings in key areas.
- 2010-2015 improvements to public realm have created pleasant seating areas at key points within the town centre.
- Opportunity to concentrate investment efforts around these areas.
- Number of buildings currently being restored/ redeveloped, by the private sector, including the former Boot Hotel.
- Significant investment by RCTCBC in key facilities such as the library and leisure centre increase overall quality of built environment.
- Key priority development sites and vacant space above retail units, provide opportunities to introduce new amenities such as high quality restaurants and visitor accommodation.
Potential to facilitate temporary uses in vacant spaces to create dynamic offer, encouraging repeat visits.

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Key:

- ▨ **Study Area**
- ▨ **Landmark Buildings**
- ⬜ **Conservation Area**
- ◯ **Areas subject to THI Improvements**
- ⬛ **Listed Structures**
- ⬛ **High Quality Structures**
- ⬛ **Under Utilised Plots**
- ⬛ **Priority Redevelop Structures**
- ▭ **Refurbished**
- ▭ **Ongoing Development**
- 〰 **Improve Edge**

Numerous landmark buildings in prominent positions along the high street. A large percentage have been restored/refurbished or are currently being developed.

Significant public realm improvement works undertaken in 2010, in key locations throughout the town centre core. These areas create good meeting/seating areas and are well used.

Significant investment in facilities such as leisure centre, school, college and modern industrial units in Robertstown.

Underutilised sites provide opportunity to intensify/diversity activity on the high street, whilst priority development projects would increase quality of built environment and introduce new modern facilities (e.g. visitor accommodation, high quality dining, community uses).

High number of high quality buildings in town centre core which positively contribute to the town's overall appearance.

Concentration of listed buildings create distinct areas within the town centre that contribute to its identity. More could be done to strengthen the purpose/type of activities in these areas.

Plan not to scale at A3 & information accurate as of November 2022.
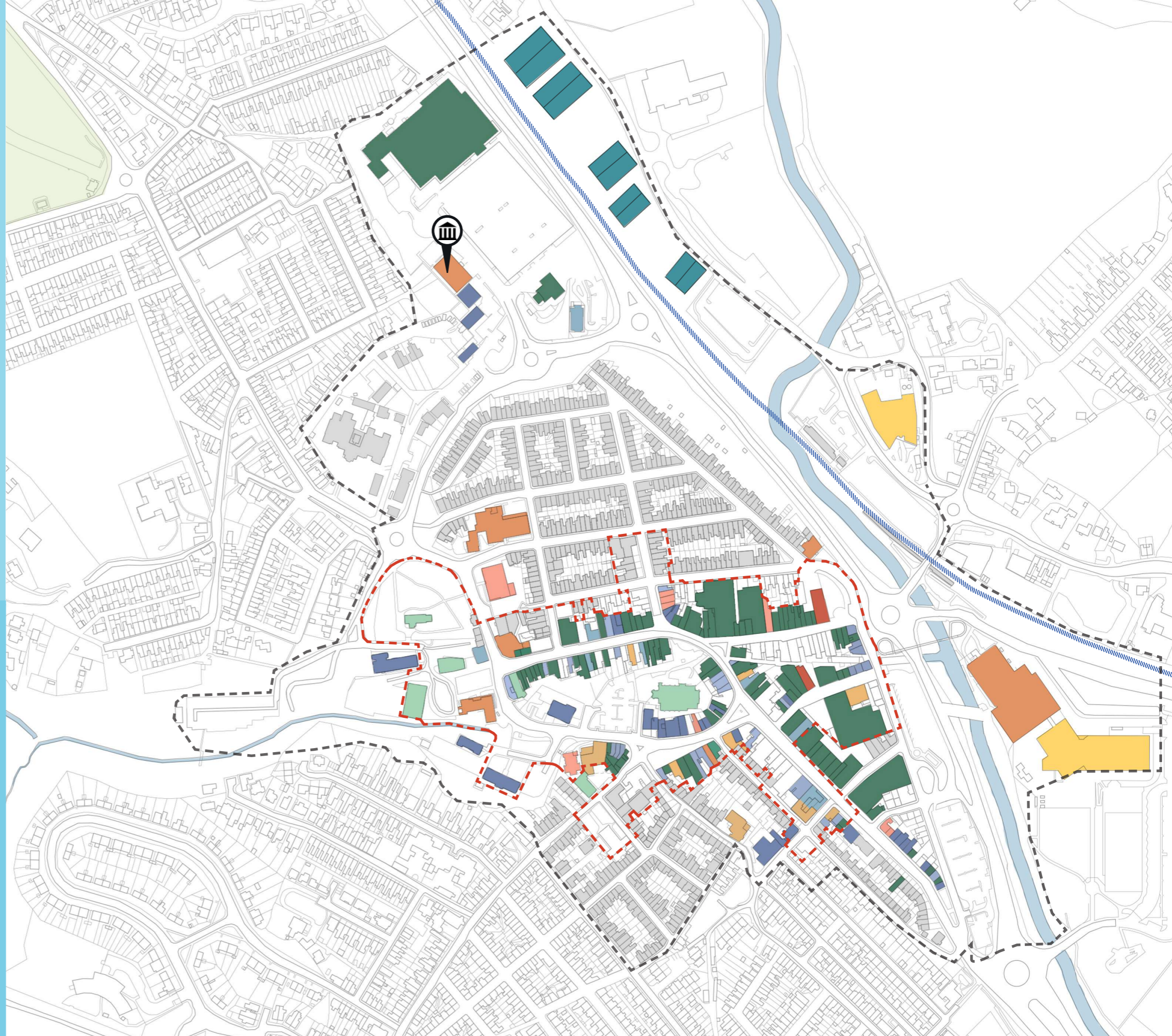
Amenities
Weaknesses & Constraints

- Lack of visitor accommodation within walking distance of the town centre.
- Public conveniences difficult to identify, due to lack of signage.
- Limited high quality sit down restaurants - lack of choice.
- Dependence on retail as dominant sector.
- Vacant properties in key locations.
- Outdated interpretation (QR codes out of date) and signposting to nearby attractions such as Dare Valley Country Park/ Cynon Valley Museum could be improved.
- Aberdare Park is within walking distance of town centre but signage could be improved to inform visitors of how to get there.
- Strong market, although well used/occupied, lacks external visitor appeal.
- Basic visitor infrastructure could be improved upon.
- Overall high occupancy rate of premises on ground floor, less so on upper floors.

Key:

- Community Facilities
- Education
- Retail
- Office/Services
- Religious
- Amusement Arcades
- Bar / Pub
- Takeaway / Restaurant
- Health / Fitness
- Cafe
- Industrial Unit

Plan not to scale at A3 & information accurate as of November 2022.

Amenities
Strengths & Opportunities

- Compact town centre with residential areas to the north and south.
- Diverse mix of amenities within town centre contributing to sustainability of overall town.
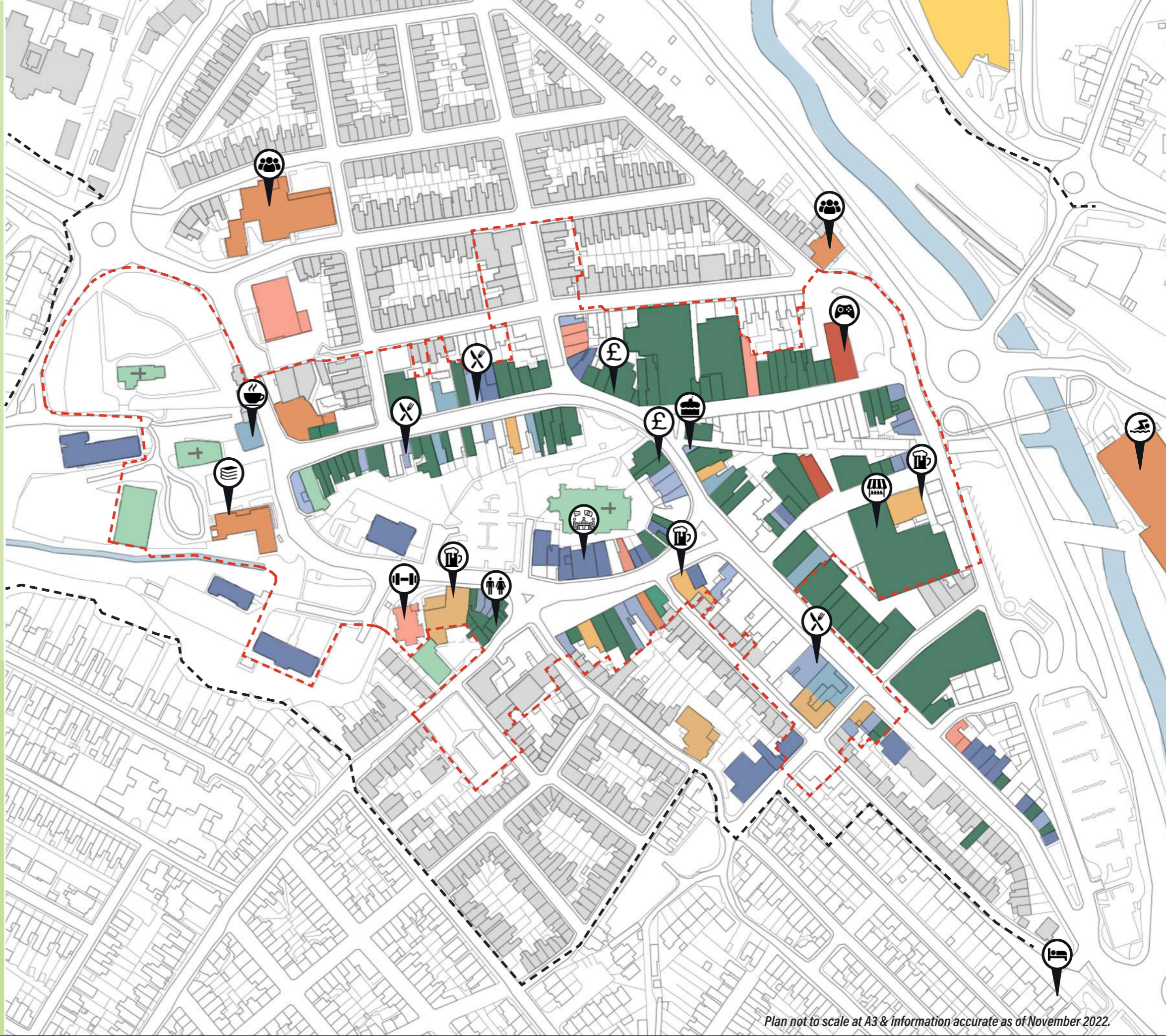- Abundance of local independent businesses.
- Close proximity of education institutions provides increased footfall/engagement opportunities along with new industrial development at Robertstown.
- Central St Elvan's church has recently undergone a major refurbishment and acts as a key landmark in the town.
- Potential to introduce more dynamic offerings above shops e.g. unique visitor accommodation, co working, short term workshops etc.
- Opportunity to intensify/cluster certain types of activities in defined areas to create key distinguishable zones.

Key:

- Community Facilities
- Education
- Retail
- Office/Services
- Religious
- Amusement Arcades
- Bar / Pub
- Takeaway / Restaurant
- Health / Fitness
- Cafe
- Industrial Unit

Plan not to scale at A3 & information accurate as of November 2022.

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28 JUNE 2023

PROPOSED EXTENSION TO RHONDDA CYNON TAF CBC'S DOG CONTROL PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND DIRECTOR OF FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, COUNCILLORS M.WEBBER, B. HARRIS AND A. CRIMMINGS

1.   PURPOSE

1.1   The two Public Spaces Protection Orders related to dog controls within Rhondda Cynon Taf are due to expire on the 30th September 2023. At any point before expiry of these orders, the Council can vary or extend them by up to three years if it considers it necessary to prevent the original behaviour from occurring or recurring.

1.2   This report revisits the terms of the two existing orders and asks the Cabinet to approve, in principle the proposal to extend those orders and to authorise officers to publicise the proposed orders and to consult as required by the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

2.   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   To approve in principle, the proposal to extend the two Public Spaces Protection Orders for dog control within Rhondda Cynon Taf, for a further period of three years from 1st October 2023, in the form set out at Appendix A1 and A2 of the report;

2.2   Subject to 2.1 above, to authorise officers to publicise the proposed orders and to carry out a consultation exercise as required by the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014; and

2.3   Subject to 2.1 and 2.2 above, receive a further report detailing the responses to the consultation and any recommendations for amendments to the proposed orders.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Dog fouling remains a significant concern for the Council and for those who live, work and visit the County Borough. Dog Fouling is unpleasant and is a serious risk to human health, particularly amongst children.

3.2 The Public Spaces Protection Orders in relation to dog controls has allowed the Council to introduce a range of reasonable and proportionate restrictions on the use of publicly accessible land across the County Borough and helped control the harmful activities of irresponsible dog owners whilst allowing responsible dog owners to continue to exercise their dogs without undue restrictions.

3.3 Despite the introduction of the orders in October 2017 and their renewal in October 2020 there remains a minority of dog owners who do not clean up after their dogs or keep them under control. Officers therefore consider it vital the orders, which would ordinarily expire on 30th September 2023, are renewed for a further period in order to maintain the significant benefits the orders have had in relation to dog fouling and ensure appropriate powers remain in place to deal with the minority who continue to flout the laws.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Dog fouling is unsightly, unpleasant and can lead to toxocariasis in humans. Toxocariasis causes serious illness and even blindness. It is caused by a parasite that lives in dogs' digestive systems. Eggs are present in the faeces of infected animals. If infected material is ingested, the eggs hatch into larvae and can cause toxocariasis. The disease can be controlled if dog faeces are disposed of immediately in a responsible manner.

4.2 The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014 (the 'Act') introduced provisions whereby a local authority can make Public Spaces Protection Orders ('PSPOs'). A PSPO is designed to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in an area. The behaviour must be having a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the community, it must be persistent or continuing and it must be unreasonable. PSPOs are designed to ensure that the law-abiding majority can enjoy public space, safe from anti-social behaviour.

4.3 The majority of dog owners are responsible, clean up after their dogs and keep them under control. However, a minority of irresponsible dog owners create significant problems. The Council receives many complaints each year about dog fouling in public places. In addition, despite the introduction of the Dog Control PSPO's some of our playing fields need to be checked for dog fouling before they can be used; on occasion individuals wishing to use the playing fields for sport are doing this.

5. **CURRENT DOG CONTROL PSPOs**

5.1 This report revisits the terms of the following two Public Space Protection Orders which came into effect on 1st October 2020:

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL (DOG CONTROL) PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER 2020

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL (DOG CONTROL – ABERDARE PUBLIC PARK) PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER 2020

(the "Dog Control PSPO's")

5.2 This report reviews the impacts of the Dog Control PSPOs and considers the case for varying and extending them for a further three years, as permitted by the Act.

5.3 The introduction of the Dog Control PSPOs, following a public consultation exercise, created transparency and consistency within Rhondda Cynon Taf and gave authorised officers the ability to issue fixed penalty notices for offences that were not able to be previously enforced.

5.4 The activities prohibited by the Dog Control PSPOs are:

(i)   The prohibition of Dog Fouling in all Public Places within Rhondda Cynon Taf;

(ii)   A requirement for a person in charge of a dog to keep that dog on a lead at all times in Cemeteries owned and/or maintained by the Council;

(iii) A requirement for a person in charge of a dog at all times to carry bags or other suitable means for the disposal of dog faeces;

(iv) A requirement for a person in charge of a dog to follow a direction given by an Authorised Officer, if they deem reasonably necessary, that a dog be put and kept on a lead in a Public Place within Rhondda Cynon Taf for such period and/or in such circumstances as directed by the Authorised Officer; and

(v)   A prohibition excluding dogs from all Schools, Playgrounds and Marked Sports Pitches owned and/or maintained by the Council and certain Community Council sites as set out in the Order.

5.5 In relation to the Dog Control PSPO covering Aberdare Park there is a specific requirement for a person in charge of a dog to keep that dog on a lead at all times in Aberdare Public Park. This requirement is consistent with existing provisions that have been in place since 1866 (local bye law) and with the expectations of many users of the park. Further detail in respect of this particular requirement can be found in the report presented to Cabinet in September 2017 prior to the original commencement of the PSPO.

5.6 The Dog Control PSPOs were not put forward as a means of unduly restricting the exercising or recreation of dogs across the County Borough. The reason for making the Dog Control PSPOs was to address the detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality caused by the irresponsible behaviour of a

small minority of dog owners; and to set out a clear standard of behaviour to which all dog owners were required to adhere.

5.7   The Council employs a dedicated team of Wardens who patrol the County Borough with powers to enforce the Dog Control PSPOs in line with the Council's Enforcement Policy The penalty for committing an offence of failing to comply with a PSPO without reasonable excuse is a maximum fine of level 3 on the standard scale (currently £1,000). Alternatively, the opportunity to pay a fixed penalty of £100 may be offered in place of prosecution.

6.   EXTENSION OF THE DOG CONTROL PSPOS

6.1   At any point before expiry of the Dog Control PSPOs the Council can extend them by up to three years if it considers it is necessary to prevent the original behaviour from occurring or recurring.

6.2   According to section 60(2) of the Act, before the time when a PSPO is due to expire, the local authority that made the PSPO may extend the period for which it has effect if satisfied on reasonable grounds that doing so is necessary to prevent-

1. Occurrence or recurrence after that time of the activities identified in the Order, or
2. An increase in the frequency or seriousness of those activities after that time.

6.3   Section 61 of the Act makes provision for the Order to be varied by increasing or reducing the affected area, or by altering or removing a prohibition or requirement included in the Order or by adding a new one. For an order to be able to be varied, the Council must be satisfied that, on reasonable grounds, the following two conditions are met.

The first condition is that:
a. Activities carried on in a public place within the Council's area have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality; or,
b. It is likely that activities will be carried on in a public place within that area and that they will have such an effect.

The second condition is that the effect or likely effect, of the activities:
a. Is or is likely to be, of a persistent or continuing nature;
b. Is, or is likely to be, such as to make the activities unreasonable; and,
c. Justifies the restrictions imposed by the notice.

6.4   This report does not propose any variations to the main conditions of the PSPO. Any variations will need to be subject to public consultation

6.5   When the existing PSPO was renewed in 2020 a number of Community Council owned sites were included within it as a result of consultation feedback and requests from Community Councils. It is likely therefore there may be further

similar representations made from stakeholders to have additional areas included within the PSPO should Cabinet agree to consult on any extension.

6.6 If the Dog Control PSPOs are to be extended this must be done before the time the Orders are due to expire, on 30th September 2023. In the event of the orders not being extended, they would lapse on 1st October 2023 at which point there would be no restrictions on dogs in Rhondda Cynon Taf (save for any enforceable local byelaws).

6.7 Officers consider it reasonable to assume that anti-social behaviour in regards to dog controls in the restricted areas would reoccur, and/or increase in the frequency and/or seriousness if the Orders are not extended. There would continue to be a positive effect on local environmental quality with the proposed extended and varied orders and continued enforcement against dog fouling and irresponsible dog owners.

6.8 Consultation feedback received prior to the introduction of the Dog Control PSPOs in 2017 and when it was renewed in 2020 highlighted that there was overwhelming public support for the introduction of the orders and prohibitions and requirements in relation to the control of dogs. Over 90% of respondents supported the Council's proposed approach to dealing with dog fouling and that dog fouling should be prohibited.

6.9 A report published by Keep Wales Tidy entitled 'An Analysis of Local Environmental Quality in RCT 2022-23' shows that the presence of dog fouling on streets in RCT has remained consistent (at 10.9%) when compared to the period the PSPO was last renewed in 2020. It is worth noting however that in 2021-22 the presence of dog fouling was recorded on 8.9% of streets – so the most recent report does unfortunately evidence an increase. Prior to the original introduction of the PSPO in 2017 this figure was around the 18% mark. The report also shows that instances of dog fouling are generally spread evenly across the County Borough. This report does therefore demonstrate that since its introduction in 2017 the PSPO has led to a reduction in the presence of dog fouling on the streets of RCT but also highlights it still remains an issue.

6.10 The Council has issued more than 1,000 fixed penalty notices for breaches of the Dog Control PSPO's since their introduction in October 2017.

6.11 Factoring in the above it is therefore proposed to extend the Dog Control PSPOs, for a further period of three years from 1st October 2023, in the form set out at Appendix A1 and A2 to this report.

7. **CONSULTATION**

7.1 In accordance with the Act if the recommended proposed extension and variation of the Dog Control PSPOs is approved in principle the Council is then required to consult the Chief Officer of Police for the area, community councils, community representatives the Council thinks it appropriate to consult and the owner or occupier of land (not owned or occupied by the Council) within the restricted areas.

7.2   The Council is also required to publish the text of the proposed draft extended and (if relevant) varied order on its website.

7.3   It is therefore proposed the Council undertakes a comprehensive consultation exercise with the public, relevant bodies and other interested parties in accordance with the Act's requirements on the proposal to extend the Dog Control PSPOs as outlined in the report.

7.4   Subject to that consultation exercise being initiated by Cabinet, officers would report the outcome of the consultation to the relevant Scrutiny Committee in the first instance and thereafter to Cabinet for any final decision(s) on the proposals. If agreed, the consultation would take place for a six week period in July and August 23.

8.   **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY (INCLUDING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY) IMPLICATIONS**

8.1   The Council must be able to demonstrate that a PSPO is a necessary and proportionate response to the problems caused by the activities of dogs and those in charge of them. The Council is required to balance the interests of those in charge of dogs against the interests of those affected by the activities of dogs. This must take into consideration the need for people, particularly children, to have access to dog-free areas and areas where dogs are kept under strict control, and the need for those in charge of dogs to have access to areas where they can exercise their dogs without undue restrictions.

8.2   In developing the original PSPO an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken to ensure that:

    •   The Council meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duties, and
    •   Due regard has been taken of the likely impact of the decision in terms of equality and discrimination.

8.3   This exercise will be refreshed but it is considered the impact on residents, visitors and businesses is expected to continue to be positive, as these proposals should continue to act as a deterrent to irresponsible dog ownership. Taking into account the exemptions set out in 8.4 and 8.5 below there is no adverse impact on any other protected characteristics from its adoption through to its potential variation and extension.   Subject to Cabinet approval to proceed the EIA would be published on the Council's website alongside the consultation document.

8.4   The provisions of the proposed Dog Control Orders would not apply to a person who:

        (i) is registered as partially sighted or blind, in a register compiled under section 29 of the National Assistance Act 1948;

(ii) is registered as "sight-impaired", "severely sight impaired" or as "having sight and hearing impairments which, in combination, have a significant effect on their day to day lives", in a register compiled under section 18 of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014;
(iii) has a disability which affects their mobility, manual dexterity, physical coordination, or ability to lift, carry, or otherwise move everyday objects, such that he cannot reasonably be expected to remove the faeces; or (iv) has some other disability, such that he reasonably cannot be expected to remove the faeces.

8.5   The provisions of the orders would not apply to a dog trained by a registered charity to assist a person with a disability and upon which a disabled person relies for assistance.

8.6   For the purposes of the orders, a 'disability' means a condition that qualifies as a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 and upon which a disabled person relies for assistance.

8.7   Nothing in the Order shall apply to the normal activities of a working dog whilst the dog is working. This includes dogs that are being used for work in connection with emergency search and rescue, law enforcement and the work of HM Armed Forces and farm dogs that are being used to herd or drive animals.

9.   **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1   Should the proposed orders be extended there would be a need to amend existing signage to reflect this however any associated costs would be met from existing budgets.

10.   **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

10.1   Section 60(2) of the Act states that before the time when a public spaces protection order is due to expire, the local authority that made the order may extend the period for which it has effect if satisfied on reasonable grounds that doing so is necessary to prevent—
(a) occurrence or recurrence after that time of the activities identified in the order, or
(b) an increase in the frequency or seriousness of those activities after that time.

10.2   An extension under this section—
(a) may not be for a period of more than 3 years;
(b) must be published in accordance with regulations made by the Secretary of State.

10.3   A public spaces protection order may be extended more than once.

10.4   Section 61 states that where a public spaces protection order is in force, the local authority that made the order may vary it—

(a) by increasing or reducing the restricted area;
(b) by altering or removing a prohibition or requirement included in the order, or adding a new one.

10.5   A local authority may make a variation that results in the order applying to an area to which it did not previously apply only if the conditions in section 59(2) and (3) are met as regards activities in that area.

These are:

The first condition is that—
(a) activities carried on in a public place within the authority's area have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality, or
(b) it is likely that activities will be carried on in a public place within that area and that they will have such an effect.
 The second condition is that the effect, or likely effect, of the activities—
(a) is, or is likely to be, of a persistent or continuing nature,
(b) is, or is likely to be, such as to make the activities unreasonable, and
(c) justifies the restrictions imposed by the notice.

10.6   A local authority may make a variation that makes a prohibition or requirement more extensive, or adds a new one, only if the prohibitions and requirements imposed by the order as varied are ones that section 59(5) allows to be imposed.

The only prohibitions or requirements that may be imposed are ones that are reasonable to impose in order—
(a) to prevent the detrimental effect from continuing, occurring or recurring, or
(b) to reduce that detrimental effect or to reduce the risk of its continuance, occurrence or recurrence.

10.7   Where an order is varied, the order as varied must be published in accordance with regulations made by the Secretary of State.

10.8   A local authority, in deciding whether to extend the period for which a public spaces protection order has effect (under section 60) and if so for how long and whether to vary a public spaces protection order (under section 61) and if so how must have particular regard to the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly set out in articles 10 and 11 of the Convention.

10.9   A local authority must carry out the necessary consultation and the necessary publicity, and the necessary notification (if any), before extending the period for which a public spaces protection order has effect or varying it.

"the necessary consultation" means consulting with—
(a) the chief officer of police, and the local policing body, for the police area that includes the restricted area;
(b) whatever community representatives the local authority thinks it appropriate to consult;
(c) the owner or occupier of land within the restricted area;

"the necessary publicity" means—
(a) in the case of a proposed order or variation, publishing the text of it;
(b) in the case of a proposed extension or discharge, publicising the proposal;

"the necessary notification" means notifying the following authorities of the proposed order, extension, variation or discharge—
(a) the community council (if any) for the area that includes the restricted area.

The requirement to consult with the owner or occupier of land within the restricted area—
(a) does not apply to land that is owned and occupied by the local authority;
(b) applies only if, or to the extent that, it is reasonably practicable to consult the owner or occupier of the land.

In relation to a variation of a public spaces protection order that would increase the restricted area, the restricted area for the purposes of this section is the increased area.

11. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 It is considered there are no immediate Welsh Language implications relating to the proposals within this report. All signs in respect of the PSPO are bilingual. The Council will ensure compliance with Welsh Language Standards if a consultation process is initiated in relation to the proposals outlined within this report and a Welsh Language Impact Assessment will be prepared alongside the consultation document.

12. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN AND FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

12.1 The proposals in this report are consistent with the priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan, in particular *"Place – creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work"*:

12.2 These proposals are also consistent with the Well-being Goals under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

• *A healthier Wales – a society in which people's physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.*
• *A Wales of cohesive communities – attractive, viable, safe and well connected communities.*

13.   CONCLUSION

13.1   Dog fouling remains a significant concern for the Council and for those who live, work and visit the County Borough and is a serious risk to human health, particularly amongst children.

13.2   The Public Spaces Protection Orders in relation to dog controls has allowed the Council to introduce a range of reasonable and proportionate restrictions on the use of publicly accessible land across the County Borough and helped control the harmful activities of irresponsible dog owners whilst allowing responsible dog owners to continue to exercise their dogs without undue restrictions.

13.3   Despite the introduction of the orders in October 2017, and their renewal in October 2020 there remains a minority of dog owners who do not clean up after their dogs or keep them under control. Therefore officers consider it vital the orders, which would ordinarily expire on 30th September 2023, are renewed for a further period of three years in order to maintain the significant benefits the orders have had in relation to dog fouling and ensure appropriate powers remain in place to deal with the minority who continue to flout the laws.

13.4   Cabinet is now asked to consider initiating the necessary consultation to extend, and if appropriate vary, the Dog Control PSPOs as outlined in the report.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972
AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28 JUNE 2023

PROPOSED EXTENSION AND VARIATION TO RHONDDA CYNON TAF CBC'S DOG CONTROL PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND DIRECTOR OF FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, COUNCILLORS M.WEBBER, B.HARRIS AND A. CRIMMINGS

Background Papers

a) Public Spaces Protection Orders (Dog Controls) – Joint Report of Director of Highways & Streetcare Services & Service Director of Public Health & Protection in discussion with the relevant Portfolio Holders, Councillor A Crimmings and Councillor J Rosser: 22nd June 2017
b) Public Spaces Protection Orders (Dog Controls) – Aberdare Park - Joint Report of Director of Highways & Streetcare Services & Service Director of Public Health & Protection in discussion with the relevant Portfolio Holders, Councillor A Crimmings and Councillor J Rosser: 28th September 2017
c) PROPOSED EXTENSION AND VARIATION TO RHONDDA CYNON TAF CBC'S DOG CONTROL PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND GROUP DIRECTOR PROSPERITY, DEVELOPMENT AND FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, COUNCILLORS A. CRIMMINGS AND R. LEWIS – 25TH June 2020
d) PROPOSED EXTENSION AND VARIATION TO RHONDDA CYNON TAF CBC'S DOG CONTROL PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND GROUP DIRECTOR PROSPERITY, DEVELOPMENT AND FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, COUNCILLORS A. CRIMMINGS AND R. LEWIS: 24 SEPTEMBER 2020
e) Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 – Chapter 12
f) Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014: Reform of anti-social behaviour powers: statutory guidance

Officers to contact:
Andy Wilkins, Director of Legal & Democratic Services; Louise Davies, Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services; Roger Waters, Director of Frontline Services

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, CRIME AND POLICING ACT 2014

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL (DOG CONTROL) PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER 2023

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council ('the Council') in exercise of its powers under Section 59 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (the 'Act') hereby makes the following Public Spaces Protection Order:

1. This Order may be cited as the 'Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (Dog Control) Public Spaces Protection Order 2023' (the 'Order').

2. This Order comes into force on 1st October 2023 and shall have effect and remain in force for a period of three years from that date.

OFFENCES

3. The effect of this Order is to impose the following conditions within Rhondda Cynon Taf:

    (i)   The prohibition of Dog Fouling in all Public Places within Rhondda Cynon Taf;
    (ii)   A requirement for a person in charge of a dog to keep that dog on a lead at all times in Cemeteries owned and/or maintained by the Council;
    (iii) A requirement for a person in charge of a dog at all times to carry bags or other suitable means for the disposal of dog faeces;
    (iv)   A requirement for a person in charge of a dog to follow a direction given by an Authorised Officer, if they deem reasonably necessary, that a dog be put and kept on a lead in a Public Place within Rhondda Cynon Taf for such period and/or in such circumstances as directed by the Authorised Officer; and
    (v)   A prohibition excluding dogs from all Schools, Playgrounds and Marked Sports Pitches owned and/or maintained by the Council and certain Community Council sites as set out in the Order.

4. For the purposes of this Order:

4.1 'Dog Fouling' means failing to immediately remove the faeces of a dog by a person who is in charge of that dog.

4.2 Placing dog faeces in a receptacle on land which is provided for the purpose, or for the disposal of waste, shall be a sufficient removal from the land. Being unaware of the defecation (whether by reason of not being in the vicinity or otherwise) shall not be a reasonable excuse for failing to remove the faeces.

4.3 'a person in charge of a dog' means a person who habitually has a dog in his/her possession at any time unless at that time some other person is in charge of the dog.

4.4 'Public Place(s)' means any place to which the public or any section of the public has access, on payment or otherwise, as of right by virtue of express or implied permission.

4.5 'Authorised Officer' means a constable or a person authorised by the Council for the purposes of enforcing this Order.

4.6 For the purposes of 3(iv) above an Authorised Officer may only direct a person to put and keep a dog on a lead if such restraint is reasonably necessary to prevent a nuisance, or behaviour by the dog that is likely to cause annoyance or disturbance to any other person, or the worrying or disturbance of any animal.

4.7 'Rhondda Cynon Taf' means the whole area of the county borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf as shown in Schedule 1 to this Order.

4.8 'Cemeteries' means the areas of land as shown and detailed in Schedule 2 to this Order.

4.9 'Schools' means the areas of land as shown and detailed in Schedule 3 to this Order.

4.10 'Playgrounds' means the areas of land as shown and detailed in Schedule 4 to this Order.

4.11 'Marked Sports Pitches' means the areas of land as shown and detailed in Schedule 5 to this Order.

4.12 'Community Council sites' means the areas of land as shown and detailed in Schedule 6 to this Order.

5. It is an offence for a person, without reasonable excuse, to engage in activity which they are prohibited from doing by effect of this Order or fail to comply with a requirement to which a person is subject by effect of this Order.

6. The Council is satisfied that the conditions set out in Section 59 of the Act have been satisfied and, that it is in all the circumstances expedient and reasonable to make this Order for the purpose of prohibiting the above activities and introducing the stated requirements. The effect or likely effect of the activities is, or is likely to be, of a persistent or continuing nature, such as to make them unreasonable, and justifies the restrictions imposed by this Order.

EXEMPTIONS

7. The provisions of this Order do not apply to a person who:

   (i)   is registered as partially sighted or blind, in a register compiled under Section 29 of the National Assistance Act 1948;
   (ii)   is registered as "sight-impaired", "severely sight impaired" or as "having sight and hearing impairments which, in combination, have a significant effect on their day to day lives", in a register compiled under Section 18 of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014;

(iii) has a disability which affects their mobility, manual dexterity, physical coordination, or ability to lift, carry, or otherwise move everyday objects, such that he cannot reasonably be expected to remove the faeces; or

(iv) has some other disability, such that he reasonably cannot be expected to remove the faeces.

8. The provisions of this Order do not apply to a dog trained by a registered charity to assist a person with a disability and upon which a disabled person relies for assistance.

9. For the purposes of this Order, a 'disability' means a condition that qualifies as a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 and upon which a disabled person relies for assistance.

10. Nothing in this Order shall apply to the normal activities of a working dog whilst the dog is working. This includes dogs that are being used for work in connection with emergency search and rescue, law enforcement and the work of HM Armed Forces and farm dogs that are being used to herd or drive animals.

11. Where a person in charge of a dog wishes to rely upon any of the exemptions set out in this Order the burden shall be on that person to prove they satisfy the requirements of the exemption being relied upon.

PENALTIES

12. A person who is guilty of an offence under this Order is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

13. A Fixed Penalty Notice may be issued by an Authorised Officer to a person who breaches this Order, offering them the opportunity of discharging any liability to conviction for the offence by payment of a fixed penalty.

THE COMMON SEAL OF RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Was hereto affixed in the presence of

....

Andy Wilkins

Director, Legal & Democratic Services

SCHEDULE 1 – RHONDDA CYNON TAF AREA

SCHEDULE 2 - CEMETERIES

SCHEDULE 3 – SCHOOLS

SCHEDULE 4 - PLAYGROUNDS

SCHEDULE 5 – MARKED SPORTS PITCHES

SCHEDULE 6 – COMMUNITY COUNCIL SITES

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, CRIME AND POLICING ACT 2014

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL (DOG CONTROL – ABERDARE PUBLIC PARK) PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER 2023

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council ('the Council') in exercise of its powers under Section 59 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (the 'Act') hereby makes the following Public Spaces Protection Order:

1. This Order may be cited as the 'Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (Dog Control – Aberdare Public Park) Public Spaces Protection Order 2023' (the 'Order').

2. This Order comes into force on 1st October 2023 and shall have effect and remain in force for a period of three years from that date.

OFFENCES

3. The effect of this Order is to impose the following condition within Rhondda Cynon Taf:

    (i) A requirement for a person in charge of a dog to keep that dog on a lead at all times in Aberdare Public Park.

4. For the purposes of this Order:

4.1 'a person in charge of a dog' means a person who habitually has a dog in his/her possession at any time unless at that time some other person is in charge of the dog.

4.2 'Aberdare Public Park' means all land within the boundary of Aberdare Public Park as detailed in Schedule 1.

4.3 'Authorised Officer' means a constable or a person authorised by the Council for the purposes of enforcing this Order.

5. It is an offence for a person, without reasonable excuse, to engage in activity, which they are prohibited from doing by effect of this Order or fail to comply with a requirement to which a person is subject by effect of this Order.

6. The Council is satisfied that the conditions set out in Section 59 of the Act have been satisfied and, that it is in all the circumstances expedient and reasonable to make this Order for the purpose of prohibiting the above activities and introducing the stated requirements. The effect or likely effect of the activities is, or is likely to be, of a persistent or continuing nature, such as to make them unreasonable, and justifies the restrictions imposed by this Order.

EXEMPTIONS

7. The provisions of this Order do not apply to a person who:

   (i)   is registered as partially sighted or blind, in a register compiled under Section 29 of the National Assistance Act 1948;
   (ii)   is registered as "sight-impaired", "severely sight impaired" or as "having sight and hearing impairments which, in combination, have a significant effect on their day to day lives", in a register compiled under Section 18 of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014;
   (iii)   has a disability which affects their mobility, manual dexterity, physical coordination, or ability to lift, carry, or otherwise move everyday objects, such that he cannot reasonably be expected to remove the faeces; or
   (iv)   has some other disability, such that he reasonably cannot be expected to remove the faeces.

8. The provisions of this Order do not apply to a dog trained by a registered charity to assist a person with a disability and upon which a disabled person relies for assistance.

9. For the purposes of this Order, a 'disability' means a condition that qualifies as a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 and upon which a disabled person relies for assistance.

10. Nothing in this Order shall apply to the normal activities of a working dog whilst the dog is working. This includes dogs that are being used for work in connection with emergency search and rescue, law enforcement and the work of HM Armed Forces and farm dogs that are being used to herd or drive animals.

11. Where a person in charge of a dog wishes to rely upon any of the exemptions set out in this Order the burden shall be on that person to prove they satisfy the requirements of the exemption being relied upon.

PENALTIES

12. A person who is guilty of an offence under this Order is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

13. A Fixed Penalty Notice may be issued by an Authorised Officer to a person who breaches this Order, offering them the opportunity of discharging any liability to conviction for the offence by payment of a fixed penalty.

THE COMMON SEAL OF RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Was hereto affixed in the presence of

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Andy Wilkins

Director, Legal & Democratic Services

SCHEDULE 1

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28ᵀᴴ JUNE 2023

**PROPOSALS TO DEVELOP A NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL
IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND WELSH LANGUAGE (COUNCILLOR R LEWIS)

AUTHOR(S):
Gaynor Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services and
Andrea Richards, Service Director of 21ˢᵗ Century Schools and Transformation.

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 Following the report to Cabinet from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services, on the 26ᵗʰ September 2022, regarding the proposal to develop a new special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT), the purpose of this report is to:

1.2 Seek formal approval to begin the relevant and required statutory consultation for the proposal to open a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT. The consultation will also include the introduction of catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT, these are:

- Park Lane Special School
- Ysgol Hen Felin
- Ysgol Ty Coch.

1.3 Provide an update to Cabinet, regarding the submission of the variation to the approved Strategic Outline Programme in accordance with the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning funding approval processes.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Note the content of this report.

2.2 Give formal approval to commence a statutory consultation with relevant stakeholders on the proposal to:

2.2.1 Build a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT on a new site.

2.2.2 Introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT (as listed in 1.2), to better meet and manage the demand for special school places.

2.2.3 Note that children and young people who wish to remain in their existing special school special school placements following the catchment changes can continue to do so. However, all new placements will be informed by the revised catchment areas once the changes are implemented so that learners attend their local special school.

2.2.4 Subject to 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 above, give formal approval to report back to Cabinet to consider the Consultation Report and determine whether to publish the Consultation Report and approve the publication of the proposal in the form of a Statutory Notice.

2.2.5 Subject to 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 above, give delegated authority to the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to make any minor changes required to the draft Consultation Document (attached at Appendix A) prior to its publication and the statutory consultation commencing.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To acknowledge the statutory duties placed upon the Council to deliver the obligations of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET Act 2018), will compound the pressures placed on special schools and the Council's capacity to provide a statutory provision for the pupils who require it.

3.2 To secure appropriate special school provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and mitigate against potential long-term budgetary pressures for the Council resulting from out of county and independent placements.

3.3 To better meet and manage the demand for special school places across RCT, helping to ensure that pupils are allocated places in the special school nearest their home.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Previous reports presented to Cabinet by the Director of Education and Inclusion Services (25th February 2021, 4th October 2021 and 26th September 2022) highlighted the pressures faced by our special schools as the number of pupils placed in these specialist provisions are increasing on an annual basis. Children's needs are becoming more complex and there is a need to meet demand for placements for some of our most vulnerable children living in RCT. The data presented clearly showed that the demand on the Council's special school provision was significant and the trend data indicated that this pressure would continue to rise. Since February 2021, the special school population has grown by 94 learners which is a significant growth.

4.2   The previous reports presented to Cabinet (linked in 4.1) also described the limitations of each special school site, and the conclusion reached was that all opportunities to significantly extend and increase capacities had been explored and, where possible, undertaken. Since the last report was presented to Cabinet on 26th September 2022, works funded by the Council, to maximise the available space on our special schools has continued to be an ongoing priority. By September 2023, an additional two-classrooms will be added to Park Lane Special School and by September 2024, a three-classroom extension will be added to Maesgwyn Special School.

4.3   Options and alternatives to expand the existing special school sites have been exhausted and the only feasible alternative is to build a new 3 to 19 special school on a new site, significantly growing the special school provision within RCT and increasing the number of special schools in RCT from four to five. Creating a highly specialist 21st century special school environment will enable the Council to meet the needs of pupils requiring access to highly specialist therapeutic facilities, equipment and resources required to meet all needs, including complex medical and health needs.

4.4   Given the considerable changes planned in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN with the implementation of the ALNET Act 2018, building a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, and creating further capacity in our current provision, will also ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations.

4.5   Following the report to Cabinet from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services on the 26th September 2022, the Council's 21st Century Schools Team have successfully submitted a variation to the approved Strategic Outline Programme to the Welsh Government in accordance with the Sustainable Communities for Learning funding approval processes. The agreed capital funding envelope to deliver a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT had increased to £53.4 million, with the Welsh Government funding this project by up to 75.0%.

5.   WHERE ARE WE NOW

5.1   There are currently 670 pupils (PLASC, 2023) accessing four special schools across RCT with a range of needs, these are:

- Maesgwyn Special School, Cwmdare, Aberdare
- Park Lane Special School, Trecynon, Aberdare
- Ysgol Hen Felin, Ystrad, Tonypandy
- Ysgol Ty Coch, Tonteg, Pontypridd
    - Buarth y Capel, Ynysybwl, Pontypridd (satellite site of Ysgol Ty Coch for learners with very complex ASD).

5.2   However, as previously reported, it has become increasingly apparent that the special schools currently available are insufficient to meet the growth in demand. In view of this, a data analysis exercise has been undertaken. Further information on each special school is provided within the draft Consultation Document (attached at Appendix A), including information on the educational provision, age range of pupils and an overview of each special school site, including property condition information and suitability ratings.

5.3 The capacity of each special school is not included. In accordance with [Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales 2011 (021/2011)](), the capacity assessment method applied to all community, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and foundation schools in Wales does not apply to nursery, special schools, or pupil referral units. Pupils are placed in special schools based on an assessment of their needs; therefore, special schools can never be classed as 'at capacity.'

5.4 The Council's school modernisation programme has been successfully making excellent progress in modernising our school estate, meeting demand for places and expanding pupil places where required. The Council has been building new schools, remodelling, and redeveloping schools across RCT providing 21st century learning environments for our pupils, staff, parents/carers and the wider community.

6. NEW 3 TO 19 SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RCT ON A NEW SITE

6.1 As outlined in 4.1 to 4.5, and as part of the continuation of the Council's school modernisation programme, investment is needed to provide a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT. It is also proposed to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT, to better meet and manage the demand for special school places, ensuring pupils are allocated places in the special school nearest their home.

6.2 The 3 to 19 special schools across RCT are:

- Park Lane Special School
- Ysgol Hen Felin
- Ysgol Ty Coch.

6.3 The rationale for bringing the proposal is set out in detail in the draft Consultation Document (attached at Appendix A).

6.4 Alongside this proposal, further options to expand the Post 16 Specialist Provision off school sites will need to be explored, and further options or alternatives to expand the existing site at Buarth y Capel may be proposed separately at a later date in accordance with the [School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018)]().

6.5 The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the [Equality Act 2010]().

6.6 The majority of pupils (75.9%) currently accessing the special schools across RCT use home to school transport. The new 3 to 19 special school will have dedicated on-site drop off and pick up facilities making this process safe, less disruptive for the community and manageable for staff.

6.7 The investment would also include a review of safe routes to school and, if required, an investment in improvements to walkways, road crossings and traffic calming measures to ensure the required safety standards are met. This is the approach the Council has implemented in other communities through

delivering the 21st Century Schools Programme with significant improvements and investment made.

6.8 The report to Cabinet from the Chief Executive on the 15th May 2023, confirmed the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale, Tonypandy is being released for the potential development of a new special school, noting that any proposal would be subject to the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018). As such, this consultation proposes that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT be built on the vacated Clydach Vale site in Tonypandy. This site is proposed as the preferred location following a site appraisal process. A number of vacant sites within RCT have been appraised using the following criteria:

- Ownership
- Have an adequate site area
- Have satisfactory access which is capable of being improved
- Is free from any visual incumbents
- Is a viable development opportunity subject to a detailed feasibility study.

6.9 On applying the appraisal criteria to the identified sites, and following several site visits undertaken by Officers from the Council's Directorate of Corporate Estates and the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services, all the other sites were discounted with the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale, Tonypandy, being identified as the preferred location for the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT.

6.10 Placement into special schools is currently agreed by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services' Access and Inclusion Service Panels with pupils being placed in the nearest suitable special school to their home where possible. However, to better manage the allocation of special school places across RCT, the proposal also seeks to introduce defined catchment areas for all of the 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.

6.11 On opening, pupils already attending other 3 to 19 special schools that will then reside within the catchment area of the new special school, will be given the option to relocate to the new school. To note this will not be mandatory and this will be down to parental/carer choice. However, once the catchment changes come into effect, the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services' Access and Inclusion Service Panel will place new pupils into specialist provision according to the newly defined catchment boundaries.

6.12 Maps identifying the proposed special school catchment areas are included within the Consultation Document (attached at Appendix A). Maesgwyn Special School will not be included in this process as it offers a different provision to the other special schools in RCT. As well as the new 3 to 19 special school, the proposed new catchment areas will cover Park Lane Special School, Ysgol Hen Felin and Ysgol Ty Coch.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Council must satisfy its public sector duties under the Equalities Act 2010 (including specific Welsh public sector duties). Pursuant to these legal duties Councils must, in making decisions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations based on protected characteristics.

7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment is being prepared in respect of the proposal and will be published on the Council's website for the duration of the consultation period, together with a Consultation Document that outlines the proposal in further detail in accordance with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018).

8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment is being prepared in respect of the proposal and will be published on the Council's website for the duration of the consultation period, together with a Consultation Document that outlines the proposal in further detail in accordance with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018).

9. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

9.1 The consultation processes in respect of the proposal will be undertaken under the arrangements outlined in the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018). These arrangements stipulate that consultation must be undertaken when the proposals are at a formative stage and that Consultation Documents must be prepared and circulated to prescribed consultees, as well as being published on the Council website.

9.2 The draft Consultation Document for the proposal outlined in this report is attached at Appendix A, although it should be noted that this remains a working document which may be subject to some minor changes before the Consultation Document is formally published and the consultation process commences.

9.3 The proposed consultation period, if it is agreed to progress this matter, would run from 3rd July 2023 to 14th September 2023.

9.4 The proposed consultation timetable for completion of each action is set out in the table that follows:

New 3 to 19 Special School in RCT – Proposed Consultation Timeline		
Action	**Detail**	**Dates**
Cabinet Permission to Consult	Cabinet to consider the proposal and give approval to commence consultation	28th June 2023

New 3 to 19 Special School in RCT – Proposed Consultation Timeline		
Action	**Detail**	**Dates**
Public Consultation	A Consultation Document would be published on the Council's website for a minimum of six weeks	3rd July 2023 to 14th September 2023
Report back to Cabinet	Cabinet would consider the Consultation Response Report and determine whether to publish the Report and approve the publication of the proposal in the form of a Statutory Notice	October 2023
Publish Statutory Notice	The Statutory Notice must be published for a 28 day period (if approved by Cabinet)	November 2023
Decision by Cabinet	Report back to Cabinet on outcome of Statutory Notice period and details of (any) objections received, with an appropriate recommendation	January 2024
Implementation	In accordance with Cabinet decision either status quo or implementation of proposal	Status Quo: N/A. New school: September 2026

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Should the proposal go ahead, a significant capital investment would be required. Funding will be secured via the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme at an intervention rate of 75.0%. Costs will be developed alongside the consultation process and approvals sought in line with the Council's decision-making procedures.

10.2 Revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the new 3 to 19 special school, including the schools' delegated budget and any potential increases in home to school transport costs will be identified as the proposal is developed and incorporated into the Council's Medium Term Financial Planning arrangements.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

11.1 Section 315 of the Education Act 1996 requires Councils to ensure that ALN provision is kept under review. In addition, the ALNET Act 2018 requires Councils to keep under review the arrangements for supporting pupils with ALN within their area and consider whether these are sufficient.

11.2 Powers for Councils to develop school organisation proposals are governed by the:

- The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013
- The Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018).

11.3 Council's must, when exercising functions under Part 3 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, act in accordance with any relevant requirements contained in the Welsh Government's School

Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018) and must have regard to any relevant guidelines contained in it.

12.   LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN, NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

12.1   There are links to Making a Difference, the Council's Corporate Plan for the years between 2020 and 2024, specifically:

- **People:**
  - Encouraging all residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles and maintain their mental wellbeing:
    - o Delivering new indoor and outdoor sporting facilities and enhancing existing sporting facilities such as changing rooms and outdoor play areas.
  - Improving services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do:
    - o Improving the social, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the range of specialist services available.

- **Places:**
  - Ensuring RCT is one of the safest places in Wales, with high levels of community cohesion where residents feel safe:
    - o Supporting the voluntary, community and faith sectors to help build active communities, creating the capacity for meeting the needs of residents within their communities.

- **Prosperity:**
  - Ensuring we have good schools, so all children have access to a great education:
    - o Improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities
  - Helping people into work and better paid employment:
    - o Offering employment schemes and apprenticeships in the Council, on the regeneration sites, and through other Council contractors.

12.2   There are links to the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services' Strategic Plan for the years between 2021 and 2024, specifically:

- **Strategic Priority 3:**
  - o Ensuring equity and support for vulnerable pupils and their families.

- **Strategic Priority 5:**
  - o Delivering 21st century learning environments and innovative services for our pupils and communities.

12.3   Due regard has been made to all seven wellbeing goals and the five ways of working, as contained within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of decisions on communities to prevent consistent issues such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

12.4 The proposal could contribute towards achieving some of the seven wellbeing goals by:

- **A Prosperous Wales** - Should the proposal proceed, construction will be competitively tendered, thereby achieving best value for money. Main contractors will be asked to advertise work on Sell2Wales which could provide opportunities for local businesses to tender for the construction. This could provide opportunities for local business to engage with the main contractor for inclusion in their supply chain, via 'Meet the Buyer' events. This would support economic activity in the area.

- **A Resilient Wales** – The proposal could improve the sustainability of school buildings in the Council's portfolio through a commitment to achieving zero-carbon buildings and building to BREEAM excellent standards.

- **A Healthier Wales** – The new school will be a fully accessible and integrated community school with a dedicated area designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day. Accommodation will consist of enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities.

- **A More Equal Wales** – The new school and the way in which it will be used will bring neutral or positve socio-economic impacts to all of the vulnerable groups.

- **A Wales of More Cohesive Communities** – Fully accessible and integrated community school with a dedicated area designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.

- **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language** – Although the new school will be English medium, Welsh is taught as part of the curriculum and all pupils will benefit from having the opportunity to be taught in brand new facilities fit for the 21st century.

- **A Globally Responsive Wales** – The new school could build upon the good working practices and initiatives already in place to further develop extra-curricular activities to encourage healthy lifestyles for the school community. zero-carbon buildings and building to BREEAM excellent standards.

12.5 The proposal could contribute towards achieving some of the five ways of working by:

- **Long Term** – The proposal forms a part of the Council's wider 21st Century Schools Investment Programme and contributes to the delivery of sustainable schools fit for the 21st century and supports the better strategic management of the Council's education estate. Given the considerable changes in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN, with the implementation of the ALNET Act 2018, building a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT,

and creating further capacity in our current provision, will ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations.

- **Prevention** – The Council believes that the proposal represents the best opportunity to safeguard and sustain educational standards for the future and provides a platform for further improvement through significant investment in permanent and fit for purpose facilities.

- **Integrations** – The new school will be a fully accessible and integrated community school. A dedicated area will be designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.

- **Collaboration** – The Council will continue to work effectively with internal and external partners to ensure the new 3 to 19 special school meets the short and long term needs of pupils, parents/carers, staff and the wider community.

- **Involvement** –The proposal is made in accordance with the School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018) and seeks the views of a prescribed list of stakeholders including pupils, parents/carers, staff and the wider community. As such face to face meetings will be arranged with the staff, school councils and governing bodies.

12.6   As stated in 7.1 and 7.2, an Equality Impact Assessment which further details the contribution of the proposal to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is being prepared.

13.   STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

13.1   Given the considerable changes in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with the implementation of the ALNET Act (2018), the proposal to build a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, creating further capacity in our current provision, will ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations and as such is a strategic proposal relevant to all wards.

14.   CONCLUSION

14.1   In accordance with Section 315 of the Education Act 1996, councils are required to ensure that ALN provision is kept under review. In addition, the ALNET Act 2018 requires councils to keep under review the arrangements for supporting pupils with ALN within their area and consider whether these are sufficient. Building a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, and creating further capacity in our current provision, will ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations.

14.2   The proposed investment to open a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT on a new site provides the opportunity for more pupils with ALN to benefit from improved educational facilities and learning environments.

14.3   Noting that on opening, pupils already attending other 3 to 19 special schools that will then reside within the catchment area of the new special school, will be given the option to relocate to the new school. This will not be mandatory,

and this will be down to parental/carer choice. However, once the catchment changes come into effect, the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panel will place new pupils into specialist provision according to the newly defined catchment boundaries.

14.4   It is recommended therefore, that Members give approval to officers to commence the consultation processes necessary, in accordance with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2nd Edition) (011/2018), to achieve the proposal outlined in this report.

Other Information:

Relevant Scrutiny Committee:
Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer(s):
Andrea Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Lisa Howell, 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28TH JUNE 2023

Item: PROPOSALS TO DEVELOP A NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Background Papers
Appendix A – Draft Consultation Document

Officer to contact(s):
Andrea Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Lisa Howell, 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO OPEN A NEW 3 TO 19 SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The Consultation Document and Appendices are also available on the 'Get Involved' page on the Council website.

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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Introduction

The Council wishes to seek the views of stakeholders on the proposal to open a new English medium 3 to 19 special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) for 180 pupils, however this will be subject to undertaking further feasibility and progressing with the detailed design of the new school. The new special school will provide education for pupils with a range of additional learning needs (ALN) including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

It is proposed that the new school will be built in the Clydach Vale area of Tonypandy, and it will open no later than the 2026 academic year. The new school is in addition to the four special schools already open in RCT.

It is also proposed to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT, these are:

- Park Lane Special School
- Ysgol Hen Felin
- Ysgol Ty Coch.

The proposal is made in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 (011/2018). Section 2.1 of the School Organisation Code 2018 refers to elements of school organisation that require the publication of proposals, including:

- The opening of a maintained school (including special school).

Who will we consult with?

We are seeking the views of the following stakeholders:

- The governing bodies of:
  - Park Lane Special School
  - Ysgol Hen Felin
  - Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.

- Parents/carers, prospective parents/carers (where possible), and staff members of:
  - Park Lane Special School
  - Ysgol Hen Felin
  - Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.

- Pupils of:
  - Park Lane Special School
  - Ysgol Hen Felin
  - Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.

- Neighbouring local authorities
- The Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Diocesan authorities
- Welsh Ministers

- Members of the Senedd for the Rhondda, Cynon and Taf constituencies and regional Members of the Senedd for the area
- Members of Parliament for the Rhondda, Cynon, and Taf constituencies
- Estyn
- Teaching and staff trade unions
- Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
- Police and Crime Commissioner for the area
- Childcare providers
- Mudiad Meithrin
- Menter Iaith
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
- Children and Young People's Partnership
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board
- Welsh Language Commissioner.

What will the consultation process entail?

The consultation will start on 3rd July 2023 and will be completed at 17:00 on 14th September 2023. Feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a Consultation Report presented to the Council's Cabinet during October 2023. This Consultation Report will be available for all persons to view on the Council's website and copies can be obtained on request from the address detailed on page 4.

The Council's Cabinet will consider the Consultation Report and decide, based on the feedback, whether to proceed with the proposal, amend the proposal or not proceed with the proposal. If the Council's Cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of the proposal.

If the Council's Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposal, a Statutory Notice will be published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2018 requires that anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal can do so. To be considered as statutory objections, objections **must** be made in writing or by email, and sent to the Council within 28 days of the date on which the Statutory Notice was published.

The Council's Cabinet will consider the outcome of the Statutory Notice at the next available Cabinet meeting and determine the proposal.

If there are objections, the Council's Director of Education and Inclusion Services will publish an Objection Report providing a summary of the objections and the response to them within seven days of the day of the determination of the proposal. This Objection Report will also be available for all persons to view on the Council's website and copies can be obtained on request from the address detailed on page 4.

If the Council's Cabinet approve the proposal, it will be implemented in accordance with the date stated in the Statutory Notice or any subsequently modified date.

What do you have to consider?

The remainder of this Consultation Document sets out the rationale for the proposal. We would like you to consider the information and to hear your views as to whether you support the proposal.

How do you make your views known?

Face to face meetings will be arranged with the staff, school councils and governing bodies as follows:

School(s) Affected	Group	Time/Date	Venue
1. Park Lane Special School 2 .Ysgol Hen Felin 3. Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel	Governing Bodies and Staff of: 1. Park Lane Special School 2. Ysgol Hen Felin 3. Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel	1. 20th July 2023 at 15:30 2. 19th July 2023 at 15:30 3. 17th July 2023 at 15:30	1.Park Lane Special School 2.Ysgol Hen Felin 3.Ysgol Ty Coch
1.Park Lane Special School 2.Ysgol Hen Felin 3.Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel	School Councils of: 1.Park Lane Special School 2.Ysgol Hen Felin 3.Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel	1.18th July 2023 at 10:00 2.19th July 2023 at 10:00 3.17th Ysgol Ty Coch at 13:30	1.Park Lane Special School 2.Ysgol Hen Felin 3.Ysgol Ty Coch

A drop in session will also be arranged so that members of the public can discuss the proposal with Officers from the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services and provide any feedback at the session. This will be held on Tuesday 22nd August 2023 between 15:00 to 18:30 at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale, Tonypandy, CF40 2XX.

A Consultation Response Form is attached on page 30. The Consultation Response Form will also be available in the meetings detailed above and on the Council's website on the 'Get Involved' page.

The Consultation Response Form enables consultees to indicate if they wish to be notified of the publication of the Consultation Report, once presented to the Council's Cabinet.

Consultees are also welcomed to put their views, comments, and any questions in writing to:

Director of Education and Inclusion Services 21st Century Schools Ty Trevithick Abercynon CF45 4UQ	**OR**	schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk

All correspondence should be received no later than 17:00 on 14th September 2023.

Please note that responses to the consultation will not be counted as objections to the proposal unless expressly requested. Objections can only be forwarded following the publication of the Statutory Notice.

The views of children and young people

The Council has acknowledged that the voice of children and young people is about involving them as active participants in the development, delivery, management, and improvement of their educational experience.

Children and young people have a right to express their views in all matters affecting them and for their views to be heard and considered in accordance with their age and maturity. As such, the Councils Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services 21st Century Schools Team will ensure that suitable arrangements are made to involve children and young people as active participants throughout this consultation process, and if a decision is made to progress the proposal, throughout the implementation process.

The Council will consult with the children and young people who attend:

- Park Lane Special School
- Ysgol Hen Felin
- Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.

This will be done by producing a children and young people's version of the Consultation Document and Consultation Response Form. As detailed on page 4, the Council will hold a meeting with the School Councils of:

- Park Lane Special School
- Ysgol Hen Felin
- Ysgol Ty Coch, including Buarth y Capel.

To discuss the proposal and guide the School Council through the children and young people's version of the Consultation Response Form. These consultation sessions will have the support of school-based specialist staff to support pupils and assist with the engagement process. Feedback from this meeting will be collated and summarised, and a Consultation Report will be presented to the Council's Cabinet for consideration once the consultation period has ended.

Community, Equality and Welsh Language Impact Assessments

As set out in the School Organisation Code 2018, it is a requirement to publish Community, Equality and Welsh Language Impact Assessments. These have been produced and are appendices to this Consultation Document and are also available on the Council's website:

- Appendix A – Community Impact Assessment
- Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix C – Welsh Language Impact Assessment.

Where we are now…

Considerable changes have been made in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET Act 2018) requires Councils to keep under review the arrangements for supporting pupils with ALN within their area and consider whether they are sufficient. The ALNET Act 2018 is supported by the statutory Additional Learning Needs Code 2021.

For pupils with significant needs who experience difficulties in coping with mainstream education, specialist provisions are required. The Council has a range of specialist provisions which include:

- Forty-five Learning Support Classes
- Two Pupil Referral Units
- Four Special Schools (three for pupils aged 3 to 19 and one for pupils aged 11 to 19).

Placement into these specialist provisions is agreed by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panels.

There are currently 670 pupils (Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), 2023) accessing four special schools across RCT with a range of needs, these are:

- Maesgwyn Special School, Cwmdare, Aberdare
- Park Lane Special School, Trecynon, Aberdare
- Ysgol Hen Felin, Ystrad, Tonypandy
- Ysgol Ty Coch, Tonteg, Pontypridd
  - Buarth y Capel, Ynysybwl, Pontypridd (satellite site of Ysgol Ty Coch).

To note, despite data and information from Maesgwyn Special School being included within this document for consistency, given the age range of the pupils at the school and the education provided which differs from the other special schools, Maesgwyn is <u>not</u> considered to be affected by these proposals.

RCT has an excellent range of special schools. However, it has become increasingly apparent that the special schools currently available are disproportionate to the demand for them. In view of this, a data analysis exercise has been undertaken. This Consultation Document provides an overview of each special school site, including property condition information and suitability ratings along with a range of data, including the:

- Total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023

- Total number pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2017 and 2023 separated by each special school
- National curriculum year of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools during the academic year 2023.

The capacity of each special school is not included. Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales (021/2011) outlines the capacity assessment method for calculating school capacities. This capacity assessment method applies to all English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided mainstream primary and secondary schools in Wales, it does not apply to nursery and special schools, or Pupil Referral Units. Pupils are placed in special schools by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panels based on an assessment of their need; as such, special schools can never be classed as 'at capacity'.

Likewise, pupil projections have not been included. It should be noted that it is difficult to project demand for special schools, as projections are dependent on several factors and historical trends and birth rates are not dependable factors. Variations in the range of needs of pupils can develop and alter over time and special schools have seen a significant growth in the complexity of the ALN of pupils.

Special Schools Across RCT

<u>Maesgwyn Special School</u>

Maesgwyn Special School is in the Cwmdare area of Aberdare. It is a special school for pupils aged 11 to 19 with a range of ALN including severe learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and autistic spectrum disorders.

Pupils are taught through a bespoke curriculum with a balance between academic, life and vocational skills options that enable pupils to mature into adult life.

Maesgwyn Special School is graded as a B for condition and a B for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £11,850. The school building consists of a CLASP type construction main block.

Over the last five years, approximately £944,000 has been invested into Maesgwyn Special School. Recent works to the site include extensive remodelling of the external area providing a new Multi-Use Games Area, the addition of a skill centre for teaching construction skills, an allotment for horticulture and an animal care centre. Future works to the site include the addition of a three-classroom extension by the academic year 2024.

As previously reported, this special school is <u>not</u> considered to be affected by this proposal.

Park Lane Special School

Park Lane Special School is in the Trecynon area of Aberdare. It is a special school for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

Pupils are taught a wide and varied curriculum, enabling them to experience a range of skills, the emphasis being on life and vocational skills. Pupils are regularly taken into the community where they apply the skills, they learn to real life situations. Pupils gain accreditation and qualifications from their vocational studies.

Park Lane Special School is graded as a C for condition and a B for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £238,800. The school building consists of a CLASP type construction main block together with a small extension that was added in 2011 to provide additional space for post 16 pupils. The site is very constrained with access and onsite parking limited.

Over the last five years, approximately £495,000 has been invested into Park Lane Special School. Future works to the site include the addition of a two-classroom mobile accommodation by the academic year 2023. Once completed there are limited options to further expand the existing site.

Ysgol Hen Felin

Ysgol Hen Felin is in the Ystrad area of Rhondda. It is a special school for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

Pupils are taught a wide and varied curriculum, enabling them to experience a range of skills, the emphasis being on life and vocational skills. Pupils are regularly taken into the community where they apply the skills, they learn to real life situations. Pupils gain accreditation and qualifications from their vocational studies.

There are also several pupils who attend Ysgol Hen Felin who should attend Buarth y Capel, however, the travelling distance and established relationships with staff at Ysgol Hen Felin discourages pupils from attending Buarth y Capel.

Ysgol Hen Felin is graded as a B for condition and an A for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £58,000. It is a single storey building situated in a residential area in the same grounds as a leisure centre. The school has an all-weather playing surface within a large sensory garden, kitchen, coffee shop, sensory facilities and hydrotherapy pool.

Over the last five years, approximately £495,000 has been invested into Ysgol Hen Felin. Works to the site include significant investment in the external play areas and several adaptations to allow more generic teaching spaces to be created, that unfortunately has been to the detriment of specialist teaching and learning areas. There are no further options or alternatives to expand the existing site.

Ysgol Ty Coch

Ysgol Ty Coch is in the Tonteg area of Pontypridd. It is a special school for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

Pupils are taught a wide and varied curriculum, enabling them to experience a range of skills, with an emphasis placed on developing life and vocational skills. Pupils are regularly taken into the community where they apply the skills, they learn to real life situations. Pupils gain accreditation and qualifications from their vocational studies.

Ysgol Ty Coch is graded as an A for condition and a B for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £227,661. The original site, which is a brick built, single storey building is situated in a residential area. The facilities available to pupils include a fully functioning kitchen, hairdressing salon, workshop, horticulture training, café, and car washing.

Over the last five years, approximately £946,000 has been invested into Ysgol Ty Coch. Works to the site include the addition of a classroom extension which has increased the size of the school but reduced the amount of outside play area. The site is very constrained with access and onsite parking limited, as such there are no further options or alternatives to expand the existing site.

Buarth y Capel

Buarth y Capel is a satellite site of Ysgol Ty Coch and is in the Ynysybwl area of Pontypridd, approximately seven miles from Ysgol Ty Coch. It was established in September 2014 to meet the needs of pupils aged 14 to 19 with a diagnosis of severe/profound autistic spectrum disorders who had previously met generic special school criteria and who require specialist and bespoke provision.

Pupils are taught a wide and varied curriculum, devised from the 14 to 19 Learning Pathways, enabling them to experience a range of skills. The emphasis of these skills includes life and vocational skills. Pupils gain accreditation and qualifications from their vocational studies.

Buarth y Capel is graded as a B for condition and a B for suitability and it has a backlog maintenance figure of £214,570. The site is a single-story building, set in grounds.

Over the last five years, approximately £335,000 has been invested into Buarth y Capel. Works to the site include a complete refurbishment to suit the needs of older pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, which include specialist therapy areas. Further options or alternatives to expand the existing site, may be proposed separately at a later date in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 (011/2018).

Post 16 Specialist Provision

In addition to the four special schools across RCT, the Council also works in partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd to provide specialist provisions for post 16 pupils. This specialist post 16 provision frees up much needed space across the four special schools whilst also providing pupils with the opportunity to gain experience of college life and to transition into this setting at post 16.

The Council, in partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd, currently provide three separate specialist provisions for post 16 pupils, one for pupils at Maesgwyn Special School at Coleg y Cymoedd's Aberdare campus, one for pupils at Ysgol Hen Felin at Coleg y Cymoedd's Llwynypia campus, and one for pupils from Ysgol Ty Coch at Coleg Y Cymoedd's Nant Garw campus.

Further options to expand the partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd may be proposed separately in accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018 (011/2018).

Out of County Specialist Provision

In addition to the four special schools across RCT and the Council's partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd to provide specialist provisions for post 16 pupils, a number of pupils attend out of county specialist provision. This is due to the lack of highly specialist provision available across RCT. The table that follows outlines the total number and cost of pupils who accessed their education in out of county specialist provision between the academic years 2020 and 2022.
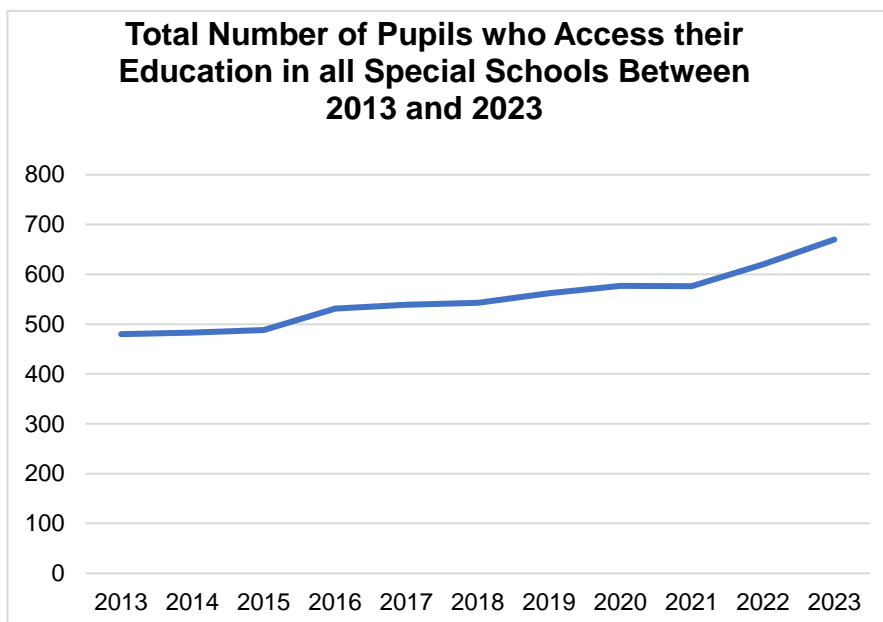
Total Number and Cost of Pupils who Accessed their Education in Out of County Specialist Provision Between the Academic Years 2020 and 2022		
Academic Year	**Total**	**Cost**
2020	93	£2,323,397
2021	97	£2,490,591
2022	85	£2,209,137

Data Analysis

The following data analysis is based on data derived from the PLASC unless otherwise stated. It is intended to outline the children and young people with ALN in RCT.

The table that follows outlines the total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023.

Total Number of Pupils who Accessed their Education in all Special Schools Between the Academic Years 2013 and 2023											
	Academic Year (PLASC)										
	2013	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
Total	480	483	488	531	539	543	562	577	576	620	670

Total Number of Pupils who Access their Education in all Special Schools Between 2013 and 2023

The graph above outlines the same trend.

- The data and graph demonstrate an increase in the number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023.

- The total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023 has increased by 39.5%. This is an increase of 190 pupils from 480 pupils to 670 pupils.

The table that follows outlines the total number pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2017 and 2023 separated by each special school.

Total Number of Pupils who Accessed their Education in all Special Schools Between the Academic Years 2017 and 2023 Separated by Each Special School						
	Special School (PLASC 2023)					
Academic Year	Maesgwyn Special School	Park Lane Special School	Ysgol Hen Felin	Ysgol Ty Coch	Buarth y Capel	Total
2017	132	101	169	126	11	**539**
2018	130	93	178	134	8	**543**
2019	127	97	179	153	6	**562**
2020	130	88	186	159	14	**577**
2021	119	93	184	171	9	**576**
2022	125	109	194	179	13	**620**
2023	126	123	211	197	13	**670**

The data above indicated that:

- Pupil numbers at Maesgwyn Special School have remained consistent between the academic years 2017 and 2023

- **Since the academic year 2020, pupil number at Park Lane have increased by 39.7%.** This is an increase of 35 pupils from 88 pupils to 123 pupils

- Since the academic year 2017, pupil numbers at Ysgol Hen Felin have increased by 24.8%. This is an increase of 42 pupils from 169 pupils to 211 pupils

- **Since the academic year 2017, pupil numbers at Ysgol Ty Coch have increased by 56.3%.** This is an increase of 71 pupils from 126 pupils to 197 pupils

- Pupil numbers at Buarth y Capel have remained consistent between the academic years 2017 and 2023

- The **total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2017 and 2023 has increased by 24.8%.** This is an increase of 131 pupils from 539 pupils to 670 pupils.

Over the previous ten academic years, the total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools has increased by 39.5% and following this trend over the next five to ten academic years, the number of pupils who access their education in all special schools is expected to increase.

The table that follows outlines the national curriculum year of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools during the academic year 2023.

National Curriculum Year of Pupils who Accessed their Education in all Special Schools During the Academic Year 2023							
Year Groups	National Curriculum Year	Special School (PLASC 2023)				Total	
		Maesgwyn Special School	Park Lane Special School	Ysgol Hen Felin	Ysgol Ty Coch (Including Buarth y Capel)		
Nursery - Year 2	Pre-Nursery	N/A	0	1	0	1	120
	Nursery	N/A	7	6	7	20	
	Reception	N/A	9	14	13	36	
	1	N/A	8	15	8	31	
	2	N/A	9	11	12	32	
Years 3 - 6	3	N/A	14	18	13	45	154
	4	N/A	9	12	9	30	
	5	N/A	5	11	25	41	
	6	N/A	7	15	16	38	
Years 7 - 9	7	17	9	22	18	66	171
	8	14	16	13	17	60	
	9	15	2	18	10	45	
Years 10 - 11	10	22	4	11	19	56	94
	11	12	5	10	11	38	
Years	12	8	7	8	10	33	131

National Curriculum Year of Pupils who Accessed their Education in all Special Schools During the Academic Year 2023							
Year Groups	National Curriculum Year	Special School (PLASC 2023)				Total	
		Maesgwyn Special School	Park Lane Special School	Ysgol Hen Felin	Ysgol Ty Coch (Including Buarth y Capel)		
12 - 14	13	21	4	10	14	49	
	14	17	8	16	8	49	
Total		126	123	211	210	670	

The data indicates:

- The national curriculum year with the highest percentage of pupils was year seven with 9.8% (9.8%) of pupils
- This was closely followed by national curriculum year eight with 8.9% (60%) of pupils
- The year groups with the highest percentage of pupils were years 7 to 9 with 25.5% (171%) of pupils.

It is difficult to provide a breakdown of the needs of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools given the complex nature of any ALN diagnosis, and the range of needs that the 3 to 19 schools in RCT cater for. It is proposed that the new school opens for pupils with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment. For consistency, this then provides the same provision as the other 3 to 19 special schools in RCT offering parity of provision across all 4 schools.

What is the basis for the proposal?

Over the last five years, the Council has invested approximately £3.28 million into all special schools to maximise the space available. By the academic year 2023, a two-classroom mobile accommodation will be added to Park Lane Special School and by the academic year 2024, a three-classroom extension will be added to Maesgwyn Special School. Once completed, there will be no further options or alternatives to expand the existing special school sites.

Over the previous ten academic years, between the academic years 2013 and 2023, the total number of pupils who accessed their education in all special schools has increased by 39.5%. Apart from the academic year 2021, the total number of pupils who have accessed their education in all special schools between the academic years 2013 and 2023 has increased year on year. Over the next five to ten academic years, the number of pupils who access their education in all special schools is expected to increase. However, it should be noted that it is difficult to project demand for special schools, as projections are dependent on several factors and historical trends and birth rates are not dependable factors. Variations in the range of needs of the pupils can develop and alter over time and special schools have seen a significant growth in the complexity of the ALN of pupils.

Options and alternatives to expand the existing special school sites have been exhausted and the only feasible alternative is to build a new English medium 3 to 19 special school in RCT on a new site, significantly growing the special school provision within RCT and increasing the number of special schools from four to five. Creating a highly specialist 21st century special school environment will enable the Council to meet the needs of pupils requiring access to highly specialist therapeutic facilities, equipment and resources required to meet all ALN, including complex medical and health needs.

Pupils are placed in special schools by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panels based on an assessment of their need; as such, special schools can never be classed as 'at capacity'. When analysing each special school, the highest percentage of pupils reside in the area that special school is located in. However, to better manage the allocation of special school places across RCT, it is proposed to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.

Given the considerable changes in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN with the implementation of the ALNET Act 2018, building a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, and creating further capacity in our current provision, will ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations.

The Council believes that the proposal represents the best opportunity to safeguard and sustain educational standards for the future and provides a platform for further improvement through significant investment in permanent and fit for purpose facilities.

What alternative options have been considered?

Options and alternatives to expand the existing special school sites have been exhausted and the only feasible alternative is to build a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT on a new site.

It is proposed that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT be built on the soon to be vacated Council Headquarters in the Clydach Vale area of Tonypandy. This site is proposed as the preferred location following an appraisal of other sites. Each site was appraised on its ability to meet the following criteria:

- Ownership
- Have an adequate site area
- Have satisfactory access which is capable of being improved
- Is free from any visual incumbents
- Is a viable development opportunity subject to a detailed feasibility study.

On applying the appraisal criteria to the identified sites, and following several site visits undertaken by Officers from the Council's Directorate of Corporate Estates and the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services, all the other sites were

discounted with the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale, Tonypandy, being identified as the preferred location for the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT.

Further feasibility focussed on the preferred site resulted in it being identified as the chosen location for the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT and the site to be taken forward to consultation.

In accordance with the School Organisation Code 2018, alternative options were also identified and consciously considered. Some of the benefits and disadvantages of each of the discounted options are listed in the table that follows:

Option	Benefit	Disadvantages
Retain the status quo	• No capital investment required by the Council	• Council cannot meet its statutory obligations in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN with the implementation of the ALNET Act 2018 • Children and young people with ALN will not have their needs met • Increased pressure on parents/carers • Increase ALN educational tribunals • Increase in cost of placing pupils in specialist provisions out of county
Expansion of existing special schools	• Less capital investment required by the Council	• Council cannot meet its statutory obligations in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of pupils with ALN with the implementation of the ALNET Act 2018 • Children and young people with ALN will not have their needs met • Increased pressure on parents/carers • Increase ALN educational tribunals • Increase in cost of placing pupils in specialist provisions out of county • Options and alternatives to expand the existing special

Option	Benefit	Disadvantages
		school sites have been exhausted
Expansion of Post 16 Provision to alleviate pressures on existing specials schools	• More Post 16 pupils with ALN will have their needs met • Frees up much needed space across the four special schools • Provides pupils with the opportunity to gain experience of college life	• May not be opportunities to expand Post 16 Provision
Out of county specialist provision	• Some children and young people with ALN will have their needs met	• Increase in cost of placing pupils in specialist provisions out of county • Does not provide a long term solution

Benefits and Disadvantages, Risks and Mitigation Factors

The benefits and disadvantages of the proposal are highlighted below, as is information as to how any identified risks can be managed by the Council.

Benefits
A new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could deliver a significant improvement in the quality of the educational provision, having a significant positive impact upon the educational performance of the pupils and staff morale.
The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT will be designed to be energy efficient and will include renewable energy systems including photovoltaic panels and rainwater harvesting. The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT will be built to achieve net Zero Carbon in operation, be built to BREEAM Excellent standards, contributing to both the Council's commitment to becoming a 'carbon free Council by 2050' and the Welsh Government's Climate Change Strategy.
The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010.
The new school will be a fully accessible and fully integrated community school. A dedicated area will be designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
The external areas will allow staff, pupils, and the community to experience a greater breadth of teaching and learning experiences.

Disadvantages	

The capital cost of the new school will be significant. The Council and the Welsh Government via the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme will fund this with a more favorable intervention rate afforded to special schools at 75.0%.

The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could cause some anxiety for some pupils, staff and parents/carers.

Risks	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating Action(s)
Approval – Parents/carers choose not to send their children to the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT	Low	Low	• The Councils Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services 21st Century Schools Team will ensure that suitable arrangements are made to involve parents/carers and children and young people as active participants throughout this consultation process, and if a decision is made to progress the proposal, throughout the implementation process
Proposal to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT – Parents/carers choose not to send their children to their catchment 3 to 19 special school in RCT.	Low	Medium	• See above
Home to School Transport – Increased home to school transport costs	Medium	Low	• Any revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the new 3 to 19 special school, including the schools' delegated budget and any potential increases in

			home to school transport costs will be identified as the proposal is develops
Staff – Cannot appoint staff to the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT	Low	High	• The needs of all special schools will be prioritised. The Council is committed to retaining staff and will, as has been the case with the delivery of other 21st century schools previously throughout RCT, work with staff and Trade Unions to ensure the change process is dealt with sympathetically and supportively and that there will be opportunities to engage with staff as the proposal progresses

Where we'd like to be…

It is proposed to open a new English medium, 3 to 19 special school in RCT for 180 pupils, however this will be subject to undertaking further feasibility and progressing with the detailed design of the new school. The new school will provide education for pupils with a range of ALN including autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.

It is proposed that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT will be built in the Clydach Vale area of Tonypandy, and it will open no later than the 2026 academic year. The new school is in addition to the four special schools across RCT.

The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010.

Accommodation will consist of:

- Modern, flexible learning environments for all pupils, a hall/dining area, and specialist teaching and learning areas to cater for the needs of all pupils.
- A hydro-therapy pool plus other therapy, sensory and stimulating specialist equipment.
- A dedicated area within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
- Enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities.

- Traffic management systems including on-site pupil bus drop off, and on-site staff parking.

Example of a typical multi-purpose learning resource area.

Example of external play area.

Example of outdoor learning area.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)

All Local Authorities in Wales must produce a WESP. The WESP is a long-term language planning tool which sets the direction for the strategic planning, delivery and growth in Welsh medium and Welsh language education. Through the WESP, and effective strategic planning and investment, the Council aims to contribute significantly to achieving the vision of one million people in Wales being Welsh speakers by 2050 as set out in Cymraeg 2050. The Council's current WESP can be viewed and downloaded from the Council website via:

[Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022 – 2032 | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (rctcbc.gov.uk)](https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk)

There are seven outcomes within the Council's WESP, two of which are:

- More opportunities for pupils to use Welsh in different contexts in school
- An increase in the provision of Welsh medium education for pupils with ALN in accordance with the duties imposed by the ALNET Act 2018.

Although the new school will be English medium, Welsh is taught as part of the curriculum and all pupils will benefit from having the opportunity to be taught in brand new facilities fit for the 21st century.

The aim is to embed positive habits and attitudes towards the Welsh language through purposeful planning to promote the informal use of the Welsh language amongst pupils inside and outside schools. Facilitating the use of the Welsh language across the curriculum and in wider contexts in schools, to ensure a continuum of linguistic progression to support pupils in the transition between year groups, offers all pupils the opportunity to become fully bilingual and aligns with the Curriculum for Wales 2022. The new school will be encouraged and supported to do this through the achievement of the 'Cymraeg Campus' Welsh Language Charter, a framework to promote and increase the use of Welsh.

In addition, the new school will be a fully accessible and fully integrated community school. A dedicated area will be designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day. Use of the facilities could include opportunities for third parties to offer Welsh medium learning classes for adults. An example of this can be seen in Tonyrefail Community School, where Welsh medium learning classes for adults are held in the community facilities. This could contribute towards the Welsh Government's ambitious goal of creating a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050 and the WESP.

Admission Arrangements

Pupils are placed in special schools by the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panels based on an assessment of their need; as such, special schools can never be classed as 'at capacity', and there is no published admission number. When analysing each special school, the highest percentage of pupils reside in the area that the special school is located in. However, to better manage the allocation of special school places across RCT, it is proposed to introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.
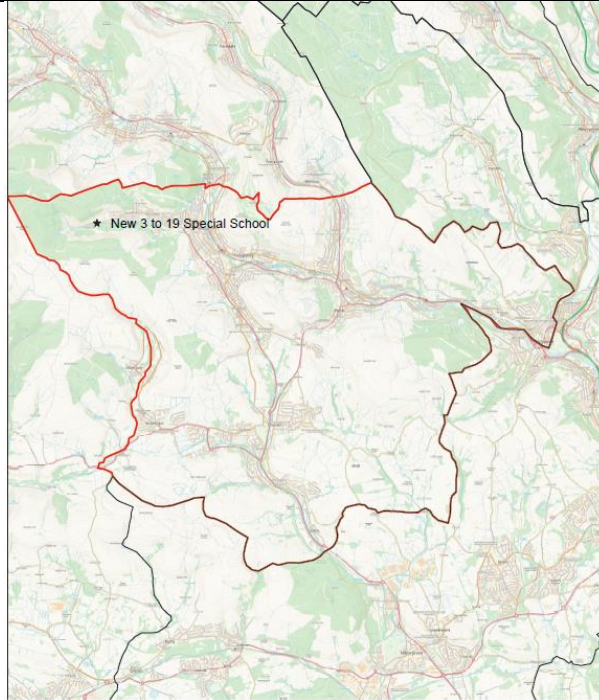
The proposed catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT are based on existing secondary school catchment areas (with a few exceptions). As previously reported, this special school is <u>not</u> considered to be affected by this proposal.

As well as the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, the proposed new catchments will cover Park Lane Special School, Ysgol Hen Felin and Ysgol Ty Coch. These are proposed as:
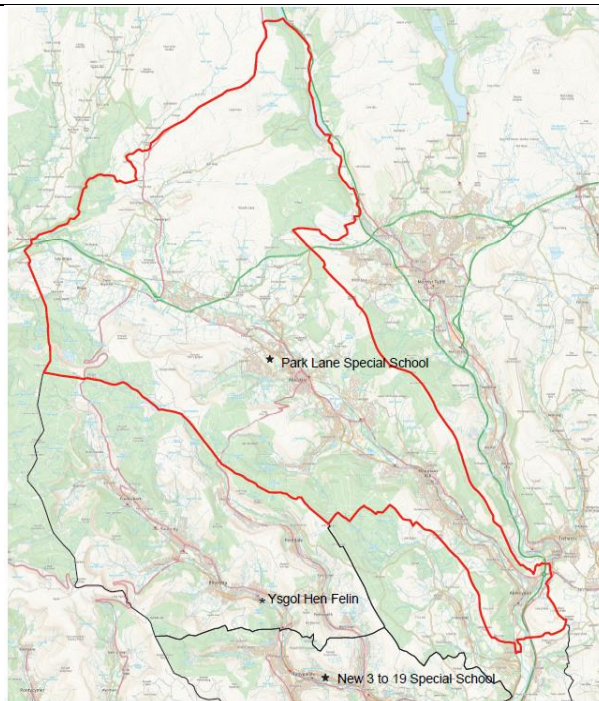
- **New 3 to 19 Special School in RCT** – Combining the catchment areas of Porth Community School, Tonyrefail Community, Ysgol Nant Gwyn (minus Pontrhondda Primary) and Coedylan Primary School and Trehopcyn Primary School

- **Park Lane Special School** – Combining the catchment areas of Aberdare Community School and Mountain Ash Comprehensive School

- **Ysgol Hen Felin** – Combining the catchment areas of Ferndale Community School, Treorchy Comprehensive, Pontrhondda Primary

- **Ysgol Ty Coch** – Combining the catchment areas of Bryncelynnog Comprehensive, Hawthorn High, Pontypridd High (minus Coedylan Primary School and Trehopcyn Primary school) and Y Pant Comprehensive.

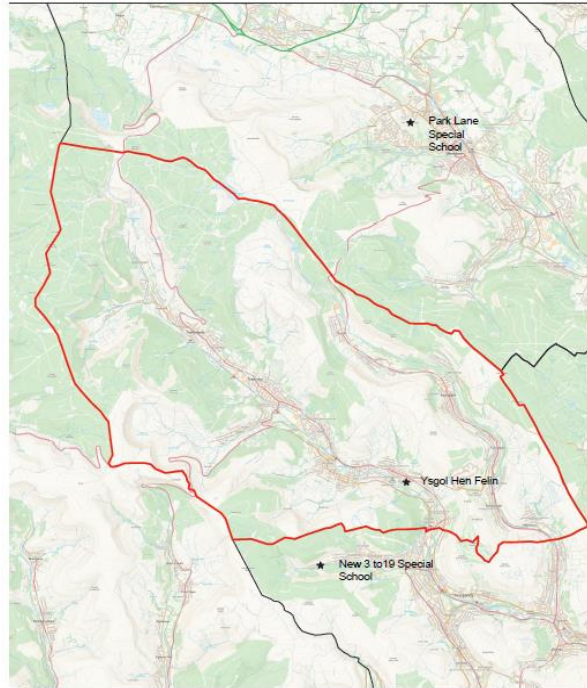The table that follows outlines maps identifying the proposed 3 to 19 special school catchment areas.

Maps Identifying the Proposed 3 to 19 Special School Catchment Areas
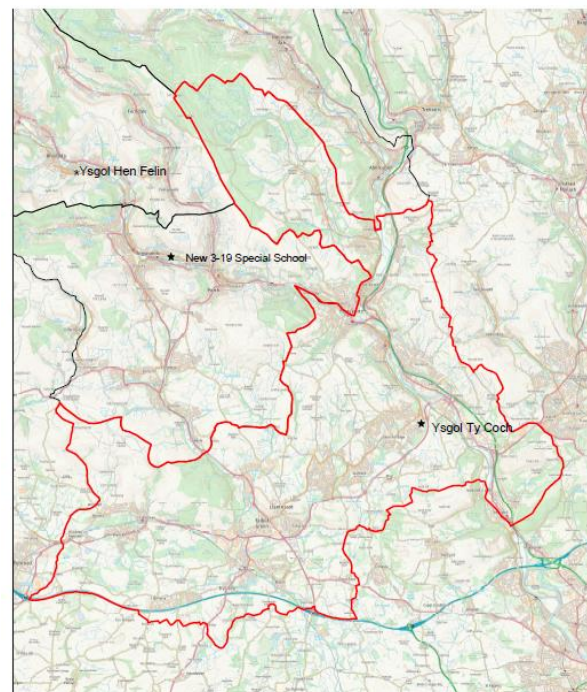

New 3 to 19 Special School.

Park Lane Special School.

Ysgol Hen Felin.

Ysgol Ty Coch.

On opening, pupils already attending other 3 to 19 special schools that will then reside within the catchment area of the new special school, will be given the option to relocate to the new school. To note this will not be mandatory and this will be down to parental/carer choice. However, once the catchment changes come into effect, the Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Access and Inclusion Service Panel will place new pupils into specialist provision according to the newly defined catchment boundaries.

The educational case for the proposal

The proposal forms a part of the Council's wider Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and contributes to the delivery of sustainable schools fit for the 21st century and supports the better strategic management of the Council's education estate.

In addition to this, school organisational proposals should highlight the educational benefits that any change will offer, particularly in relation to overall improvements in standards, but also in terms of the social and emotional development of children and young people, which would usually impact beneficially on their overall achievement and outcomes.

Park Lane Special School

Parklane Special School's most recent Estyn Inspection was in March 2017. The table that follows summaries the outcomes of this inspection.

Estyn Inspection Outcomes: Park Lane Special School	
Inspection Area	**Judgment**
Date of Inspection	March 2017
The School's Current Performance	Good
The School's Prospects for Improvement	Adequate
Key Question 1: How Good are Outcomes	Good
Key Question 2: How Good is Provision	Good
Key Question 3: How Good are Leadership and Management	Good

Estyn set out several recommendations to implement to make improvements to the quality of the education provision on offer. The points that follow summarise the recommendations made by Estyn.

1. **Recommendation One** – Increase the opportunities for pupils who are more able to access accredited courses that provide them with suitable challenge.
2. **Recommendation Two** – Implement effective procedures for moderating pupils' work.
3. **Recommendation Three** – Address the safety issue related to traffic management noted during the inspection.
4. **Recommendation Four** – Strengthen self-evaluation to ensure that it effectively identifies all areas for improvement.
5. **Recommendation Five** – Engage all staff in evaluating the work of the school and planning the improvements needed.

Ysgol Hen Felin

Ysgol Hen Felin's most recent Estyn Inspection was in January 2015. The table that follows summaries the outcomes of this inspection.

Estyn Inspection Outcomes: Ysgol Hen Felin	
Inspection Area	**Judgment**
Date of Inspection	January 2015
The School's Current Performance	Good
The School's Prospects for Improvement	Good
Key Question 1: How Good are Outcomes	Good
Key Question 2: How Good is Provision	Good
Key Question 3: How Good are Leadership and Management	Good

Estyn set out several recommendations to implement to make improvements to the quality of the education provision on offer. The points that follow summarise the recommendations made by Estyn.

1. **Recommendation One** – Address fully the safeguarding concerns identified by the inspection team.
2. **Recommendation Two** – Improve the use of data to analyse and compare the performance of all groups of pupils, track progress and inform planning.
3. **Recommendation Three** – Make sure that the school's self-evaluation is more evaluative and clearly identifies the school's strengths and weaknesses.
4. **Recommendation Four** – Improve the school's policies and plans by making them more robust, in line with current government guidelines and linked effectively together.

Ysgol Ty Coch

Ysgol Ty Coch's most recent Estyn Inspection was in March 2017. The table that follows summaries the outcomes of this inspection.

Estyn Inspection Outcomes: Ysgol Ty Coch	
Inspection Area	**Judgment**
Date of Inspection	June 2017
The School's Current Performance	Excellent
The School's Prospects for Improvement	Excellent
Key Question 1: How Good are Outcomes	Excellent
Key Question 2: How Good is Provision	Excellent
Key Question 3: How Good are Leadership and Management	Excellent

Estyn set out several recommendations to implement to make improvements to the quality of the education provision on offer. The points that follow summarise the recommendations made by Estyn.

1. **Recommendation One** – Improve the provision for developing pupils' Welsh language development.

2. **Recommendation Two** – Ensure that teachers provide specific feedback to pupils to help them improve their work.
3. **Recommendation Three** – Strengthen a very few areas of self-evaluation processes to ensure sufficient focus on the progress that pupils make.

Impact on ALN Provision

It is the Council's view that a new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could have a major positive impact on all five Estyn inspection areas, as well as more generally in enhancing the quality of education and support for children with ALN, this is detailed as follows:

1. **Standards**	The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Accommodation will consist of: • Modern, flexible learning environments for all pupils • A hydro-pool and specialist teaching and learning areas • Specialist equipment • A dedicated area within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day • Enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities • Traffic management systems including on-site pupil bus drop off, and on-site staff parking. All of which would support the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT to raise standards and make progress against Estyn's inspection areas.
2. **Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning**	The new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be built in accordance with current requirements of planning and building control legislation and will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Accommodation will consist of: • Modern, flexible learning environments for all pupils • A hydro-pool and specialist teaching and learning areas • Specialist equipment • A dedicated area within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day • Enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities • Traffic management systems including on-site pupil bus drop off, and on-site staff parking.

		All of which would support the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT to raise standards and make progress against Estyn's inspection areas.
3.	Teaching and Learning Experience	A new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would ensure that staff are able to provide a balanced curriculum at all stages in line with the new Curriculum for Wales – 2022. A 21st century learning environment could also provide pupils with greater flexibility and therefore greater choice and opportunities in their learning experience.
4.	Care, Support and Guidance	A new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could build upon the good working practices and initiatives already have in place. Enhanced outdoor spaces to support the full range of curriculum activities could provide opportunities to further develop extra-curricular activities to encourage healthy lifestyles for the school community. The new school will be a fully accessible and fully integrated community school. A dedicated area will be designed within so that the local community will be allowed to safely use the facilities, both during and after the school day.
5.	Leadership and Management	A new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, would remove the burden of time consuming and expensive maintenance issues, which could allow staff to focus on delivering the best teaching and learning and outcomes for their pupils.

What is the likely impact of the proposals on pupils?

It is anticipated that the proposed changes will not adversely impact upon pupils as this is creating a new school which can only enhance the current ALN provision on offer. Numerous benefits can be realised – the principal change will be to create a new 3 to 19 special school which will be built to 21st century school standards that should have a significantly positive impact upon the pupils who will attend.

The Welsh Government and the Council has adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which is expressed in seven core aims that all children and young people:

1. Have a flying start in life
2. Have a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities
3. Enjoy the best possible health and are free from abuse, victimisation, and exploitation
4. Have access to play, leisure, sporting, and cultural activities
5. Are listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised
6. Have a safe home and a community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing
7. Are not disadvantaged by poverty.

The Council considers that the proposal benefits the children and young people who will attend the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT in accordance with the seven core aims set out above.

Further information relating to the impact of the proposal on pupils, including how the proposal contributes to all seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015 and an assessment of the proposal on the five ways of working, can be found in the Equality Impact Assessment which is at Appendix B.

What is the likely impact of the proposal on staff?

We anticipate that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT, and the modern 21st century learning environments, will have a positive impact on staff morale, well-being, and retention.

As this will be a new school provision, a temporary governing body will be established if a decision to proceed with the opening is agreed. The main role of this temporary governing body will be to establish a staffing structure for the new school, appoint its senior management team and make decisions about the method of recruiting other staff to the posts that are available in the new school.

The number of staff required for the new school is likely to increase over time. The staffing requirements would align according to the increased school population which we anticipate will grow organically. Once open, the Governing Body of the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT would be responsible for the staffing structure which would be determined primarily by the numbers and educational needs of the pupils at the school and the budget available.

The Council has well established Human Resource policies and procedures that give reassurance to staff and employers about the management of organisational change. The Council is committed to working with staff and Trade Unions to ensure the process is dealt with sympathetically and supportively and there will be numerous opportunities to engage with staff as the proposal progresses.

Financial implications of the proposal

The estimated capital cost of this proposal is £53.3 million. The Council and the Welsh Government via the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme will jointly fund this project, with the Welsh Government funding up to 75.0% of project costs, and up to 100% of costs directly associated with making the school Net Zero Carbon in operation. Detailed costs will be developed alongside the consultation process and approvals sought in line with the Council's decision-making procedures.

Any revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the new 3 to 19 special school, including the schools' delegated budget and any potential increases in home to school transport costs will be identified as the proposal is develops.

Home to School Transport Provision

There is a statutory duty placed upon all local authorities in Wales to provide pupils with free transport to their nearest suitable school if they reside beyond safe 'walking distance' to that school. The term suitable school applies to the catchment area English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided mainstream primary school, secondary school or special school/class as appropriate. The law relating to safe 'walking distance' is defined as two miles for pupils of compulsory school age receiving primary education and three miles for pupils of compulsory school age receiving secondary education.

The Council has exercised the discretionary powers afforded to it under the provisions of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to make a more generous provision to pupils. The relevant information in relation to the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT is set out below:

- The eligibility criterion for walking distance for pupils receiving compulsory primary education at their nearest suitable school has been set at one and a half miles, instead of two miles as required by the Measure
- Free transport to their nearest suitable school, where places are available, is provided to pupils who meet the one and a half mile eligibility criterion from nursery (the start of the school term after their third birthday), rather than from the start of compulsory education (the start of the school term after their fifth birthday) as required by the Measure
- The eligibility criterion for walking distance for pupils receiving compulsory secondary education at their nearest suitable school has been set at two miles instead of three miles as required by the Measure
- Free transport is provided to post 16 pupils until the end of the academic year in which they attain their 19th birthday who meet the two mile eligibility criterion.

Further information in relation to the Council's Home to School transport provision can be viewed and downloaded from the Council website via:

https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/ParkingRoadsandTravel/Travel/Schooland CollegeTransport/SchoolandCollegeTransport.aspx

Any revenue implications resulting as a consequence of the new 3 to 19 special school, including the school's delegated budget and any potential increases in home to school transport costs will be identified as the proposal is develops.

Land and buildings information

It is proposed that the new 3 to 19 special school in RCT could be built on the soon to be vacated Council Headquarters in the Clydach Vale area of Tonypandy. This site is proposed as the preferred location following an appraisal of other sites and is in the ownership of RCT Council, so no land acquisitions are required.

Consultation Response Form

To comply with its legal duty under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, and help the Council reach a decision on the proposal, it would be helpful if you could answer the following questions. Please note, any personal information given will not be shared and will only be used to provide you with feedback, should you request it. Any comments that could identify you will be anonymised in the Consultation Report produced. Completed Consultation Report Forms should be returned to:

Director of Education and Inclusion Services
21st Century Schools Team
Ty Trevithick
Abercynon
CF45 4UQ

or

Email: schoolplanning@rctcbc.gov.uk

The proposal:

To open a new English medium 3 to 19 special school in RCT and the introduction of catchment areas for the 3 to 19 special schools.

Do you agree with the proposal?   Yes   No   Not sure

Please let us know the reasons for your choice

Do you think the proposal could impact opportunities for people to use and promote the Welsh Language (Positive or Negative)?

Do you think the proposal in any way treats the Welsh Language less favourably than the English Language?

● How positive effects on the Welsh Language could be increased, or negative effects be decreased?

● Please state any alternative views or points which you would like to be considered (attach additional sheets if necessary).

● Please indicate who you are (e.g., parent/carer of a pupil at named school(s), Governor at named school(s), etc.).

● Name (optional):

● Please provide contact details if you wish to be notified of the publication of the Consultation Report.

Please forward completed questionnaires to the above address no later than no later than 17:00 on 14th September 2023.

The Council is committed to keeping your personal information safe and secure and keeping you informed about how we use your information. To learn about how your privacy is protected and how and why we use your personal information to provide you with services, please visit our Consultation privacy notice:

https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/DataProtectionandFreedomofInformation/DataProtection/serviceprivacynotices/ChiefExecutives/ConsultationPrivacyNotice.aspx

and

https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/DataProtectionandFreedomofInformation/DataProtection/DataProtection.aspx

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