



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021 / 2022

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 MARCH 2022

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide a summary update on the progress being made to deliver town centre regeneration in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- 2.1 Considers and scrutinises the contents of the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Town centres are the heart of our communities in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Their role in providing services for local people, leisure and retail opportunities, and as places to live means it is critical that they are vibrant and sustainable places where people want to visit, live and work.
- 3.2 The economy of our town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf has been challenged over the last two years as a result of the external economic influences of Brexit, the COVID 19 Pandemic, storms and flooding and the changing patterns of the retail sector which have seen national chain retailers leaving high street locations. Because of this, Town Centre Regeneration continues to be a key priority for the Council.

3.3 Town Centre Regeneration is central to the Corporate Plan, 2020-2024, which sets out the actions that we will take to deliver town centre regeneration. This includes:

- Investing in our town centres bringing jobs and homes to create vibrant, thriving places where people wish to live, work and socialise.
- Delivering major regeneration and transportation schemes maximising the impact of the South Wales Metro to create better places to live and work.
- Supporting new businesses to open up in town centres and existing businesses to expand their offer through a wide package of support and interventions.
- Where the private sector is unable to tackle empty or rundown sites and premises in town centres, the Council will proactively acquire them where appropriate.
- Develop town centre strategies for our town centres which value their uniqueness, building on Metro benefits including office accommodation, increasing employment and homes above shops creating increased footfall.

3.4 Welsh Government recognises the importance of town centre regeneration and has adopted a Town Centre First Approach where public sector investment in new services and buildings should be at the heart of towns wherever possible. This is now being supported and delivered by the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns funding which is a key source of investment to support the delivery of town centre regeneration in RCT.

3.5 The Corporate Plan actions set out above are further delivered and monitored through the Corporate Priority Action Plan and Key Service Priorities for Prosperity and Development.

4. SUMMARY OF TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION ACTIVITY

4.1 A summary of regeneration activity in key town centres is set out below in the following categories:

- Key Town Centre investments
- Town Centre Business Engagement and Support
- Financial Assistance for Town Centre businesses
- Making Town Centres safer for visitors during the Pandemic

Key Town Centre Investments

- 4.2. **Pontypridd Town Centre:** In February 2022, the Draft Town Centre Placemaking Plan was considered by Cabinet. The plan aims to improve the prosperity of the town, enhance the townscape and make it more resilient to future change. It proposes a series of phased interventions to deliver early positive change but also consistent growth and investment over a realistic delivery period.
- 4.3 An exercise on the Draft Placemaking Plan is currently underway and will close on 29th March 2022 with the results of the consultation being reported to Cabinet later in the year.
- 4.4 The plan will build upon the foundations of what has already been delivered and will provide a framework for delivering further new development and investment.
- 4.5 **Llys Cadwyn:** Completed in Autumn 2020, the development has transformed the centre of Pontypridd with a modern office led development alongside food/drink units, a library, council customer contact point and a leisure and fitness centre.
- 4.6 The development provides the new headquarters for Transport for Wales and is home to two new hospitality businesses - Bradleys Coffee Ltd and the Gatto Lounge under its Loungers brand.
- 4.7 Positive negotiations are ongoing with prospective tenants for the remaining accommodation at 2 Llys Cadwyn and further detail will be released when legal arrangements are finalised.
- 4.8 **Llys Cadwyn / Park Footbridge:** The new footbridge provides an important pedestrian link between Llys Cadwyn and Ynysangharad War Memorial Park. With financial support from Welsh Government and Council resources, the footbridge was completed in Summer 2020.
- 4.9 Former **Bingo Hall / Angharads Nightclub:** Funded by investment from the Council and Welsh Government, these vacant and dilapidated buildings were acquired in March 2020 and subsequently demolished in August 2021 leaving the site development ready.
- 4.10 Expert advice has been commissioned to explore commercial uses to strengthen the viability of the town and the advice received clearly supports a hotel-led development with retail uses at the lower ground floor. Following approval from Cabinet in February 2022, a formal procurement exercise will be undertaken over the coming months to

secure a Development Partner to take forward a hotel-led development on site.

- 4.11 **96-99a and 100-102 Taff Street:** In March 2021, these vacant buildings formerly occupied by Marks & Spencer, Dorothy Perkins and Burtons, were acquired with investment from the Council and Welsh Government. Early design work commissioned to explore opportunities for the site demonstrate that the properties provide a great opportunity to open the town centre towards the river and the park and to provide a range of leisure, commercial and retail uses.
- 4.12 Cabinet agreed at its February meeting to a funding application being submitted to Welsh Government to demolish the vacant buildings due to their dilapidated and structural state and general poor quality and to commence the demolition process when funding is in place and any necessary statutory consents are secured.
- 4.13 **Muni Arts Centre:** Proposals to refurbish and secure the building's future in partnership with charitable organisation Awen, were approved by Cabinet Members in late 2019. Informed by consultation with key stakeholders and the local community, the project aims to secure the Grade II Listed building's heritage and re-establish the Muni as a unique local venue for regional arts and music.
- 4.14 With £5.3million secured from the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund, the project will deliver a venue that offers music, cinema, theatre and bar facilities. It will create flexible community facilities to maximise use of the space and also a registered Changing Place facility.
- 4.15 **Ynysangharad War Memorial Park:** Completed in March 2021 with £1.2million investment from the Valleys Regional Park initiative, all main footways across the park were refurbished, upgraded LED streetlighting was installed and a new changing place facility provided at the Lido.
- 4.16 Funded by £1.9million investment from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Welsh Government, further works are currently progressing to improve and rejuvenate the heritage features of the Grade II listed park including refurbishment of the bandstand area, rock outcrop area and the sunken garden. A new training/activity centre will be provided as well as new signage and interpretation.
- 4.17 **YMCA Redevelopment:** The ambitious c.£5million redevelopment project will bring the historic 1910 venue back into use by creating a state-of-the-art mixed-use facility. A major redesign of the building will make it fully accessible, rationalising the use of internal spaces,

creating new and improved facilities including offices and workspace for social enterprises and businesses and a suite of dedicated arts facilities.

- 4.18 **Pontypridd Property Investment Programme:** With c.£850k investment from the Welsh Government's Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme, 7 applicants have been supported to improve their town centre properties for commercial or residential uses.
- 4.19 **Porth Town Centre:** In January 2019, the Town Centre Regeneration Strategy was approved by Cabinet. The strategy sets out an integrated, co-ordinated and holistic approach to town centre regeneration that takes into account the distinctive role Porth has at the heart of the community and its important location for services, employment, housing and transport functions. The Council continues to deliver a range of projects as set out within the strategy, along with further complementary activity to improve the town. These include:
- 4.20 **Porth Transport Hub:** In late 2021, the Council received a Levelling Up Fund approval to deliver this highly strategic project. Also funded by Welsh Government and Cardiff City Region City Deal, the Porth Transport Hub will deliver a centralised and seamless transport interchange between bus and rail. Situated next to the existing railway line, the Transport Hub will also replace the existing ticketing facility run by Transport for Wales.
- 4.21 Construction began in January and will complete in Spring 2023. The Porth Transport Hub is the 'anchor' project for the regeneration of Porth contained within the Porth Town Centre Regeneration Strategy.
- 4.22 **Porth Plaza Community Hub:** This scheme was completed in 2020 and now houses a range of public services including the public library and One4All Centre, as well as a privately run day nursery.
- 4.23 **Extending the current Park and Ride provision:** The completion of the Phase 2 park and ride facility in 2019 has delivered a further 72 parking spaces, taking the overall park and ride offer in the town to almost 150 parking spaces. The project has also delivered new EV charging points.
- 4.24 **Redevelopment of existing underused, disused and derelict buildings:** The Council have identified a number of core properties at key locations throughout the town centre that have the potential for mixed-use development, with commercial and retail opportunities on the ground floors. The Council have already deployed the Welsh Government Placemaking Grant to support the delivery of 38 Hannah Street. A circa £160,000 grant approval has been awarded towards the

refurbishment of a new commercial premises that will accommodate a co-working facility and meeting space. The scheme commenced in 2021 and is due for completion in 2022.

- 4.25 **Relocation of Council Staff into Porth Town Centre:** In 2021 the Council completed the relocation of staff to Oldway House in the town centre. This has generated increased footfall into the town with the potential to also enhance the town centre economically.
- 4.26 **Mountain Ash Town Centre:** In December 2018, the Town Centre Regeneration Framework was approved by Cabinet. The framework sets out an integrated and co-ordinated approach to town centre regeneration and provides a vehicle to co-ordinate the effective development and delivery of the project package and to maximise their benefits and impact for the town and local community.
- 4.27 The Council has delivered the range of projects as set out within the framework, along with further complementary activity to improve the town. These include:
- 4.28 **The redevelopment of Rhos Square (known locally as Guto Square):** Rhos Square is located centrally within Mountain Ash town centre and provides a social hub for the town, particularly during events such as the Nos Galan. The square provides direct access from the town to one of the town's two main car parks; it also houses the town's public toilets and provides a venue for the well-established weekly open-air market.
- 4.29 The project has seen the acquisition and subsequent demolition of a number of vacant or dilapidated buildings, together with the acquisition of a derelict area of land in the heart of the town centre. The project, supported by a £110k contribution from the Welsh Government Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme, has delivered significant improvements to the public realm and further developed an area of public space that offers flexibility and adds social value to the town and its wider community.
- 4.30 **The development of Mountain Ash Community Hub – Canolfan Aberpennar:** The creation of community hubs enable the provision of a range of community based services in one or a number of closely located buildings, which best serve the community. A number of community hub proposals already existed across the county borough and with the former Mountain Ash Day Centre centrally located within the town but offering a limited range of services, the development of a modern community hub on the site has delivered improved facilities and the provision of enhanced services whilst maximising Council assets.

- 4.31 **The Development of an Integrated Primary Care Facility:** Completed and opened in 2020, the project was led by Cwm Taf University Health Board in partnership with local General Practitioners, RCT County Borough Council, Interlink and the Community Health Council.
- 4.32 The facility, located in the town centre provides sustainable and effective primary care services for the local population, offering integrated support to help people maintain their health and wellbeing in accessible, high quality accommodation, within a community network framework. Its location benefits from easy access, good parking and transport links and has helped deliver increased town centre footfall.
- 4.33 **The Redevelopment of 1-4 Oxford Buildings:** Previously a vacant building at the southern entrance to the town centre, the properties were acquired by the Council in 2018, for redevelopment. Completed in 2021, the project has delivered 8 self-contained, high quality apartments for adults with a learning disability, where individuals have access to targeted support to enable them to maximise their independence and promote choice.
- 4.34 **Coworking Offices – Final Frontier Developments – former Town Hall building:** A £550,000 investment (WG, Council and private developer investment) has regenerated just under 700 square metres of unused office space. The whole building has been brought back into use as coworking, flexible office space with conferencing/event facilities. The internal areas have been carefully upgraded and enhanced to allow this historic listed building to provide modern and stylish office space.
- 4.35 **Extended services - Rowan Tree Cancer Care – former Barclays Bank, Commercial Street:** Adjoining Rowan Tree's existing headquarters and lying vacant since the bank's closure, this building is being completely refurbished to extend the charity's vital services. The scheme brings 570 square metres back into use to accommodate the extension of the cancer support services, including a mini-café, a men's 'shed', conference room and respite for carers. Costing just under £330,000, a contribution of £250,000 of Welsh Government TRI Thematic funding will assist this important project
- 4.36 **Abigail Lewis Photography – 12-14 Oxford Street:** This project has completely redeveloped a former vacant betting shop into a modern, high quality award winning photography studio. A grant of approximately £160,000 using Welsh Government funding has made this development possible.
- 4.37 **Aberdare Town Centre:** There are number of significant regeneration-led projects being delivered in **Aberdare** at present, including:

- 4.38 **Affordable Housing – former Black Lion Hotel:** A grade II listed building, The Black Lion has lain derelict for two decades, a long-term target for regeneration in the town. In partnership with Trivallis and using Social Housing Grant, TEDS Development Limited are delivering 11 new affordable homes, along with 7 more already delivered in the adjacent Exchange Building. An ambitious project to restore the building, a commercial bar/restaurant unit is now underway for the ground floor. Via Welsh Government Placemaking fund, a grant of £250,000 is in place to assist with the completion of this project
- 4.39 **The Boot Hotel:** Another grade II listed building, this property was vacant and in a state of disrepair. In partnership with Trivallis, TEDS Development delivered 12 affordable housing units to the upper floor. The Council continues to work with the owner to discuss the redevelopment of the ground floor commercial unit
- 4.40 **Dare Valley Country Park:** As part of the Valleys Regional Park programme £1,3M of grant funding was secured to refurbish the hotel, extend and refurbish the shower block, upgrade the play area and construct a new family friendly cycling trails and pump tracks, with a bike workshop / hire facilities.
- 4.41 **CORE Business Solutions Centre:** In June 2021, the Council's Cabinet approved an application from the Wales Co-operative Centre for the UK Government Community Renewal Fund for consideration. The application enables a collaborative project between the Wales Co-operative, the Our Aberdare BID and Purple Shoots to create, manage and facilitate a co-working space / community hub and tourist information centre in the heart of Aberdare town centre, to deliver a variety of innovative workshops, activities and events to businesses. It also includes the distribution of 10 x £10,000 grants to local businesses to help support micro-economic stimulation and develop new products and services related to sustainable food and climate change.
- 4.42 The project received approval from UK Government in November 2021 and has provided £611,000 funding support which has facilitated the development of a new CORE Business Solutions Centre in Aberdare town centre. The centre is due to open in April 2022 and will occupy a former vacant town centre property, bringing it back into use and providing collaborative local economic development in the Cynon Valley and beyond.
- 4.43 **Repair / Reuse shop:** In February 2021 the Council approved the acquisition of two existing vacant retail properties within the key location of Canon Street in Aberdare town centre to enable the development of a repair / reuse facility. Once completed the facility will provide an opportunity for a variety of household and leisure items to be repaired or refurbished to avoid going to landfill.

- 4.44 **Highways alterations on Cardiff Road:** In 2021 the Council completed a scheme to alter the layout of a section of the highway on Cardiff Road by way of creating additional outdoor public space within the town centre to enable the placement of street cafe furniture to support outdoor trading opportunities for the hospitality sector. The project has contributed to delivering safer public spaces throughout RCT town centres during and post COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.45 **Tonypandy Town Centre:** There are number of significant regeneration-led projects being delivered in **Tonypandy** at present, including:
- 4.46 **The Court House - Edwards Investments, former Magistrates Court, Llwynypia Road:** This project has redeveloped 750 sq. metres of unused office space brought back into use as coworking, flexible office space where users can access a gym, coffee bar, meeting rooms and modern high quality conferencing facilities. Adjacent to the Glyn cornel nature reserve, many of the work spaces will have views over the lake allowing access to green space during the working day.
- 4.47 The project has re-modelled the building to create open, light workspace and allow new and small businesses to benefit from working alongside each other and creating networks. A £250,000 grant from Welsh Government's Valleys Taskforce and a further £50,000 from the Council's Major Projects Investment Fund made this happen.
- 4.48 **The Work Shed, Rhondda Housing Association (RHA) existing headquarters:** Complementing the Court House to align with Welsh Government's advocacy of sustainable coworking projects, RHA delivered a £49,400 project called the Work Shed. The funding is being provided by Welsh Government Valleys Taskforce, made available via a Council agreement. This coworking project is a pilot to deliver 8 leading to 12 accessible work spaces with superfast broadband, kitchen, break out space and meeting rooms.
- 4.49 **The Big Shed:** A large former supermarket and car parking area, vacated by the Co-operative has been purchased by RHA. Planning has recently been granted to redevelop this site as a mixed-use facility with commercial space and 52 affordable housing units
- 4.50 **122-126 Dunraven Street:** The Council has worked with RHA to enable the safe demolition and clearance of a severely fire damaged block of properties in the town centre. The project is benefitting from a grant of circa £186,000 of Welsh Government Placemaking funding to enable this. This project will deliver 12 new affordable homes which are in high demand in this area. RHA will further invest Welsh Government Social Housing Grant to complete the new homes project

- 4.51 **Treorchy Town Centre:** There are also number of regeneration-led projects being delivered in Treorchy at present, including:
- 4.52 **Redevelopment of area of land adjacent to Parc & Dare Theatre, Treorchy:** The Council delivered a project in 2019 to install new benches and flower planters in front of the Parc & Dare, using the Visit Treorchy brand. The project has improved the look and feel of the area whilst providing additional public seating in a key location of the town centre.
- 4.53 Phase 1 of a project to redevelop the area at the side of the theatre to provide for outdoor seating, eating and drinking, as well as a social space for town and community has also been completed. Delivered with support from the Welsh Government Transforming Towns Fund the project has delivered improvements to the public realm by way of creating increased space for community use. Phase 2 of the project is in the design phase and will be delivered in 2022/23, subject to funding.
- 4.54 **Treorchy Sewing Enterprise:** Treorchy Sewing Enterprise Ltd is a new social enterprise based at a unit at the former Burberry Factory near Treorchy. With £10,000 from the RCT Enterprise Investment Fund and support from Welsh Government, the business has restarted garment manufacturing, using the invaluable experience of workers who previously worked at the factory.

Town Centre Business Engagement and Support

- 4.55 Improving town centre resilience, encouraging and facilitating footfall and stimulating business growth cannot be achieved with a single approach. It requires a coordinated and integrated approach that maximises the opportunity for partnership development.
- 4.56 Whilst the Council has and continues to deliver a range of key regeneration projects across its town centres, the role of the town centre business community itself is also really important.
- 4.57 The Covid-19 Pandemic has made us think hard about the changing role our towns play in the resilience and well-being of our communities. The Council's work in supporting our town centres throughout this period continues to highlight how important it is for us to work with the business community. Harnessing this relationship and supporting it to flourish will be key to the long-term success of our towns.
- 4.58 The Council supports and, in some cases, facilitates a business community network in all of its town centres. This takes the form of a

business forum, a Chamber of Trade or Commerce, or a Business Improvement District (BID). These networks allow for town centre issues to be addressed, projects to be developed, information to be shared and available financial assistance to be discussed.

- 4.59 In 2015, the first BID in RCT was established in Pontypridd (Your Pontypridd), for an initial 5-year term. This was followed by further BIDs being established in Aberdare (Our Aberdare) and Treorchy (Love Treorchy) in 2020. Following a successful first term the Your Pontypridd BID was re-elected for a second (5-year) term in 2021. The importance of this approach has been emphasised with Treorchy winning the prestigious UK High Street of the Year Award in 2020.
- 4.60 BIDs are business-led partnerships that agree by ballot to pay an extra levy on their business rates based on their rateable value to fund activities, services and improvements that will benefit the businesses and the place in which they operate.
- 4.61 All BIDs, Business Forums and Chambers of Trade / Commerce in RCT have and continue to work positively with the Council to develop and deliver a range of projects and activities that improve the town centre environment, for businesses, shoppers, visitors and residents, whilst helping to boost the local economy.

Financial Support for Town Centre Businesses

- 4.62 The Regeneration Service offers a range of financial assistance to businesses to enable them to respond to the economic challenges they have faced, helping them build their resilience, support economic growth and diversification with the aim of stimulating future private sector investment.
- 4.63 **RCT CBC Enterprise Investment Fund:** The aim of the Fund is to support sustainable economic growth by investing in enterprises which contribute to creating a vibrant and strong local economy. It provides financial assistance for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), including Start Ups as well as existing enterprises. The Fund can support businesses with the purchase of capital equipment, building works, website development and measures to improve environmental sustainability, which will help them expand and diversify.
- 4.64 The scheme can contribute a maximum of 50% towards eligible costs (excluding VAT) – with a maximum grant of £10,000. Since 2020/21 the Fund has supported 31 businesses in key town centres with grant awards totalling £206,774.
- 4.65 **RCT CBC Town Centre Maintenance Grant:** The Town Centre Maintenance Grant provides support for minor improvements and

maintenance works, which will improve the external front elevation of town centre properties and contribute to a positive impact on the street scene. The grant can support traders and landlords, including those of vacant properties, to carry out minor improvement and maintenance works (including painting, powder coating on shutters) and a range of repairs to town centre property fronts.

- 4.66 The scheme can contribute a maximum of 75% towards eligible costs – with a maximum grant of £1,000. A further grant of up to £300 (75% maximum contribution) may also be available where scaffolding or skip hire is required to carry out the work. Since 2020/21 the Fund has supported 15 businesses in key town centres with grant awards totalling £20,052
- 4.67 **COVID Recovery Fund:** The funding from the Welsh Government Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme was available to support businesses with external interventions which helped facilitate social distancing and a lower density of occupation in places where customers and members of the public would meet, be served food or drink or rest.
- 4.68 The scheme could contribute a maximum of 80% towards eligible project costs – with a maximum grant of £10,000. In 2020/21 the Fund supported 23 businesses in key town centres with grant awards totalling £134,114.

Other Support for Town Centre Businesses

- 4.69 In addition to the financial support set out above, the Council has also provided other key initiatives to improve the town centre business environment. Free public access Wifi has now been successfully introduced in seven key town centres – Aberdare, Mountain Ash, Ferndale, Porth, Treorchy, Tonypany and Pontypridd. This is a valuable asset for local residents, visitors and the business community.
- 4.70 A Street Café Furniture Permit Scheme has been introduced in Aberdare and Pontypridd to regulate safe outdoor trading. This scheme is intended to support businesses who want to improve their trading environment with outdoor space which will lead to an improved outdoor cafe culture for shoppers and visitors.

Making Town Centres safer for visitors during the Pandemic

- 4.71 The Covid 19 Pandemic has had a significant impact on town centres and their business communities with lockdowns leading them to close and at other times their business operations being restricted. Following the first lockdown in 2020 the Council provided co-ordinated support

for town centres to make them as accessible and safe as possible for people to visit and go about their business.

- 4.72 The support provided to improve safer access in town centres has been on the basis of a ‘**signs and lines**’ approach and significant physical interventions and the closure of areas were avoided wherever possible. The measures were designed to enable visitors to town centres to exercise social distancing and be safe rather than to force it to happen.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no Welsh Language implications as the contents of the report are for information purposes only. Applicants to the grant schemes referred to in this report were able to apply in the Welsh language if this was their preferred language.

7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 Reports were taken to Cabinet in February 2022 on the Draft Pontypridd Placemaking Plan, in January 2019 on the Porth Regeneration Strategy and in December 2019 on the Mountain Ash Regeneration Framework. A report on the Review of the Regeneration Grants Portfolio was approved by Cabinet in September 2020.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 There are no financial implications as the contents of this report are for information purposes only. The financial resources to deliver these schemes came from funding provided by Welsh Government and from the approved RCT CBC budgets.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 There are no legal implications as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.

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

- 10.1 The initiatives and investment to improve town centres and financial assistance delivered to businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic has been of crucial importance to ensure they will survive, diversify and be sustainable in this extremely uncertain economic climate. These measures will contribute to achieving the “Prosperity” priority within the Corporate Plan.
- 10.2 They will also make a significant positive contribution to the seven goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations Act, in particular a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The economy of town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf has been severely challenged since the start of 2020 as result of the devastating storms and flooding followed immediately by the COVID- 19 pandemic with the subsequent lockdown measures and restrictions. Despite this a significant level of investment in regeneration initiatives and financial assistance to businesses has been delivered. This has helped our key town centres to better face the new challenges and to change and improve what they offer local communities and visitors to make them become sustainable, vibrant and thriving places into the future.