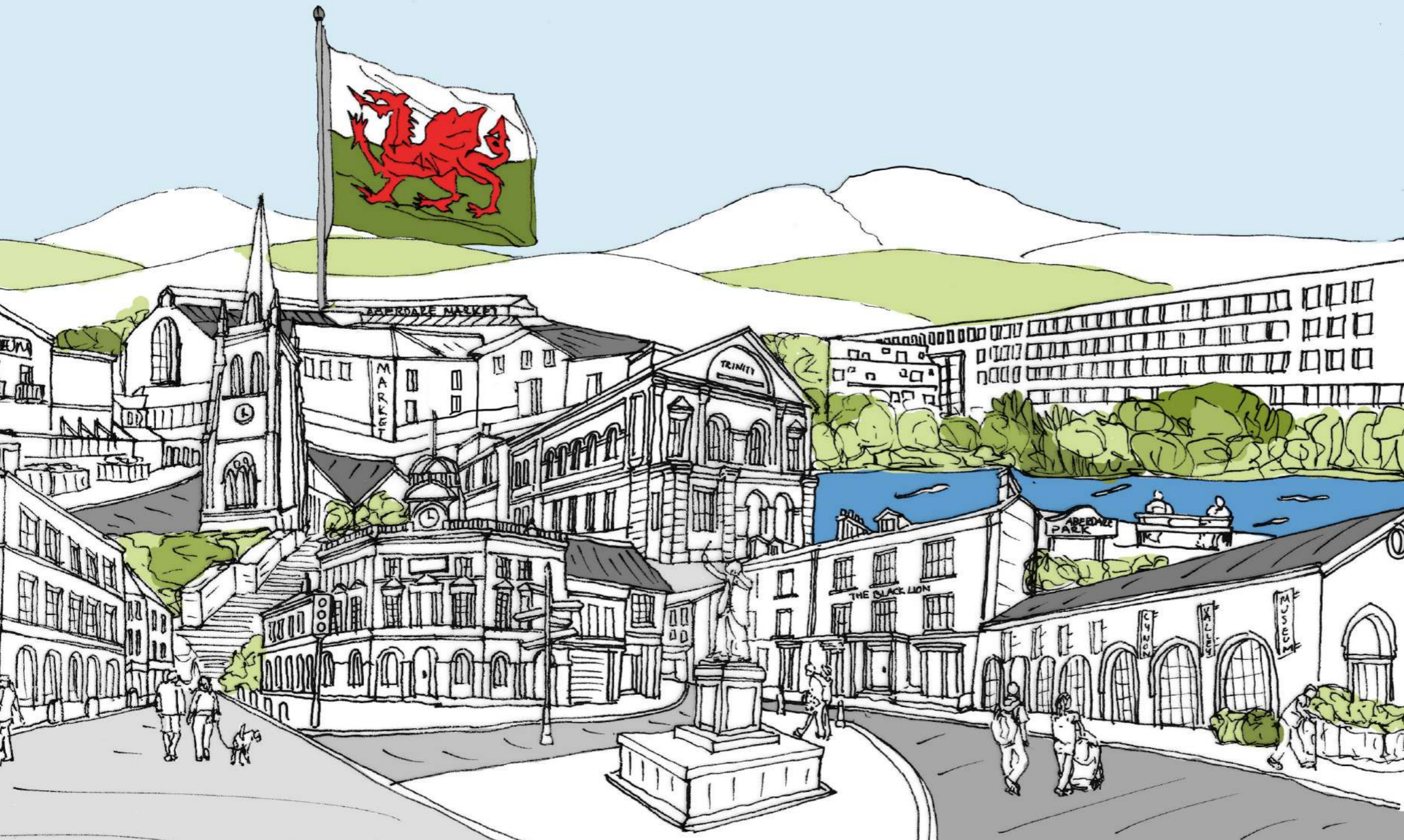


Enabling vibrant and enticing  
town centres, at the heart of our  
communities.

TOWN CENTRE  
STRATEGY 2023/24



# Aberdare Town Centre

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Produced by:

*RCTCBC Regeneration Department*

*Final Version*

*November 2023*



# 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.

1



# 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.





Brecon Beacons National Park

Brecon Beacons National Park

A465

PONTARDAWE

HIRWAUN

MERTHYR TYDFIL

Aberdare

A4059

MOUNTAIN ASH

CWMBRAN

Afan Forest Park

NEATH

SWANSEA

MAESTEG

TONYPANDY

PONTYPRIDD

CAERPHILLY

NEWPORT

A470

M4

BRIDGEND

PORTHCAWL

CARDIFF

BARRY

### Regional Location Plan


Key




 RCT Boundary

 Railway

 City / Town

 Water

 Park

# 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 3 years. 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 an adventure tourism offer reflecting the area's unique industrial and social history, outstanding natural landscape and strategic regional location which will be enhanced further by the arrival of the South Wales Metro.

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.

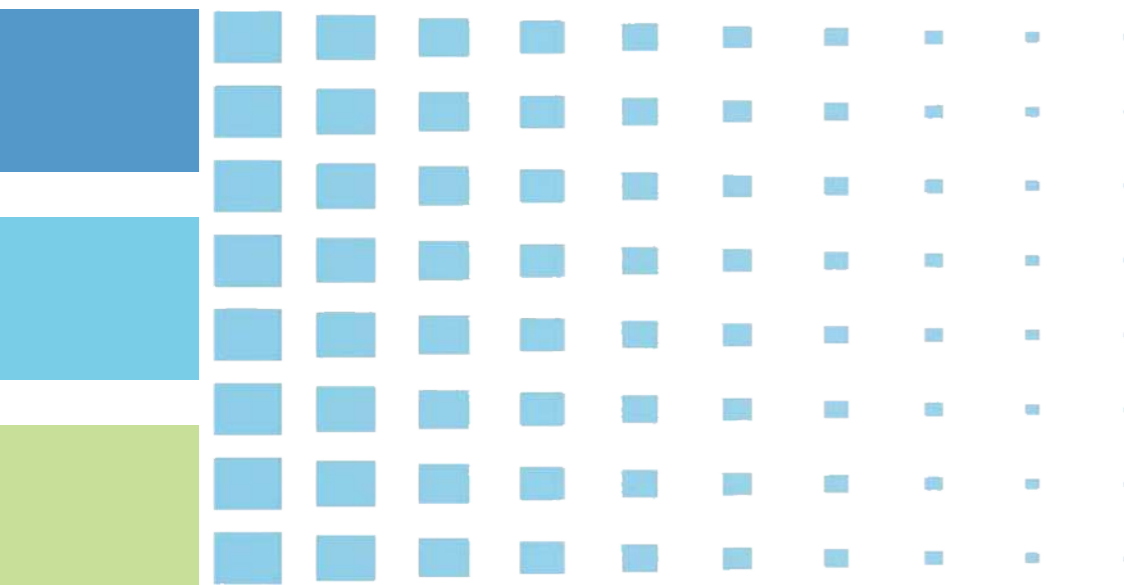
Aberdare Town Centre's role in satisfying the needs of local people has the potential to be built upon through strengthening its identity as a sustainable place to live, work and visit. Central to achieving this, will be effective collaboration between public, private and community groups. In this context, the recent positive momentum generated through a series of key events in the town centre, delivered by the BID and other local organisations, should be built upon to strengthen the town's identity as a regional destination.



Zip World at Tower Colliery



Aberdare Festival 2022





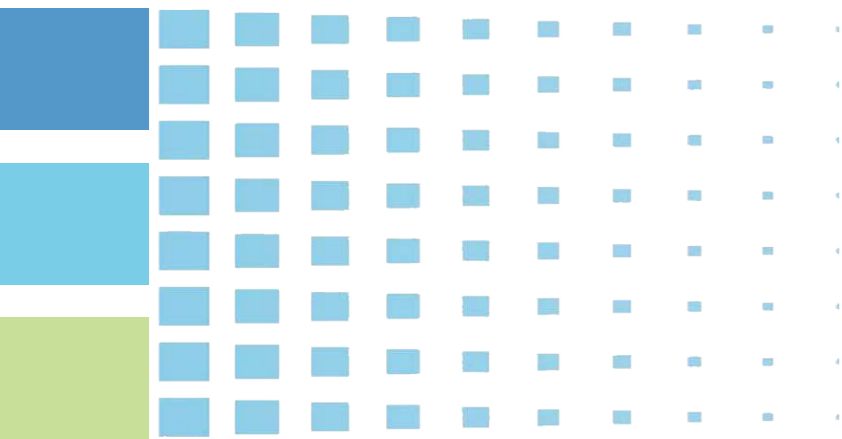
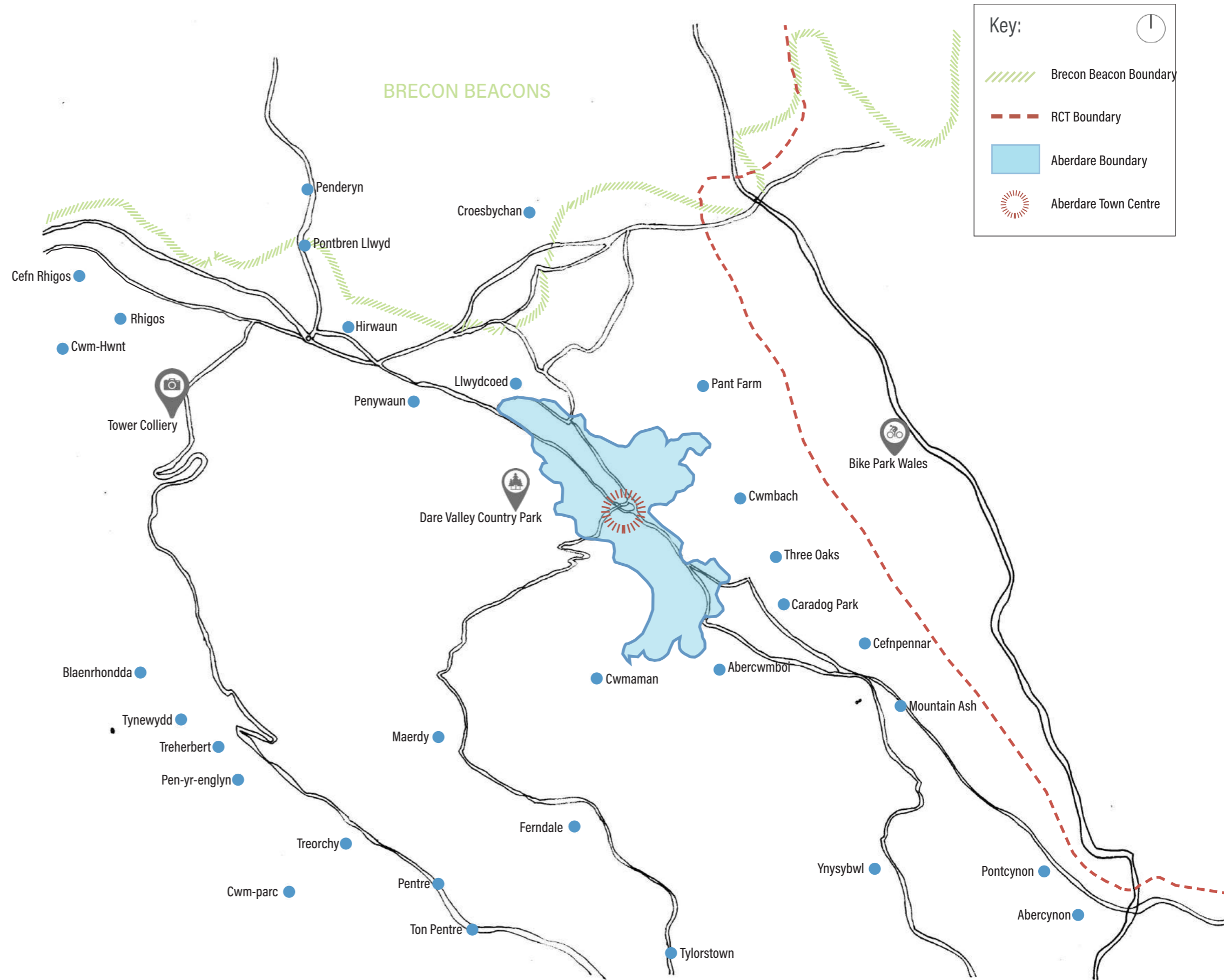
# Local Context:

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.

Additionally, the strong existing network of local groups and organisations, discovered via early engagement and consultation, represents a considerable strength which has the potential to be developed further.



# 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 its 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.

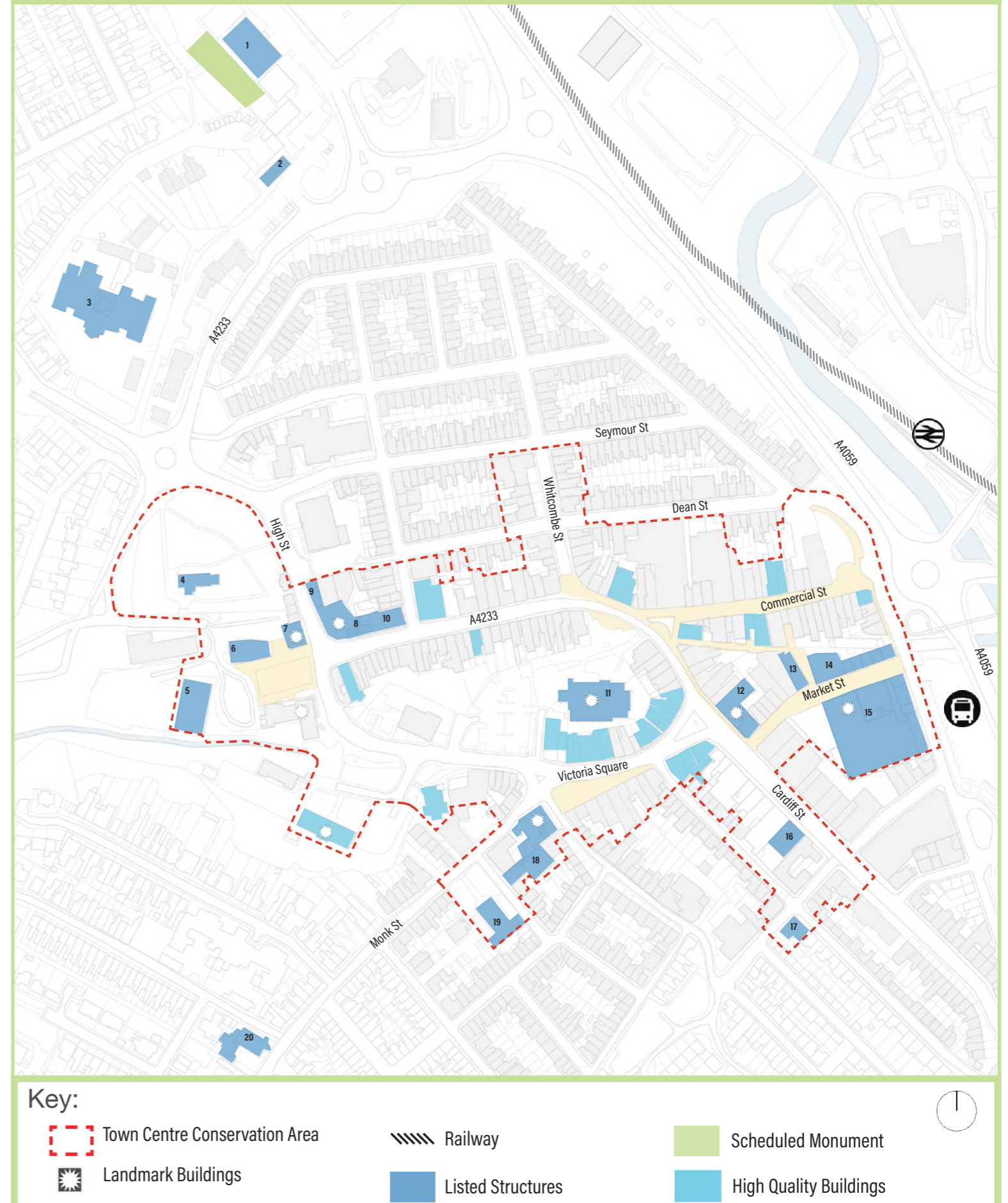
The architectural quality of such buildings contribute strongly to Aberdare's overall identity and act as physical reminders of the town's unique history and heritage. Extensive work has already been undertaken to restore and re-purpose many of these listed buildings but opportunities remain for further 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 | 11. St Elvan's Church                        |
| 2. Blast Engine House at former Gadly's Iron-works       | 12. Caradog Arms Hotel & Radio Rentals       |
| 3. Gadlys Higher Standard School                         | 13. The Old Courthouse                       |
| 4. St John the Baptist Parish                            | 14. Market Shopping Centre                   |
| 5. Siloa Capel Y Annibynwyr                              | 15. Aberdare Market & The New Market Tavern. |
| 6. English Methodist Chapel                              | 16. Midland Bank                             |
| 7. Town Hall   | 17. Bute Chambers                            |
| 8. Constitutional Club                                   | 18. The Black Lion Hotel & Bethania Chapel   |
| 9. No 42 & 43 High Street                                | 19. Calfaria Chapel                          |
| 10. Trinity Presbyterian Church of Wales                 | 20. Catholic church of St Joseph             |

## Aberdare Town Centre: Listed & 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 socialise. 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.

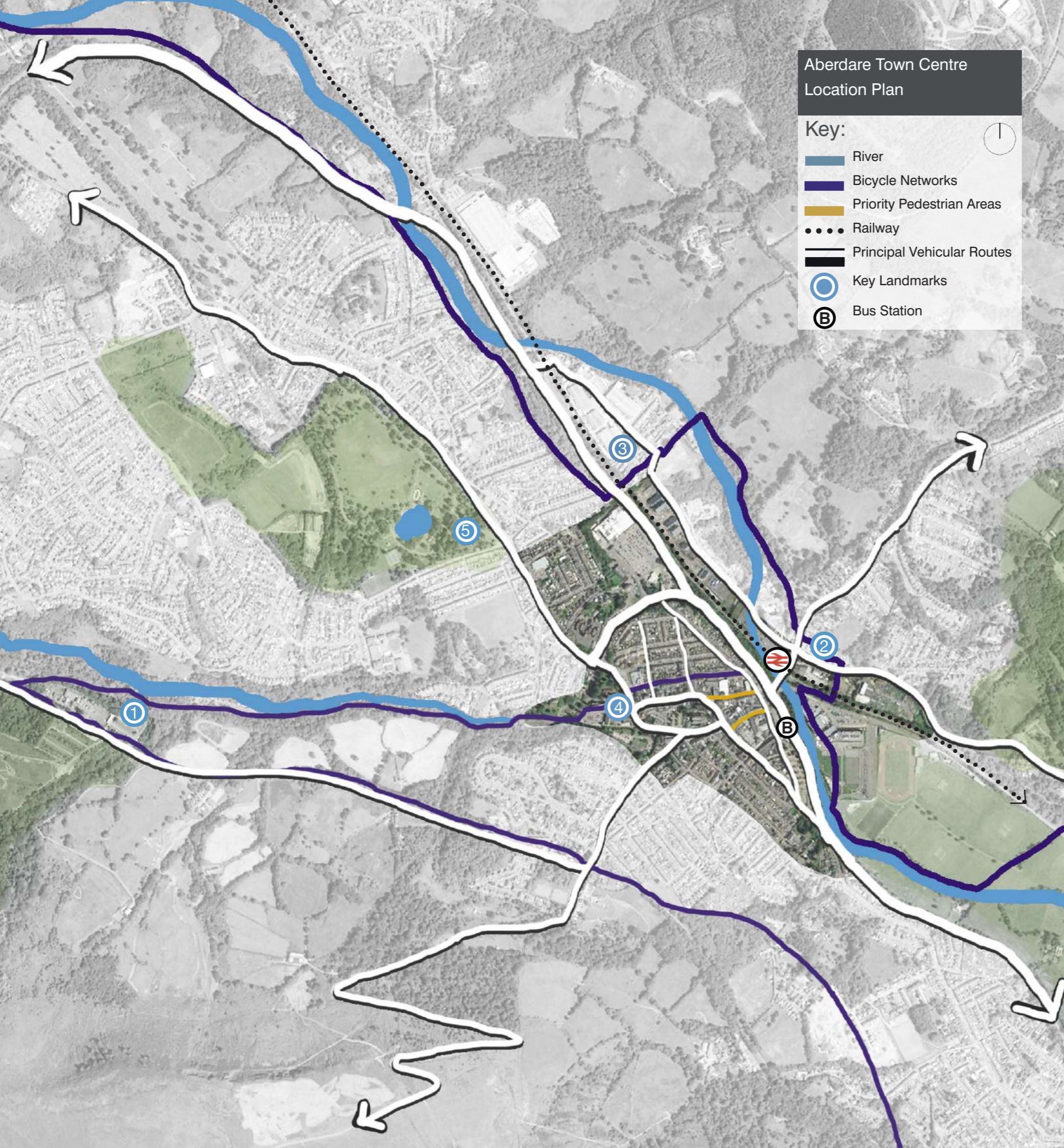


Dare Valley Country Park



Aberdare Community School





③ Cynon Valley Museum



④ Library Square



⑤ Aberdare Park

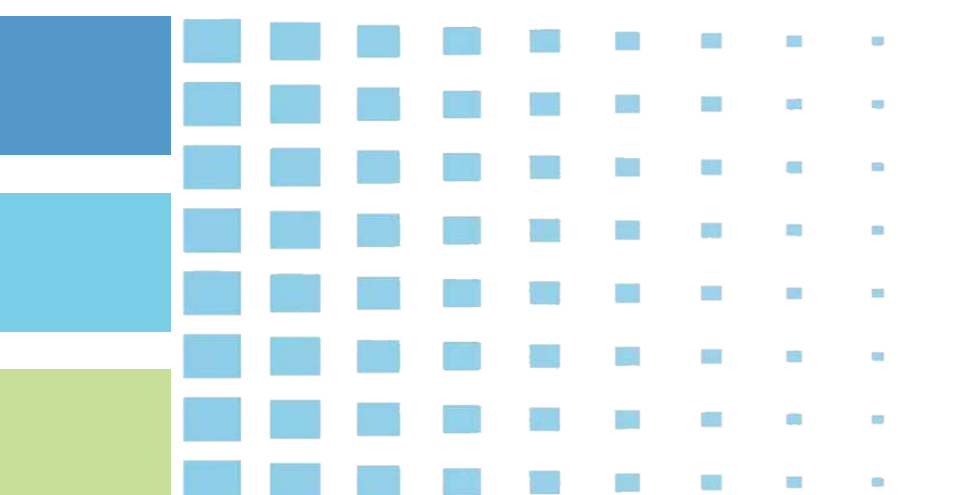
# Current Momentum:

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.

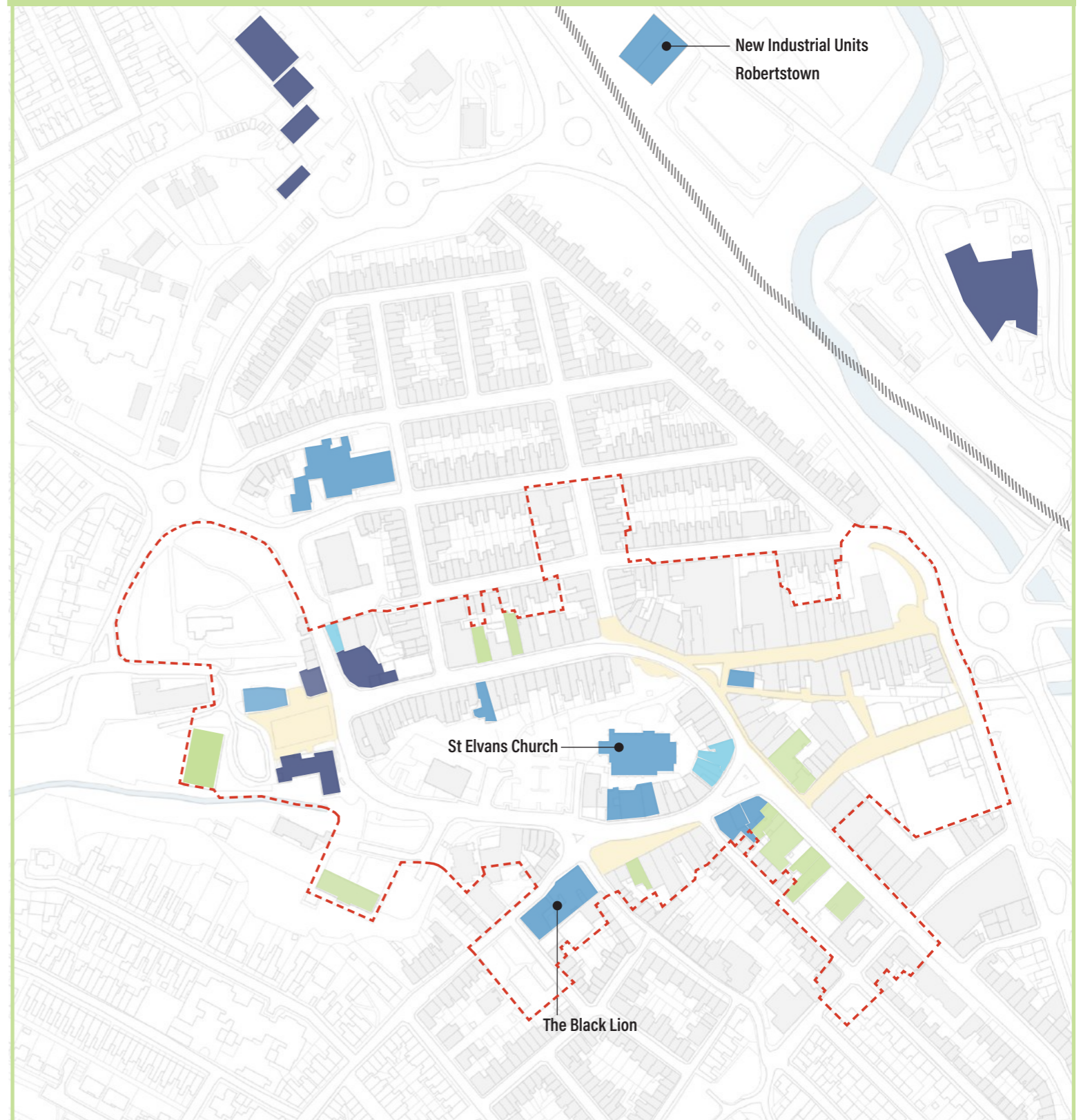
A recent increase in private sector acquisition of key properties within the town centre signals growing interest in the town and taking opportunities to work in partnership with private and third sector actors will be fundamental to the successful delivery of this strategy.

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.

Additionally, the recent positive momentum generated through a series of key events in the town centre, delivered by the BID and other local organisations, should be built upon to strengthen the town's identity as a regional destination. The strong existing network of local groups and organisations, discovered via early engagement and consultation, also represents a considerable strength.



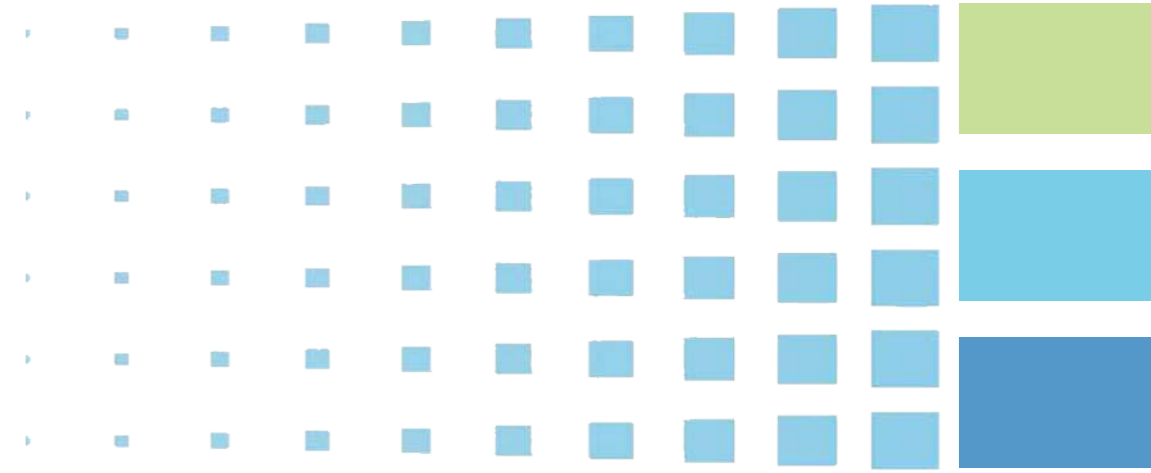
## Aberdare Town Centre: Past, Present and Potential Future Projects



**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 better understand 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 the Early Engagement Findings Report. 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.

## What makes a GREAT PLACE?



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

# Engagement Process:

- Early Engagement (Pre-Cabinet)
- Formal Consultation

## 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. 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



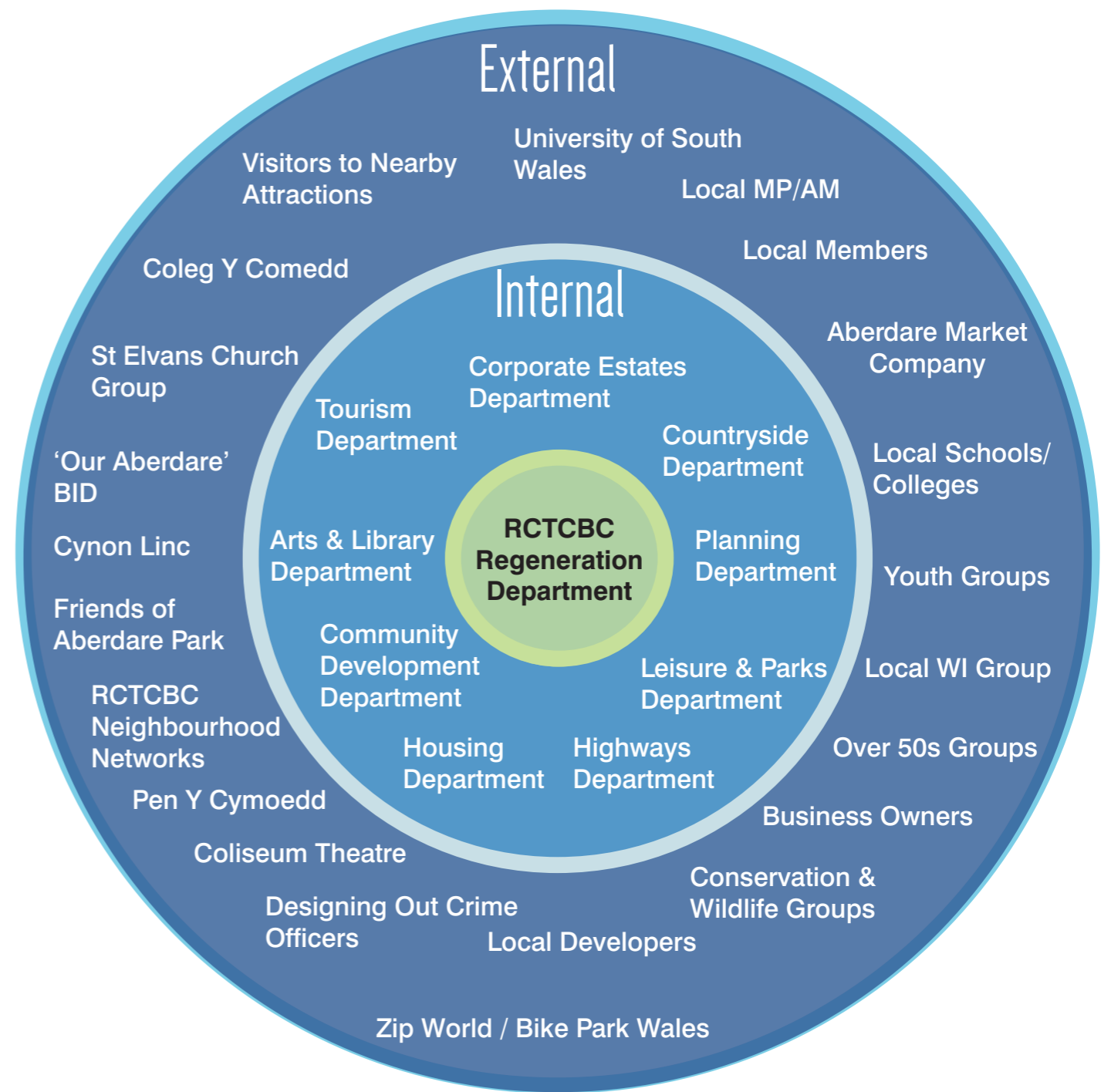
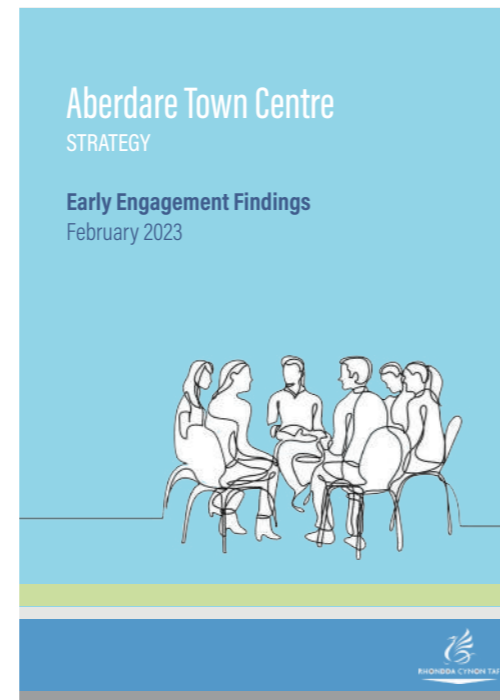
The Final Strategy will be once again submitted to Cabinet with recommendation for approval and adoption. Implementation plans will be developed during this stage and delivery mechanisms explored.

# Early Engagement:

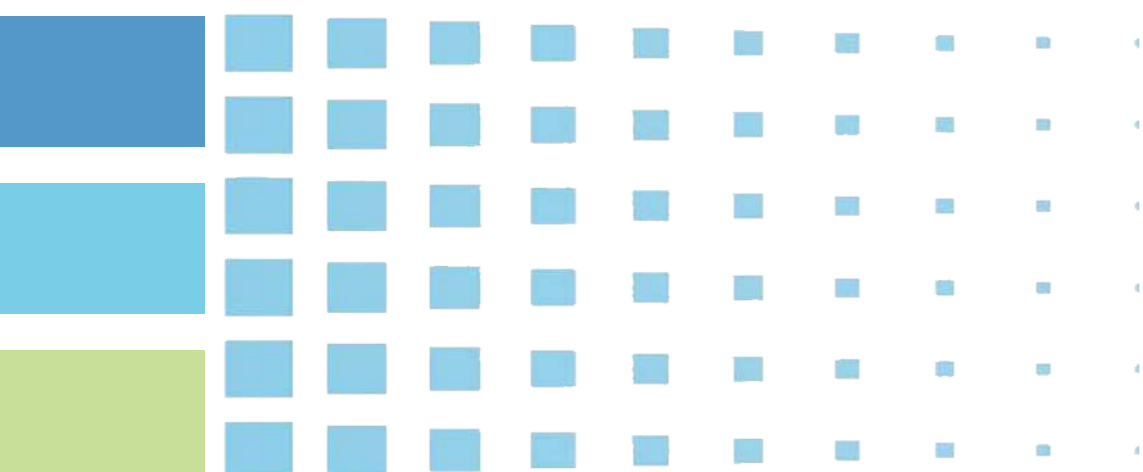
Prior to the commencement of a programme of early engagement, delivered by RCTCBC's Regeneration Department, a full engagement plan was produced within which stakeholder mapping was undertaken. The diagram on this page shows the range of stakeholders considered when undertaking the engagement.

The findings from the programme of early engagement, conducted between November 2022 and January 2023, have been collated into a findings report.

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.



Stakeholder Mapping



# Early Engagement:



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



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



Local Councillors attend engagement workshop at Sobell Leisure Centre, Aberdare.

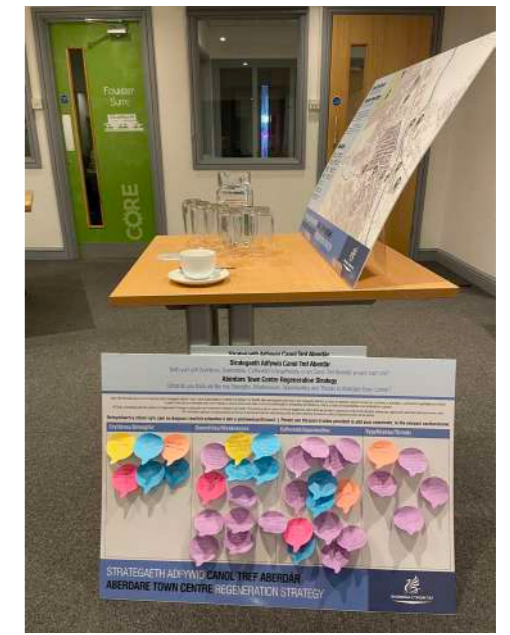


Photo of SWOT analysis produced during meeting with the Our Aberdare BID board members.

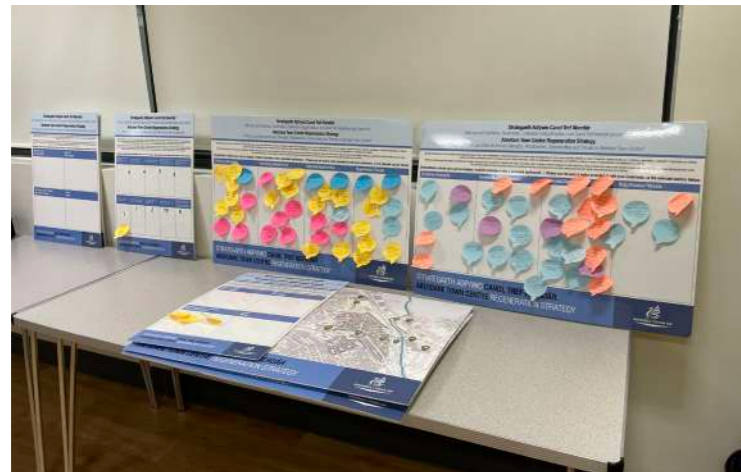


Photo showing how engagement boards were used to deliver workshop exercise.



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



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



RCTCBC Regeneration Officers facilitate engagement session at Abercwmboi Rugby Club.

# 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

Dare Valley Country Park **Events**  
Natural Landscape Outside Seating  
**Parking Indoor Market** Cynon Linc  
**History & Heritage** Planters  
Walking & Cycling Routes Aberdare Park  
New Restaurants Opening  
Central Library **St Elvan's Church**  
**Strong Community** Listed Buildings  
Cwmbach Community Wetlands

## Weaknesses

Conservation Area Rules  
Not Enforced **Events** Lack of Offer  
Natural Landscape Vacant Buildings  
**No Free Parking Large & Empty Shops**  
**Overall Town's Appearance**  
Negative Perception Poor Accessibility **Anti-Social**  
Visitor Information Same Type of Shops **Behaviour**  
**Poor Signage Poor Connectivity**  
Nothing for Young People No Cycle Hire

# ABERDARE TOWN CENTRE: SWOT Analysis

## Opportunities

### Utilise Vacant Shop Windows

Promote and Support the Welsh Language

Improve Directional Signage **Events** Aberdare BID

**Make Connections Better** Promote History

Build on 'Green Town' Credentials Cynon Linc

**Diversify the Offer** Utilise Upper Floors

Walking & Cycling Routes Pop-up Shops Central Library

Strong Adventure Tourism Opportunities

Circular Economy **Improve Visitor Information**

**Small Scale Enterprise Units** Strengthen Links with Schools

Re-purpose Large Vacant Properties South Wales Metro

Enhance Marketing **Visit Wales 2023-2025 'Year of the Trails'**

**Aberdare Market** Promotion of Active Travel

## Threats

Ageing Population

**Weak Regional Identity** Weak Partnership Working

Rising Cost of Energy Poor First Impressions

**Local Lettings Policies** Absent Landlords

**Changing Consumer Trends** Digitalisation

Potential Bypassing of Town **Decline of the High Street**

**Rent and Rates on Buildings** Rise of Online Shopping

Barriers for Local Business Cost of Living Crisis

Growth & Innovation Poor Advertising

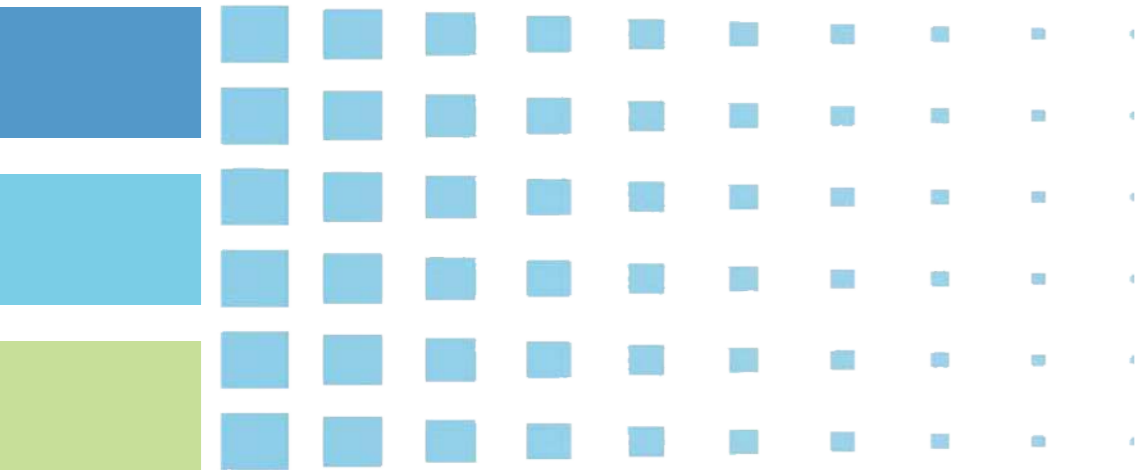
**Ongoing Impact of Covid-19**

# 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.

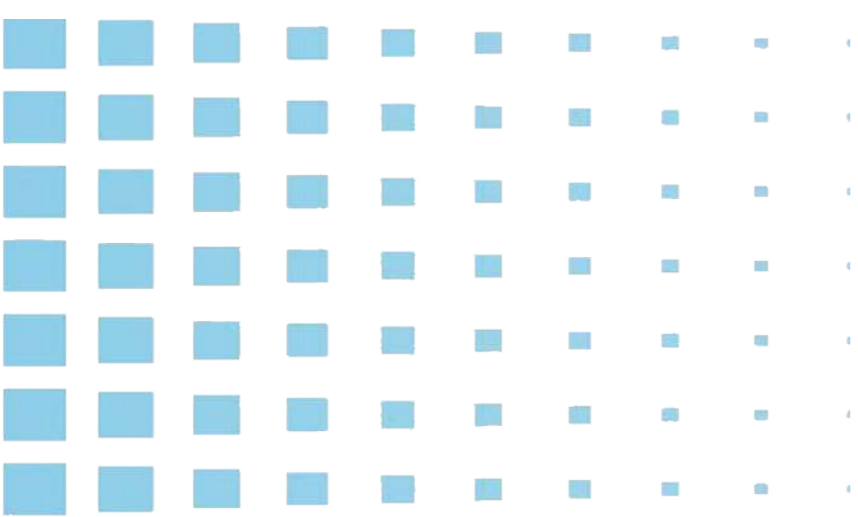
## Vision Realisation

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 investment.

Many felt that the existence of poor shop frontages distributed within the town served to detract from the town's appearance. Concerns were also raised about competition 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. During early engagement, way-finding signage was highlighted as one of the town's key weaknesses. 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 exist 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. Utilisation of vacant shop windows was identified during formal consultation as a key opportunity to promote the town's offer and tell the story of Aberdare.

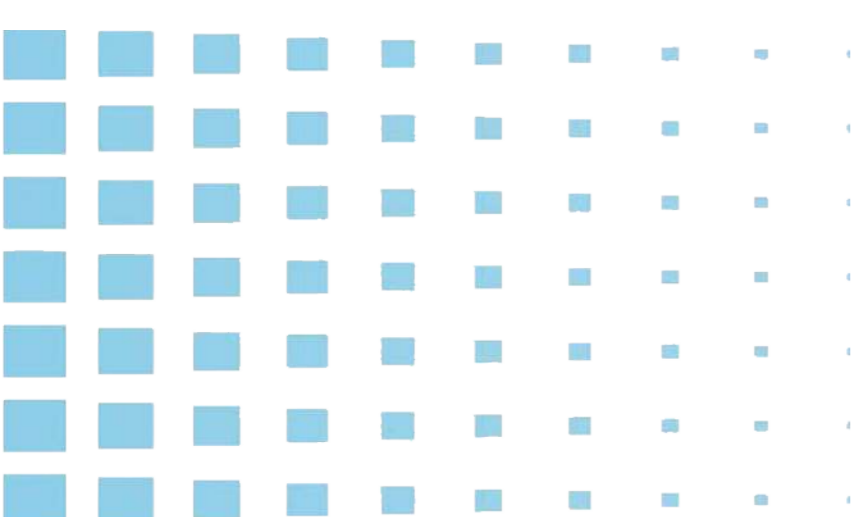
There are also clear opportunities, given the town centre's proximity to outstanding natural landscapes, nearby tourism attractions and walking/cycling trails, to establish Aberdare as a destination for visitors interested in active/adventure tourism. In this context, more could be done to increase the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

Opportunities also exist to support the promotion of the Welsh Language, within the town centre via engagement with the younger generation who are learning the language in school. The Welsh Language also offers a unique opportunity to strengthen the town's local and regional identity which may be attractive to visitors. A key part of realising such opportunities will be the integration and encouragement of basic Welsh within the town's retail core to stimulate the Welsh Language and ensure a friendly and approachable environment within which people are encouraged to have a go!



# 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 ecosystems 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 town's 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. The nearby Cwmbach Community Wetlands was also highlighted during the formal consultation as a key opportunity due to the great work that the group are already doing, particularly in relation to sustainability.

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

Adventure 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:

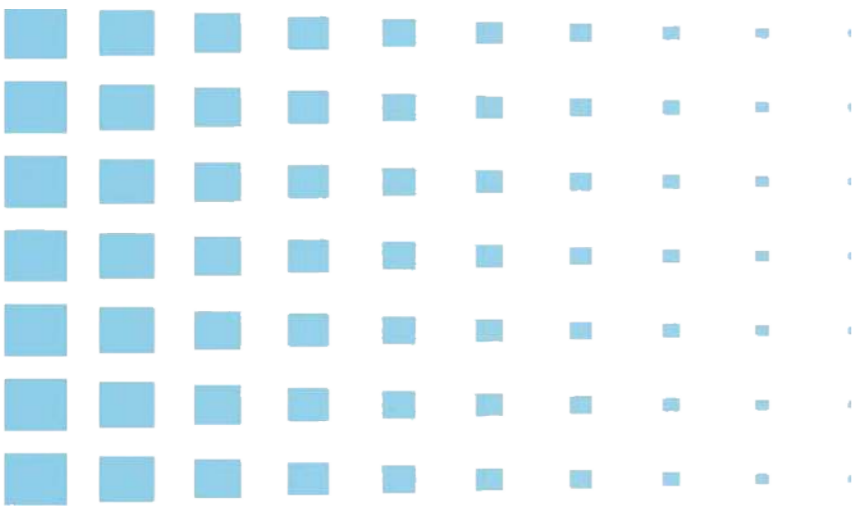
As a principal town, Aberdare plays an important supporting role to nearby visitor attractions and has potential to become a strong visitor destination in its own right. Key, unique facilities such as the historic Aberdare Market have the potential to contribute greatly to establishing Aberdare Town 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 adventure 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.

Key opportunities also exist to connect with existing groups engaged in sustainable activities, such as the Cwmbach Community Wetlands group, to boost the 'green' profile of the town and engage more people in sustainable actions.



# 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:

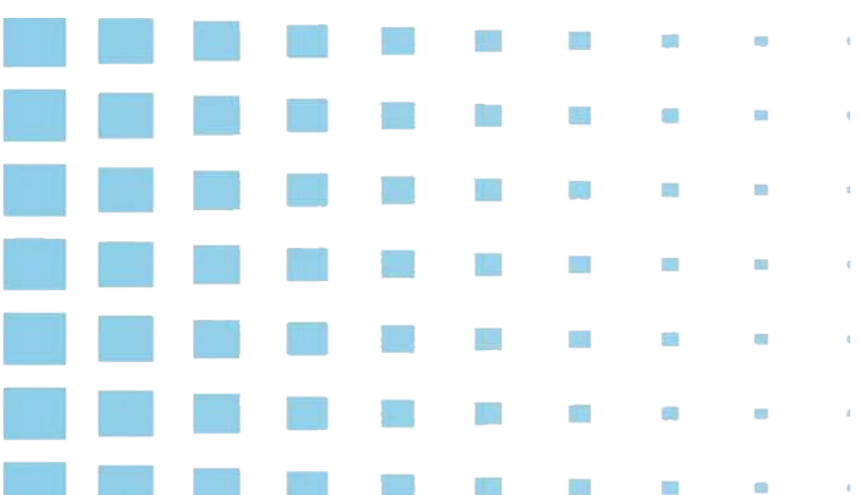
Density of the built form within town centres contributes to perceptions of vibrancy and activity. In this context, every effort should be made to maximise the use of existing buildings, including through the re-purposing of underutilised sites and premises.

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. Utilisation of vacant shop windows to create engaging displays would serve to increase vibrancy on the high street.

Additionally, opportunities exist for new development in and around the indoor market which is a considerable asset to the town together with creation of accommodation within the market for small businesses/start ups.

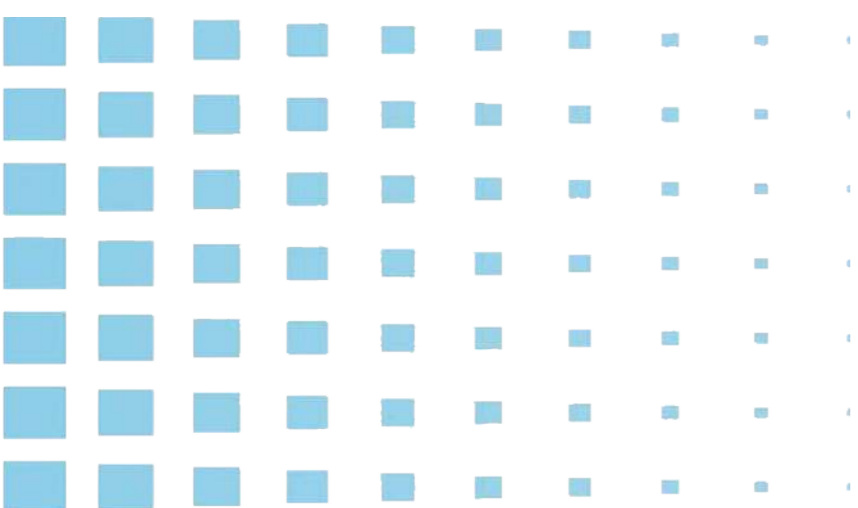


# Business Development

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 e-commerce 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.

Finally, integration of a greater array of under-represented groups on the high street is a key challenges within the town centre.

## 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 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.

The strong network of existing businesses contained within the Aberdare Indoor Market represent a key asset within the town and opportunities to support and further strengthen this businesses accommodation should be explored. This includes identification of opportunities to increase support for small businesses and start-up enterprises within the Market Quarter through which a stronger, more distinct 'Market Quarter' identity can be developed.

# 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:

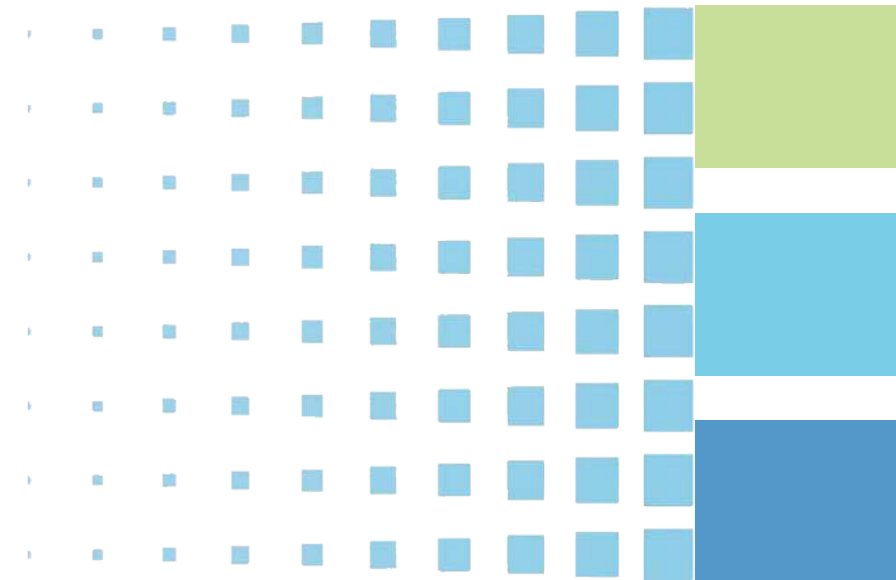
- 1** To improve the sustainability of Aberdare town centre through increasing visitor footfall and capturing a greater share of visitor spend. This includes:
  - Developing a variety of high-quality visitor accommodation offerings.
  - Enhancing the night-time economy through the introduction of a more 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 opportunities, notably those associated with a growing regional adventure tourism offer.
  - 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.
  - Identification of development opportunities in and around the indoor market to create a distinct area within the town centre.
  - Subdivision of vacant, large premises to optimise opportunities for smaller enterprises to make better use of such accommodation.
  - 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 improvements to existing routes where necessary combined with creation of new routes if required.
  - 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, including identification of opportunities to create start up incubator units in the indoor market.
  - 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 adventure 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.
  - Identifying locally led initiatives to stimulate and promote the use of the Welsh Language within the town centre.



# 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. A variety of accommodation should be pursued, particularly for start up and small businesses. Additionally, temporary or 'mean-while' use of vacant properties will be explored to make the high street more dynamic.

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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 together with identification of how the Welsh Language can be better promoted within the town.

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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 adventure 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 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.

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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 adventure 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. The accessibility of these routes for all will be a key consideration during the development of individual projects.

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.

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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. Consideration of how public spaces function for all, particularly those with disabilities, will be a key consideration during the development of individual projects.

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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 as 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.

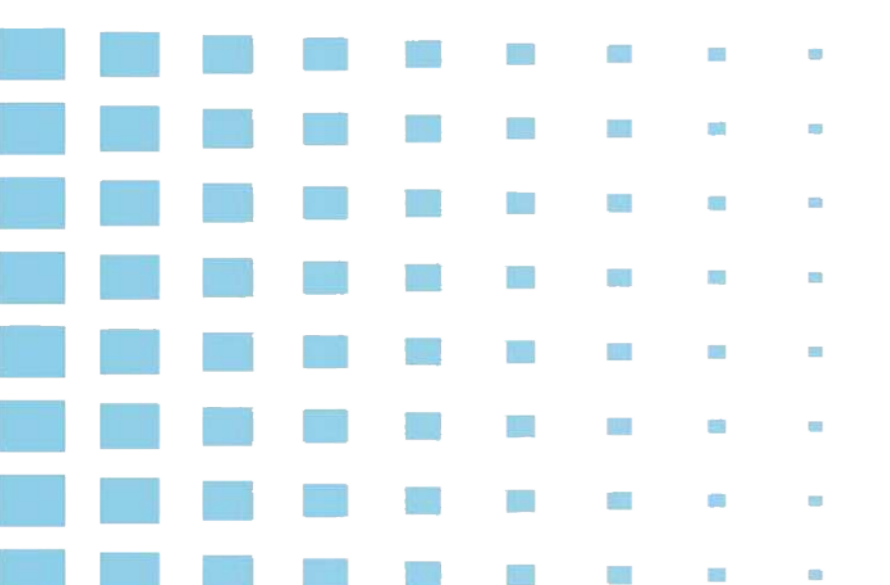
Opportunities to provide increased support to independent businesses will be explored to enable them to respond and maximise benefits from emerging opportunities, such as adventure tourism. This will include identification of opportunities to help Aberdare's businesses adopt and implement a 'Digital 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.

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

# Implementation Plan

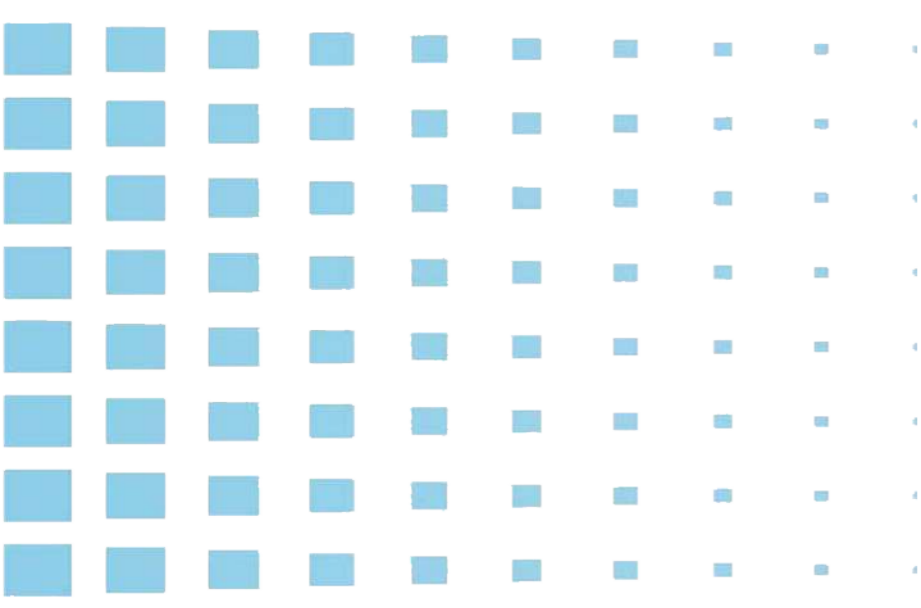
The implementation plan sets out each theme, along with an indication of the delivery time-scales and which strategic objectives the theme supports.



	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.	✓	✓		✓	✓	[Blue Box]			[Blue Box]					
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.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	[Green Box]			[Green Box]					
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 adventure 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.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	[Blue Box]			[Blue Box]					

# 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.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
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.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
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 as adventure tourism and the visitor economy.	✓	✓		✓	✓								



# Evaluation

Each theme has been evaluated against the Well-being of Future Generations Act's (2015) 'Seven 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
<b>ONE</b> 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 greater variety of commercial accommodation will enable enterprises to test and develop commercial concepts within the town. Attraction of new businesses will also stimulate enhancement of local employment.	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.
<b>TWO</b> 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 storytelling 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 mental 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.
<b>THREE</b> 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 a connected 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 and 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
<b>FOUR</b> 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.
<b>FIVE</b> 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.
<b>SIX</b> 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 as 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, bringing 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

