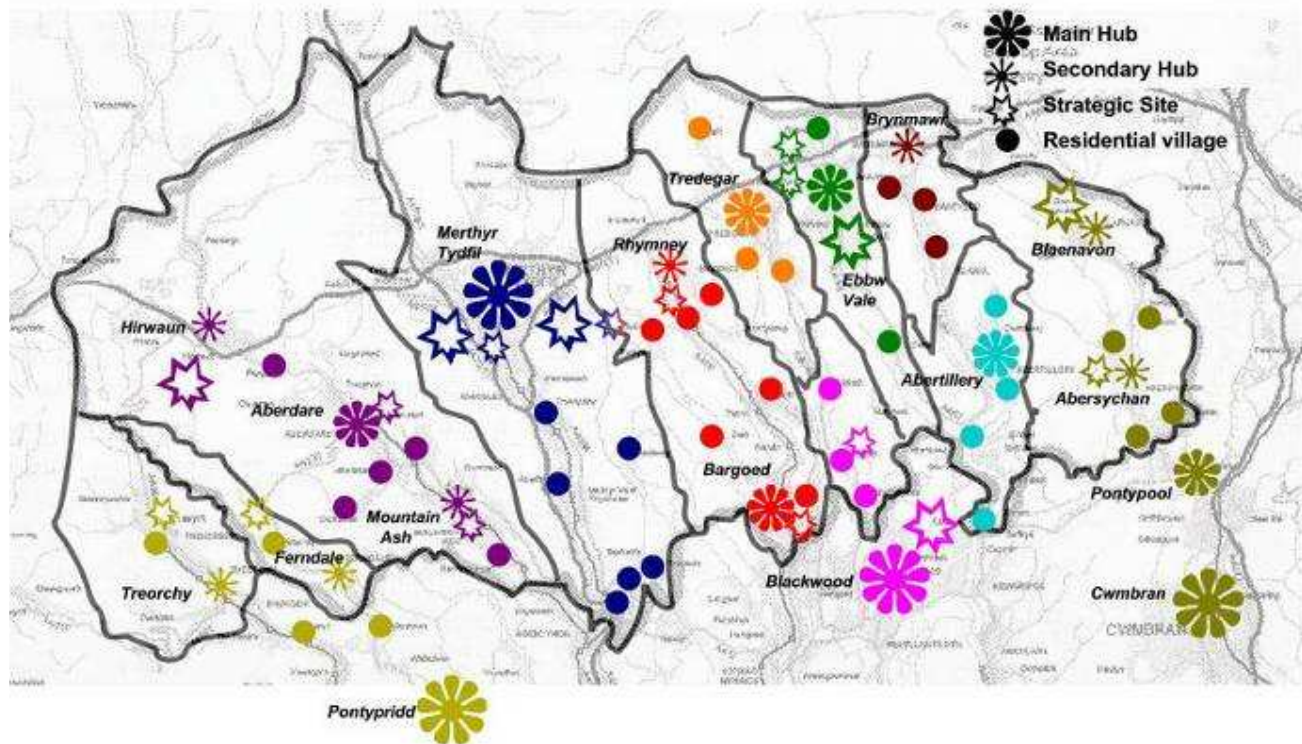


# Heads of the Valleys



# Spatial Strategy 2006- 2021

February 2007

***CONTENTS***

Page No.

1. Introduction
2. Urban Function Analysis;
3. Upper Rhondda Fawr
4. Upper Rhondda Fach
5. Cynon Valley
6. Merthyr Tydfil
7. Upper Rhymney Valley
8. Mid Sirhowy Valley
9. Tredegar
10. Ebbw Vale
11. Abertillery
12. Brynmawr
13. Upper Torfaen
14. Summary of the Urban Analysis
15. Conclusion – What must be done

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## “Turning Heads”

This spatial strategy is designed to complement the main Heads of the Valleys policy document “Turning Heads” which was published in June 2006. It provides a spatial framework for the 12 Strategic Programmes in “Turning Heads”.

In particular this Spatial Strategy sets the context for the first three year action programme in “Turning Heads” in respect of the Heads of the Valleys Landscaping, Town Centres and Tourism initiatives planned over 2006-2009, and subsequent 3-year action plans. It will also provide a spatial context for the employment initiatives of the Heads of the Valleys Programme.

Specifically, Strategic Programme No.1 (SP1) of “Turning Heads” states;

*“To preserve and make the most of historic patterns of settlement, we will identify roles for towns and villages in the Heads of the Valleys that enable them to complement each other and that serve the diverse needs of those who live in, work in and visit the area. Our focus will be on retailing and service centres, tourist towns and employment hubs. . . .”*

This spatial strategy is intended to fulfil that commitment.

## Role of the Spatial Strategy in the regeneration process

Many older people in the former mining towns and villages can remember a time when each settlement contained the full range of urban facilities – retail, entertainment, social and of course jobs – and wish their town or village could recapture these former functions. Younger people, particularly the educated and ambitious, often see no role at all for their native town or village in the post-coal era and leave at the first opportunity. The challenge is therefore to define a new and sustainable role for the settlements of the former coalfield that can form the basis for their regeneration.

This strategy forms the first stage in the process of regenerating these communities by

defining a realistic and realisable role for each town and village. This must be done in such a way that it complements its neighbours, in the context of an ‘urban cluster’ centred on a large or medium sized town providing a range of urban facilities.

There is a mistaken belief, borne out of the historical experience of most Valley towns and villages, that a settlement must have an economic role if it is to survive. This ceased to be the case in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when advances in transportation led to specialisation in the functions of towns and villages. In fact, in most cases, particularly for the smaller villages, their most appropriate role will be mainly residential. This does not mean such villages or suburbs should only contain housing development. In order to fulfil this role satisfactorily, it should have a range and choice of housing types and tenures, basic shops and services, a local primary school, GP surgery, park with play equipment for younger and older children, good road and public transport links to higher-order centres and a pleasant landscaped environmental setting.

The Valleys are particularly fortunate that in so many cases, nature (aided by a widespread land reclamation programme) has furnished its towns and villages with a spectacular and accessible background of mountainous countryside that should be the envy of residential areas elsewhere in the UK. Valley communities need to build on this natural advantage rather than seek to restore historic roles that are no longer viable. Together with the strong sense of community, the physical setting of most Valley villages means that being a great place to live will be a realistic and worthwhile objective to aim for.

Once a viable role has been identified for a settlement, then it should not be too difficult to decide what a settlement aspiring to such a role could realistically be expected to contain. Comparing this aspiration with the actual situation in the town or village will reveal the actions that need to be taken in order for the settlement to become a success and the basis of a local regeneration strategy will have been laid.

## Strategic Context

The Strategic context for the Heads of the Valleys Spatial strategy is provided by the Wales Spatial Plan. The Wales Spatial Plan, approved in 2004,

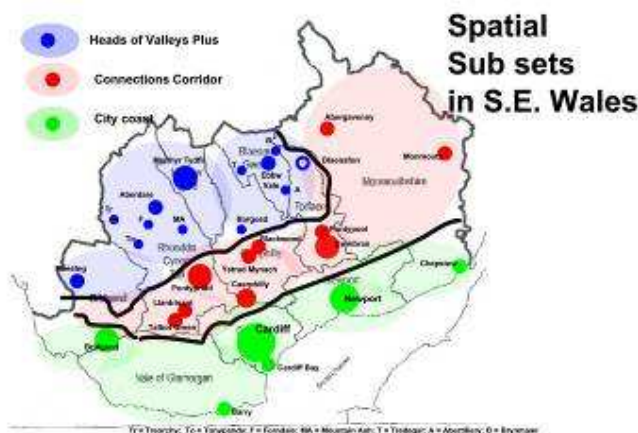
divides Wales into six spatial areas. One of these is South East Wales, containing half of the population of Wales, including the whole of the Heads of the Valleys Programme area.

Various groups are currently working on programmes to implement the Wales Spatial Plan in each 'area' and to prepare more detailed proposals for a 'refreshing' of the WSP towards the end of 2007. As part of this work a strategic spatial framework for South East Wales will be produced that will identify key settlements and their roles and functions as well as strategic sites, including employment sites.

The Heads of the Valleys Spatial Strategy will complement the South East Wales framework, developing it in more detail. In fact the Heads of the Valleys Spatial Strategy identifies a viable role for *every* community in the Heads of the Valleys Programme Area with a population of 1000 or more. In this way the Heads of the Valleys Spatial strategy will form a bridge between the Wales Spatial Plan and the emerging Local Development Plans (LDPs) of the local authorities.

Current work on the South East Wales Area Framework of the Wales Spatial Plan envisages the region comprising three strategic sub-regions – the City-Coast, the Heads of the Valleys Plus and a 'Connections Corridor' stretching from west to east across the centre of the region.

The 'Heads of the Valleys Plus' sub-region comprises the Heads of the Valleys programme area plus additional parts of the Rhondda Valleys and the Valleys north of Bridgend.



A limited number of key centres and strategic sites in the Heads of the Valleys will be identified in the framework for South East Wales as part of an examination of the roles and functions of settlements – a process that this strategy carries forward in more detail to identify lesser centres and major sites and also the 'urban clusters' around each major centre or 'hub'.

### Structure of this document

This strategy identifies 11 groups of settlements or 'urban clusters' and the bulk of the document comprises a detailed analysis of each of these districts. One important conclusion of the Strategy is that several urban clusters lie across the Heads of the Valleys programme area boundary and that the future of many of the communities in the area is therefore bound up with communities outside it, particularly to the south.

Each cluster analysis looks at the roles and functions of the towns and villages within it. Each is based on at least one major town or 'hub'. The main employment areas are identified as are key strategic sites which have yet to be developed for various purposes. The local transportation network is examined as are the links to adjacent districts and beyond. The tourism potential of each area is examined in the context of the proposed Valleys Regional Park, which the Heads of the Valleys Programme is promoting. There are, of course many other fundamental issues, such as health and education, facing each community but this strategy concentrates on the above issues addressed by "*Turning Heads*" and its current action plan.. Finally each section concludes with a list of 'things that must be done' if the cluster is to fulfil its potential, concluding with a vision of what the district could aspire to be in 2021.

The document concludes with a summary of the 'things that must be done' over the area as a whole – the basis of series of three year Action Plans that the Heads of the Valleys Programme team is already implementing.

Much of the information underpinning the cluster analyses has been drawn from the existing development plans of the five local authorities in the Heads of the Valleys area. These local authorities are now in the process of producing a new generation of Local Development Plans and

this Strategy will help to provide a sub-regional context for those plans.

The Wales Spatial Plan and the Heads of the Valleys document, "*Turning Heads*" are long term strategies looking ahead to the year 2021. This spatial strategy adopts the same time frame while recognising that some of the many proposals contained within it may take even longer to realise. It is important, however to identify these long term goals for a community with an aspiration for the future is a community with hope – a sentiment all too often lacking in the Valleys in recent years.

## 2. Urban Function Analysis

The next eleven sections of this Strategy examine different areas of the Heads of the Valleys programme area, grouped into 'Urban Clusters'.

Urban Clusters are defined as a self contained group of towns and villages that are mutually dependent. They usually contain at least one sizeable town that forms the 'hub' of the cluster and contains a wide range of shops and other urban facilities such as colleges and hospitals, of more than local importance.

Each hub will be complemented by a number of primarily residential villages and suburbs. Usually these will (should) contain a range of local shops and services but will look to the 'hub' town for higher order facilities.

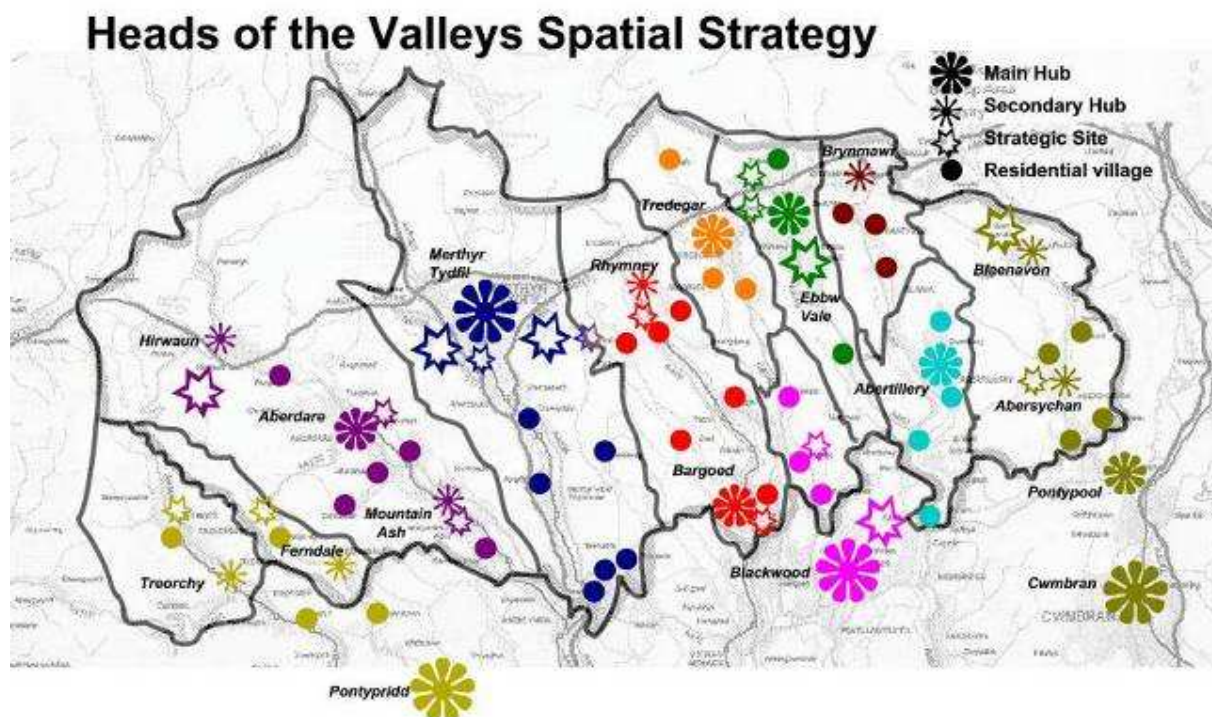
Some hubs contain secondary centres that contain one or two facilities that serve a wider catchment area but do not offer the full range of services of a primary hub.

Each urban cluster will usually also contain employment areas, often in the form of industrial estates and a few of them contain the major strategic sites listed in section 5 of this Strategy.

Each of the Urban Analysis sections contains an overview of the urban cluster district and identifies the main and secondary towns, the primarily residential areas and the main employment centres. The internal transport links, which are critical to the functioning of the urban cluster are examined, as are the links between the district and adjacent areas.

An important part of each analysis looks at the tourism offer of the district and in particular its potential contribution to the proposed Valleys Regional Park.

Finally there is an analysis of what needs to be done to enable the urban cluster to function effectively and a vision of what the district might aspire to look like in 2021.

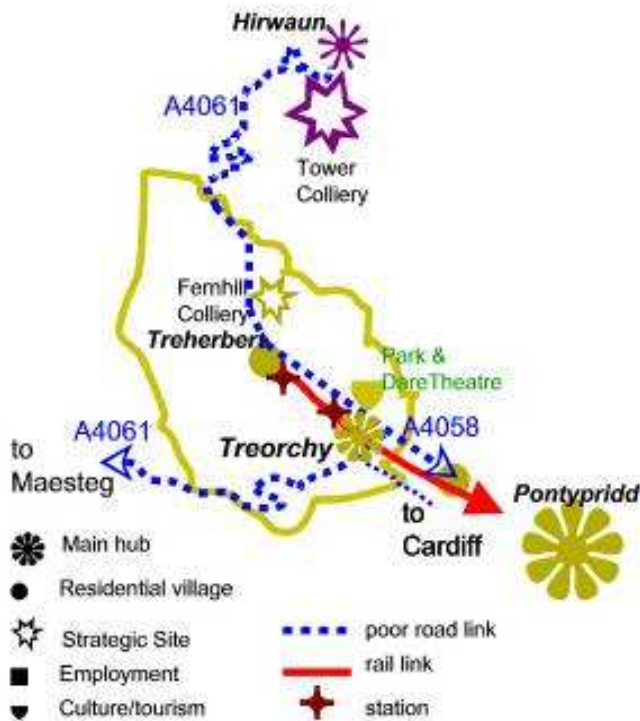


### 3. UPPER RHONDDA FAWR Rhondda Cynon Taff

**1. Overview** – The Upper Rhondda Fawr had a population of 14,100 in 2001 – an overall decrease of 3.8% since 1991, although Treorchy actually increased in population by 3.3%. It comprises the secondary centre of Treorchy and the mainly residential village of Treherbert.

The Rhondda Fawr is a narrow valley which was densely developed in the Nineteenth Century. Only the northernmost two of its 8? Wards are in the Heads of the Valleys programme area. Together with villages immediately to the south they form a an urban cluster centred on Treorchy – part of a much larger functional unit centred on the sub-regional centre of Pontypridd to the south.

#### 2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions 2006



**Hub: PONTYPRIDD (outside HoV area)**  
Although it is located outside the defined Heads of the Valleys area, Pontypridd, ranked 13<sup>th</sup> out of Wales’ retail centres, serves all the communities of the Rhondda Valleys. There is a high presence of multiple retailers, local authority offices, the central police station and a Magistrates Court. The University of Glamorgan provides an increasing student population and Ynysangharad Park is a major attraction. The town also has a rugby stadium, cinema, golf course and hotel. The proposed redevelopment of the Taff Vale Centre will greatly enhance the retail offer of the town.

**Hub; TREORCHY**, ranked 79<sup>th</sup> out of Wales retail centres, is one of two major centres serving the Rhondda Fawr (the other is Tonypany to the south). The population in 2001 was 8,100 however, the town serves an area with a population of ?????, including Treherbert and ??? outside the HoV area.

In 2005 there were 121 retail units and this figure has remained stable for the past decade. The retail centre is largely comprised of independent shops. The Park and Dare theatre is an important venue capable of hosting large performances. A railway station provides links to Pontypridd and Cardiff.

#### Residential areas

**TREHERBERT** – A Communities First ward, is now predominantly a residential settlement.

#### Employment centres

The proposed closure of the Burberry factory could greatly reduce Treorchy’s employment role but the Cae Mawr industrial estate offers opportunities for mixed use development.

#### Major Sites

the spectacular setting of the 100 acre FERNHILL COLLIERY site is the key to the regeneration of Treherbert as a popular residential village. The spectacular setting lends itself to the development of new housing and a country park.

### 3. Local transport network

The main road through the Rhondda Fawr is the A4058 from Pontypridd. North of Treorchy it becomes the A4061. The B4221 runs parallel to

the A4058 on the west bank of the Rhondda Fawr south of Treorchy.

There is a passenger rail service to Pontypridd and Cardiff with stations at both Treherbert and Treorchy.

#### 4. External links

##### South

The principal access to the Rhondda Fawr is from the A470, through **Pontypridd** and **Porth**. Road links north of Tonypany, are inadequate and there is a bottleneck at Stag Square, Treorchy, where congestion is seen as a barrier to investment in the upper Valley.

##### North

A winding mountain road (the A4061 Rhigos road) leads from Treherbert to **Hirwaun** and the A465. The road is unsuitable for large vehicles and cannot accommodate large volumes of traffic.

##### West

The A 4061 continues as a winding mountain road west from Treorchy to **Maesteg** and the Valley communities north of Bridgend.

##### East

There are no significant links to the east of the Upper Rhondda Fawr

The Rhondda Fawr is therefore better integrated into the region as a whole than the Rhondda Fach – its rail service being a particular advantage.

Poor road links in all directions detract from its potential however.

#### 5. Tourism & potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park

The Upper Rhondda Fawr has limited tourism potential compared to other parts of the South Wales Valleys, though this is not the case further south.

Landscape There are spectacular views from the tops of the valleys, particularly north of Treherbert and opportunities to develop further walking routes.

Country Parks; There are no country parks in the area, though there is potential to develop one at the Fernhill colliery site as part of a mixed use development at Treherbert.

Cyclepaths; ????

Heritage; The Park & Dare at Treorchy is an important cultural venue.

Accommodation ???

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively;

##### Retail & cultural functions

- TREORCHY will continue to be the secondary centre serving the upper Rhondda Fawr. The high quality goods offered by independent traders provide a sound basis for developing a unique shopping experience. This could be linked to the development of the Park and Dare theatre.

##### Transport

- The traffic congestion at Stag Square in Treorchy needs to be resolved and proposals are being developed.
- Long term proposals for a new road that would relieve traffic and open up new development land.
- The Mountain Roads North and West of the area need to be improved to enable the Rhondda Fawr to access opportunities in adjacent districts, particularly at Hirwaun.

##### Employment

- The Cae Mawr industrial estate offers opportunities for mixed use development.

##### Housing

- Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive and new residential sites identified in order to halt net migration outflow from the heads of the Valleys

#### 7. 2021 Vision

*Overall, Population levels have stabilised and the area is now viewed as quite central to the*

*facilities that the region has to offer. Besides the easy access to Cardiff by train, the ability to access the new developments along the Heads of the Valleys Road and countryside recreation facilities to the West have made the Upper Rhondda Fawr an attractive place to live.*

*Secondary Hub; TREORCHY's appeal as a 'traditional' valleys town combined with road improvements to the South, North and West have contributed to a greater role for the town as a retail and service centre.*

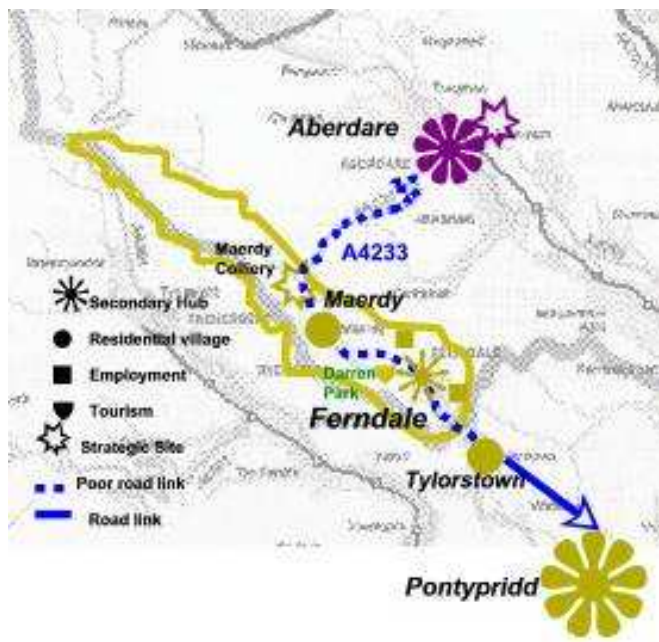
*The redevelopment of the former Fernhill colliery site in TREHERBERT for housing and a country park has made the village a popular place to live.*

## 4. UPPER RHONDDA FACH Rhondda Cynon Taff

**1. Overview** – The Upper Rhondda Fach had a population of 7,900 in 2001 – a decrease of 11% since 1991. It comprises the secondary centre of Ferndale and the mainly residential village of Maerdy

The Rhondda Fach is a narrow valley which was densely developed in the Nineteenth Century. Only the northernmost two of its 5? Wards are in the Heads of the Valleys programme area. Together with Tylorstown immediately to the south they form a small urban cluster centred on Ferndale – part of a much larger functional unit centred on the sub-regional centre of Pontypridd to the south.

### 2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions 2006



Secondary hub; **FERNDALE** is one of two secondary centres serving the Rhondda Fach (the other is Porth to the south). The population in 2001 was 4,400 however, the town serves an area with a population of 12,600, including the Maerdy and Tylorstown wards (the latter outside the HoV area).

In 2005, the centre contained 61 commercial units, mainly independent retailers. There is a local health centre and rugby and football pitch

provision. **Darren Park** is an under-utilised recreational area that offers future tourism potential.

#### Residential areas

**MAERDY** is now predominantly a residential settlement.

Employment areas There are two industrial estates located north and south of Ferndale town centre at Oaklands and Highfield

Major sites – The 100 acre **FERNHILL COLLIERY** site has the potential to greatly increase the appeal of Maerdy as a place to live if it were to be developed to provide a choice of modern homes in a spectacular setting.

### 3. Local transport network

The main road through the Rhondda Fach is the A4233 from Porth to Aberdare. There are no rail services.

Feasibility work has commenced on an inner relief road for Ferndale. This would relieve the traffic congestion in the town centre

### 4. External links

#### South

The principal access to the Rhondda Fach is from the A470, through **Pontypridd** and **Porth**. Although only a few miles, the journey from Porth to Maerdy is along narrow residential roads and can take up to half an hour. Completion of the £80 million Porth and Lower Rhondda Fach Relief Road will significantly improved access to the valley. However, the road stops south of Ferndale and access to the upper Rhondda Fach will remain difficult.

#### North-East

A winding mountain road leads from Maerdy to Aberdare.

#### East & West

There are no significant links to the east or west of the Upper Rhondda Fach

Its relative isolation and inaccessibility is therefore one of the fundamental problems of the Upper Rhondda Fach

## 5. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park

The area has the potential to make a contribution to the VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK.

Landscape There are spectacular views from the tops of the valleys and opportunities to develop further walking routes.

Country Parks; Darren Park, in Ferndale, is under utilised and has the opportunity to link into walking routes. The feasibility of a visitor centre is being looked at in the regeneration study.

Cyclepaths; ????

Heritage; ????

Accommodation; ???

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively

### Tourism

- The district's potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited.

### Housing

- Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive and new residential sites identified in order to halt net migration outflow from the heads of the Valleys

### Transport

- Ferndale needs an inner relief road to relieve traffic congestion in the town centre to enable it to function properly as the district's secondary centre.
- In the long term the Upper Rhondda Fach relief road needs to be extended as far as Maerdy to reduce the isolation of this area.
- For similar reasons the mountain road to Aberdare should be improved to the mutual benefit of both the Upper Rhondda Fach and Aberdare.

## 7. 2021 Vision

*Overall. Population decline has slowed dramatically. The extension of the relief road to Maerdy and the improved link to Aberdare combined with the spectacular landscape setting of the Upper Rhondda Fach has made it a popular place to live for commuters to Pontypridd and Aberdare. Houses in the modern 'eco-village at MAERDY are particularly sought after,*

*Secondary Hub; FERNDALE's appeal as 'traditional' valleys town combined with enhanced facilities at Darren Park has put the town on the tourist trail within the Valleys Regional Park.*

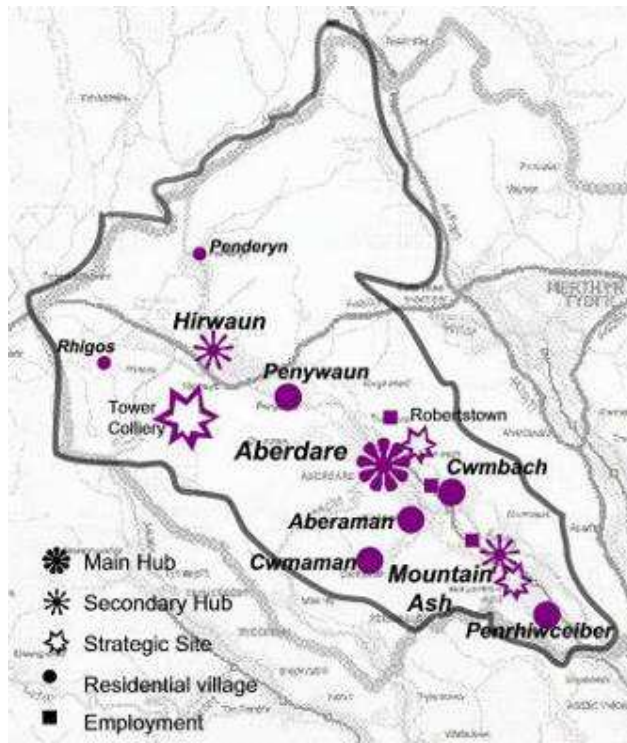
## 5. UPPER & MID CYNON VALLEY

### Rhondda Cynon Taff

**1. Overview** – The Upper and Mid Cynon Valley had a population of 52,297 in 2001 – a decrease of 3.7% since 1991. It comprises the primary centre of Aberdare, the secondary centres of Mountain Ash and Hirwaun and a number of small former mining settlements, along the line of the River Cynon.

The Cynon is a broad valley containing a relatively large area of level ground making development less problematic here than in many of the more steep sided Valleys in the Coalfield. Only four of the 11 wards are community first wards so the area is relatively prosperous compared to the Heads of the Valleys as a whole.

#### 2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions 2006



**Hub:** **ABERDARE** is the hub of this district. Ranked 25<sup>th</sup> out of Wales' retail centres, Aberdare had a population of 21,000 in 2001<sup>1</sup> and is one of the few towns in the Heads of the Valleys to experience recent population growth. Between 1999 and 2001, the population grew by 4.1%.

<sup>1</sup> Aberdare East and West and Aberaman North wards

Aberdare has 227 commercial units, the largest number of any centre in Rhondda Cynon Taff, including Pontypridd.

Aberdare has several civic buildings, including a central police station and Magistrates Court. There is an FE College, and 3 comprehensive schools in the area, as well as a swimming pool, leisure centre and an athletics track. There are further recreational opportunities at a golf course, Dare Valley Country Park and Aberdare Park.

**Secondary hub; MOUNTAIN ASH** is the second largest town in the Cynon Valley. The population of Mountain Ash East and West is 7,149 and a further 6265 people who live in the Penrhiwceiber ward use the town as their local centre. In 2005, Mountain Ash had 100 commercial units.

There is a large comprehensive school and a new District hospital, serving the Cynon Valley is planned for 2008.

**MOUNTAIN ASH is currently benefiting from a major regeneration programme funded through PRF, LRF and Objective 1. A new relief road is under construction and street enhancements will follow in 2007. A new Primary Care Centre is under design and the Welsh Assembly Government is undertaking land assembly of a redevelopment site in the town centre. There are further town centre development opportunities on land created by the diversion of the railway line**

#### Residential areas

PENRHIWCEIBER, CWMBACH, ABERAMAN, CWMAMAN, PENYWAUN and HIRWAUN are predominantly residential settlements, though **HIRWAUN** has the potential to become a secondary centre because of its strategic position on the transport network.

#### Employment areas

Industrial estates are located at Cwmbach and Robertstown in Aberdare and a modern industrial

development is located on reclaimed land at Cwm Cynon Business Park near Mountain Ash

### Major Sites

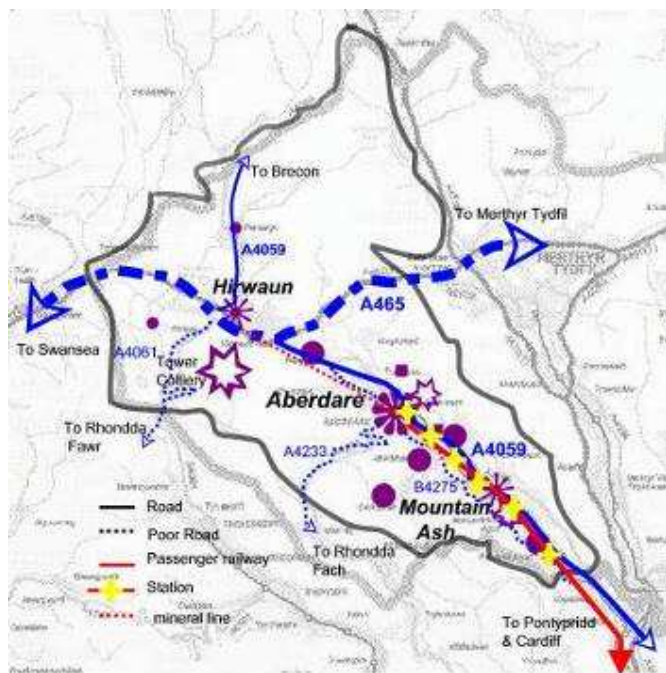
The upper and Mid Cynon Valley has at least three major development sites, making it a key area for regenerating the Heads of the Valleys.

The massive 556 acre **TOWER COLLIERY** site near Hirwaun will have huge potential when deep mining ceases in a few years' time. Situated adjacent to the A465, it could become a key strategic employment site for the region as a whole, perhaps pioneering new alternative energy and recycling technologies.

The 143 acre **FORMER PHURNACITE PLANT, ABERCWMBOL**, near Mountain Ash is constrained by contamination but offers a major development opportunity for employment, residential and leisure uses.

The 74 acre **ROBERTSTOWN/ABERNANT**, site at Aberdare includes the site of Aberdare Hospital, which will close when the new hospital opens in Mountain Ash. It has potential for mixed use development linked to the town centre.

### **3. Local transport network**



The A4059 is the main road along the Cynon Valley. It provides a fast and relatively uncongested route from the A470 at Abercynon,

bypassing Mountain Ash and Aberdare. There is a proposal to extend the Aberdare bypass and provide an improved link to Hirwaun and the Heads of the Valleys A465.

While the A4059 provides a fast route up the Cynon Valley, there are only limited opportunities to cross the valley and access the main communities. Between Abercynon and Aberdare, there is only one bridge in the centre of Mountain Ash. This leads to heavy traffic congestion in the town centre. Two cross valley link roads are proposed north and south of Mountain Ash town centre. These would ease traffic congestion through Mountain Ash and provide improved access to the communities along the Cynon Valley.

A rail service runs between Aberdare and Cardiff, via Pontypridd. It is part of the heavily used Valleys Line services. A rail link exists to Hirwaun but is currently only used by Tower Colliery to transport coal. There is an opportunity to extend the passenger service to Hirwaun.

### **4. External Links**

#### South.

The A4059 is the main road route south to **Abercynon**, where it joins the A470 to **Pontypridd** – a major sub-regional centre and University town, and eventually **Cardiff**. The railway line also provides access to these areas.

#### West

The A465 is dual carriageway standard from Hirwaun to **Swansea**. A poor mountain road links Aberdare to the **Rhondda Fach** at **Maerdy** to the south-west.

#### East

The A465 from Hirwaun to **Merthyr** is currently a three lane road but is scheduled for upgrading to dual carriageway.

#### North

The 4059 leads from Hirwaun up into the **Brecon Beacons**, eventually joining the A470. A mountain road also links Hirwaun to the **Rhondda Fawr** to the south.

**HIRWAUN** is thus a key node on the Heads of the Valleys road network, with links to East, West, North and South.

Valley Riverside Park, featuring a network of cycle and footpaths.

Cyclepaths; ????

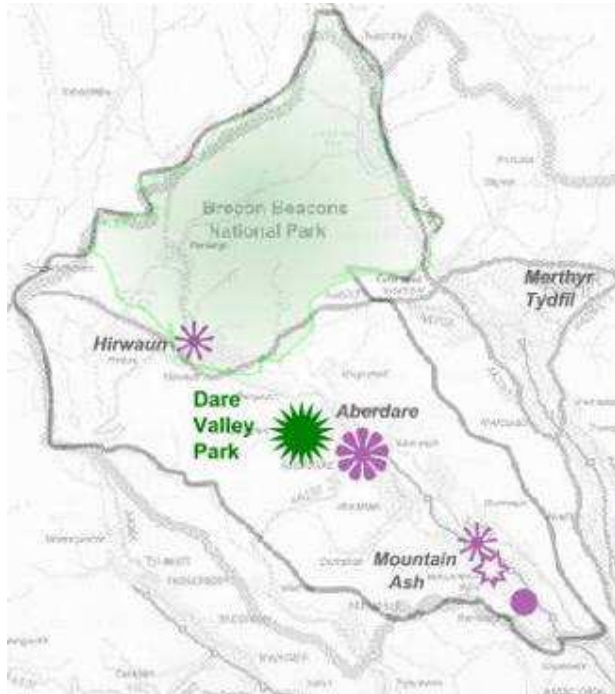
Heritage; ????

Events;

The Nos Galan race that is held at New Year begins in Mountain Ash and is a national attraction. Recently, events have been planned to attract families and make the race an all day event.

Accommodation; ????

## 5. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park



The area has the potential to make a major contribution to the VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK.

### Landscape

There is potential for northern part of Rhondda Cynon Taff to benefit from its proximity to the National Park and in fact a small area of the County Borough is within the Park boundary . There are spectacular views from the tops of the valleys and opportunities to develop further walking routes.

### Country Parks;

The Dare Valley Country Park is one of Rhondda Cynon Taff's key tourist attractions.

The Heads of the Valleys programme is currently funding works that will help create a Cynon

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively;

### Retail

- Aberdare offers a range of interesting and attractive independent shops, supported by a strong core of national chain shops. Vacancy rates are low but the size of available units may be limiting the presence of other national chain stores. There is strong evidence of this in Pontypridd and further investigation is needed in Aberdare.
- The quality of public space in Aberdare is generally high but there is a need to enhance the main square in the town centre.
- There is an opportunity to extend car parking in Aberdare town centre and this project is a priority, as the present car park is often full.
- The Regeneration Strategy for Mountain Ash town centre is being implemented and this will provide a significant boost to the town. It is essential that all the envisaged works are implemented. Redevelopment of the vacant town centre site will boost the retail centre. Research suggests that there is interest from national retailers, if appropriate units can be provided.

### Tourism

- To assist in enhancing the town centre, the Council is currently developing a Town Heritage Initiative bid for the Aberdare.
- Dare Valley Country Park is an important tourist attraction that can be developed within the context of the Heads of the Valleys as a regional attraction
- The district's potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited.

#### Transport

- The proposed cross valley link roads around Mountain Ash are essential to ease congestion in the town centre and provide access to communities along the Cynon Valley.
- The rail service to Cardiff should be improved and extended to Hirwaun.
- The road link between Aberdare and Hirwaun also needs improvement if the regeneration potential of Hirwaun is to be realised.

#### Housing/Mixed use

- When the hospital function is transferred from Aberdare to Mountain Ash the current site will present a large and attractive development opportunity
- The former Phurnacite Plant between Mountain Ash and Aberdare offers an opportunity for mixed use development that could benefit both town centres.
- Robertstown offers an opportunity for mixed use development adjacent to Aberdare town centre. Appropriate development will boost the town.

#### Health

- The new District Hospital will provide new job opportunities and will be a boost to regeneration as well as health for the whole of the Cynon Valley.

#### Employment

The new business park, north of Cwm Cynon will provide new job opportunities and will be of particular economic benefit to Mountain Ash

#### Housing

- The surrounding attractive and accessible countryside provides a very positive environmental setting and the smaller settlements could provide desirable residential locations if the choice of housing they offer were not so limited. Most of the current housing stock is council rented or 19<sup>th</sup> century terraced and there is a need to develop a wider choice of modern housing in most of the settlements in order to retain and attract people to bring a halt to the population decline of recent decades.

### **7. 2021 Vision**

***Overall.** Population decline has halted and there has been in-migration from Cardiff commuters seeking affordable housing, since rail services were increased in frequency. The Cynon Valley has become a popular area to live and work. It plays a major part in the regional attraction of the Valleys Regional Park and is a leisure destination for both visitors and local residents.*

*The dualling of the Heads of the Valleys road has helped attract huge amounts of private investment into the northern part of the district.*

***Hub; ABERDARE** has become a popular shopping centre where over half the district's population shop for their weekly needs. It has developed an employment role as a rail-oriented location for small and medium sized office-based businesses. The town's tourism role has expanded on the back of its heritage and leisure offer and it now boast several quality hotels. Aberdare is now a popular base for tourists visiting the Valleys Regional Park.*

***Secondary Centre; MOUNTAIN ASH** has been transformed into a popular place to live, with the atmosphere of a pleasant rural market town. It has attracted several high quality residential developments on the back of the new hospital development.*

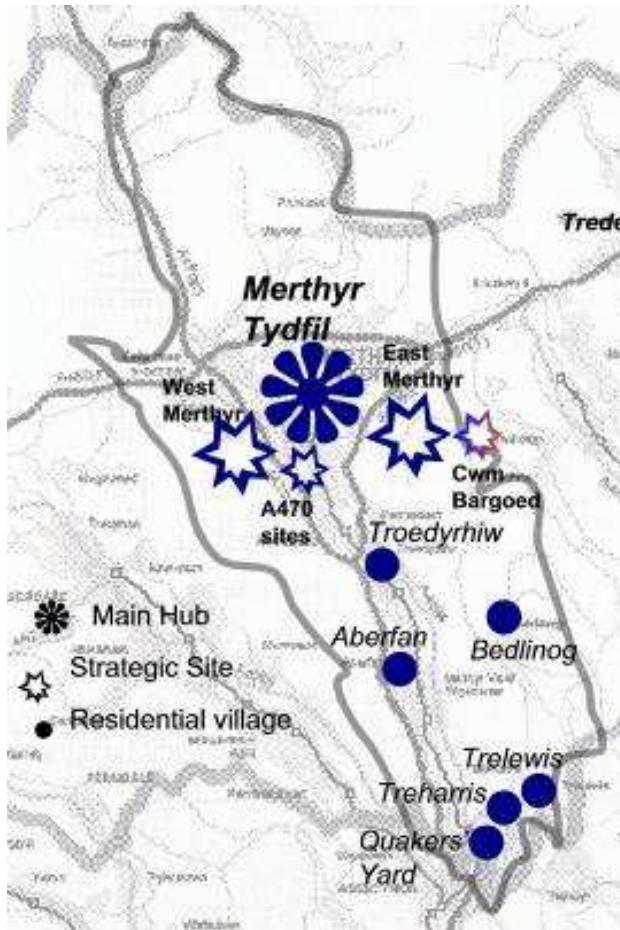
***Secondary Centre; HIRWAUN** has exploited its strategic location to become a secondary hub for the north of the district with new retail and leisure facilities. The redevelopment of the huge Tower*

*Colliery site for advanced alternative energy and recycling industries has made the area an exemplar of regeneration famous throughout Europe.*

## 6. MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH

**1. Overview** – The County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil is the smallest of the unitary local authorities in Wales with a population of 55,980 in 2001, a decrease of 7% from 1991. The County Borough comprises 2 river valleys – the River Taff and the smaller Taff Bargoed, covering some 43 square miles, approximately one fifth of which is in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

### 2. Main settlements – Roles and Functions 2006



**Hub: MERTHYR TYDFIL**, ranked 15<sup>th</sup> out of Wales' retail centres, is the hub of the County Borough. It is located at the northern end of the County Borough and lies in the centre of the Heads of the Valleys sub-region. The town is strategically located at the intersection of the A470 and the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road. With a population of 40,000 it is the main retail and service centre in the Heads of the Valleys sub-

region, containing over 264 commercial units within the town centre, as well as an indoor market and over 272,000 square foot of shopping floorspace within the Cyfarthfa Retail Park. The town also contains a leisure centre, law courts, hospital and the regional offices of the National Assembly for Wales.

**Residential Centres:** The lower valley settlements of **EDWARDSVILLE, TROEDYRHIW, ABERFAN, TRELEWIS, QUAKERS YARD** and **TREHARRIS** are interdependent, mainly residential communities.

New housing developments at Treharris have enabled the village to reverse the trend in population decline which still affects the rest of the county borough.

**BEDLINOG**, situated in the northern most part of the Taff Bargoed Valley is also a residential settlement but has an expanding tourism role as well due to the presence of the International Climbing Centre and country park to the south of the village.

**Employment areas:** The County Borough's main industrial estates are located at Pant, Goatmill Road, Cyfartha, Dragon Park, Abercanaid and Pentrebach, underlining the importance of Merthyr Tydfil as an employment centre.

Merthyr Tydfil town centre is an important centre for office based service employment. This has been boosted recently by the opening of the Welsh Assembly Government Offices on the outskirts of the town centre.

#### Major sites

**MERTHYR TYDFIL TOWN CENTRE.** A number of medium sized sites in and around Merthyr Town Centre cumulatively could have a huge impact. They include Rhydycar (leisure), Georgetown (housing) and Cyfarthfa (employment) where the new VITEC facility is to be located. Trago Mills is currently building a major retail and leisure park on the outskirts of the town, complementing the new retail park at Cyfarthfa. In the town centre itself there are plans to redevelop the bus station and implement a large number of urban improvement schemes

Elsewhere in the county borough there are huge tracts of land that could be reclaimed to strengthen the area's contribution to the Valleys Regional Park;-

**East Merthyr** - huge 420 ha land reclamation / opencast coal mining scheme designated for mixed uses, though mostly restoration of natural habitats – it includes the 140 Ha **Cwm Bargoed** site which has good regional road and rail links and potential for the development of recycling technology industries.

**West Merthyr** – another huge area of land reclamation – 350ha – mainly designated in the local plan for forestry and amenity.

The **Deep Navigation Colliery** reclamation site at Treharris is linked to the country park facility at Bedlinog, which also includes the Climbing Centre.

### 3. Local transport network

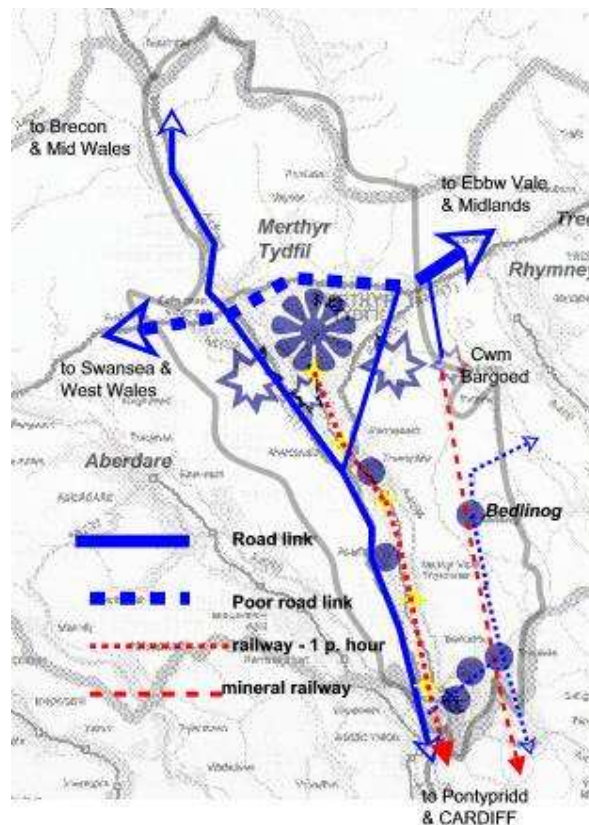
There is an hourly rail service to Cardiff with local stations at Quakers Yard, Merthyr Tydfil, Troedryhiw and Pentrebach.

A mineral line runs from Cwm Bargoed through the Taff Bargoed valley, connecting with the Rhymney Valley line to Cardiff at Ystrad Mynach in Caerphilly County Borough but it does not carry passengers.

The A470 dual carriageway runs north-south along the length of the county borough and together with the A465 and A460 forms a triangle of fast modern roads encompassing the town of Merthyr Tydfil.

The former A470, now designated the A4050, links the residential communities to the south of the town.

Only in the Taff Bargoed valley is the road network now of a poor standard, detracting from the Valley's tourism potential.



### 4. External Linkages

#### South.

The rail link to Cardiff is too infrequent to make a major difference to transport patterns in the county borough.

The A470 Trunk road connects the southern part of the County Borough with Cardiff and the M4.

#### North-West.

The A465 (Heads of the Valleys Trunk Road) runs to the north of Merthyr Tydfil and serves as a major west-east strategic highway corridor connecting the town with major settlements to the west of the County Borough and West Wales beyond.

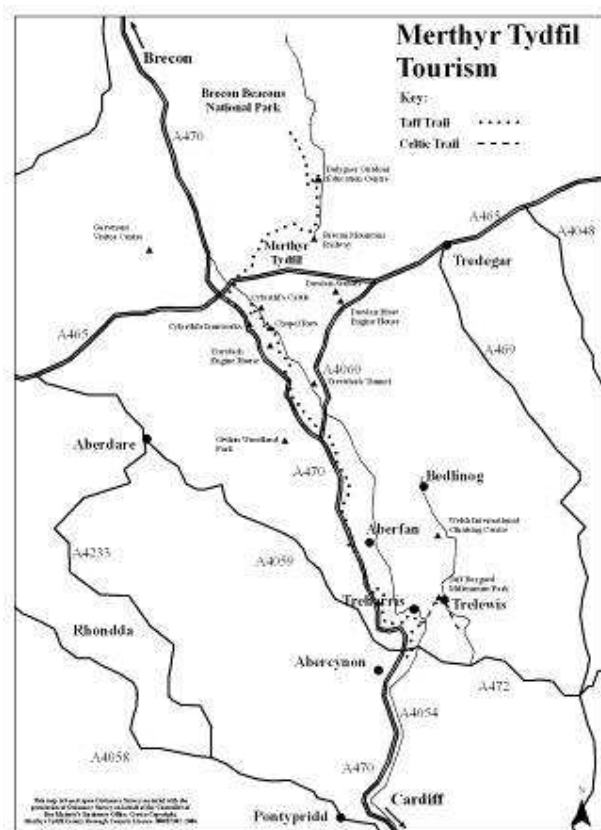
#### North-East.

The recently upgraded section of the A465 (Heads of the Valleys Trunk Road) to the east of Merthyr Tydfil between Dowlais Top and Tredegar, connects the County Borough to the main settlements in the Heads of the Valleys corridor, and to the Midlands beyond.

#### North.

The main North Wales to South Wales A470 Trunk Road connects to the recently upgraded A465 strategic highway immediately north of Merthyr Tydfil and continues northwards beyond the County Borough into the Brecon Beacons National Park.

## 5. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park.



### Landscape.

The steeply sloping valley sides with their high ridges and moorland vegetation, along with many historic landscapes and archaeological features define the character of the County Borough. This dramatic countryside setting provides an impressive backdrop to the valleys settlements and is an ideal environment for a wide range of outdoor activities.

### Country Parks

- **Taff Bargoed Millennium Park** near Bedlinog provides numerous opportunities for informal recreation with facilities for fishing and is easily accessed from the **Celtic Trail** which runs through the site.

- **Garwnant Visitor Centre** is located near Llwyn Onn within the Brecon Beacons National Park and provides activities during term holidays.
- **Dolygaer Outdoor Education Centre** is a purpose built residential centre situated in 11 acres of national parkland.
- **Gethin Woodland Park** is a picturesque forest environment with a variety of way marked walks.

### Cyclepaths

- **The Taff Trail** long distance footpath and cycleway runs through the County Borough, linking Cardiff in the south to Brecon to the north and incorporates many interesting historic features.

### Heritage

**Merthyr Tydfil** played a pivotal role in the Industrial Revolution as the Iron capital of the world. The town features

- **Cyfarthfa Castle**, an impressive Grade I Listed Building, built by the Crawshays in a castellated style in 1825. The Castle is set in 160 acres of parkland and houses a museum and art gallery.
- the **former Cyfarthfa Ironworks**. Little remains of the Ironworks, except for the impressive former Furnaces structure which is protected as a scheduled ancient monument
- **Chapel Row** - a fine example of 19<sup>th</sup> century terraced cottages including the birthplace of Dr Joseph Parry, musician and composer.
- Other remnants of the Industrial Revolution include the Grade II listed **Dowlais Blast Engine House, Dowlais Stables** and **Ynysfach Engine House**, now used as the base for Herian
- **Trevithick's Tunnel Interpretation Point** is now a focal point for those wishing to find out more about the Trevithick's 1804 Locomotive.

### Accommodation

The County Borough is well served by accommodation with a total of 6 hotels (providing around 133 bed spaces); 4 guest houses (with 11 bed spaces); 3 farm houses (with 19 bed spaces); 2 hostels (with 13 rooms); 1 travel Inn (40 rooms); 2

self catering establishments (with 3 units) and 2 camping and caravanning sites.

#### Attractions

- **The Welsh International Climbing Centre** at Bedlinog provides a state of the art climbing complex with a high ropes course, caving experience, gym, conference centre and café/bar.
- **Brecon Mountain Railway** runs from Merthyr Tydfil on a seven mile roundtrip into the Brecon Beacons National Park between March and October..

#### Events

- The Millenium Park hosts the annual **County Borough Show** on the August Bank Holiday as well as a **Fireworks Skyshow Display and Christmas Lighting Ceremony** in early November.
- **The Tydfil Festival** is held in October and hosts a feast of arts workshops and performances around the County Borough.

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively

#### Housing

- New housing to reverse the trend of out-migration from the County Borough, which experienced the highest fall in population of all Welsh local authorities between 1991 and 2004.
- Merthyr Tydfil has the highest proportion of unfit housing in Wales. Improvements are needed to the quality of the housing stock, potentially to include the designation of Housing Renewal Areas.

#### Retailing

- Reinforce the role of Merthyr Tydfil as a regional shopping centre and develop a distinctive role for the town centre in response to out of centre retail developments.

#### Community

- Attract shops and commercial opportunities in the County Borough's residential centres to improve the viability of these communities.

#### Leisure

- Develop a modern, purpose-built leisure and sports complex at Rhydycar, to serve the residents of the County Borough as well as visitors and tourists to the town.

#### Transport

- Dualling of the remaining sections of the A4685 Heads of the Valleys Trunk Road between Merthyr Tydfil and Hirwaun.
- Improved rail services to Cardiff and increased frequency and timetabling of bus services across the County Borough.
- Greater use of the Taff Bargoed Mineral railway line, potentially as a passenger line to serve the settlements of Trelewis and Treharris.
- Re-development of the existing Bus Station in Merthyr Tydfil to provide a modern, purpose built transport facility to improve public access to the town centre.

#### Training

- Develop a Lifelong Learning Campus on the site of Merthyr College (now part of the University of Glamorgan)
- The development of the Valleys Information and Technology and Communications Centre (VITEC) on the former Cyfarthfa Furnaces site.

#### Tourism

- Develop a co-ordinated programme of building restoration to refurbish the many currently vacant and derelict historic buildings in and around Merthyr Tydfil.
- The Borough Council's potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited as well as heritage tourism in identifying future uses for key historic buildings and in implementing the Herian *Trail of Light* initiative.
- Development of the Rhydycar Leisure Centre and Lifelong Learning Campus in Merthyr Tydfil.

## 7. 2021 vision

### Overall.

*Population decline has been halted and reversed with a period of enhanced growth in population levels in the 10 years leading up to 2021.*

*The implementation of major retail, leisure, employment and retail developments has led to increased economic activity throughout the County Borough with private sector interest seeking new development opportunities.*

*Improved public transport, with increased frequency of train services between Merthyr Tydfil and Cardiff and the re-opening of the Taff Bargoed railway line for passenger services has improved accessibility throughout the County Borough and led to a reduction in commuter traffic.*

*Improved educational opportunities has brought about significant changes in the local economy, with reductions in levels of long-term unemployment and increased skill levels.*

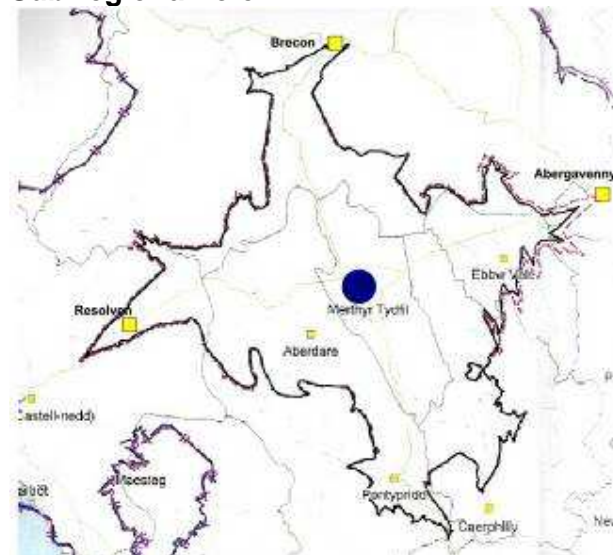
*Hub. **MERTHYR TYDFIL** has developed into a major sub-regional shopping and service centre, serving a wide catchment area. The town's accessibility has been greatly improved with the completion of the Heads of the Valleys dualling, which has reinforced the position of the town at the heart of this strategic investment corridor.*

*The appeal of the town has been greatly increased following a major programme of urban renewal that has restored its many fine historic buildings for a range of new uses. This has helped to provide a modern, attractive shopping and leisure destination for workers and visitors alike. The profile of the town has been further enhanced with the development of Cyfarthfa Castle and Park as a major conference and leisure facility.*

*Villages The County Borough's residential centres have stemmed their economic and physical decline with an increase in population growth as people have taken advantage of the improved accessibility to the area (with the re-opening of the Taff Bargoed railway line) with the employment markets to the south of the County Borough as well as significant improvements in the quality of the urban fabric. The appeal of these communities has been further reinforced by the*

*growth in green tourism, supported by small scale retail and business development opportunities to sustain and support the needs of the area.*

### **Sub-regional role**

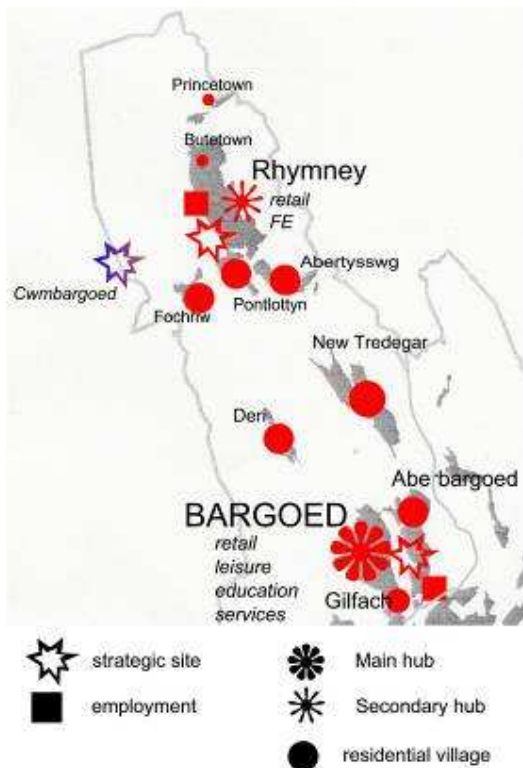


30 minute drive time from Merthyr Tydfil

## 7. UPPER RHYMNEY VALLEY Caerphilly county borough

**1. Overview** – The Upper Rhymney Valley had a population of 28,111 in 2001 – a decrease of 8.2% since 1991. It comprises a cluster of relatively small former mining settlements along the line of the River Rhymney and its tributary, the Nant Bargod Rhymney. The Valley sides are generally very steep but broaden out at the Heads of the Valleys into a rather bleak plateau. The area is among the most deprived in Europe – all nine wards in the district are Community First wards, indicating that the area is one of the largest concentrations of deprivation in the Valleys.

### 2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions 2006



**Hub; BARGOED**, ranked 45<sup>th</sup> out of Wales' retail centres, is the hub of this district. It is the largest town in the district with a population, including the suburb of GILFACH, of 8,300. It contains the only significant shopping centre with over 100 commercial units, a comprehensive

school with swimming pool and a range of minor urban services.

**Secondary hub; RHYMNEY** is the second largest town with a population of around 5,500. Its comprehensive school, further education college (a branch of Ystrad Mynach College) and large supermarket give it the potential to be a secondary centre for the villages in the northern part of the district.

**Residential areas; NEW TREDEGAR** (itself a cluster of five distinct settlements) **ABERBARGOED, DERI, FOCHRIW, PONTLOTTYN, ABERTYSSWG** and a number of small hamlets are predominantly residential villages. Some have tourism potential.

#### Employment areas

Large **industrial estates** are located between **Rhymney** and **Pontlottyn** and south of **Aberbargoed**, giving these settlements an important employment role.

**NEW TREDEGAR** is an exemplar of comprehensive regeneration. Over the past two years a mutually supporting set of initiatives, including a new community school, new road, incubator industrial units, environmental improvements, engineering works to river retaining structures and a comprehensive safe routes to school footpath network including two major footbridges, has been implemented in a £20m + package financed from a number of sources.

#### Major sites

- A major redevelopment opportunity is located at **Rhymney** in the form of 84 acres of land in the Capital Valley, Maerdy and Lawn industrial estates. A recent study advocated redevelopment of these areas for mixed uses including a cluster of recycling industries, a new college

building and a health resource centre.

- At **Bargoed**, the town centre redevelopment site for retailing and leisure will be complemented by a large housing site (200+ dwellings) at **Aberbargoed** on the other side of the valley. Coedtir Country Park connects the two sites.

#### 4. Local transport network

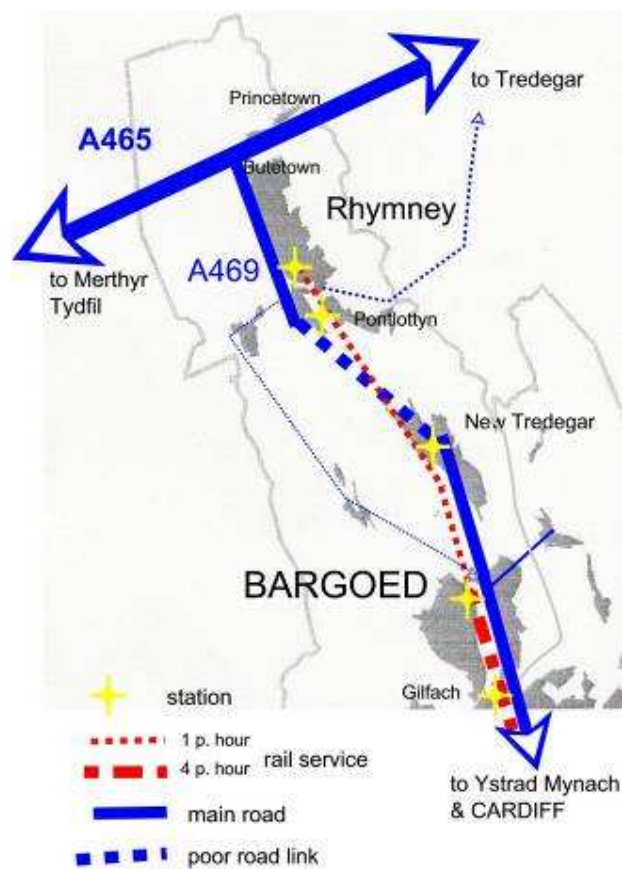
The area benefits from the Rhymney Valley railway line with stations at Rhymney, Pontlottyn, New Tredegar, Bargoed and Gilfach. Four trains an hour now run from Bargoed and Gilfach but only two an hour from the stations to the north.

The A469 is the main north-south road link through the Rhymney Valley. A fast modern road connects Rhymney and Pontlottyn to the A465 and recently the southern approaches to New Tredegar have been improved but the stretch through New Tredegar and from there to Pontlottyn is poor and a constraint on the proper functioning of this urban cluster.

South of new Tredegar the A4049 runs parallel to the A469 on the eastern side of the valley, giving a choice of routes.

A relief road ('Angel way') around Bargoed and Gilfach is currently under construction.

A winding minor road connects the communities of the Darran Valley and Parc Cwm Darran to the main highway network and well used mountain roads run north-south along the ridgeways to the west and the east.



#### 4. External linkages

South. The A469 is the main road route south to **Ystrad Mynach** (location of Caerphilly council offices, Further Education College, proposed new general hospital, employment sites).

The Rhymney Valley railway line connects the area to **Ystrad Mynach, Caerphilly** and the national and regional centre of **Cardiff**.

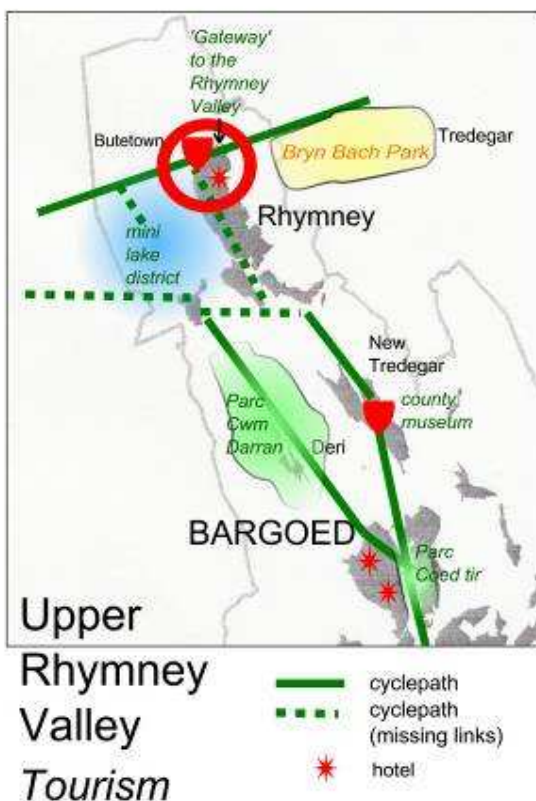
North-West. The A465 links the district to employment opportunities along the A465 corridor and to the Sub-regional centre of **Merthyr** (shopping and current general hospital) as does a minor road from Fochriw.

North-East. The upgraded dual carriageway section of the A465 connects the district to employment opportunities along the A465 corridor and the historic town of **Tredegar** with its leisure centre and swimming pool. A sub standard minor road from Abertysswg provides an alternative access to Tredegar.

South-East A poor network of minor roads leads to the sub-regional shopping centre and major employment centres around **Blackwood**.

There are no direct road or rail links to the North where the county borough borders the Brecon Beacons National Park.

## 5. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park



The area has the potential to make a major contribution to the VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK.

Landscape: The hillsides are dramatic and magnificent views are obtained from the minor roads and long distance footpaths along the ridgeways. Most of the countryside is common land, including the extensive and historic landscape of **Gelligaer Common**. The northern part of the area contains a number of small lakes and reservoirs, including Parc Cwm Darran lakes, Rhaslas pond, Butetown reservoir and Jepsens pond. This area is currently being enhanced

through £1million of Heads of the Valleys programme funding.

Country Parks: there are two major Country parks at **Cwm Darran** (Deri and Fochriw) and **Parc Coedtir** (Bargoed-Aberbargoed); Bryn Bach Park lies just across the border in Blaenau Gwent.

Cyclepaths: the **east-west cyclepath** from Merthyr to Tredegar passes through the historic hamlet of Butetown and leads to Bryn Bach Park. A **north-south cyclepath** runs through Parc Coedtir and up to Abertysswg while another cyclepath connects Bargoed through Deri to Parc Cwm Darran.

Heritage: Butetown (Welsh 'Drenewydd') north of Rhymney, is a Nineteenth century 'model' settlement, dating from around 1835. It contains 44 listed buildings. The county borough museum is being constructed in the former mining village of **New Tredegar**. Roman and prehistoric remains are found on Gelligaer Common - a designated 'historic landscape'.

Events: **Bargoed** is seeking to establish a regular annual fair in its large urban park at Heolddu. This year the event was entitled **Bargoed Big Bed**. The annual British **Giant Vegetable Competition** at Abertysswg may have some tourism potential if marketed imaginatively.

Accommodation: Bargoed and Rhymney have small hotels and there is a campsite at Parc Cwm Darran.

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively;-

#### Retailing

- New shops and commercial businesses need to be developed in the district's main centre at Bargoed. Attracting a major food retail 'anchor store' is a fundamental requirement.
- Rhymney would benefit from a second foodstore, located closer to the town centre

#### Leisure

- There is currently no cinema or theatre or 'family' pub/restaurants in the area. There are indications, however, that there is strong private sector interest in providing a multiplex cinema and other leisure facilities in the Bargoed Town Centre Redevelopment. This would be of immense importance to the quality of life for the whole county borough and will be supported.
- The local authority's formal leisure offer also needs to be developed. Bargoed's swimming pool is 30 years old and only available to the public at weekends and evenings.

#### Further Education

- The further education facilities at the secondary centre of Rhymney could be expanded further if this were compatible with developments in further education elsewhere in the Heads of Valleys sub region.

#### Transport

- Railway services are infrequent and need to be increased, especially between Rhymney and Bargoed.
- The A469 through this district needs to be substantially improved to facilitate access to employment facilities and services in the Mid Valleys corridor. The scheduled opening of a new general hospital for the county borough to the south at Ystrad Mynach, the need for improvement to this section of the A469 will become even

more acute.

- Transport links to the Oakdale/Blackwood sub-region need to be improved to provide access to jobs.

#### Housing

- Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive and new residential sites identified in order to halt net migration outflow from the heads of the Valleys

#### Tourism

- The east-west and north-south cyclepaths need to be connected to each other and to the cyclepath network to the south in order to form an effective part of the regional network.
- The rather bleak 'mini-lake district' in the north of the district, between Rhymney and Fochriw has been identified for a strategic landscaping initiative that should greatly enhance the potential of that part of the district to function as a pleasant residential area and visitor destination.
- The historic hamlet of Butetown is located just off the junction of the A469 and the improved A465 heads of the Valleys Road. It has the potential to become the centrepiece of a landscaped 'gateway' to the Rhymney Valley from the north.

#### **7. 2021 Vision**

*Overall. Population decline has halted and there has been in-migration from Cardiff commuters seeking affordable housing, since rail services were increased in frequency. The A469 is no longer a deterrent to internal movements within the district. The Upper Rhymney Valley has become a popular area to live and work. It plays a major part in the regional attraction of the Valleys Regional Park and is a leisure destination for both visitors and local residents.*

*Hub; BARGOED has become a popular shopping centre where over half the district's population shop for their weekly needs. It has developed an*

*employment role as a rail-oriented location for small and medium sized office-based businesses. The town's leisure role has expanded mainly because of provision of a new leisure centre, multiplex cinema and several family-oriented pub-restaurants. Bargoed is now a popular base for tourists visiting the Valleys Regional Park and its famous 'town wall' has itself become a tourist attraction.*

***Secondary Centre; RHYMNEY** has been transformed into a popular place to live, with the atmosphere of a pleasant rural market town. It is still an important employment centre, having pioneered the new recycling and wood craft industries which are now well established. It is also a significant centre for further education and training, specialising in construction skills. At Butetown, the restored historic village, massive landscaping and spectacular artworks form an impressive tourism Gateway to the Rhymney Valley.*

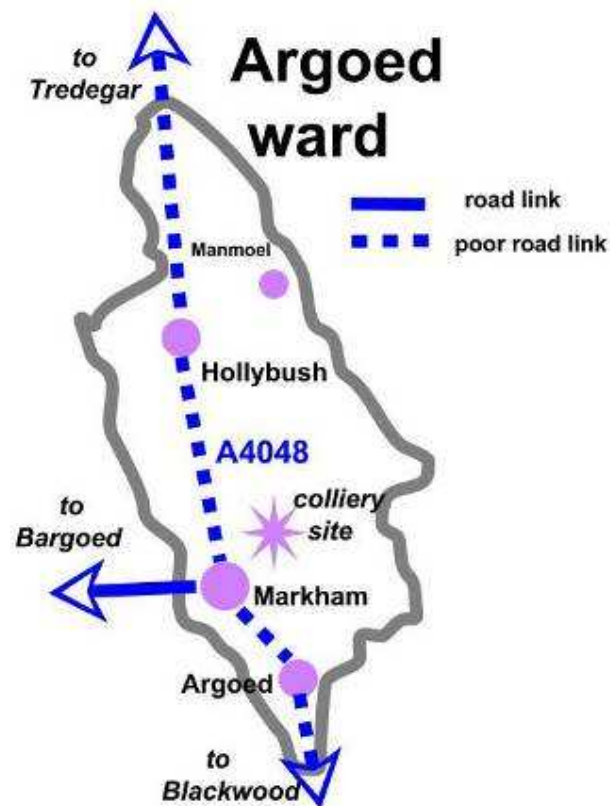
*NEW TREDEGAR, ABERBARGOED, DERI, FOCHRIW, PONTLOTTYN and ABERTYSSWG are now pleasant commuter villages offering a range of affordable, family and executive housing and good local health, education and local commercial facilities. The villages all now have excellent public transport links with Bargoed, Rhymney and centres in adjacent urban clusters.*

## 8) MID SIRHOWY VALLEY Caerphilly county borough

The Communities First ward of Argoed, though within the Heads of the Valleys programme area, looks mainly to the sub-regional centre of BLACKWOOD, outside the Heads of the Valleys area, for employment and services.

These villages are therefore part of the Blackwood urban cluster which is largely within the Connections corridor sub-region.

The population in 2001 was 2515 – a decrease of 5.2 % since 1991.



BLACKWOOD, ranked 20<sup>th</sup> out of Wales' retail centres, is itself part of a MID VALLEYS CONURBATION of 65,000 people comprising Blackwood itself, Bargoed, Ystrad Mynach, Newbridge and a square kilometre of employment estates at Penyfan/Oakdale. Major employment, retailing, leisure, health and administrative facilities are planning in the conurbation over the next five years, making it a major driver of regeneration in the Valleys. The conurbation is partly in the Heads of the

Valleys area but the majority lies to the south. It nevertheless is important that Heads of the Valleys communities are able to avail themselves of opportunities and services in this area

### 2. Main settlements – Roles & Functions 2006

Residential areas –MARKHAM, HOLLYBUSH and ARGOED are mainly residential settlements though Markham has a modern sports centre.

#### Major sites

**Markham Colliery** is an unreclaimed xxx ha site in the Upper Sirhowy Valley with great potential for countryside recreation. It is likely to be the focus of Caerphilly's Heads of the Valleys tourism project for 2008/09.

### 3. Local Transport network

There are no railway services in this Valley.

The main road is the A 4048, which passes through this area from south to north. and links Blackwood to the south with Tredegar to the north. It is a poor road, detracting from the communities in Argoed ward and the functionality of Tredegar and Blackwood.

A network of minor roads provide access to the countryside to the east, centred on the hamlet of **Manmoel**.

### 4. External Links

#### North

The A4048 provides the only link to **Tredegar** in the north.

#### South

The A4048 provides the only link to **Blackwood** in the south.

#### West

The B4511 provides access from Markham to Aberbargoed and beyond to the primary centre of **Bargoed**.

#### East

A network of steep and winding minor roads eventually lead to the A4046 in the Ebbw Valley

and the major employment complex at Oakdale/Penyfan near Blackwood.

Thus although not containing a major centre itself, Argoed is surrounded by primary hubs and major employment areas and its poor transport infrastructure is thus a constraint for a much wider area, detracting from the functionality of Tredegar and Blackwood in particular.

## **5. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park**

The area has the potential to make a major contribution to the Valleys Regional Park. It could become the centre of a concentration of country parks and cycle tracks in the mid/upper valleys.

### Landscape

This part of the Sirhowy Valley is relatively unspoiled, containing spectacular and historic landscapes punctuated by small villages.

### Country parks

Though the area does not contain any country parks at the moment there are plans to create one on the Markham colliery site. There are also many country parks nearby. Immediately to the east is the country park at Penyfan Pond, to the north is Bedwellty Park in Tredegar and to the west is Parc Coedtir at Bargoed.

### Cyclepaths

A network of cycle and footpaths is being developed the length of the Sirhowy Valley to link the country parks.

### Heritage

The landscape around Manmoel has remained unchanged for centuries and features an historic field pattern of small fields defined by mature hedgerows.

## **6. What needs to be done to enable this urban cluster to function effectively**

### Transport

The A4048 needs improvement, not just to support the viability and improve the environments of Markham, Hollybush and Argoed but also to integrate Tredegar and Blackwood more fully into the region as a whole.

### Housing

As in so many valley communities the only choice of housing is between a Nineteenth Century terraced house or council rented accommodation. A variety of new housing units needs to be introduced into the villages to create more choice.

### Tourism

Markham colliery needs to be reclaimed and sensitively developed for recreational uses that complement those already provided in nearby country parks.

The cyclepaths and footpaths need to be expanded into a comprehensive network linking all the main countryside attractions in the area and around it.

### Utilities

A gas pipeline should be put in from Blackwood to Argoed and Markham to relieve fuel poverty in this area.

## **7. 2021 Vision**

*Improvements to the A4048 have opened up the area with dramatic results. The spectacular landscape setting combined with easy access to nearby urban centres have made the villages of Markham, Hollybush and Argoed very popular places to live and the population is now increasing.*

*The improved accessibility together with the development of the Markham Country Park has also fuelled a boom in tourism in the area, which is seen as one of the most attractive parts of the Valleys Regional Park. Accommodation for visitors and country pubs and restaurants have helped breathe new life into the local economy.*

## 9. TREDEGAR / UPPER SIRHOWY VALLEY

### Blaenau Gwent

**1. Overview** – The Upper Sirhowy Valley had a population of 15,057 in 2001 – a decrease of 3.7% since 1991. The town is formed by a number of quite distinct communities; Ashvale, Cefn Golau, Dukestown, Georgetown, Nant-y-Bwlch, Sirhowy, Waundeg and Tynewydd. To the north is the village of Trefil and to the south the hamlet of Pochin. The valley sides are generally very broad but narrow and become steeper to the south. The area is among the most deprived in Europe – 2 of the 3 wards in the district are Community First wards.

### 2. Main Settlements Roles & Functions 2006



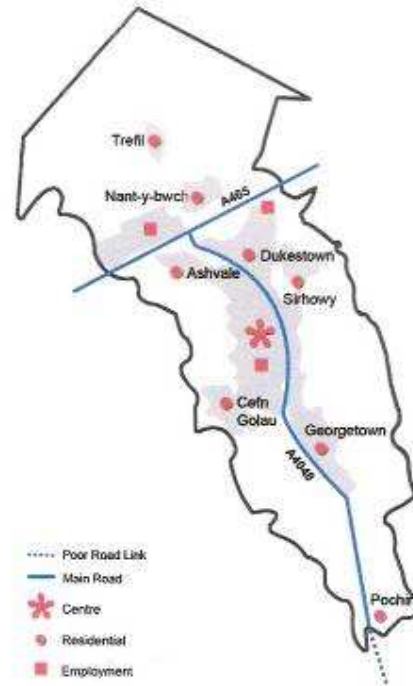
**Hub: TREDEGAR**, ranked 53<sup>rd</sup> out of Wales' retail centres, is the hub of the district. It contains over 100 commercial units, a comprehensive school, leisure centre, training centre and a small community hospital.

**Residential areas:** Ashvale, Cefn Golau, Dukestown, Georgetown, Nant-y-Bwlch, Sirhowy, Waundeg, Tynewydd, Trefil and Pochin.

#### Employment areas

Large industrial estates are located to the north of Tredegar along the Heads of the Valleys Road, giving Tredegar an important employment role.

### 3. Local Transport network

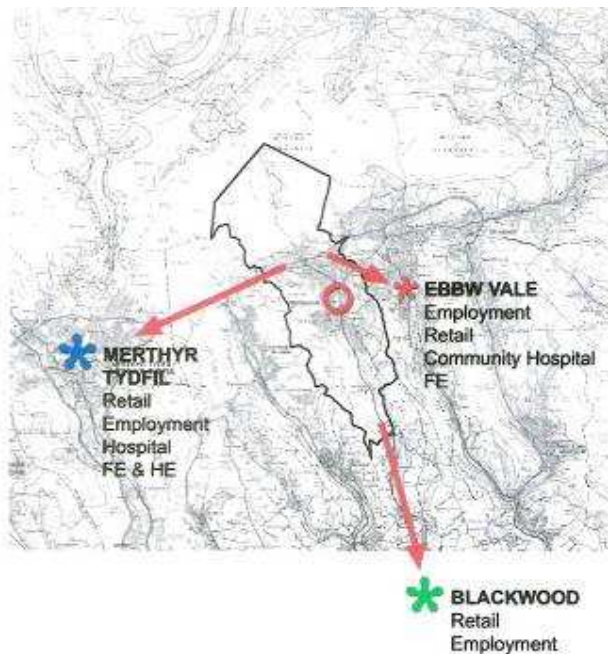


The A4048 runs north south through the district. It is a good quality road as far as Georgetown but is of poor quality thereafter.

The A465 runs east-west across the top of the district. The western link to Dowlais has been improved to dual carriageway standard but the eastern link still awaits improvement.

There are no direct rail services to the area but there is a railway station at Rhymney nearby.

#### 4. External Links



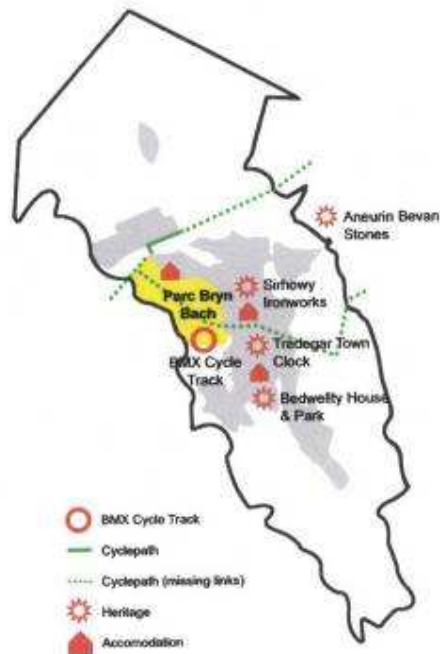
East. The A465 connects the district to employment opportunities at Rassau and the town centre of Ebbw Vale with its larger swimming pool and greater shopping offer. Minor roads, from Sirhowy and Georgetown, provide alternative access to Ebbw Vale.

West. The A465 links the district to employment opportunities and a rail link to Cardiff at the historic town of Rhymney, as does a minor road from Cefn Golau. Further along the A465 is Merthyr - a sub-regional shopping centre.

South. The A4048 links the district to the residential areas of Hollybush, Markham and Argoed, the sub-regional shopping centre of Blackwood and employment opportunities at Oakdale.

North. There are no direct road links to the North where the county borough borders the Brecon Beacons National Park.

#### 5. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park



The area has the potential to make a major contribution to the VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK & the tourism market.

Landscape: The hillsides are dramatic and magnificent views are obtained from minor roads and long distance footpaths along the ridgeways.

Country Parks: there is one major country park at Parc Bryn Bach covering approximately 250 hectares of land with a 15 hectare lake. The park attracts around 300,000 visitors a year, and features water activities on the lake.

Cyclepaths; the east-west cyclepath from Ebbw Vale to Merthyr passes through Tredegar. A north-south cyclepath runs along the Sirhowy Valley walk to Newport via Blackwood.

Heritage; Tredegar features a famous Clock Tower which was erected in 1858. Close by is the historic Bedwellty Park and House, a Victorian parkland that includes one of the very few remaining Ice Houses in Wales. Aneurin Bevan, the founder of the National Health Service was born in a small cottage in the town, his life is commemorated in the Aneurin Bevan Stones,

which stand on the hillside between Tredegar and Ebbw Vale.

Footpaths; The Sirhowy Valley Walk is a 26-mile trail starting at the Aneurin Bevan Memorial Stones and finishing at the Transporter Bridge in Newport. In addition there are three local walks along the riverside and mountain paths providing varied landscapes, splendid views and a taste of the town's history.

Events; Parc Bryn Bach holds a series of events throughout the year based around water-based activities, BMX racing activities and nature.

Accommodation; Tredegar has a range of accommodation varying from Bunk Houses at Central Chambers and Parc Bryn Bach, a caravan and camp-site at Parc Bryn Bach to a holiday cottage and guest houses in the town.

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively

#### Retail

- Tredegar town centre would benefit from a new tenant for its anchor store and a greater range of and quality of retail outlets. The town would also benefit from environmental works to improve its attractiveness and accessibility. A number of shops would benefit from refurbishment.

#### Tourism

- The town needs to develop its potential as a tourist destination and visitor service centre. This can be achieved through building on the facilities at Bedwellty House and Park, Parc Bryn Bach and the Sirhowy Iron Works. In addition the town needs a Festival to attract visitors.
- The areas potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited.

#### Community facilities

- The town must broaden the range of community facilities and visitor attractions to improve local amenities for local

residents and encourage increased visitors spending in the town.

#### Transport

- The road links between Tredegar and Blackwood would benefit from upgrading as the road is poor and acts as a fundamental constraint to north-south movements.
- Access to railway services at Rhymney need to be improved along with improvement to the frequency of the service. A new bus route needs to link Tredegar with the new Ebbw Vale railway line. This could be achieved by one bus route that serves both the Rhymney station and the new proposed station in Ebbw Vale

#### Employment

- Tredegar is well provided for in terms of access to local employment sites, however it needs to diversify its economic base. VITCC is an example of what can be achieved but Tredegar needs to build on this type of development and look at developing a service sector.

#### Housing

- Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive and new residential sites identified in order to halt net migration outflow from the Heads of the Valleys.

### **7. 2021 Vision**

Overall: *Population decline has halted, thanks to new housing provision, an improved environment and better access to facilities. Improvements to the A4048 have meant that there is no longer a deterrent to north-south movements. The area is a popular area to live and work as a result of its strong sense of community. Litter is no longer a*

*problem as the community take pride in their environment.*

*The residents of Tredgar have good access to rail links to Cardiff at both Rhymney and Ebbw Vale.*

*The town plays a major role as a tourism and heritage centre for thousands of visitors to the region. The Town Clock is a popular tourist area as it provides a focal point where people can congregate on the pavement cafés.*

*Parc Bryn Bach has gone from strength to strength and is now a popular place to stay for those visiting the area, as a result of its new prestige hotel. The BMX track hosts national events, in addition to regional, and the annual festival attracts thousands of people over the August Bank Holiday weekend.*

# 10. EBBW VALE / EBBW FAWR VALLEY

## Blaenau Gwent

### 1. Overview

The Ebbw Fawr Valley had a population of 23,622 in 2001 – a decrease of 1.3% from 1991. There are two main settlements within the district; Ebbw Vale and Cwm. The valley sides are generally very broad and become steeper to the South. Only one of the seven wards is among the most 100 deprived wards in Wales.

Ebbw Vale stands at the head of the valley of the Ebbw Fawr River and is the administrative centre of Blaenau Gwent County Borough. It is also the largest town of the County Borough. Ebbw Vale is rich in industrial heritage, with a history of iron and steel production.

### 2. Main Settlements - Roles & Functions 2006



**Hub: EBBW VALE**, ranked 25<sup>th</sup> out of Wales' retail centres, is the hub of the district. It contains a sports centre, a higher and further education college, 2 comprehensive school, a library and a small community hospital. Ebbw Vale also boasts a welfare ground that accommodates rugby, football and a county cricket wicket, together, with a regional indoor cricket school.

Ebbw Vale town centre contains over 100 commercial units. It is ranked 25<sup>th</sup> in Wales. The out-of-town retail shopping mall at the Garden Festival site has a sub-regional catchment and contains over 40 commercial units.

**Residential areas:** EBBW VALE (itself is a cluster of seventeen distinct settlements) Rassau, Hilltop, Beaufort Hill, Newtown, Garden City, Garnlydan, Carmelton, Glyncoed, Newchurch, Newtown, Willowtown, Pont-y-Gof, Mountain Air, Briery Hill, Ty Llwyn, Waun Lwyd and Victoria.

CWM is the secondary residential settlement within the valley.

### Employment Areas

Large industrial estates are located to the north of Ebbw Vale Town Centre along the Heads of the Valley Road. Rassau Industrial Estate is the largest in the County Borough giving this settlement an important employment role.

### Major sites

The current focus for regeneration activity is on the former CORUS STEELWORKS SITE in Ebbw Vale. Proposals for this site include a passenger rail line from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff and Newport, business premises capable of accommodating nearly half a million square feet of office space, development of a new Learning Campus, a new local district hospital, 500 new homes and refurbishment of the former steelworks general office building.

Rassau west and east extensions will provide 40ha of employment land. The A465 dual carriageway is planned to take a new route through the western extension. The estate as a whole will be readily accessible from the upgraded road.

Rhyd y Blew / Bryn Serth also totals 40ha and will be well located in related to the upgraded A465. A new access road will run between the two sites, connecting them to the A465.

### 3. Local Transport Network

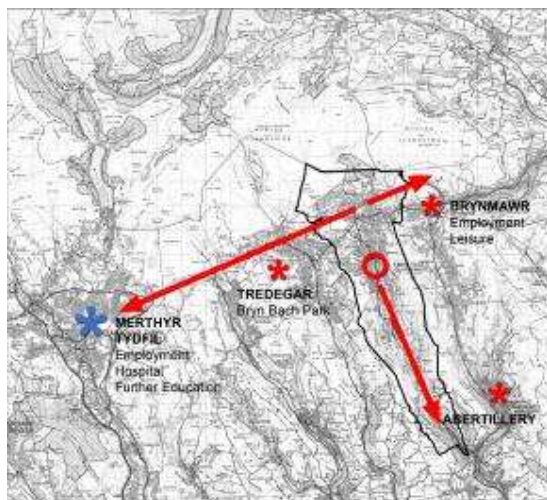


The A4046 runs north south through the district. It is a good quality road and includes the recently constructed Cwm by-pass

The A465 runs east-west across the top of the district. This section still awaits improvement. The A4047 also runs east west across the northern part of the town.

There are no direct rail services to the area but an hourly passenger rail service to Cardiff is due to commence in 2007 including a station at Ebbw Vale. A station at Cwm is a possibility for the future.

### 4. External Linkages



West. The A465 connects Ebbw Vale to the historic town of Tredegar with the major country park of Parc Bryn Bach. Further along the A465 is Merthyr – a sub-regional shopping centre.

East. The A465 links the district to employment opportunities and a cinema at Brynmawr. The A4047 links Ebbw Vale to Beaufort and Brynmawr.

South. The A4046 links Ebbw Vale to the southern end of the borough;

A rail link to Cardiff will be established by 2007 for the first time since 1962.

North. The Brecon Beacons is a short distance to the North and can be accessed via Llangynidr from Beaufort or by way of the A465 and B4560.

### 5. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park



The area has the potential to make some contribution to the VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK and the area's tourism market.

Landscape: The hillsides are dramatic and magnificent views are obtained from the minor roads and long distance footpaths along the ridgeways.

Cyclepaths: 'Y Tri Chwm' is a 37 mile mountain bike route that traverses the 3 valleys of Sirhowy, Ebbw Fach and Ebbw Fawr.

Parks Following the National Garden Festival in 1992, much of the site was secured as the Festival Park. Alongside new housing and commercial developments are the woodlands, wetlands and ornamental gardens surrounding the Japanese Pavillion and lakes.

#### Heritage

Ebbw Vale was traditionally built around the iron and steel industry and The Works – Ebbw Vale Iron and Steel Archive - is an impressive reminder of the origins of the town.

Footpaths: The Ebbw Valley Walk from Festival Park and the Ebbw Vale Heritage Trail provide varied landscapes, splendid views and an experience of the town's history.

Events: The Beaufort Theatre & Ballroom, Ebbw Vale has a regional reputation for hosting a range of quality arts and music performances throughout the year.

Accommodation: The range of accommodation within Ebbw Vale consists of a hotel and several inns on the outskirts of the town.

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively

#### Retail & Leisure

- The main function of Ebbw Vale town centre is currently retail. This needs to be broadened and strengthened through diversifying the shopping offer.
- The formal leisure offer also needs to be developed; there is an opportunity through the Corus regeneration for the leisure provision to improve.
- Improving the quality of the environment and physical appearance of the streets and the buildings would also benefit the town centre.
- Ebbw Vale would benefit from a co-ordinated approach to town centre management. *The Heads of the Valleys programme has agreed to fund two town*

*centre managers from 2007.*

- For Ebbw Vale to become a sub-regional shopping centre rather than just its district status at present, a major retail development adjacent to the town centre on the former Corus site would be needed in order for the town to achieve this.

#### Tourism

- The town centre must also seek to diversify, to extend people's stay in terms of both daytime and evening recreational pursuits. The linkages to different parts of the town need to be enhanced so that visitors can be encouraged to make more and better use of the Town Centre.
- The area's potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited.

#### Transport

- Ebbw Vale needs to be accessed easily on a multi-modal basis and improvements to public transport, on foot, by bicycle and by private car are necessary to encourage local residents and visitors spending in the town.

#### Housing

- Most of the current housing stock is 19<sup>th</sup> century terraced and there is a need to develop a wider choice of modern housing in most of the settlements in order to retain and attract people to bring a halt to the population decline of recent decades.

## **7. 2021 Vision**

#### Overall:

*The Population of the town has risen due to the in-migration of Cardiff commuters seeking affordable housing, since the success of the passenger rail service between Ebbw Vale and Cardiff.*

*Ebbw Vale has become a popular place to live and work as a result of a strong sense of community. The town has also become a significant centre for further education and training. It plays a major part in the regional attraction of the Valleys Regional Park and is a*

*leisure destination for both visitors and local residents.*

*Ebbw Vale has achieved the status of a sub-regional shopping centre due to the successful integration of the town centre with the Corus regeneration site. Therefore, Ebbw Vale has become a popular shopping centre where over half the district's population shop for their weekly needs. The town centre itself has strengthened through diversifying the attractions on offer to local residents and visitors.*

*The residents of Ebbw Vale have good access to rail links to Cardiff and Newport.*

# 11. ABERTILLERY / EBBW FACH VALLEY

## Blaenau Gwent

1. **Overview** – Abertillery had a population of 16,663 in 2001 – a decrease of 6% since 1991. It comprises the main settlement of Abertillery, together with Cwmtillery, Llanhilleth and Six Bells. All four wards in the district receive some form of Community First intervention though only 2 wards are among the 100 most deprived in Wales

### 2. Main Settlements Roles & Functions 2006

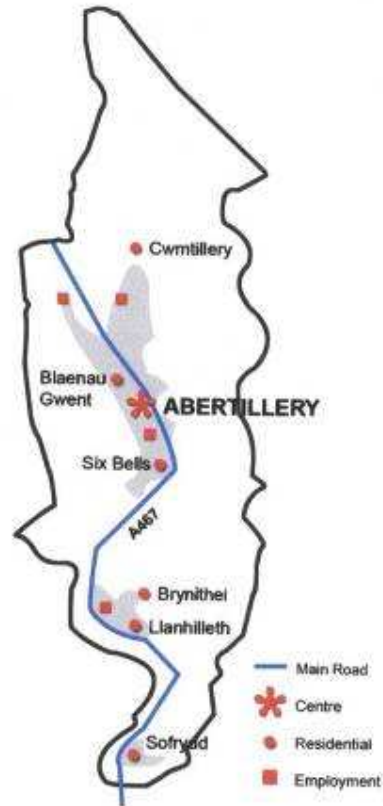


Complex which offers state of the art fitness equipment, swimming pools for adults and learners.

Residential areas: Cwmtillery, Llanhilleth, Six Bells, Brynithel

Employment areas: The industrial estate and business parks located at Cwmtillery, Roseheyworth and Llanhilleth play an important employment role. Roseheyworth Business Park, in particular, is a high quality development

### 3. Local Transport network

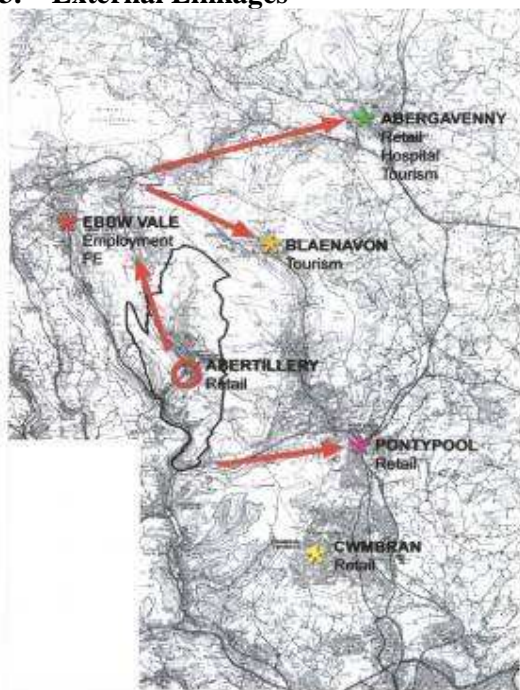


The A467 runs north-south along the length of the district. It is a good modern road as far as Llanhilleth.

Hub: **ABERTILLERY**, ranked 38<sup>th</sup> out of Wales' retail centres, is the hub of the district. It contains over 125 commercial units, an open learning centre, a 3 Rink Indoor Bowls Centre, and an award-winning Sport and Day Centre

## Valleys Regional Park

### 3. External Linkages



East. There are no direct links to Northern Torfaen in the east.

West. There are no direct links to the Ebbw Valley in the east.

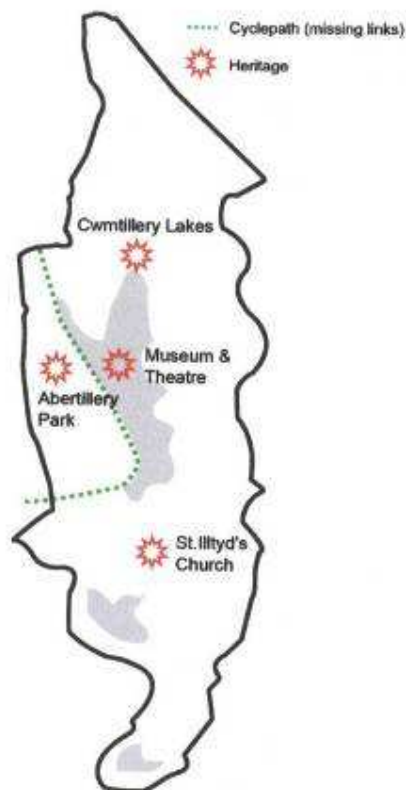
South. Abertillery is accessed from the south by the A467 which connects to the A472 at Crumlin and continues east towards Pontypool, and west to Newbridge and Blackwood.

A winding minor road from Aberbeeg connects Llanhilleth to the major employment concentration at Oakdale/Penyfan in Caerphilly county borough.

The Ebbw Valley Railway Line is due to be re-opened to passenger transport in 2007 with a station at Llanhilleth. A Rail links to Abertillery may be reopened in the future.

North. The A467 links this district to the A465 at Brynmawr and thence to Abertillery in the east and Ebbw Vale and Merthyr Tydfil to the west .

### 5. Tourism and potential contribution to the



The area has the potential to make a major contribution to the VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK.

The rugged mountain landscape is a potential haven for mountain bikers and there is further potential to develop this opportunity for tourism.

Landscape: The hillsides are dramatic and magnificent views are obtained from minor roads and long distance footpaths along the ridgeways. Cwmtillery, set in a quiet valley, is home to picturesque lakes and rambling farmland and is a popular area for walking.

Parks: Abertillery Park is an attractive 20-acre park on the outskirts of the town. The park provides the opportunity for local residents and visitors to appreciate the scenery and local sporting activities.

Cycle paths: there is a planned cycle route for the Ebbw Fach Valley.

Heritage: There are many architecturally attractive 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings rising to three and four storeys set against a backdrop of steeply sloping

and wooded hillsides. Abertillery has an important Victoria arcade.

The ancient church of St. Illtyd sits high on the hillside above Abertillery. This beautifully restored 12th century building retains many original features and was the winner of the Prince of Wales Award and the Civic Trust Award. It is used regularly for live performances and is open to visitors on summer Sunday afternoons.

Abertillery and District Museum contains a collection of artefacts, documents and photographs dating from the Stone Age through to the Industrial Revolution and more recent history. The museum is housed in the former historic Victorian Metropole Theatre, which has been renovated into a state-of-the-art cultural and conference centre.

Footpaths: There are two heritage trails available. One trail begins at Foundry Bridge, and the other commences at Cwmtillery.

Events: Abertillery Community Theatre has become renowned for the quality of its blues music, attracting performers from all over the world. An annual Blues Festival is held in Abertillery Park which attracts UK and international artists.

Accommodation: The only accommodation available in Abertillery is a Guest House located in Cwmtillery.

## **6. What needs to be done to enable this urban cluster to function effectively**

### Retail

- The town centre would benefit from a greater range of and quality of retail outlets. Environmental works are needed to improve the attractiveness and accessibility of the town centre. A considerable number of shops would benefit from refurbishment.
- Retail activity should be concentrated in the northern part of the town. Cultural and business and enterprise zones should be established to the south. Residential use would be appropriate in buildings close to the town centre which are currently vacant or empty as a consequence of retail users relocating.

### Tourism

- The town needs to develop its potential as a tourist destination and visitor service centre. This can be achieved through promoting activities which are suited to the natural environment, for example, mountain biking.
- The potential contribution of the area to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited.

### Employment

- Abertillery is well provided for in terms of access to local employment sites but it needs to diversify its economic base. It would be beneficial to attract high-tech companies to the area and develop a service sector.

### Housing

Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive and new residential sites identified in order to halt net migration outflow from the region.

### Transport

A direct rail link to the Ebbw Valley line would transform the town's attractiveness as a place to live

## 7. **2021 Vision**

*Abertillery is now a popular shopping destination due to the successful regeneration of the town centre which provides a 'traditional' alternative to 'anytown' shopping centres. The town centre itself has been strengthened through diversifying the attractions on offer to local residents and visitors.*

*Abertillery plays a major part in the regional attraction of the Valleys Regional Park and is a leisure destination for both visitors and local residents.*

*Abertillery has developed into a mountain bike 'mecca', attracting over 100,000 visitors a year. The new cycleway and footpath to Blaenavon provides a popular link to the World Heritage site.*

*The residents of Abertillery have good access to rail links to Cardiff and Newport and this, together with new housing, has stemmed the fall in population.*

## 12. BRYNMAWR – UPPER EBBW FACH VALLEY

### Blaenau Gwent

1. **Overview** – The Upper Ebbw Fach Valley had a population of 14,722 in 2001 – a decrease of 2.0% since 1991. Brynmawr is located at the head of the Ebbw Fach Valley and the Clydach Gorge. Although it is considered to be a valley town it is in fact quite elevated, with a distinctive open character. The Ebbw Fach is a very steep valley comprising the former mining communities of Winchestown, Nantyglo and Blaina.

2 of the 3 wards in the district are Community First wards.

### 2. Main Settlements Roles & Functions 2006



**Hub:** **BRYNMAWR** is the hub of the district. It contains over 106 commercial units, a comprehensive school, and a cinema – the only free standing cinema in the Heads of the Valleys programme area. The district Leisure Centre is in Nantyglo.

**Residential areas:** WINCHESTOWN, NANTYGLO and BLAINA.

### Employment areas

Industrial estates are located to the south east of Brynmawr (Blaenant, and Noble Square) and at Nantyglo (Rising Sun, Barleyfields and Pond Road).

### 3. Local Transport network

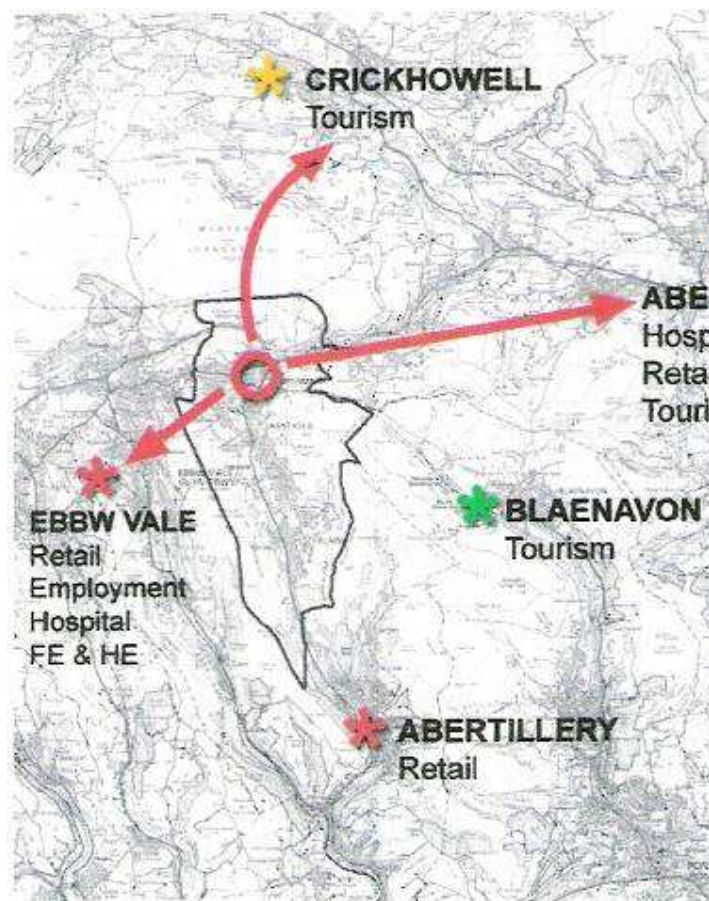


The A467 runs north south through the district, connecting the main settlements. It is a good quality road.

The A465 runs east-west across the top of the district. It is scheduled to be improved to dual carriageway standard.

There are no direct rail services to the area but there will be a service from Ebbw Vale nearby in 2007.

#### 4. External Linkages



The area has the potential to make a major contribution to tourism in the Heads of the Valleys and contribute to the Valleys Regional Park.

Landscape: While Brynmawr is considered to be a Valley Town it is in fact quite elevated, with a distinctive, open character. The Brecon Beacons lie to the north, while to the southeast lies Coety Mountain and Mynydd Carn-y-cefn to the southwest. To the east lies the Clydach Gorge, which forms an attractive and dramatic approach to the Town.

East. The A465(T) connects the district to the market town of Abergavenny. To the southeast a mountain road leads to Blaenavon with its world heritage site and Big Pit Museum.

West. The A465 links the district to employment opportunities, a new rail link, learning facilities, and retail provision at Ebbw Vale. Further along the A465 is the sub-regional shopping centre of Merthyr.

South. The A467 links the town of Brynmawr to the residential areas of Nantyglo and Blaina and the town of Abertillery.

North. The Brecon Beacons is a short distance to the north and can be accessed via Llangynidr from Beaufort or by way of the A465 and A40.

The **Clydach Gorge** is the location for a number of visitor attractions, these include, waterfalls, nature reserves and caves unique to the area. The caves are known to be amongst some of the longest in the world, and include a number of unexplored chambers.

Cyclepaths; a Sustrans cycle route runs through Brynmawr to Newport and there is a proposal for an east-west cyclepath from Abergavenny to Swansea. Local links are to be provided to these routes.

Planning permission for improvements to the Heads of the Valleys cycle way, NCR 46 between Abergavenny and Brynmawr has now been approved. The route follows the gentle incline of the former Merthyr to Abergavenny railway passing through natural and historic sites.

#### 5. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park

Heritage: The foundations of Ty Mawr Mansion, built in 1816, act as a reminder of the wealth of the ‘Masters’ of the iron industry. The towers at Roundhouse farm nearby were built as a fortress to protect the ironmaster Crawshay Bailey in the event of a worker’s uprising.

Footpaths: there is an extensive network of footpaths which link Brynmawr to surrounding communities, the Brecon Beacons, Clydach Gorge and the moorland areas to the south.

Accommodation: is limited to a Guest House and Inn in Brynmawr and a Guest House in Blaina.

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively

#### Tourism

- The area’s potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited.
- Brynmawr must broaden its hotel facilities and build on its tourism potential.
- The Town must build on its location as the eastern gateway to the valleys and its tourism links with the Brecon Beacons and the world heritage site and Big Pit museum at Blaenavon.
- The cycle way, NCR 46 between Abergavenny and Brynmawr need to be completed to ensure connection with the Heads of the Valleys area.

#### Transport

- Public transport should be provided to the new rail station at Ebbw Vale and the education and training facilities at the Corus regeneration site.
- The B4248 road to Blaenavon should be improved to provide better access to the area from the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road.

#### Retailing

- Brynmawr shopping centre should be promoted as a market town, taking advantage of its status as the highest market town in the UK.

#### Community facilities

- The area needs to broaden the range of community and leisure facilities to improve amenities for local residents.

#### Housing

- Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive and new residential sites identified in order to halt net migration outflow from the Heads of the Valleys.

## **7. 2021 Vision**

*Overall: Population decline has reversed thanks to new housing provision and a new sense of civic pride in the whole area.*

*The residents of Brynmawr, Nantyglo and Blaina have good access to the rail link and new learning facilities at Ebbw Vale.*

*Brynmawr is a thriving market town serving the district.*

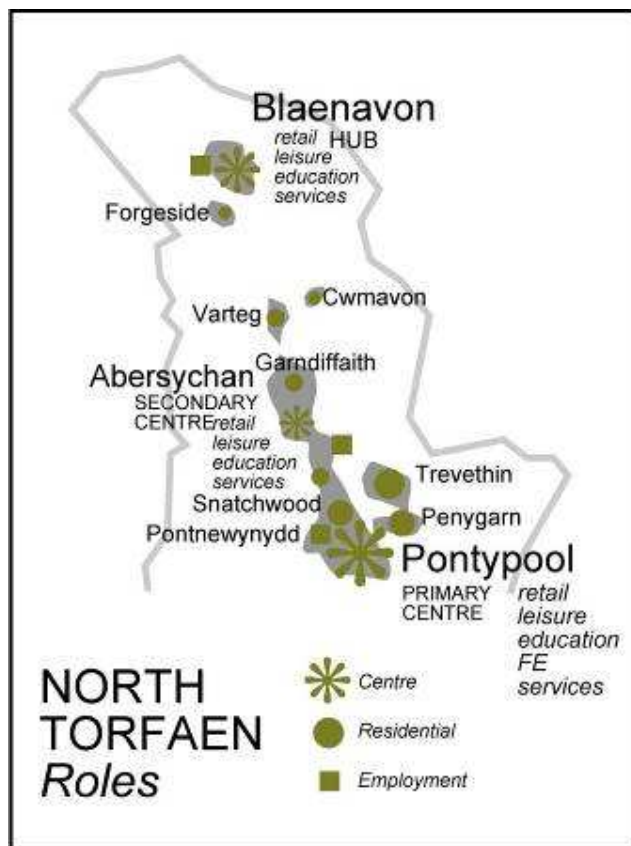
*There is now a strong link between Brynmawr, Blaenavon and the Brecon beacons - with Brynmawr offering a good range of tourism accommodation and acting as a gateway to the Valleys.*

## 14. NORTH TORFAEN

- 1. Overview** – The North Torfaen area had a population of 19,723 in 2001, a decrease of 3.4% since 1991. It comprises a cluster of relatively small former mining settlements mainly located along the course of the Afon Llwyd river in the eastern valley.

The area is partly within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

### 2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions 2006



Secondary Hub: **BLAENAVON** is the main shopping centre within the Heads of the Valleys project area in North Torfaen, with a population of 5763. It contains over fifty independent retailers, including several book shops and two small supermarket stores.

Gilchrist Thomas Industrial Estate is a substantial new development providing important job opportunities at the north end of the Avon Llwyd Valley. Blaenavon has a swimming pool, a

leisure centre, a small cinema within the Workmen's Hall and a newly renovated and well used library.

**Blaenavon was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in November 2000 and has enormous tourism value and further potential including becoming a gateway centre for the Valleys Regional Park and Heritage tourism in the Heads of the Valleys area.**

Secondary Centre: **ABERSYCHAN** has a population of around 6826. The village centre contains approximately twenty independent retailers and a Spar supermarket. The village has a comprehensive school, a leisure centre, library and a range of minor urban services.

Primary Hub: **PONTYPOOL**, currently ranked 84<sup>th</sup> out of Wales' retail centres, with a population of 36,012, lies just outside the Head of the Valleys Programme area but is one of the key shopping centres for residents of North Torfaen.

It has a shopping centre with 140 commercial units, a new 30,000sq ft supermarket and traditional indoor Market but is currently ranked only 84<sup>th</sup> in Wales. It has three comprehensive schools a FE college, a leisure centre (currently being renovated to a high standard) with a range of activities on offer including a dry ski-slope, a large Victorian public park and several other tourism attractions.

Pontypool also hosts the County Borough Council Civic Offices which operate on a split site arrangement with County Hall, Cwmbbran.

The new town of CWMBRAN five miles south of Pontypool with around 50,000 population is a major buoyant regional shopping centre (ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in Wales) but has tended to have a negative effect on Pontypool

Residential areas: All the settlements within North Torfaen tend to be in part dormitory housing areas. They comprise of a mixture of older housing stock general a hundred years old and newer Council housing estates. For example the centre of **ABERSYCHAN** is older housing but **TREVETHIN** and **VARTEG** are fairly modern council housing. Blaenavon and Abersychan currently fall within Torfaen's Housing Renewal

scheme. They have a lower proportion of owner occupied households at 63.7% and 64.6% respectively, than Torfaen of 68.3% and Wales as a whole of 71.3%.

Employment areas

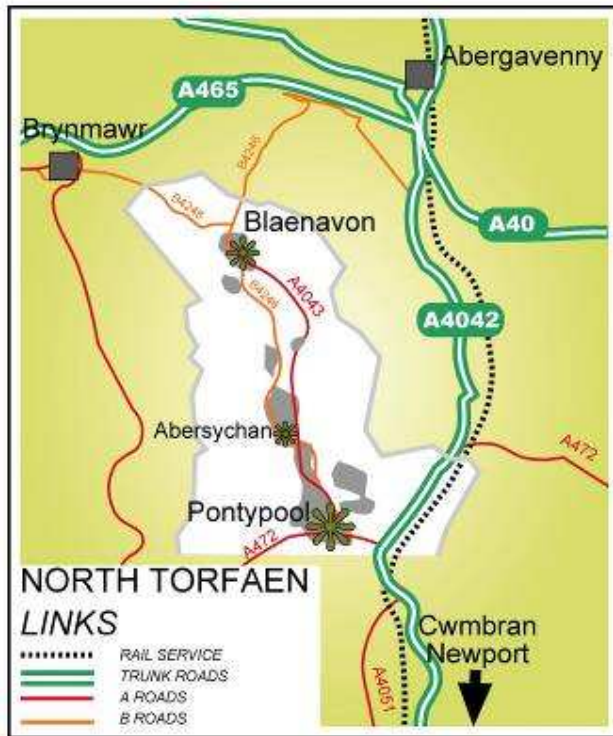
Key Industrial Estates are located at Pontnewynydd, Abersychan and Blaenavon mentioned above, including a large business centre, giving these settlements an important local employment role for North Torfaen.

However, much of the employment for the area is provided in the corridor between Pontypool and Cwmbran and the new town itself, notably the Llantarnam and Springvale Industrial estates .

Major site

**The British**, near Abersychan, is a 158 acre site in need of reclamation but with potential for mixed use development, including housing, primary school, local shops, community uses and open space. Access to the site is constrained, however.

**3. Local Transport network**



The A4043 road is the main road from Blaenavon to Pontypool. It is a show winding road that suffers from traffic congestion in the Abersychan area.

The B4046 runs parallel with the A4043. This road provides the access link to the A4043 for the communities of Abersychan, Talywain, Garndiffaith and Varteg. The B4046 road is increasingly being used as access to Blaenavon.

A bus service is available from Mid Torfaen and Blaenavon to Brynmawr. There are no rail links currently available.

**14. External Linkages**



South. From Pontypool the A4043 road is a fast modern road linking to the M4 via Cwmbran.

The A4043 connects with the A472 at Pontypool which links the district to Crumlin, Newbridge and the mid Valleys area. Pontypool is thus strategically situated and provides a natural gateway to the Mid Valleys and Heads of the Valleys area.

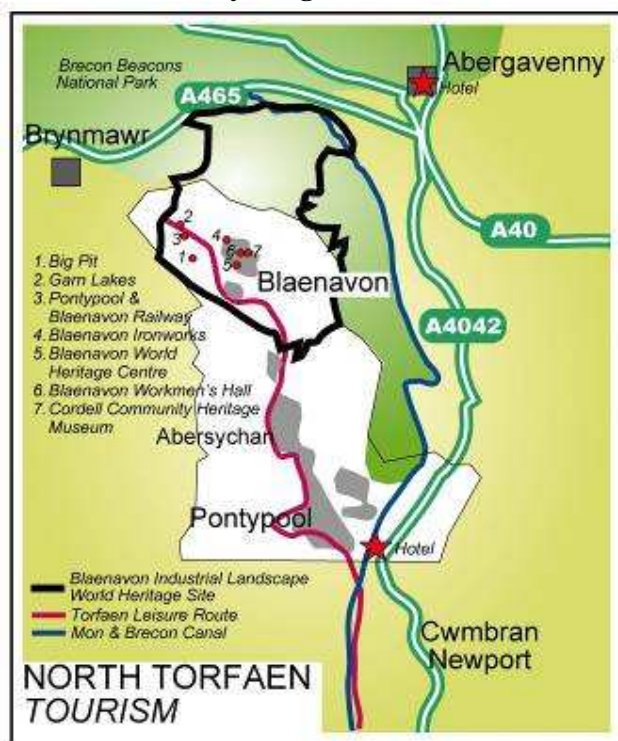
There are no direct rail links from North Torfaen, but there is a railway station at Pontypool.

North-West The B4248 road leads from Blaenavon to the town of Brynmawr (Shopping centre and leisure). The route passes over a high

mountain and suffers from poor signage, road surface and landscaping. At Brynmawr the B4248 connects with the A465 and the shopping and employment opportunities at Ebbw Vale.

North-East The B4246 is a very steep, slow and winding road which connects to the A4143 and on to the sub regional centre of Abergavenny with its. Substantial shopping centre, general hospital and leisure facilities. There is no direct rail and only limited bus links to Abergavenny from North Torfaen.

#### 14. Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park



Landscape: Blaenavon Industrial Landscapes was inscribed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites in November 2000 based on the numerous monuments and buildings of significance in and around the town and the surrounding landscape. The 32.9 square kilometres of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape includes the town of Blaenavon, places of interest such as Big Pit, the Ironworks and the Monmouth and Brecon Canal and surrounding landscape

**Blaenavon** is a pilot **walking town** and has been develop as such in accordance with

WTB policy. The walks pass historical sites from the Bronze Age, through the Industrial Revolution and into a landscape and history that inspired famous author Alexander Cordell. Each walk starts and finishes at a convenient car park, village centre, pub, picnic site or a heritage attraction

Outdoor Activities; More than 40% of **Blaenavon World Heritage Site**, including the canal, falls within the Brecon Beacons National Park which contains some of the most spectacular and distinctive upland formations in southern Britain.

This part of the World Heritage Site is outside the Heads of the Valleys Area, however, meaning that close co-operation with **Monmouthshire county borough council** is essential to fully realise the potential of the area as a whole.

#### Attractions

**Big Pit National Coal Museum** Big Pit is the main attraction within the World Heritage Site attracting over 150,000 visitors per year.

**Blaenavon Ironworks** is the best preserved blast furnace complex of its period and type in the world and therefore is the main focus of Blaenavon World Heritage Site. The site also hosts the TIC.

**Blaenavon World Heritage Centre** will be opening in spring 2007 *aided by funding from the Heads of the Valleys programme*. It will be a stand alone attraction explaining the relevance of World Heritage Sites and will

also offer an educational resource to schools and universities.

**The Blaenavon Workmen's Hall and Institute** was completed in 1895. The Workmen's Hall has been refurbished and is a fine example of a Valleys miners' institute housing a 380 seat auditorium, cinema, snooker room, bar and meeting room.

**The Cordell Community Heritage Museum** holds a collection of local objects which tell the history of the town of Blaenavon and its residents from the early days.

**Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway;** The railway line runs on a limited length of the original track but has been preserved thanks to local railway enthusiasts. It is highest standard gauge preserved railway in Wales and England. There is potential for extension along the disused tracks to the north and south.

**The Brecon and Monmouth canal** runs for 32 miles between Brecon and Pontypool and then on into Newport. Built between 1797 and 1812 the canal linked Brecon with Newport and the Severn Estuary as a way of transporting materials to ships sailing Newport Docks.

A section of the canal passes through Blaenavon World Heritage Site and takes in views of landscape and many industrial landmarks.

Cycle paths; The Newport to Blaenavon cycle route forms part of the National Cycle Network which in the south of Torfaen follows the Monmouth and Brecon canal towpath and in the north runs along the former London and North Western Railway Line.

Events; Blaenavon WHS is building a quarterly events calendar, including the Spring Literary Festival, Blaenavon World Heritage Day and Garn Lakes Activity Fair, Halloween and a winter event (i.e. lantern parade).

Accommodation; North Torfaen currently has no hotels. Visitor accommodation is mainly provided through Bed and Breakfast facilities in Abersychan, Blaenavon and Cwmavon. Nearby, a budget hotel near Pontypool and the Angel Hotel in Abergavenny are available for Visitors.

Within the WHS Pwll, Du Adventure centre with 21 beds is mainly used for outdoor education and environmental activities. This can be hired subject to availability.

**6. What needs to be done** to enable this urban cluster to function effectively

#### Retail

- New independent shops (both quality traditional and tourism businesses) need to be attracted into the main centre at Blaenavon.

#### Education

- Abersychan has an effective secondary school but is in need of urgent repairs and further investment. It is also directly linked to the leisure centre, which is not open to the public at the present time.

#### Leisure

- Improved leisure facilities and provision of a new health centre need to be developed within Blaenavon. Blaenavon's swimming pool is in need of renovation and modernising.

### Community facilities

- A new school, leisure and health centre in Blaenavon to improve living and educational standards.

### Transport

- Road links from Brynmawr (A4047) needs to be improved which could encourage traffic to enter Blaenavon from the north using the A465 and A4047. This could relieve some of the pressure on the main valley route from Pontypool.
- Road links are poor from Pontypool to Blaenavon. Localised road improvements and slight easements on this road would help to improve traffic flow. The junction from Pontnewynydd Industrial Estate needs to be improved. Traffic management within Abersychan town could be investigated to try and ease the congestion.
- Improved bus services particularly to and from Abergavenny, this would improve access to the major regional hospital and Neville Hall as well as to other areas such as Monmouth, Hereford and Worcester. Although the road has its limitations smaller buses could be appropriate.

### Housing

- Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive. This could be achieved through extending and retaining the Housing Renewal Schemes in Abersychan and Blaenavon.
- Most of the current housing stock is council rented or 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces. There is a need for modern housing in most of the settlements to diversify the housing stock and to retain and attract people to bring a halt to the population decline in recent decades. A housing development proposal has recently been approved on New Farm Road Blaenavon consisting of around one hundred houses with a variety size of accommodation.

### Mixed use

- Landscape proposals for The British could provide a major housing and employment area

and Blaensychan could provide the potential for a nature park.

### Tourism

- Acquisition of a commercial building within the town of Blaenavon for use as a centre for informal outdoor recreation would assist economic development for the town and encourage healthy living activity using the cultural landscape, and to act as a gateway centre for the Valleys Regional Park.
- The district's potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited and heritage tourism in accordance with the HERIAN concept needs to be fully addressed including holding events such as the Trail of Light. The Cordell tours a SE Wales initiative with first tour primarily in north Torfaen should be fully supported.

## **14. 2021 Vision**

*Overall. Population decline has halted and the quality of life has improved for everyone with better housing, educational provision, health services, leisure facilities and shopping centres. New high technology and green research and development value added business have invested in the area providing high quality and sustainable employment.*

*New housing and upgrading of old housing stock has encouraged young families into north Torfaen. Former council housing has benefited from stock transfer. There has been a clear reduction in anti social behaviour including effective reduction of litter. Waste disposal and husbanding of natural resources are in accordance with best principles of sustainability.*

*Secondary Hub; BLAENAVON has become a successful, nationally significant and busy "historic" tourist town with high quality/premium traditional shops for local residents needs. The town offers a range of restaurants, pubs and cafes within a high quality town environment. The town will offer facilities for visitors not only interested in industrial heritage but in outdoor pursuits including walking, cycling, hang gliding and caving. There will be several good quality B & B providers and good visitor accommodation in several pubs. There will be a small but good*

*quality camping and caravan site. The Workmen's Hall will have become a centre of increased local and visitor activity.*

*Secondary hub: **ABERSYCHAN** has become a quality town with retail outlets that meet many of the needs of the community through the provision of high quality shops. There is greater access to employment due to the improved road links and improved public transport.*

#### *Residential Areas*

*The residential settlements will be connected by improved roads to the major centre to the south and between each other. The new improved road between Blaenavon and Brynmawr will increase access to the heads of the valleys area.*

*The settlements of Blaenavon, Cwmavon, Varteg, Talywain, Pentwyn, Abersychan, and Pontnewynydd will be augmented by a new planned village at the British which will include employment opportunities.. They will all be pleasant villages with their older and former housing stock improved by renewal and better management. The centres of the village will provide for effective local shopping, health and educational needs. Anti social behaviour will have been greatly reduced through educational and social provision and effective policing.*

*There will be important new housing areas and in the design of these areas the concept of sustainability will be incorporated. The concept of sustainability and management of waste will also be evident in a greener better maintained environment.*



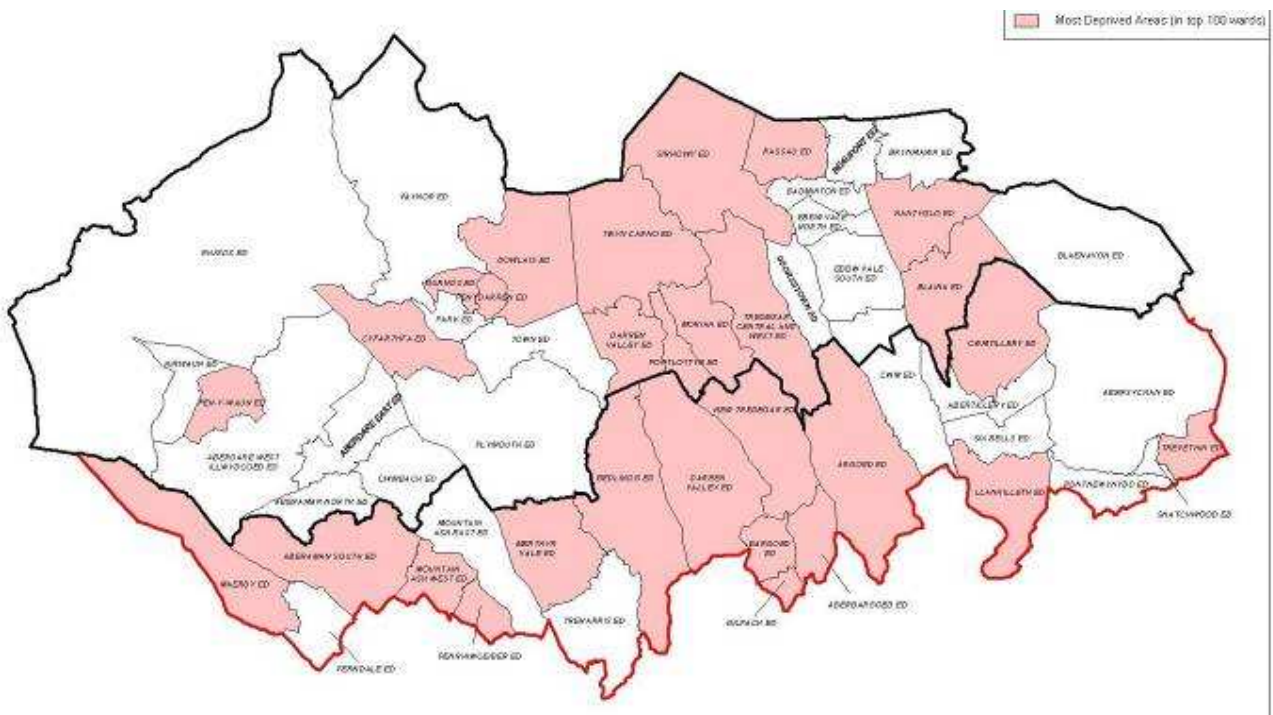
### 13. SUMMARY OF THE URBAN ANALYSIS

**Falling population** is a concern across all areas. Population decreases range from 11.0% in the Upper Rhondda Fach to only 1.3% in Ebbw Vale from 1991 to 2001. Population decline is not inevitable, however and several settlements defied the trend over this period. Aberdare’s population increased by 4.1% for example and the populations of Treorchy and Treharris also increased.

**Population decline in the Heads of the Valleys Programme Area 1991-2001**

Urban Cluster	Pop 2001	Change since 1991 %
Upper Rhondda Fawr	14,100	-3.8
Upper Rhondda Fach	7,900	-11.0
Upper & Mid Cynon Valley	52,297	-3.7
Merthyr Tydfil cb	55,980	-7.0
Upper Rhymney Valley	28,111	-8.2
Mid Sirhowy Valley	2,515	-5.2
Tredgar & Upper Sirhowy Valley	15,057	-3.7
Ebbw Vale & Ebbw Fawr Valley	23,622	-1.3
Abertillery & Ebbw Fach Valley	16,663	-6.0
Brynmawr & Upper Ebbw Fach	14,722	-2.0
North Torfaen	19,723	-3.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>250,690</b>	

**Multiple deprivation** is another concern. The Heads of the Valleys contains 30% of the 100 most deprived wards in Wales, although the area only contains 8.5% of the Welsh population overall. A solid block of very deprived areas extends across the centre of the Heads of the Valleys area, in the Upper Rhymney and upper Sirhowy Valleys.



**Role and function** The analysis identified 7 primary hubs, 7 secondary hubs and dozens of mainly residential settlements, though there are considerable differences between settlements within each category. All the primary hubs feature in the Wales retail rankings (none of the secondaries) but this ranged from Merthyr Tydfil (15<sup>th</sup>) to Pontypool (84<sup>th</sup>). Very few currently have major sites allocated for new retail development – Bargoed is an exception. Some, like Merthyr Tydfil, are already important centres for office based jobs. Others, like Blaenavon are potential tourist centres. Hirwaun is identified as a future centre because of its potential as a hub of transport links adjacent to the huge Tower Colliery development site.

A most important conclusion was that the primary centres for four of the 11 ‘urban clusters’ lie outside the Heads of the Valleys programme area – in Pontypridd, Blackwood and Pontypool. This demonstrates the strong linkages with the ‘Connections corridor’ stretching across the centre of the Valleys and suggests that the Programme needs to address concerns in certain areas outside its formal boundary to ensure the regeneration of settlements within it. Much of the Blaenavon World Heritage site lies in Monmouthshire county borough providing the need for a cross border initiative to promote and develop the site.

Many of the smaller communities are identified as ‘mainly residential’ communities but this should not be equated with a lower status or importance. Making them attractive places to live underpins the whole Spatial Strategy.

**Poor Transport links** were perceived as a major problem almost everywhere. This is a fundamental issue affecting the viability of all other regeneration initiatives. It is particularly relevant for the many settlements in narrow valleys with only one or two roads in or out of the district. In five of the 11 urban clusters road links between the hub and its dependent villages were poor. These tended also to be wards with high levels of deprivation and population loss. In several cases, good rail services to the Connections Corridor and Cardiff stopped at the Heads of the Valleys towns, which tend to have only one train an hour, or a mineral railway line only.

The potential strength of the **Tourism offer** is evident both in terms of attractions such as Big Pit, the Ironworks and the steam railway at Blaenavon, the International Climbing centre at Bedlinog, the Brecon Mountain railway in Merthyr Tydfil, Festival Shopping at Ebbw Val, events such as the Nos Galon race at Mountain Ash, the annual Blues Festival at Abertillery, country parks, cycle and footpaths almost everywhere and hundreds of heritage sites, including the World Heritage Site at Blaenavon. Almost all districts had considerable potential to contribute to the Valleys regional Park.

Some 18 **Strategic Sites** have been identified. All are previously developed or ‘brownfield’ sites. One of the least appreciated assets of the Heads of the Valleys Programme Area is this vast supply of ‘brownfield’ land. This means the area has huge potential for sustainable development, in line with the Welsh Assembly’s Government’s basic ethos. The total area of the 15 largest brownfield sites in the area (there are many hundreds of smaller ones) is around 1,500 hectares. For comparison, the employment land bank for the whole of South East Wales in 2005 was 1,389 hectares.

The sites are allocated in the local development plans of the 5 local authorities for a variety of uses including employment, housing and recreation. Much of the land is planned to revert to countryside, but even here there are opportunities to enhance the Valleys Regional Park if restoration is planned properly. Several of the larger sites, including Tower Colliery, Rassau east and west and Rhyd y Blew/Bryn Serth, will be directly served by junctions of the planned A465 dual carriageway.

The exploitation and development of major brownfield sites in the Heads of the Valleys Programme Area is therefore a key factor in the future economic success of the Heads of the Valleys. In the meantime the Heads of the Valleys programme will be seeking to unlock the potential of these key sites for private sector development, public urban facilities or major hubs of activity in the proposed Valleys Regional Park in order to spearhead physical regeneration in the sub-region.

Several new **Hospitals** are planned as are for the first time, including Local General Hospitals at Mountain Ash and Ebbw Vale. **Higher Education** facilities are proposed at Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale, complementing Further Education facilities in these towns and at Aberdare and Rhymney.

There are many industrial estates providing **employment** but very few business parks accommodating service sector jobs. A regular theme throughout the area was the need to diversify the opportunities for employment, particularly into the service industries. **Access to employment** is an equally important issue with the poor transport links throughout the area limiting access to job opportunities for residents of the communities most in need of them.

The lack of modern **Housing** is perceived as a problem in every urban cluster and is inextricably linked with the problem of population decline. In very many villages which otherwise would benefit from having a strong community and attractive surroundings, the choice of housing is limited to 19<sup>th</sup> century terraced housing or council or housing association rented accommodation.

## 18. WHAT MUST BE DONE

The preceding sections of this strategy have identified a long list of actions that must be carried out if the identified roles and functions of each urban cluster are to be realised successfully. This section summarises these proposals by topic, across the Heads of the Valleys as a whole.

### **Retailing and Town Centres**

Town centres are at the heart of the Spatial Strategy as they form the ‘hubs’ around which each urban cluster is based. In many parts of the country there is a clear hierarchy of settlements with a market or county town serving a wide rural area or a major city surrounded by commuter villages but the Valleys are not like that. Because of the topography of the Valleys and the historical development of towns based around mines and metal works there is no single large centre but many medium sized towns, often in quite close proximity. This need not be a problem as long as each centre recognises its limitations, seeks to complement rather than compete against, its neighbours and builds on its strengths rather than striving to be the same as everywhere else.

A number of common themes emerge from the urban analysis sections;

- The need for the larger centres to widen their shopping ‘offer’ by attracting new stores. Few acknowledge, however, that for this to happen, areas of the town centre must be redeveloped to provide new modern shop units. Bargoed is an exception.
- The smaller centres and some of the larger ones want to trade on their character and sense of being different. In some cases – Aberdare, Abertillery and Pontypool are examples – there is a rich architectural heritage to draw upon if it can be saved from deterioration and desecration. In others – Treorchy and Ferndale, for example - relative isolation has meant that there is still a very strong representation of traditional, locally owned independent shops such as butcher and bakers and some specialist retailers. With increasing disillusion with the ‘clone town’ offer of centres that all look the same, the distinctiveness and friendly local service offered by such towns offers a future strategy for viability.
- Improvements to the public realm is a constant theme. Although such improvements do not produce jobs directly, safe and attractive streets and public spaces are an essential pre-requisite if town centres are to attract investment.
- Town centre infrastructure shortcomings, such as inadequate parking, is recognised as a constraint in Aberdare but in fact applies to most of the centres.
- There is a recognition that the town centres need to diversify from retailing into other appropriate activities such as leisure, cultural facilities, housing and employment, in order for them to remain or become viable and vibrant centres of activity in their respective urban clusters.
- Lack of town centre management – an essential day to day service in most UK towns today - has been flagged up in Blaenau Gwent in particular.

Most of the centres already have action plans either in place or in the process of being drawn up. These have in most cases been produced by specialist consultants to address the particular need of each centre but need to be re-examined in the light of this strategy. An indication of the size of the job to be done is given by the calculation by the Heads of the Valleys Programme’s Town centres Group that current plans for all of the town centres amounts to £128.5 million of works but that this would draw in at least the same amount of private investment into the area.

*The heads of the Valleys programme is already carrying out many of these proposals by investing more than £5 million in Blaenavon, Abertillery, Bargoed, Merthyr Tydfil and Ferndale in the first 3 year programme and by funding town centre management initiatives, including Blaenau Gwent’s first town centre managers. Subsequent 3 year action plans will complement other funding streams to address the needs of the other centres identified in this strategy.*

## **Tourism**

The Heads of the Valleys Programme has funded studies into the concept of the Valleys Regional Park – a concept which looks at the tremendous range of countryside recreation assets across the Valleys and proposes to plan their development strategically and market them as single entity, with the aim of giving the Valleys a very positive ‘green’ image both inside and outside the area. The aim is to create a comprehensive network of open recreational spaces linked by a comprehensive network of cycleways and footpaths that will serve every community in the Valleys and will prove an enormous attraction to visitors.

Some common themes to emerge from the urban analysis are;

- The importance of the town centres to tourism in the area. These centres serve not only local people but visitors and are invariably contribute to the vital ‘first impressions’ that visitors form of the area. In Aberdare a specific Townscape Heritage Initiative will contribute to this, as has a recent similar initiative in Rhymney. Proposals to enhance Merthyr Tydfil’s finer buildings are a key part of plans for the town centre.
- Almost all of the districts stress the need to make a contribution to the Valleys Regional Park and most are well placed to do so. New country parks, cyclepath links and trails are proposed in a most districts. Other proposals include a new festival at Tredegar, mountain bike trails at Abertillery and a hotel at Brynmawr.
- At Blaenavon, in addition to initiatives already funded, like the new visitor centre, a new indoor informal recreation centre is proposed and a number of new events and themed trails.

## **Transport**

It is in the field of transport that the Spatial Strategy has the most ambitious and fundamentally, the most important set of proposals to make. For it is the links between the hubs and supporting settlements and the links between hubs and between the Heads of the Valleys and adjacent sub-regions that in the end determine how each urban cluster functions in practice and whether each town and village will succeed in realising its aspirations.

It must be stressed that the suggested list of transportation proposals arising from this strategy are specifically not based on traffic forecasts or standard cost-benefit analyses. They relate first and foremost to enabling settlements to function properly in a viable role in relation to the towns and villages around them and larger key centres outside the sub-region.

functioning of the Heads of the Valleys sub-region can be divided into three groups;

- a) Improvements to the connections between the sub-region and other sub-regions.
- b) Improvements to linkages within the sub-region itself

## **Transport constraints identified by the Strategy**

### **a) Connections between the sub-region and other sub-regions.**

This is properly a matter for the South East Wales Regional Transport Plan to address but the following broad brush issues have been identified that are relevant to the Heads of the Valleys Strategy;

- **To the North** links are of a reasonable standard enabling, for example, parts of Mid Wales to benefit from the expanding retail and leisure offer in Merthyr Tydfil.
- **To the East** improvements to the A465 to Abergavenny are ongoing. Once the A465 has been dualled from Abergavenny to Tredegar it will form, together with the A470, the M4 and the A40/A449 to the east, a complete circuit of fast modern highways around South East Wales – the region’s equivalent of

London's M25.

- **To the West**, the top priority is to accelerate the planned dualling of the A465 from Dowlais to Hirwaun. If this scheme is spread over a long period of time it the disruption caused could actually discourage investment and recovery in the Heads of the Valleys Programme area rather than boosting it as intended.
- Although not a strategic route, improvements to the A4061/A4107 between Treorchy and Glyncoed / Maesteg are needed to reduce the sense of isolation of the Rhondda Fawr and to facilitate the development of the Valleys Regional Park (around Glyncoed).
  
- **Links to the South** are, however the most important to the Heads of the Valleys Programme Area in strategic terms but many links are currently unsatisfactory;
  - Although an hourly passenger rail service is to be introduced in 2007 from Ebbw Vale to Cardiff, the infrequent service, small number of stations and lack of a link to Newport will detract from its regeneration potential.
  - Rail service have been recently doubled in many parts of the Valleys but in most cases the frequency of service to the Heads of the Valleys area is significantly less than that provided in the mid and lower valleys.
  - Road links between the Heads of the Valleys Plus and Connections Corridor sub-regions are patchy with excellent links in, for example the Taff Valleys contrasting with generally poor links almost everywhere else.
  
  - *Addressing the quality of the transport links between the Heads of the Valleys Plus and Connections Corridor sub-regions should therefore be a high priority for the RTP and the SE Wales Framework of the Wales Spatial Plan.*

#### **a) Connections within the Heads of the Valleys Programme Area.**

A large number of transport constraints preventing the communities in the Heads of the Valleys Programme area from realising their full potential have been identified in the Urban Analysis chapters of this strategy.

It is recognised that removing them will take a long period of time - perhaps longer than the time scale of this strategy - and involve the investment of scarce resources but that is no reason for not striving toward this key long term goal.

Much has been achieved in this field since the Welsh Assembly was established, including the Cwm bypass, the Rhondda Fach relief road and the recent commencement of a relief road for Bargoed.

It is recognised that many of the roads links described as 'poor' are in fact *perceived* as poor rather than objectively identified as such in traffic capacity terms, but in the fields of investment and regeneration, perception is everything. In most cases 'improvement' will not necessitate the building of an expensive and environmentally disruptive dual carriageway or grade separated junction. Instead a package of more modest proposals to remove sharp bends, provide overtaking stretches, improve substandard junctions, provide traffic lights or widen some stretches of the road will make all difference between a village or town being perceived as isolated and inaccessible and it becoming a desirable place to live or visit.

The following list of 26 proposed improvements comprises 10 public transport proposals and 16 road improvement proposals, some of which are already programmed.

#### ***Local transport constraints identified in this Strategy include;***

##### **a) Upper Rhondda Fawr**

Current road connections are, alas, poor in all directions. Requirements are;

1. The traffic congestion at Stag Square in Treorchy needs to be resolved and proposals are being developed.
2. Long term proposals for a new road that would relieve traffic and open up new development land.
3. The Mountain Roads North and West of the area need to be improved to enable the Rhondda Fawr to access opportunities in adjacent districts, particularly at Hirwaun

#### **b)Upper Rhondda Fach**

4. Ferndale needs an inner relief road to relieve traffic congestion in the town centre to enable it to function properly as the district's secondary centre.
5. In the long term the Upper Rhondda Fach relief road needs to be extended as far as Maerdy to reduce the isolation of this area.
6. For similar reasons the mountain road to Aberdare should be improved to the mutual benefit of both the Upper Rhondda Fach and Aberdare.

#### **c)Cynon Valley**

7. The proposed cross valley link roads around Mountain Ash are essential to ease congestion in the town centre and provide access to communities along the Cynon Valley.
8. The rail service to Cardiff should be improved and extended to Hirwaun.
9. The road link between Aberdare and Hirwaun also needs improvement if the regeneration potential of Hirwaun is to be realised.

#### **d)Merthyr Tydfil**

10. Dualling of the remaining sections of the A4685 Heads of the Valleys Trunk Road between Merthyr Tydfil and Hirwaun.
11. Improved rail services to Cardiff and increased frequency and timetabling of bus services across the County Borough.
12. Greater use of the Taff Bargoed Mineral railway line, potentially as a passenger line to serve the settlements of Bedlinog, Trelewis and Treharris.
13. Re-development of the existing Bus Station in Merthyr Tydfil to provide a modern, purpose built transport facility to improve public access to the town centre.

#### **e)Upper Rhymney & Sirhowy Valleys**

14. Rail services need to be increased between Rhymney and Bargoed.
15. The A469 through this district needs to be substantially improved to facilitate access to employment facilities and services in the Mid Valleys corridor. The scheduled opening of a new general hospital for the county borough to the south at Ystrad Mynach, the need for improvement to this section of the A469 will become even more acute.
16. Transport links to the Oakdale/Blackwood sub-region need to be improved to provide access to jobs.

#### **f) Mid Sirhowy Valley**

17. The A4048 needs improvement, not just to support the viability and improve the environments of Markham, Hollybush and Argoed but also to integrate Tredegar and Blackwood more fully into the region as a whole.

### **g)Tredegar**

18. The road links between Tredegar and Blackwood would benefit from upgrading as the road is poor and acts as a fundamental constraint to north-south movements.
19. Access to railway services at Rhymney need to be improved along with improvement to the frequency of the service. A new bus route needs to link Tredegar with the new Ebbw Vale railway line. This could be achieved by one bus route that serves both the Rhymney station and the new proposed station in Ebbw Vale

### **h)Ebbw Vale**

20. Ebbw Vale needs to be accessed easily on a multi-modal basis and improvements to public transport, on foot, by bicycle and by private car are necessary to encourage local residents and visitors spending in the town.

### **i)Abertillery**

21. A direct rail link to the Ebbw Valley line would transform the town's attractiveness as a place to live

### **j)Brynmawr**

22. Public transport should be provided to the new rail station at Ebbw Vale and the education and training facilities at the Corus regeneration site.

23. The B4248 road to Blaenavon should be improved to provide better access to the area from the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road.

### **k)Upper Torfaen**

24. Road links from Brynmawr (A4047) needs to be improved which could encourage traffic to enter Blaenavon from the north using the A465 and A4047. This could relieve some of the pressure on the main valley route from Pontypool.

25. Road links are poor from Pontypool to Blaenavon. Localised road improvements and slight easements on this road would help to improve traffic flow. The junction from Pontnewynydd Industrial Estate needs to be improved. Traffic management within Abersychan town could be investigated to try and ease the congestion.

26. Improved bus services particularly to and from Abergavenny, would improve access to the major regional hospital and Neville Hall as well as to other areas such as Monmouth, Hereford and Worcester. Although the road has its limitations smaller buses could be appropriate.

## **Housing**

- All districts, without exception stressed the need for new housebuilding to stem out migration from their respective areas.
- All districts also stressed the need to make existing housing areas more attractive, whether through Housing Renewal Areas where there is extensive 19<sup>th</sup> century housing or the renewal of social housing estates or straightforward environmental enhancements.
- In some areas, eg the Cynon Valley and North Torfaen specific housing or mixed use sites were proposed for housing development, in most cases on 'key strategic sites' identified below.

## **Other Issues**

Some issues were specific to particular areas, including;

- The need for better community facilities in Merthyr Tydfil, Abertillery, Tredegar and Blaenavon.
- Develop a new leisure complex in Merthyr Tydfil (now started) and in Bargoed town centre. Better leisure provision in Ebbw Vale.

- Training and/or technology centres at Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney
- Provide a gas supply to the villages in the Mid Sirhowy Valley
- Diversify the local employment base at Tredegar (though in fact the analysis implies that this could apply to all districts)
- Improvements to schools in North Torfaen

The above is very much a provisional list and will no doubt be added to in due course. A few issues stand out, however and will continue to do so –

- *The crucial role played by the 13 main and secondary ‘hubs’ in the sub-region*
- *The potential of 20 key strategic sites to spearhead the regeneration of the Heads of the Valleys*
- *The immense leisure and tourism potential of the whole area, particularly for countryside recreation.*
- *The critical role that poor transport links – whether real or perceived – play in holding back the potential of the sub-region’s towns and villages*
- *The need for new housing and improvements to the existing stock.*