

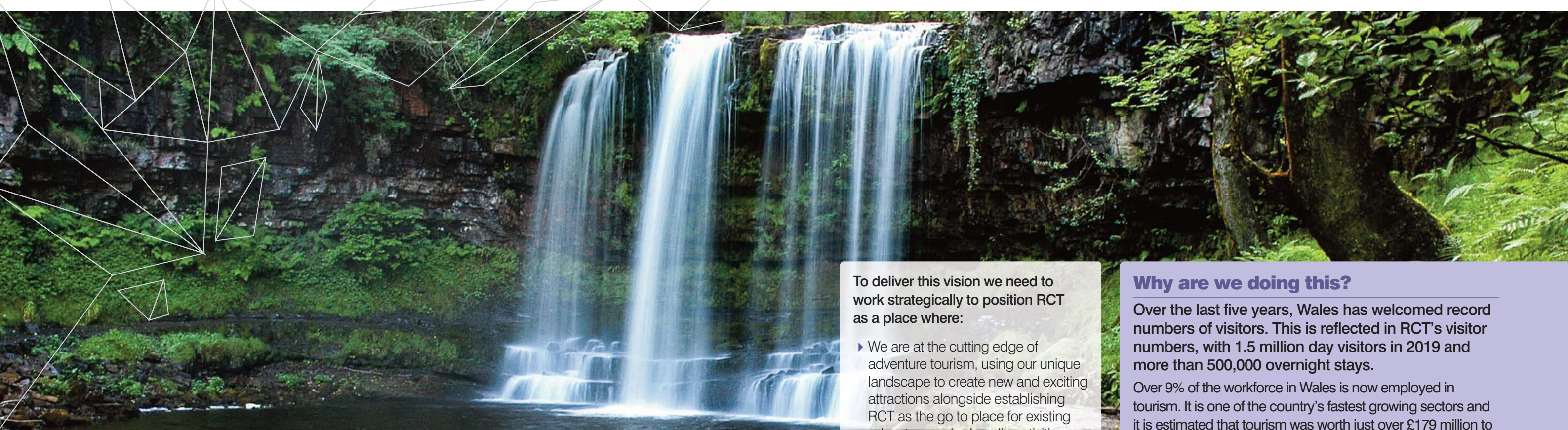
RHONDDA CYNON TAF

# Tourism Strategy



RHONDDA CYNON TAF





**Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) is renowned the world over for its pivotal role in the industrial revolution and we can still boast of a rich heritage and cultural history. However, now that the coal mines have gone, our landscape has returned to a breath-taking expanse of natural beauty that will rival any landscape in the country. The only difference between RCT's landscape and those that are already major tourism destinations is that ours is for the most part a secret!**

The Council has ambitious plans for tourism and this strategy sets out to establish RCT as:

*"The premier destination in the UK for "experience" based visits and vacations showcasing our first class landscape, culture and heritage."*

Central to this vision is the strength of our natural landscape, culture and heritage. Our landscape is breath-taking and stands alongside any of the more tried and tested destinations in the UK and our social history and heritage assets tell a story of innovation, ingenuity and impassioned Valleys communities. These unique selling points provide a foundation on which this Strategy will build upon and enhance.

**To deliver this vision we need to work strategically to position RCT as a place where:**

- ▶ We are at the cutting edge of adventure tourism, using our unique landscape to create new and exciting attractions alongside establishing RCT as the go to place for existing adventure and adrenalin activities.
- ▶ We are the premier destination for all those seeking an active lifestyle, maximising the benefits of our outstanding landscapes.
- ▶ Our thriving culture and heritage is maximised to the full, benefiting residents and tourists alike.
- ▶ Our accommodation is not just a place to stay but is an experience in its own right.
- ▶ That the excellent food, drink, attractions and events that will be at the heart of our offer are locally provided and sourced.
- ▶ Our calendar is packed with the very best in local and major events across all the arts and sports.
- ▶ That fundamentally, RCT is a destination with a sense of drama and place where the narrative of our pioneering past is reinvented to provide a first class, contemporary visitor experience.

### **Why are we doing this?**

Over the last five years, Wales has welcomed record numbers of visitors. This is reflected in RCT's visitor numbers, with 1.5 million day visitors in 2019 and more than 500,000 overnight stays.

Over 9% of the workforce in Wales is now employed in tourism. It is one of the country's fastest growing sectors and it is estimated that tourism was worth just over £179 million to the RCT economy in 2019 and employed more than 2000 people. It is clear that tourism has the potential to be the main driver of the local economy and source of employment in large parts of the County Borough.

### **What do we need to do?**

Evidently the tourism industry is changing. People are moving away from traditional package holidays and instead are increasingly piecing together their own getaways, predominantly through the internet, seeking an 'experience' based break or holiday with the ubiquitous opportunity for a once in a lifetime selfie.

To maximise the opportunities that marrying our fantastic landscape and heritage with the changing face of tourism presents, this strategy recommends that we target our efforts in the following areas:

- ▶ 1. Product & Attractions
- ▶ 2. Accommodation
- ▶ 3. Accessibility, Infrastructure & Connectivity
- ▶ 4. Skills & Employment
- ▶ 5. Experience



**Parc Rhanbarthol  
y Cymoedd**



**Valleys  
Regional Park**





# Product & Attractions

**It is essential that we build upon our existing visitor products and attractions by developing new high quality destinations. The success of the RCT visitor economy depends upon having a number of high quality, unique visitor offerings, that can create itineraries and packages to provide short and long stay opportunities.**

To fully realise our ambition of being the premier destination in the UK for “experience” based visits and vacations we need to develop a suite of strategic, nationally renowned attractions that will act as an anchor for our whole visitor offer. Attractions such as Zip World and the potential development of the Rhondda Tunnel are just what we need to bring people to the area from far and wide.

Our tourism offer will receive a massive boost through the development of the new Zip World attraction at the former Tower Colliery site in Rhigos. However, it is critical that we guard against visitors solely using Zip World and returning to where they came from without visiting and experiencing any other parts of our area, spending in our communities and boosting the local economy.

Visitor numbers to RCT are growing year on year but the vast majority that come are day visitors. To truly maximise the economic benefits to our communities of the tourism sector we need to create the conditions whereby those day visits are converted to overnight stays, overnight stays become weekend breaks and eventually RCT is established as a major destination for full blown holidays.

It is therefore critical that we establish a series of attractions that will encourage visitors to undertake multiple activities over more than one day. We already have a number of attractions in RCT that perform well, with the National Lido of Wales – Lido Ponty, a Welsh Coal Mining Experience at Rhondda Heritage Park, Royal Mint Experience and Penderyn Whiskey Distillery all seeing strong visitor numbers. Whilst it is important to continue to support and develop these in the future, we also need to see additional attractions developed that will showcase our ambition to be a premier experience based destination.

These can take a range of forms. We can replicate attractions that we know are successful in other parts of the UK and Ireland such as Zip World and high wire rope bridges. We can maximise the untapped resources we already have such as developing the Rhondda Tunnel as the longest of its kind in Europe and the stunning reservoirs we have that are for the most part hidden from the public. It is also important that we find innovative products and attractions that will put us at the cutting edge of adventure based tourism and outdoor leisure.

Action plans will need to be produced to identify the areas where new attractions can be developed and where appropriate, work with sector leading providers to enable their delivery.

Alongside the delivery of these major attractions it is important that we maximise the benefit and use of our smaller scale assets such as Clydach Vale Lake and Nantgarw Chinaworks as they have a significant role to play in providing a complementary and additional offer alongside our major attractions.

Natural Resources Wales has also identified the need to encourage user access on its land, not only to connect local communities with their landscape as a part of the Active Travel and Health and Wellbeing agenda but also to encourage a guardianship presence in isolated forestry and rural environments. The opening of forestry routes presents significant opportunities for tourists to explore areas previously inaccessible to them and install infrastructure to service those visitors.







# Accommodation

**Our accommodation offer will range from high end boutique hotels to quality bunkhouses and caravanning facilities. To ensure we deliver on our ambition to significantly increase the amount of visitors that stay in RCT it is critical that we see an increase in the amount of accommodation available in the County Borough which needs to be of high quality, varied in nature and will also appeal to a wide range of visitors.**

Based on current figures, RCT does not have enough bed spaces or accommodation available to satisfy the existing visitor numbers travelling to RCT. With potential projects such as Zip World developing in the area, it is expected that visitor numbers will significantly increase and therefore the development of additional accommodation is vital to capitalise on the associated increased visitor spend.

There is an opportunity to provide a unique accommodation offer that is bespoke to the type of tourism and locations we are seeking to promote and develop. Adventure tourists appreciate the experience that quirky offers such as 'glamping' can provide and the rise of Airbnb in our area demonstrates that there is a demand for a range of self-catering accommodation. This provides an opportunity for a significant boost to the local economy in valleys communities as existing property is repurposed to meet an increasing visitor demand.

There are opportunities to explore the development of hotels that can service large numbers of tourists in key towns such as Pontypridd and towns like Aberdare can be increasingly recognised as a tourist town at the gateway to our 'adventure' landscape and the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The accommodation offer in RCT is growing and strengthening with existing hotels such as Llechwen Hall and Premier Inn expanding their capacity and new entrants to the market such as the high class boutique hotel at Lanelay Hall highlighting how successful a quality offer can be.

Funding opportunities are available through Valleys Regional Park and Visit Wales and these are helping to facilitate the improvements to the hotel accommodation at Dare Valley Country Park and the Cardiff Arms Bistro in Treorchy. However, it is important that this momentum is maintained and all opportunities for funding are maximised.





# Accessibility, Infrastructure and Connectivity

**The success of a tourism destination is reliant upon its infrastructure and connectivity. Transport links and public transport availability, car parking, signage, accessible facilities and understanding how they interconnect is vital to ensure a positive visitor experience.**

RCT has good infrastructure and connectivity to the A470 (Cambrian Way), A465 and M4, enabling convenient links to Cardiff and Newport in the South, Swansea in the West and northwards through to the Midlands, travelling through some of the most scenic landscapes Wales has to offer. Destinations such as Bristol & Bath are within an hour and a half catchment of RCT and the A465 connects RCT to Abergavenny, Monmouth, and the Midlands positioning RCT favourably within the Cardiff Capital Region.

By 2022/23, connectivity into and within RCT will be significantly improved via the Metro and Valleys Lines Electrification. Transport for Wales have indicated benefits such as improved travel times, better commuter conditions and renovated station facilities. Dualling of the A465 will improve accessibility to the North Cynon Valley.

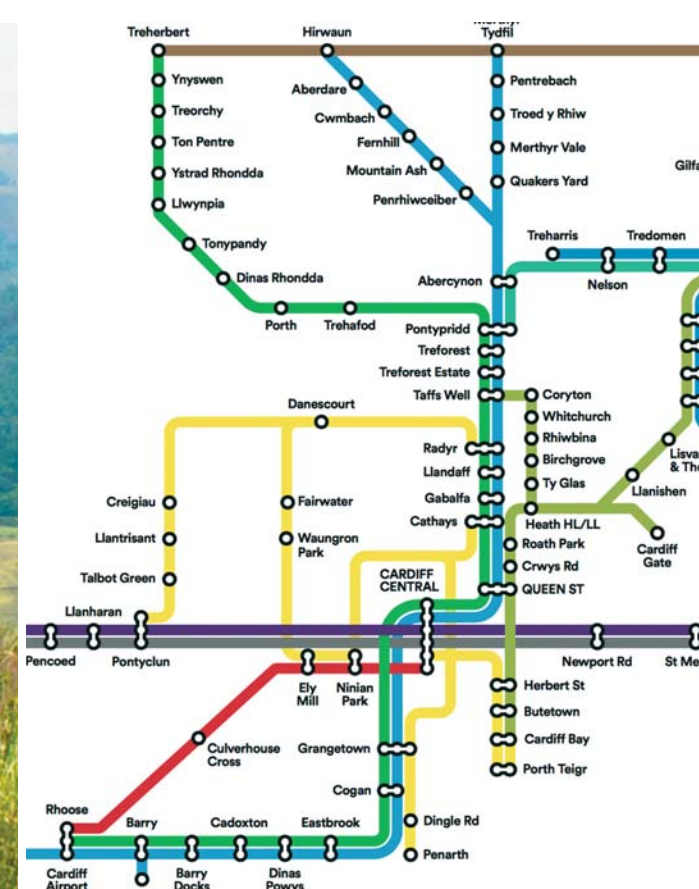
It also needs to be recognised that increases in visitors accessing RCT has the potential to lead to issues such as those now seen at places like Storey Arms in the Brecon Beacons where large numbers of visitors to Pen y Fan are having to park indiscriminately over the highway verges as parking infrastructure and public transport have not kept up.

It is important that strategic plans are developed identifying opportunities for new car parks to be provided to serve the new visitor attractions envisaged by this strategy and it will be increasingly important that the implementation of the South Wales Metro is maximised through an integrated transport offer that will encourage visitors to arrive by public transport and other low carbon means of travel.

Infrastructure to serve the needs of visitors should be developed including toilet facilities and the challenge of making heritage and adventure attractions accessible to all needs to be addressed in the development of our delivery plans.

Infrastructure that will deliver against the Council's carbon reduction ambition is vital and plans for innovative, "green" sustainable solutions for implementation and maintenance will need to be developed. Funding to support carbon neutral initiatives should be investigated to provide RCT with an opportunity to lead the way in green tourism innovation. There is an opportunity to pilot initiatives, such as carbon neutral places to stay, which intertwine carbon efficient measures and actions which protect biodiversity and manage eco systems effectively.

The role of digital infrastructure needs to be explored further with a view to placing RCT at the forefront of digitally connected destinations. The use of mobile technology should be investigated to enable an integrated booking platform allowing for the online booking of tickets, packages and itineraries through the RCT tourism website.







# Skills & Employment

**Improving the tourism economy in RCT means encouraging the development of tourism related skills and supporting the creation of well paid, secure jobs within the industry for local residents.**

Welsh Government has identified tourism as one of the nine Priority Sectors which underpin the Economy of Wales and with tourism in RCT worth over £179 million to the local economy, it is vital that communities become aware of the importance of capturing the benefits of increased visitors and local businesses develop skills which will benefit the customer service and tourism sectors. The RCT's Corporate Plan 2016-2020, "The Way Forward" and "Our Cwm Taf", the Public Services Board Well-being Plan identifies the importance of developing skillsets within the local workforce, acknowledging that the strength in RCT's visitor offer stems from our local communities.

According to the Employer Skills Survey: 2017 Wales Data report, there were 1,200 vacancies within the Hotel & Restaurant sector in 2017 due to skill shortages. With the right training and support, significant opportunities will present themselves for local people and businesses to thrive in a vibrant tourism industry. Given the nature of the adventure, landscape based tourism offer that is likely to flourish there is potential for a wide range of hospitality roles and jobs to become available in the very places in RCT where employment opportunities have been most challenging.

As our tourism offer flourishes it is natural that a large proportion of visitors to RCT will be coming here for the first time, and their perception of our ex-coalfield communities and landscape may be prejudiced by outdated and stereotyped anecdotes. It is therefore critical that alongside a high quality physical and natural environment, the customer service they receive whilst they are here needs to be of the highest quality. It is paramount that hospitality jobs are not second rate jobs, and in order to provide the best customer and visitor experience possible we need people working in the sector to be well trained and valued.

As a unique selling point, there are opportunities to promote the use of the Welsh Language within the hospitality and accommodation sectors and provide Welsh Language skills to the local workforce.

Great work has already been undertaken within RCT to focus on skills development and job creation. Our Human Resources team supports local businesses by providing advice, guidance and signposting for workforce development. There is now an opportunity to develop this further with a specific focus on tourism related roles to maximise the benefit of new job roles coming into the sector such as those from outdoor activity attractions like Zip World.

Working with partners such as Coleg y Cymoedd and The University of South Wales, there are opportunities to undertake work to identify skills shortages within the sector and develop courses which will provide the skills required by the industry and facilitate the development of home grown tourism entrepreneurs.

Many tourism attractions in the County Borough use volunteers and this is beneficial not only to the attraction itself but also to the volunteers, who can develop a skillset that can be taken forward into future employment. There are many social and wellbeing benefits to volunteering and opportunities should be investigated with third sector partners.







# Experience

**The destination experience is at the heart of RCT tourism. RCT will provide a first class, positive and unique experience which visitors will want to repeat and tell others about.**

Visitors are coming to the South Wales valleys and RCT in particular for its spectacular countryside and unique environment and we can build on this further, maximising the potential of adventure experiences with the Global Adventure Tourism Market Report 2016–2020 predicting a 46% growth in the adventure market globally by 2020.

It is possible for RCT to position itself as a premier visitor experience destination for adventure (both cultural and activity adventure tourism), outdoor, adrenaline and activity tourism, which will enhance our year round tourism offer.

We should develop experience based packages and itineraries covering all parts of the visitor experience (eating, drinking, doing and staying) and where appropriate maximise the benefits of cross boundary relationships and attractions.

In order to position RCT as a premier destination within the Valleys Regional Park a clear and distinct tourism brand should be developed to benefit the whole of the sector including attractions, accommodation, communities and local services. Establishing and developing the brand will rely heavily on partnership buy-in.

Plans should be developed to maximise the opportunities presented by emerging tourism themes such as Wellbeing Tourism which is already being identified as a lucrative market by accommodation providers such as Lanelay Hall and potential businesses such as Bryn Gobaith Farm. The potential of genealogy and packages which promote the Welsh Language and local culture should also be investigated.

There are clear opportunities to build on the strong programme of events in RCT and work with Visit Wales and Welsh Government's Major Events Unit to bring specialist and major events to RCT which in turn will introduce an increased number of visitors to the area.

The destination experience begins prior to a visitor getting to RCT. There are opportunities to re-brand and position RCT favourably online by providing a mechanism to book and plan a visit and itinerary before arriving. Redeveloping the tourism website to include initiatives such as interactive mapping and the ability to book tickets in theatres and attractions will help to co-ordinate the visitor offer and provide a hassle free, pre-visit experience.

Responding to visitor and resident requirements, the redevelopment of the tourism website for RCT will incorporate interactive mapping, e-commerce functionality and booking systems to improve the customer and visitor experience. There are also further opportunities to explore through social media channels in ways to engage and interact with visitors.







# Next Steps

**The RCT Tourism Strategy is a partnership document and it is recommended that it should be delivered through the establishment of a RCT Strategic Steering Group in addition to the oversight from the Council's Scrutiny process and decision making by Cabinet. The Strategic Steering Group should be comprised of RCT Council representatives alongside major players from the Tourism Sector in RCT supplemented, where appropriate, by representatives from the wider industry.**

RCT Council will be responsible for evaluating and reporting to the Steering Group on the Tourism Action Plan, organising meetings and amending or adapting this Strategy in the future. RCT Council will lead on tourism data collection and surveying to inform future STEAM reports and will ensure that economic data in relation to STEAM is shared with the Strategic Steering Group.

The Tourism Action Plan will be reported upon quarterly. The RCT Tourism Strategy and associated action plan will be reviewed annually with input from Scrutiny Committees and the Strategic Steering Group.