



# Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners

Planning Design Economics

## HIRWAUN VILLAGE STUDY

Prepared on behalf of Rhondda  
Cynon Taf County Borough Council

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

- This report provides detailed information about Hirwaun and makes recommendations on the sustainable enhancement of this key village.
- It considers the supply, nature and quality of local facilities and the extent to which they are presently serving the needs of the local community. On-site research was supplemented by consultation with various stakeholders.
- This approach has enabled us to make recommendations on the need for improvement and development in respect of key sectors such as retail, leisure, community facilities, information facilities, education, health and connections including pedestrian, public and private transport routes and facilities.
- Hirwaun has accommodated a relatively large amount of residential development in recent years in relation to its modest size but this has not been replicated in an increased provision of local services and facilities. The result has been an inability to adequately serve the needs of the community and the surrounding villages.

### **Current supply of public facilities**

- Retail provision in the village is limited, dispersed, of a small-scale and is mainly used for 'top up' shopping purposes. The shopping area within Hirwaun contains a high proportion of vacant shop units.
- The two main community facilities in Hirwaun are the YMCA Youth and Community Centre and the Village Hall. Whilst the YMCA is a well used community facility the village hall is less so.
- The library and the YMCA are currently very popular and are considered to be the main contributors in providing access to information within Hirwaun village. However, both facilities are full to capacity which subsequently limits the benefits they can bring to the community.
- In terms of educational facilities, Hirwaun has only one primary school. This is in a poor physical condition and is currently operating at capacity.
- Hirwaun benefits from one primary health care facility. The surgery is small, in a poor physical condition and is not to current standards. A small dentist surgery is also located on the High Street although this is full to capacity.
- Hirwaun has a number of outdoor sport facilities, the largest being Hirwaun Welfare. The majority of these are of a poor quality with associated access and public safety problems.
- Four small play areas are located with Hirwaun which offer play facilities in close proximity to the main housing areas. The play areas are of a poor quality in terms of the condition and type of play facilities they offer with the exception of the playground at Springfield Gardens which was found to be of a modern design and to provide a safer and more appealing play space.
- Hirwaun currently has no formal indoor sports facility, but existing community facilities such as the Hirwaun YMCA are alternatively used for a variety of sporting uses.

- Hirwaun has limited provision for tourists.
- Within the centre of Hirwaun itself there are limited employment opportunities. However, two industrial estates are located within the area which do provide employment prospects although, within these estates, many units were found to be vacant.
- Hirwaun is easily accessed by road and has a reasonably good bus service although this has its limitations.

### **The Vision for Hirwaun**

- Hirwaun is a small settlement but has considerable opportunity for enhancement and to provide a greater level and range of facilities to meet the needs of the local community and make a positive contribution to the long term viability of RCT as a whole.
- It is possible to establish the village as an exemplar of sustainable community development wherein the level of provision reflects its scale and the appropriate needs of all residents are met within the context of the village.
- The local challenge is to remedy this imbalance and to ensure that any future population growth contributes towards the enhancement of the village rather than further undermining its strength and profile as has been the case in recent years.
- In spite of this, it is neither wished nor expected that Hirwaun will develop into a major town. The vision for its development is based upon the expectation that it will remain a large village.

### **Future Elements within Hirwaun**

- The high proportion of vacant units that currently exists is of concern and more needs to be done to restrict the further loss of retail units and to encourage more retail activity.
- Better use should be made of existing community buildings, in particular, the village hall. An alternative, larger and more centrally located site should also be sought for the YMCA.
- In terms of access to information, an extension to the library would provide more usable space within the building in order for the needs of the community to be better provided.
- The relocation of the YMCA would similarly provide a greater range of training opportunities and a wider access to information. Further implementation of the E3 programme will provide more learning and leisure activities for the community in coming years.
- The primary school will be operating substantially above optimum capacity in the future. It is considered that the most appropriate solution to meet Hirwaun's future needs would be the development of a new primary school at the east of the village. In addition to providing a new school, the existing primary school should also be enhanced.
- A replacement health facility is required within Hirwaun.
- There is a clear demand for the provision of improved community facilities for leisure and sports.

- The area could benefit from a small-scale, indoor 'door-step' sports facility provided as part of an improved community facility.
- The quality of the outdoor sports facilities needs to be improved. The focus of investment should be on the refurbishment, enhancement and maintenance of existing parkland and recreational grounds and play areas.
- Promotion of tourism in the area is important.
- Improved access to employment is recommended especially to Hirwaun Industrial Estate. Pavements and cycle paths should be developed further to improve linkages from surrounding villages and public transport services to employment sites.
- The village should be improved where possible to be designed around pedestrians as well as other more sustainable forms of transport and not car drivers. Provision of appropriate pedestrian crossing points e.g. 'build-outs' and pedestrian island refuges is recommended.

### **Conclusions**

- The levels of development that have taken place in the past have not been sustainable. They have resulted in a considerable expansion in residential accommodation but without the essential facilities that are required to serve the local communities.
- It is evident that much needs to be done to enhance the sustainability of Hirwaun and to ensure that the needs of the local community can be more readily satisfied.
- The viability and long term success of the proposals depend upon achieving public buy-in of and support for the proposals.
- The real challenge for the village lies in the future through the Council's ability to deliver a change in development trends and to maintain the balance that is needed. This change might be delivered through two separate ways:
  - through planning policy; and/or
  - through the planning obligation system
- Care should be taken to avoid the unnecessary duplication of local provision within the village or in adjoining villages as this might undermine their viability and ultimately result in their inability to remain open.
- Local facilities can be combined into a single building or developed to make the most sustainable, efficient and equitable use of land, buildings and resources.
- Pro-active approach to establishing maintenance regimes should be assumed.
- The 'no action' option is not appropriate and would result in a continued failure to meet the needs of the community.
- The vision established in this report and the recommendations set out are designed to help deliver Hirwaun as a settlement that serves all members of the local community and within which no one suffers from social exclusion or isolation.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Aims and objectives of the study

- 1.1 This study has been undertaken by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) on behalf of Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) County Borough Council in order to inform the Local Development Plan (LDP) process. It provides detailed information about Hirwaun - one of the way settlements in the County Borough - and makes recommendations on its sustainable enhancement.
- 1.2 The Council's LDP Preferred Strategy seeks to promote sustainable regeneration for the County Borough as a whole. However, in delivering this objective, it adopts a different development strategy for the northern and southern strategy areas.
- 1.3 In the northern area, which includes Hirwaun, the focus is upon the development of sustainable communities and halting the process of depopulation and decline whilst, in the southern area, the focus is upon sustainable growth beneficial to the County Borough as a whole.
- 1.4 Throughout the County Borough the Preferred Strategy recognises the important role that principle towns and key settlements will play in providing services and facilities to local residents and those living in surrounding areas. It states that, where possible, development will be focused upon the following principal towns and key settlements in order to support their important role as places for social and economic activity.
- 1.5 The Principal Towns are recognised as important hubs for activity and act as gateways for new investment, innovation and sustainable development. The key centres, such as Hirwaun, are smaller but nevertheless provide important services and act as foci for commercial and communal activity.

**Figure 1.1: Identified principal towns and key settlements in the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough (Preferred Strategy)**

Principal towns	Pontypridd	Southern Strategic Area
	Llantrisant	Southern Strategic Area
	Aberdare	Northern Strategic Area
Key settlements	Tonypandy	Northern Strategic Area

Tonyrefail	Southern Strategic Area
Llanharan	Southern Strategic Area
Treorchy	Northern Strategic Area
Mountain Ash	Northern Strategic Area
Porth	Northern Strategic Area
Ferndale	Northern Strategic Area
Hirwaun	Northern Strategic Area

1.6 The Council's aspiration is to create multifunctional sustainable settlements. This means settlements that adequately meet the needs of the local communities that they serve. In particular, they should provide a range of facilities, including shops and services as well as leisure and employment opportunities. In offering this balance of land uses and facilities, the need to travel will be reduced and investment will be retained within individual centres at a level that reflects their role and status within the overall settlement hierarchy. This aspiration underlines the Council's commitment to sustainable development.

1.7 The Preferred Strategy recognises that Hirwaun is presently less significant than the other key settlements identified in the strategy in terms of the range of facilities and services that it provides and in terms of its sustainability. However, it benefits from an excellent strategic location alongside the Heads of Valleys Road and with good links to Merthyr Tydfil, Brecon, Swansea and Cardiff. It has also been recognised as being capable of accommodating additional residential and commercial development in the future. As such, whilst its influence will be less than that of larger centres such as Pontypridd and Aberdare, it has the potential to make an increasingly important contribution to the local area and to serve the surrounding villages such as Penywaun, Cwmdare and Rhigos. However it is evident that Hirwaun is presently failing to adequately fulfil this role and that this failure is having a detrimental impact upon the local communities. It will be vital to ensure that this shortcoming can be remedied so that it's the role might be enhanced. If the village is to accommodate further growth, it will be even more critical to achieve an appropriate balance of services and facilities.

- 1.8 Recognising that the current failure to meet local needs is having a detrimental impact upon the local community, this project will appraise the implications of development in terms of the need for new facilities and will make recommendations on the scale and type of additional facilities that should be provided within Hirwaun. Although it is not intended to look at particular site opportunities for the development of new and additional facilities, this report will seek to identify the broad areas for search and will thereby provide a foundation upon which subsequent work by the County Borough Council is to be based.
- 1.9 This study is well placed not only to inform the Local Development Plan process but also to identify the ways in which the Council's strategic aspirations might best be delivered. In so doing, it will also recognise the ways in which the development of Hirwaun might reflect the broader aspirations for the achievement of sustainable communities whose needs are adequately met and which are no longer subject to the continued threat of outward migration and depopulation.

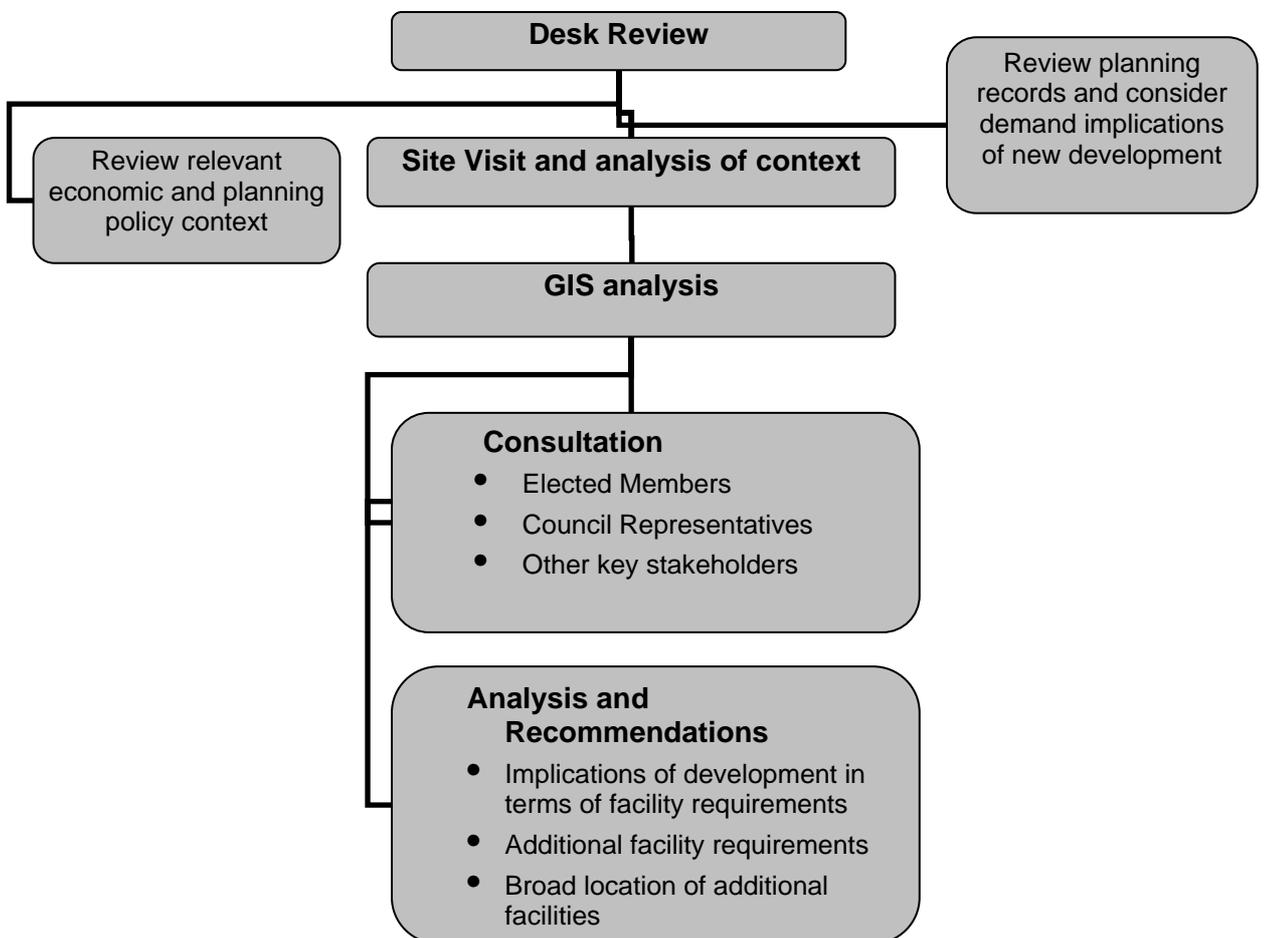
#### **Overview of methodology**

- 1.10 The broad methodology to this study is set out in figure 1.2 below. A key input into the process was a detailed review of Hirwaun and the surrounding area. This enabled us to consider the supply, nature and quality of local facilities and the extent to which they are presently serving the needs of the local community. It also enabled us to identify the various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Hirwaun and – in conjunction with other stages of the methodology – to identify the key areas for its development and enhancement and for an improvement in its sustainability and ability to meet the needs of local residents.
- 1.11 Our on-site research was supplemented by consultation with various stakeholders (see Appendix 2 for the list of consultees). This process was designed to gain the views of a range of stakeholders with particular interests in Hirwaun, as well as the professional opinions of those Council officers and elected members with particular responsibility for the area and for the provision of key services. Along with a background review of existing policies and strategies and an analysis of planning records, this helped to inform our understanding of the local social, economic and environmental context of Hirwaun and our appreciation of some of the key issues that exist and which are likely to continue to shape Hirwaun in the future.
- 1.12 The use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) has been useful as an analytical and presentation tool. In particular, it has helped to show clearly the relationship

between facilities and services and the population that they serve. This has been important in considering the suitability of the distribution of facilities and its ability to serve the local community

1.13 This approach has enabled us to make recommendations on the need for improvement and development in respect of key sectors such as retail, leisure, community facilities, information facilities, education, health and connections including pedestrian facilities and public and private transport routes.

**Figure 1.2: Broad Methodological Approach to the study**



### Structure of study

1.14 The report is structured as follows:

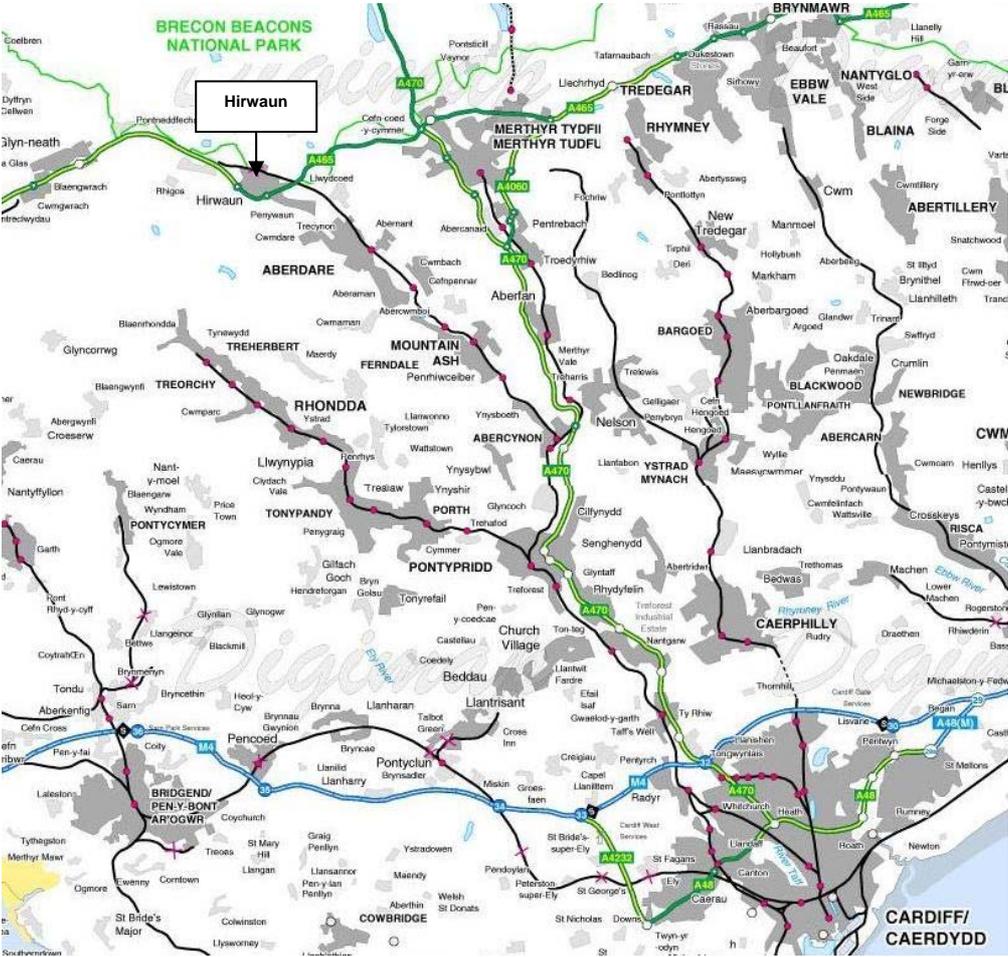
- An appraisal of the existing context in Hirwaun in respect of population and demographic characteristics (Chapter 2);
- A review of the range, nature and quality of existing local facilities (Chapter 3);
- An assessment of the implications of future growth in respect of the need for additional facilities and the achievement of balanced and sustainable development (Chapter 4);
- A review of the specific requirements for particular topic areas (Chapter 5);
- Conclusions and Recommendations (Chapter 6).

2.0 HIRWAUN VILLAGE PROFILE

Location

2.1 Hirwaun is located immediately north of the Heads of the Valleys Road (A465), within the County Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf and on the southern edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the village’s close proximity to Merthyr Tydfil, approximately 11 kilometres to the east and Aberdare close to 6 kilometres in the south-east.

Figure 2.1: Hirwaun Village in relation to Cardiff and South Wales



History

2.2 Over the past 250 years, Hirwaun has grown substantially and has changed beyond recognition. The village initially grew from the need to provide houses and services for the workers at the Hirwaun Ironworks (founded in 1757). In 1813 the village contained 64 houses near the works. Despite the economic problems associated with

the depression of 1829, the Ironworks remained relatively prosperous throughout the early nineteenth century.

- 2.3 The opening of the Vale of Neath Railway from Swansea to Aberdare in 1851 provided the next impetus for growth in Hirwaun. Following the decline of the Ironworks in the 1860s, the coal industry became the main employer within the village.
- 2.4 The remainder of the Nineteenth Century was generally prosperous for Hirwaun, although in common with the rest of the South Wales coalfields the area suffered from the boom and bust trends inherent in the coal industry. Consequently, when that industry went into severe decline following the First World War, Hirwaun suffered the same economic and social problems as communities throughout the region.
- 2.5 Although the large majority of collieries were closed in the decades following the Second World War, the Tower Colliery in Hirwaun was kept open as workers purchased the mine from British Coal. The Tower Colliery reopened in 1995 under the new ownership of the workforce and thrived for over a decade until very recently when it became clear that the seams were becoming exhausted; the colliery finally closed in January 2008. However parts of the site may have potential for opencast mining in the future subject to planning permission and other necessary statutory consents being obtained.

### **Village profile**

- 2.6 Hirwaun village is accessible from the Heads of Valleys Road via two main roads: Brecon Road off the eastern roundabout on the outskirts of the village and Rhigos Road from the western edge of the village. Both roads converge onto the High Street which forms the main cluster of retail, services and community facilities.
- 2.7 The physical structure of the village is now based upon the former tramlines which were an important element of the old industries. Whilst this has resulted in an irregular settlement pattern it does provide a clear link with its industrial heritage.
- 2.8 The war memorial on the High Street appears to mark the centre of the village (see figure 2.2). The High Street contains a number of facilities including a pharmacy, Rugby Football Club, public house, village hall, various shops, library, police station, car park and dentist. Many of the shops and other buildings are in relatively poor condition with unattractive frontages and an evident need for some repairs.

**Figure 2.2: War Memorial, High Street**



**Figure 2.3: High Street**





2.9 A cluster of services and retail units are also contained on Tramway, south-east of the High Street, and on Brecon Road, to the south of the High Street. Most notably this includes a Co-op store which is the largest and most well used shop in Hirwaun. The service and retail units on the High Street, Brecon Road and on Tramway are interspersed with larger numbers of dwellings. This, together with their physical separation, acts to disperse pedestrian footfall through the village and undermine the coherence of the village centre. It also reduces the attractiveness and the viability of Hirwaun as a shopping and service centre.

**Figure 2.4: Co-op Convenience Store, Tramway**



**Figure 2.5: Brecon Road**



- 2.10 There are a number of vacant properties throughout the centre of Hirwaun, including former chapels, a former primary school and former retail units. These further undermine the appearance and character of Hirwaun as well as its vitality and sustainability. There is a concern that over time the number of vacant buildings within the village may increase and their condition and appearance might deteriorate further.

**Figure 2.6: Vacant former retail units on Tramway**



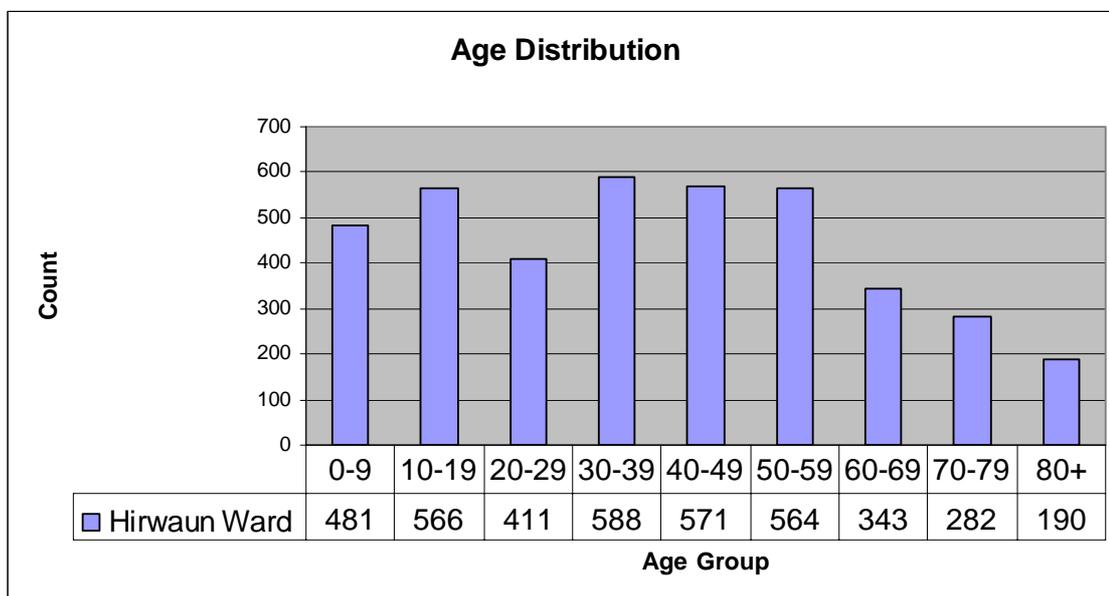
- 2.11 Additional public facilities such as the YMCA, the village hall and church hall are located a short distance from the High Street. Both of the village's recreation grounds – Hirwaun and Cefn Don are located some distance away from the centre. The Hirwaun ground is situated beyond the A465 road, on the southern outskirts of the village whilst Cefn Don is located alongside a residential area to the north-east of the village.

#### *Population and age breakdown*

- 2.12 The village of Hirwaun has a total population of 3,995 (2001 Census). The age profile of the populace is evenly distributed, with a broadly equal proportion of the population in each cohort. This age structure will shape the nature of facilities and services that should be provided within Hirwaun. The even distribution of the population profile demonstrates the importance of serving all age groups from the very youngest

children to the most elderly. This will have obvious implications upon the types and facilities that are required and upon resource allocations.

**Figure 2.7: Age Distribution in Hirwaun Ward**



(Source: ONS, Census 2001)

#### *Economic Activity*

2.13 According to the 2001 Census, only 57% of the working age population are economically active. This illustrates the substantial level of economic inactivity in this area. Of those considered economically active, 65% are in full-time employment, 14% are in part-time employment, 11% are self-employed and 4% are temporarily unemployed. The remaining 3% are students.

2.14 This leaves 43% of the working age population as economically inactive. Of those categorised as economically inactive, 29% are retired, 35% are permanently sick / disabled, and the remaining 36% are comprised of individuals looking after family / home, students, and 'other'.

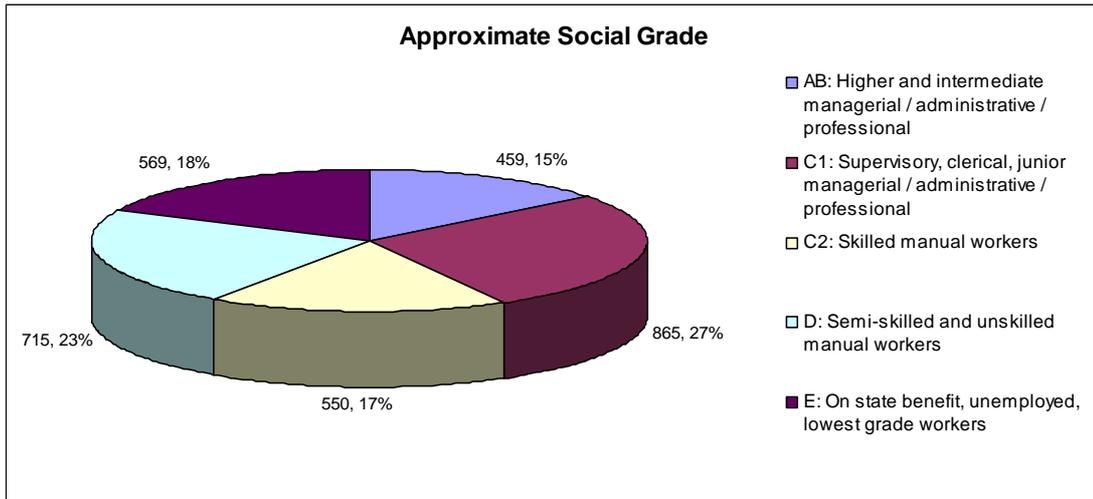
#### *Approximate Social Grade*

2.15 15% of people are classed as the highest social grade 'AB' which includes higher and intermediate managerial / administrative / professional whilst 18% of people are classes as the highest social grade 'AB' for the whole of Wales.

2.16 27% of the population (865 people) are defined as falling within social grade 'C1' ('supervisory, clerical, junior managerial / administrative / professional') in comparison to 29% for the whole of Wales. The remaining 58% of the population are described as

either manual workers (17% of which are skilled and 23% of which are unskilled), and individuals who are unemployed, on state benefit, or of the lowest grade workers (count of 569, 18%). These figures are not too dissimilar than the percentages for the whole of Wales and clearly reflect the nature of the local economy in Hirwaun and of the resident workforce. An understanding of this context is important in considering future development options and economic enhancement solutions.

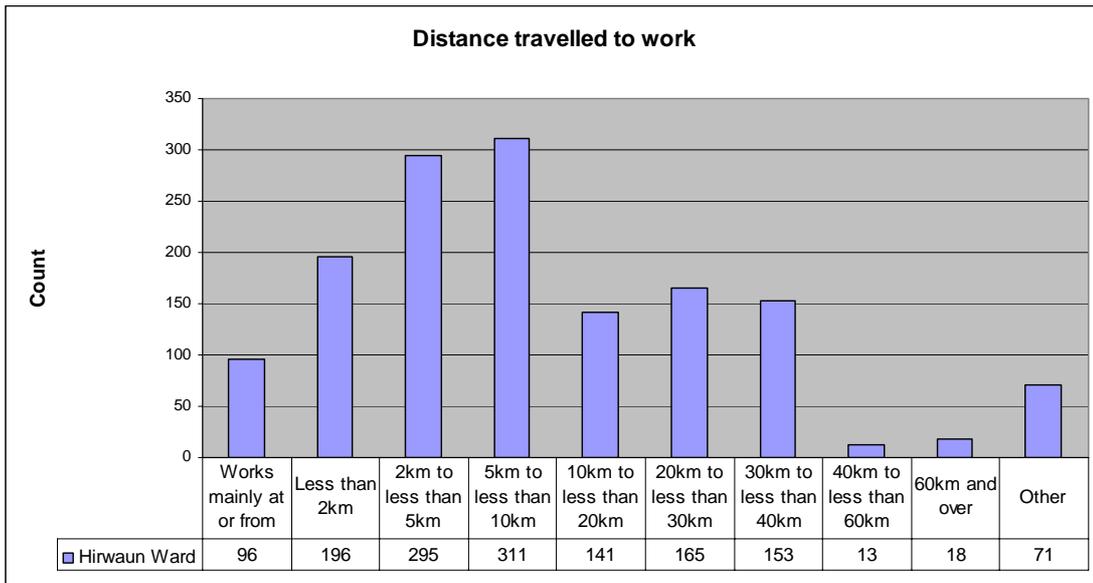
**Figure 2.8: Approximate Social Grade in Hirwaun Ward**



### *Distance Travelled to Work*

2.17 Most people in Hirwaun travel between only 5 and 10 km to work, with the number significantly decreasing for all distances over 10km. In total, 62% of the population work within 10km of their homes, with 31% working within 10km and 40km. It is interesting to compare these distances with the distances of two major employment centres in Cardiff and Bridgend which are both over 20km from the ward (see Appendix 8 – Distance Ring Map). This tendency to work locally is an important element in the sustainability of Hirwaun and should be encouraged.

**Figure 2.9: Distance Travelled to Work in Hirwaun Ward**



(Source: ONS, Census 2001)

**‘SWOT’ Analysis**

2.18 Following a desk-based research, site visit and consultation with key stakeholders, we were able to reach an understanding of the various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to Hirwaun. Our analysis is summarised in figure 2.10 below.

*Strengths*

2.19 Hirwaun is strategically located with good access to such major centres as Cardiff, Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil. It is also located on the edge of the Brecon Beacons and is close to other centres such as Aberdare.

2.20 Consultation interviews confirmed that despite an obvious need for enhancement, current facilities are relatively popular with residents. This is a key strength for the village and surrounding area and represents a major opportunity for the future.

2.21 Consultation with various groups and stakeholders also revealed a strong community spirit in Hirwaun. This existing community cohesion provides an invaluable platform upon which Hirwaun can be better developed in a more balanced manner. It provides the basis by which the community can take ownership of local facilities and services and become more involved in shaping the future role of the village.

2.22 History and heritage is a key strength for Hirwaun. The former Hirwaun Ironworks was probably the first coke fired iron furnace in South Wales whilst Tower Colliery was the

last deep coalmine in South Wales and the only one run by the miners themselves. Both places are extremely important to the history of the South Wales region and are key strengths to build upon in the future in terms of the village's heritage and sense of place.

- 2.23 The recent demolition of tower blocks, new residential development in Hirwaun and the potentially large-scale development for the future can also provide positive opportunities for the village. New development can diversify the population, contribute to the viability of new community facilities and benefit the local economy.

#### *Weaknesses*

- 2.24 Considering Hirwaun's close proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park, the village's tourism role is limited. The village only has two hotels and does not cater specifically for tourists in any other respect.
- 2.25 Existing recreation grounds and play areas are problematic. In particular Hirwaun recreational ground is often inaccessible due to the flooding of the access road; security problems at the site have been brought up by consultees on several occasions. In addition, despite being of a substantial site Cefn Don recreational ground, whilst of a substantial size, has little to offer the community in terms of formal sports facilities. It does not have any changing facilities, the pitch was waterlogged at the time of our visit and it contains a run-down children's playground which is somewhat hidden away in the corner of the field. Within the recreational grounds the remnants of two large bonfires were also visible. Access to and within the site is considered inadequate resulting in particular problems for those with pushchairs or wheelchairs who often require the provision of well maintained footpaths for ease of movement.
- 2.26 The numerous children's play areas around the town are in a very poor state of repair with the exception of the recently constructed play area within the residential estate at Springfield Gardens. There are no purpose-built indoor sport facilities in the village. The only (limited) indoor activities that exist take place within the YMCA and the village hall but the nature of these buildings limits the potential of what can be offered.
- 2.27 Pedestrian and cycling linkages within the Hirwaun are restricted. Consultation highlighted a feeling that more recent developments had not been successfully integrated into the area both in terms of walking and cycling linkages and that such development focuses too heavily on the car. This undermines the sustainability of the village and also has implications upon the extent to which greater levels of community

cohesion might be achieved. If people were encouraged to walk more and drive less they might be more likely to engage with other members of the community.

- 2.28 The High Street area represents a key concentration of community facilities but the range of units is relatively limited and many of the buildings are in a state of relative disrepair. The area does not appear as a coherent centre to the village due to a number of other clusters of services and retail shops around the village and due to the extent of residential properties that are located in amongst commercial properties. This makes people less willing to use the shops and services which are not conveniently arranged close to one another.
- 2.29 There are a number of vacant/derelict buildings dispersed throughout Hirwaun's streetscene. These represent an inefficient use of premises and land and undermine the quality of the public realm which is currently very poor.
- 2.30 The bus links within Hirwaun are quite frequent during week days but are infrequent during the evenings and on Sundays. The bus links to vital services such as local hospitals and surrounding villages are inadequate.
- 2.31 Lastly the primary school and health surgery are both of a poor quality. Both were built in the 1960s and are now of an insufficient size to meet current needs and in a poor state of repair. As such, they are increasingly being viewed as not fit for purpose

### *Opportunities*

- 2.32 There is an opportunity to improve the range and quality of facilities and services to better serve the community in a sustainable manner. Although the range of facilities that it might reasonably accommodate is limited, there is nonetheless considerable scope for expansion and enhancement in the existing offer. This would be important in meeting local needs and in reducing the need to travel to surrounding centres.
- 2.33 Two important development opportunities exist in Hirwaun at the Ironworks and at the Tower Colliery. Both represent exciting large-scale opportunities for the area which would enhance its offer for the local community and its profile in RCT more generally.
- 2.34 The village's position at the gateway to the Brecon Beacons National Park is a significant opportunity which could be exploited in the future. This may be linked to potential tourism development at Tower Colliery.
- 2.35 An increasing level of attention upon the regeneration of the upper valleys area through the Wales Spatial Plan and the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration

Programme may encompass a number of positive aspects for the regeneration of the area. The aims of the Valleys Regeneration Programme, in particular, are based around the following five priority themes:

- An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment
- A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities
- A well educated, skilled and healthier population
- An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience
- Public confidence in a shared bright future

2.36 This will provide an important basis by which the recommendations of this report may be delivered.

2.37 Other more long term opportunities relate to the re-opening of Hirwaun railway station which would considerably improve the village's access to important employment centres. However, this is not expected to be a particularly short term solution due to the likely costs involved and concerns about viability.

#### *Threats*

2.38 Alongside these opportunities for Hirwaun there are a number of threats which warrant forward-thinking in order to minimise adverse impacts for the area.

2.39 There is the threat that nothing will be done to improve the well-being of the village, resulting in the potential worsening of the range and quality of the facilities and services within Hirwaun. A major criticism within the village is that it has been neglected for too long. The threat associated with a 'do nothing' option would serve only to exacerbate these concerns and would also perpetuate the unsustainable nature of the village and the evident cycle of decline.

2.40 The recent closure of Tower Colliery has released a large-scale site for development. However as this land is in private ownership, future use of the site is dependent on the wishes of the landowners. There is also a vulnerability when relying on such a single large scale project to deliver comprehensive change to the village; a more balanced strategy is required and should be promoted.

2.41 Consultation revealed inadequacies in the amount and range of developer contributions which have been sought in the past for development. The Council need to invest in a firm evidence-base to support policy. This will go some way to ensuring adequate Section 106 payments in the future, although there is a continued danger of not attracting sufficient funding to the continued detriment of the area.

- 2.42 Whilst the recent increase in local population has the potential to support the viability of the village, this change also encompasses the threat of creating a dormitory, commuter village.
- 2.43 The proposed dualling of the Heads of Valleys Road is likely to result in short term congestion within Hirwaun and the knock-on effect of this could cause serious problems for the village. However, once the development is completed, it is understood that one of the accesses to the village will be closed, resulting in a further reduction in connectivity. This could further threaten its sustainability and the ease of movement within the settlement. Consideration should therefore be given as to whether it is appropriate to close one of the main access points into the village or whether alternative access arrangements can be retained.

**Figure 2.10: ‘SWOT’ analysis**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong community spirit</li> <li>- Important historical significance due to Tower Colliery and Ironworks</li> <li>- Attractive war memorial</li> <li>- Increasing population and prospective critical mass required to enhance village life</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of tourism role for the village</li> <li>- Bad public transport particularly buses on Sundays and in the evenings</li> <li>- Hirwaun Recreation – poor accessibility and security problems.</li> <li>- Cefn Don Recreation Ground – no changing facilities, waterlogged pitch, signs of vandalism and poor accessibility.</li> <li>- Lack of coherent centre in the village</li> <li>- High street shops are in a bad state of repair</li> <li>- A number of vacancies – chapels and former retail outlets</li> <li>- Poorly built primary school</li> <li>- Poorly built doctors surgery</li> <li>- No indoor sports facility</li> <li>- Lack of pedestrian and cycling linkages within the area especially within newer developments</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ironworks site represents a key development opportunity</li> <li>- Potential development site adj. to Hirwaun village hall</li> <li>- The village’s close proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development opportunity at Tower Colliery is dependent on the wishes of Tower Colliery – mention of open-cast mining</li> <li>- Failure to collect adequate section 106 payments from future</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Programme</li> <li>- Vacancies – chapels and former retail outlets</li> <li>- Proposed widening of the A465</li> <li>- Closure of Tower Colliery and subsequent release of new, large-scale strategic sites</li> <li>- Tourism opportunity associated with Tower Colliery</li> <li>- Long term aim to reopen Hirwaun railway station</li> </ul>	<p>development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact of the changing village demographics – potential threat as a commuter village or aging community.</li> </ul>
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### Village development

2.44 Hirwaun has been subject to a limited amount of development in recent years although these have appeared to be quite considerable in the context of the limited size of the village and a number of major developments are likely to come forward in the future. This section considers the location and scale of development.

#### *Approved development*

2.45 A Council search of all major applications in the last five years identified 11 major applications, some of which were dismissed or withdrawn. The applications which were approved predominantly feature residential proposals at 5 sites. According to data provided by RCT County Borough Council, 78 new dwellings have been approved on these 5 sites. It is anticipated that these new dwellings will accommodate approximately 150 extra people. This is a relatively high increase for a small settlement such as Hirwaun and will off set the losses from the recent demolition of the tower blocks.

**Figure 2.11: Residential development sites in Hirwaun (last 5 years)**

Planning Application Number	Site	Scale of proposal
03/0484/16	Land at rear of 1 – 6, Tramway	5 dwellings (reserved matters)
02/1726/10	Land at Tramway	9 dwellings
02/1909/13	Land off Swansea Road	31 dwellings
04/2264/10	Former Aman Metal Spinners Site,	19 dwellings

	Groesffordd, Rhigos	
06/0315/16	Site of Cynon Valley Commercials, The Bryna, Rhigos	14 dwellings
		<b>TOTAL NO. DWELLINGS APPROVED: 78</b>

2.46 Importantly, since 2000, 194 new dwellings have been granted planning permission, sufficient to accommodate almost 500 new residents within Hirwaun (see Appendix 5).

#### *Potential Future Development Sites*

2.47 The RCT Council Preferred Strategy identifies a number of candidate, non-strategic and strategic development sites throughout Hirwaun. All sites have been plotted in Appendix 6. The identified sites are currently being assessed by RCT County Borough Council with the most suitable sites being taken forward into the emerging Local Development Plan.

2.48 There are 19 candidate, non-strategic sites in Hirwaun. All but 2 of these sites (Site ID: 336 and 363) are entirely residential in nature. Those predominantly under 3 hectares in size but range in size from 0.3 hectares to 11.47 hectares. It is unlikely that all candidate sites will come forward although at this stage it is unknown what the likely level of development (and population growth) will be.

2.49 6 candidate, strategic sites are identified, 5 of which are located around Tower Colliery. Two candidate sites, ID 493 '*Land West of Mount Pleasant Inn*' and candidate site ID 494 '*Land between A465 and Treherbert Road*' specify a proposed development, which in each respective case is an 'Eco Park'. If implemented, the proposed redevelopment of the Tower Colliery site would transform the area into a comprehensive mixed use commercial, residential, community and amenity scheme, with an emphasis on sustainability and high environmental standards. An Eco-Park would potentially form part of the scheme and responds to the latest EU, National Government and Welsh Assembly Government requirements aimed at developing modern sustainable alternatives to the disposal of waste through conventional means. The sites could present significant regeneration opportunities within Hirwaun and the surrounding area whilst fulfilling many of the objectives of the Heads of the Valleys Programme.

## **Surrounding area**

- 2.50 Several other villages are located within a close proximity to Hirwaun; these include Penywaun, Rhigos and Croesbychan. All three are slightly smaller settlements than Hirwaun and have a distinct relationship with it, relying upon Hirwaun to provide services and facilities to their population. The extent to which the needs of these smaller settlements is being met is presently unclear, due to the limited offer within Hirwaun.
- 2.51 Rhigos is a small settlement located to the west of Hirwaun, accessed along Rhigos Road (A4061). Due to the village's close proximity, Rhigos relies on Hirwaun for a number of community facilities, although the settlement is also located very close to the town of Glyn Neath (approximately 3 kilometres).
- 2.52 The village of Penywaun is located immediately to the east of Hirwaun and as a result, the two settlements function closely together. Residents of Penywaun utilise important community facilities such as the library in Hirwaun whilst also utilising the lower order, door-step community facilities available in Penywaun.
- 2.53 The town of Aberdare is located to the south-east of Hirwaun and Penywaun. Aberdare is identified as a principal town in the Council's emerging Preferred Strategy and will provide a higher hierarchy of goods and services to the surrounding areas including Hirwaun. Many people that live in Hirwaun travel to Aberdare on a regular basis for a range of shopping and service functions.

### **3.0 CURRENT SUPPLY OF PUBLIC FACILITIES IN HIRWAUN**

#### **Introduction**

- 3.1 This chapter outlines the existing current supply of public facilities in Hirwaun. It provides information on the quality, quantity, distribution and current capacity of such facilities and provides the basis for chapter 5 which outlines the required future elements for the area.
- 3.2 The location of all existing public facilities within the Hirwaun area are set out in Appendix 7.

#### **Retail**

- 3.3 Retail provision in the village is limited and performs a solely 'top up' function. The largest shop within the local centre is the Co-op foodstore which is popular and trading very successfully. However, in spite of this store, it is evident that the vast majority of residents shop elsewhere for their larger, weekly shops.
- 3.4 The shopping area within Hirwaun is quite dispersed and contains at least 6 vacant shop units, the majority of which are clustered along Tramway and Heol Uchel, close to the Co-op foodstore. Given the small size of Hirwaun, this is a relatively high level of vacancy which, together with the dispersal of uses undermines the attractiveness of the village centre and acts as a disincentive to people's full use of the village centre.
- 3.5 The shopfronts within the local centre are also in a poor state of repair with a significant number of solid shutters cluttering the High Street resulting in the deadening of the streetscene.

**Figure 3.1: Shopfronts within the High Street**



## Community Facilities

- 3.5 Hirwaun YMCA Youth and Community Centre, which is located off Manchester Place, was established in 1943 and provides social, physical and educational opportunities for the surrounding area.

**Figure 3.2: Hirwaun YMCA**



- 3.6 Local consultation suggests that this venue is currently well used. It provides the following facilities:
- a multi-track recording studio,
  - a Family Learning Technology Centre (involving courses that are both accredited and non-accredited),
  - a crèche,
  - an after school club
  - approx. 30 Adult Education classes
  - indoor sports facilities (include football, circuit training and pilates)
- 3.7 There are also computer facilities at the YMCA, which is recognised as a wider training centre. However the building is of a modest size and is surrounded on all sides by housing with only on-street car parking provision. This creates some conflict

with the residential neighbours and means that there is very no potential for physical expansion.

3.8 In contrast to the YMCA, the village hall is a modern building with an associated rear car park and with a bus stop directly outside. It is also centrally located close to the local centre and currently provides a facility for:

- those who wish to partake in evening classes;
- it also provides meeting rooms for such groups as the Community Council and Hirwaun Police; and
- is used for social events such as birthday parties.

3.9 However, whilst the village hall is also used by the community it is more limited than the YMCA in its offer.

**Figure 3.3: Village Hall**



3.10 Other community facilities provided for in Hirwaun village include Hirwaun Gardening Society, the Conservative Club (Brecon and Radnor), Hirwaun Rugby Club, the Cadets Hall, the Scouts Hut and the Church Hall. All of these are used for a variety of community clubs ranging from scouts to facilities for the elderly.

**Figure 3.4: The Conservative Club and Nebo Chapel**



3.10 There are a considerable number of churches in the village for its limited size. These serve a further important community function although some have closed in recent years.

**Figure 3.4: Vacant church, Penyard Road**



### Access to information

- 3.3 Hirwaun library is located in a central area (off the High Street), adjacent to a fairly large, free car park. It is a relatively small facility with a total floorspace area of just 184 sq. m. Local residents expressed concerns that this facility is not large enough and could not satisfactorily meet local needs. To try and address this concern, the opening hours of the library have recently been extended from 30 hours to 35 hours per week and IT facilities have been increased.

**Figure 3.5: Hirwaun Library, High Street**



- 3.4 According to the library usage statistics for 2007/08, Hirwaun Library ranked 11<sup>th</sup> out of the 29 libraries in RCT which is above average despite its limited size and offer. This highlights its importance as a major local facility, its role within the community and its popularity amongst the local population.
- 3.5 In addition to its role as a lending library and IT centre, the library also runs a free and non-accredited computer course during the day and hosts a reading group as well as mother and toddler group meetings and a Community Police Surgery.
- 3.6 There are a number of other training courses available in Hirwaun. The Village Hall hosts two day-time and early evening courses relating to floral design and textiles, whilst the Hirwaun YMCA also provides a variety of educational opportunities through a number of courses relating to, for example:

- history of Rome
- self-defence
- music-making workshops including singing
- song writing
- performing and making recordings

3.7 Hirwaun Rugby Football Club also hosts a popular Welsh class.

### **Education**

3.8 Hirwaun village has one primary school, Hirwaun Primary School, which is an English language school that caters for children aged between 3 and 11 years. This school was combined with the former Hirwaun nursery school on Brecon Road, which closed in 2005. The former nursery school was previously a full primary school and its closure resulted in a reduction of local choice in school provision.

3.9 Hirwaun Primary School is located on the southern outskirts of Hirwaun village within a residential area but close to the A465. The buildings are in a poor condition and, although improvements are currently being undertaken, there is a concern regarding the long term ability of the school to meet local needs and to accommodate future growth.

3.10 The school is set in spacious grounds with four playgrounds, two seated areas, an enclosed garden, playing fields and a developing woodland. Two separate, single storey buildings provide classrooms, activity areas, kitchens, toilet facilities and central halls for the pupils and staff.

3.11 According to the latest RCT pupil numbers in January 2007, 200 pupils were on the roll, leaving a 25 pupil surplus capacity. However the future capacity of the school is predicted to rise. This is considered in more detail in Section 5.

3.12 There is no Secondary school in Hirwaun. The nearest Secondary school is Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun, off Lawrence Avenue, in Penywaun, approximately 1.5 miles from Hirwaun. This is a Welsh language school with a capacity for 1,018 pupils. The school had 870 pupils on its roll in January 2007 (85% of capacity). The Sixth form is presently at capacity, with 157 pupils on roll in January 2007.

### **Health**

3.13 Hirwaun benefits from one primary health care facility, located off Brecon Road, to the east of Hirwaun, close to the A465 / Brecon Road roundabout.

**Figure 3.6: Hirwaun Primary Health Care Facility, Brecon Road**



- 3.14 The surgery is outdated, small, in a poor condition and not to current standards. It is not in an ideal location and has a small car park. Consultation with the Local Health Board revealed concerns over its ability to adequately meet the (current and future) medical needs of the local community. In particular, there are concerns over the limited scale and quality of the building required to cope with future health demands. As it stands, the Doctors Surgery is currently at capacity and has limited capacity to grow.
- 3.15 One small NHS dentist practice is situated on the High Street. This facility is currently open 5 days a week. It is currently full although may be accepting more NHS patients in coming months.

### **Leisure**

#### **Outdoor Sport**

- 3.16 Hirwaun has a number of outdoor sport facilities, the largest being Hirwaun Welfare located south of the A465. This area provides a good range of sports pitches (cricket, football, bowls and rugby) but suffers from poor access arrangements.

**Figure 3.7: Hirwaun Welfare**



- 3.17 Its location to the south of the A465 means that there is one access to the area via a small underpass beneath the A465. This access is prone to flooding and therefore often means the entire area is inaccessible to the community.

**Figure 3.8: Access to Hirwaun Welfare is prone to flooding**



- 3.18 There is also a lack of lighting at this outdoor facility and problems have arisen in the past in respect of public safety. A playground is also provided within the confines of the site however this was of a poor quality and considered unsafe. These factors considerably reduce its local value.
- 3.19 Cefn Don Recreation Ground is surrounded by residential areas and is accessible from Cefndon Terrace and from Swansea Road. This area was found to be limited in its provision of facilities with no lighting, drainage problems, deliberate vandalism and with limited access for all. The associated play area was also considered to be of an inadequate quality and poorly located within the recreation area. However, it is acknowledged that the recreational ground does provide an important kick-about area for the surrounding areas.

**Figure 3.9: Playground, Cefn Don Recreation Ground**



- 3.20 Two small play areas are located off Tramway and Springfield Gardens. These offer play facilities in close proximity to the main housing areas. Whilst the play area located off Tramway was of a poor quality in terms of the condition and type of play facilities it offered, the playground at Springfield Gardens was found to be of a modern design and to provide a safer and more appealing play space.

**Figure 3.10: Playground, Tramway**



**Figure 3.11: Playground, Springfield Gardens**



3.21 Although there are limited areas of informal open space within Hirwaun, the surrounding area is rich in rights of way and strategic trails. These provide an important benefit in terms of informal outdoor recreation opportunities and the basis by which links to the Brecon Beacons National Park might be exploited.

### **Indoor Sport**

- 3.22 Hirwaun currently has no formal indoor sports facility, but existing community facilities such as the Hirwaun YMCA are alternatively used for a variety of sporting uses including aerobics and pilates. This offer is important to the local community but the size and ability of this facility means that it is unable to meet current demand, limiting its overall contribution to the area.

### **Tourism**

- 3.23 Despite being very close to the Brecon Beacons National Park, Hirwaun has not traditionally been viewed as a tourism destination and has limited provision for tourists. However, one important asset is the Ty Newydd Country Hotel located off Penderyn Road, approximately 1.5 miles north of the centre of Hirwaun village. This hotel is located within a detached neo-Georgian property which was built in the 1930s. It has 28 en-suite rooms and is of a good quality and helps to serve the locational advantage of the village and its links to the Brecon Beacons National Park.
- 3.24 Only one other hotel, 'Fifth Avenue House', is located off Lower Halt Road, approximately 2 miles from the village centre. This fairly new hotel is in very close proximity to existing businesses in Hirwaun Industrial Estate and is a modern, family-run hotel with just 5 rooms. It is uncertain as to the extent that this hotel serves Hirwaun village although it promotes its good links to the Brecon Beacons and surrounding destinations such as Cardiff and Swansea.

### **Sustainable Access to employment**

- 3.25 Within the centre of Hirwaun itself there are limited employment opportunities beyond those associated with small-scale retail and services.
- 3.26 Hirwaun Industrial Estate is located on the outskirts of the village; this is occupied by a large number of manufacturing and processing companies including Authentic Curry Company, Phoenix Metal Products Ltd and Environmental Solutions Wales.
- 3.27 In addition, a smaller lower quality Industrial Estate called Bryngelli is located to the western edge of Hirwaun. This contains a number of occupiers including Ferraris Bakers and JJ Maintenance Electrical Contracting Property Services. However, the estate currently has a number of vacant units.
- 3.28 In the surrounding area, Aberdare and Merthyr Tydfil also act as the major employment centres. Both towns are close to Hirwaun and can be easily accessed by bus or car and the availability of jobs in these centres act as a major draw for local

residents. This is particularly demonstrated in respect of the high proportion of people that travel less than 10 km to their place of work.

### Public Transport and Infrastructure

- 3.29 Hirwaun is easily accessed by road. Twelve local bus services run to and from the village of Hirwaun and link it with larger settlements such as Merthyr Tydfil, Swansea, Aberdare and Abergavenny. There is a reasonably good Monday to Saturday day service, with half hourly services to and from larger centres such as Merthyr Tydfil, Swansea and Aberdare. However very few services run on Sundays or later than 7pm.
- 3.30 Hirwaun benefits from a sizable (approximately 50 car parking spaces) free car park located just off High Street, adjacent to the library. However car parking has been identified as a local concern: respondents from Hirwaun expressed a view that more car parking was required in the village, albeit that Council representatives saw car parking as adequate.

**Figure 3.12: Existing Public Facilities in Hirwaun**

	Details
<b>Health facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Hirwaun Health Centre</b>, Brecon Road, Hirwaun, Aberdare, CF44 9NS</li> <li>- <b>Hirwaun NHS Dentist</b> – D Adams, 70a High Street (open 8.45am - 5.45pm Mon-Fri)</li> </ul>
<b>Education provision</b>	<p><b>Primary School:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hirwaun Primary School (Ages 3-11), English Language, Glanant Street, Hirwaun, Aberdare, CF44 9NF.</li> </ul> <p><b>Nearest Secondary School:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun, Lawrence Avenue, Penywaun, Aberdare, CF44 9ES.</li> </ul> <p><b>Nearest Sixth Form School:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun, Lawrence Avenue, Penywaun, Aberdare, CF44 9ES.</li> </ul>
<b>Leisure provision</b>	<p><b>Outdoor Sport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hirwaun Welfare – rugby pitch, football pitch, cricket pitch, play area, bowling green, tennis courts</li> <li>- Springfield Play Area</li> <li>- Tramway Play Area</li> <li>- Cefn Don Recreation Ground – Football pitch and play area</li> </ul> <p><b>Indoor Sport</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- YMCA (informal)</li> </ul>
<b>Access to information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Hirwaun Library</b> Opening hours: Monday/Thursday 0930 to 1300 &amp; 1400 to 1700 Tuesday/Friday 0930 to 1300 &amp; 1400 to 1800 Wednesday/Saturday 0930 to 1300</li> <li>- <b>Various Adult Classes</b> at Hirwaun YMCA, Hirwaun Library, Hirwaun RFC and Hirwaun Village Hall</li> </ul>
<b>Community facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Place of worship (x 7, some derelict)</li> <li>- Hirwaun Gardening Society</li> <li>- Conservative Club (Brecon and Radnor)</li> <li>- Hirwaun Football Rugby Club</li> <li>- Hirwaun Fire Station</li> <li>- Hirwaun Village Hall</li> <li>- Hirwaun YMCA</li> <li>- Cadets Hall</li> <li>- Scouts Hut</li> <li>- Church Hall</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainable access to employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bus services available to surrounding towns such as Aberdare and Merthyr Tydfil as well as Cardiff and Swansea</li> <li>- Hirwaun Industrial Estates located a short distance north west of Hirwaun off A465</li> <li>- Byngelli Industrial Estate</li> <li>- Small-scale employment opportunities within local businesses and service providers</li> </ul>
<b>Public transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 12 local bus services have been indicated for Hirwaun. These include:</li> <li>- Service No. 6 Aberdare Circular – Sun (3 trips)</li> <li>- Service No. 7 Glynhafod to Penderyn – Mon-Sat (every 30 mins)</li> <li>- Service No. 8 Glynhafod to Glynneath – Mon-Sat (every 30 mins)</li> <li>- Service No. 9 Glynhafod to Merthyr Tydfil – Mon-Sat (every 30 mins)</li> <li>- Service No. 775 Merthyr Tydfil to Swansea – Mon-Sat (6 trips)</li> <li>- Service No. 903 Aberdare to Rhigos - Mon-Sat (10 trips)</li> <li>- Service No. B3 Brackla to Brecon – Summer only, Sun (1 trip)</li> <li>- Service No. B13 Brecon Circular – Summer only, one way only, Sun (2 trips)</li> <li>- Service No. un Penderyn to Pontypridd (College) – School terms only, (1 trip)</li> <li>- Service No. X6 Rhigos to Cardiff – Only this direction, Mon to Sat (1 trip)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service No. X10 Swansea to Abergavenny – Tue (1 trip)</li> <li>- Service No. X55 Aberdare to Swansea – Mon to Sat (8 trips)</li> <li>- Aberdare Railway Station – nearest trains station – approx. 5 miles from Hirwaun (Service No: 130 Aberdare – Barry Island)</li> </ul>
<b>Retail provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 x Convenience stores and off licences</li> <li>- 5 x Public Houses (2 for sale)</li> <li>- 4 x takeaways</li> <li>- 15 x Misc. retail and services e.g. funeral directors, accountants, travel agents, sewing shop, financial services, builder's merchants, hardware stores.</li> <li>- 4 x Hairdressers</li> <li>- 1x Pharmacy</li> <li>- 1 x Post Office</li> <li>- 1 x Café</li> <li>- 1 x Butchers</li> </ul> <p>TOTAL: 35 units</p>
<b>Tourism provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ty Newydd Country Hotel</li> <li>- Fifth Avenue House</li> </ul>

#### **4.0 LOOKING FORWARD – THE FUTURE ROLE OF HIRWAUN**

- 4.1 Hirwaun has accommodated a relatively large amount of residential development in recent years in relation to its modest size but this has not been replicated in an increased provision of local services and facilities. The consequence of this has been an unsustainable level of development and a situation whereby a wide range of basic needs are not fully or even adequately served. This has created a sense of community dissatisfaction in the village and the perception that it is increasingly acting as a dormitory settlement with local people travelling for employment as well as for retail, leisure and other services.
- 4.2 This does not accord with the policy aspiration to minimise the need to travel. It has also served to threaten the vitality and viability of the centre and has thereby resulted in a risk that the facilities that are present might be further undermined. A failure to provide adequate and accessible local services creates a potentially serious issue of social equality and the ability for all members of the local community to access facilities.
- 4.3 Despite having been identified by the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP Preferred Strategy as a key settlement, Hirwaun retains the character, role and status of a village. The Preferred Strategy states at paragraph 6.11 that it benefits from an excellent location and that it is *'capable of assimilating significant additional residential and commercial growth'*. In spite of this, it is not wished nor is it expected that it will develop into a major town. The vision for the development of Hirwaun is based upon the expectation that it will remain as a large village, albeit one that is better equipped to meet the needs of the local community.
- 4.4 Whilst people are generally willing to travel for a wide range of shops and services, they nevertheless expect certain facilities to be located nearby. 'Towards Urban Renaissance', the 1999 Urban Taskforce paper sets out the principles for a sustainable settlement. It focuses on the various facilities which should be located within different types of centres. In line with this, a centre such as Hirwaun would normally include lower order shops, a community centre, library, health facilities, and some leisure, sporting and recreation opportunities. A failure to meet these basic needs would result in the village being unable to fulfil the essential demands that are being placed upon it and would contribute towards an increase in unsustainable travel patterns.

- 4.5 An understanding of the future role of Hirwaun as a village will be important in shaping the direction of its future growth in terms of the range and type of facilities and opportunities that might reasonably be expected to be provided within the village. Most people will continue to travel to the larger surrounding centres for employment and for all but relatively low order shops, services and facilities. The development strategy for Hirwaun should not seek to challenge this but rather should be based upon the aspiration of ensuring that it adequately fulfils its identified purposes and objectives.
- 4.6 Given the current shortage of facilities and services within the village, there is a concern that a continuation of previous development trends would serve only to increase the unsustainability of the settlement. The starting point in the establishment of a vision for the future development of Hirwaun must therefore also be a commitment to redress the imbalance in the provision of local services. This would be important in ensuring that, where possible, local residents in Hirwaun can be better served without having to travel to surrounding centres and that Hirwaun can appropriately and fully perform its role in serving the surrounding, smaller settlements.
- 4.7 The aspiration for the northern area of the County Borough is for the development of sustainable communities and to halt the continued trend of depopulation. Although the rapid level of residential development in Hirwaun has resulted in a population increase, the inadequate growth in local facilities and services has undermined the sustainability of the community. The local challenge is to remedy this imbalance and to ensure that any future population growth contributes towards the enhancement of the village rather than further undermining its strength and profile as has been the case in recent years.
- 4.8 Hirwaun's village centre is focused in close proximity to the High Street clock tower and contains a very small number of shops including a Post Office, café, fish and chip take-away and a pharmacy. Other shops and services including a Co-op convenience store, newsagents, public houses and community facilities, including a primary school and doctors surgery are located elsewhere within the village and are interspersed with residential areas. This creates a lack of coherence and undermines the vitality of the village and its ability to meet the needs of local residents. In the light of this, the village centre should be encouraged as the preferred location to provide additional and enhanced shops, services and facilities.

- 4.9 The range and suitability of services cannot be appraised solely in quantitative terms. Regard should also be given to the quality and capacity of each individual facility. In a number of cases, it is evident that this should be increased so that local needs are better able to be met. In particular, the doctor's surgery, primary school and library all have insufficient capacity to meet emerging needs. The YMCA centre and village centre are similarly too small to fulfil their full potential and to meet the demand for activities.
- 4.10 Chapter 5 considers these issues in detail and sets out recommendations in respect of the type and scale of the necessary additional provision.
- 4.11 The issue of future growth in Hirwaun is a matter of considerable concern. Given its status as a key centre which contains a number of strategic sites, it is evident that there will be on-going pressure for further expansion within the village. This is likely to attract local opposition but should not, in itself, be viewed as inappropriate. The continuation of past development trends should be resisted as these have resulted in a substantial under provision of facilities and an inability to meet the needs of the local community. However, if future development is appropriately located and carefully approached, with adequate consideration being given to the need for additional services and facilities to meet the needs of the existing and the increased population, then it need not necessarily be detrimental to the local community.
- 4.12 In delivering the vision for Hirwaun, the starting point must be a concerted effort to remedy the existing imbalance in services and facilities that has been permitted to arise and then to ensure that the existing unsustainable and imbalanced patterns of development are not permitted to continue in the future. The achievement of these aims will provide benefits for the community in Hirwaun and the surrounding centres but a failure to achieve these aims will result in the village becoming even less sustainable and less able to fulfil its requirements; essentially it would mean that Hirwaun would fail to contribute towards the strategy for the northern development area.

## **5.0 FUTURE ELEMENTS WITHIN HIRWAUN**

### **Introduction**

- 5.1 This Chapter recommends a way forward for the village taking into consideration the existing community facilities.

### **Retail**

- 5.2 In policy terms, High Street and Lower Cross Street form the local shopping centre which is required to serve the needs of the settlement and surrounding villages.
- 5.3 Prevailing policy that relates to local centres aims to prevent the sprawl of commercial uses into adjoining residential uses by focusing commercial activity within a defined area and it also seeks to enhance vitality and viability of such areas. This is important to retain the viability of a local shopping centre and to ensure that a range of goods is accessible to the public. The on-going policy approach is to focus development into local centres in order to strengthen them. It is evident that more is required in order to satisfactorily implement this approach so that the centre of Hirwaun might be enhanced.
- 5.4 The number of retail units within the village centre has been dwindling for a number of years. The high proportion of vacant units that currently exists is a matter of concern and more needs to be done to restrict the further loss of retail units. This could be achieved, for instance, by promoting the re-use of the existing vacant units for such uses as retail, commercial businesses, facilities for leisure or as additional community facilities. Although retailing should continue to underpin the village centre, it is only one of the factors which contribute to its well-being and policies should encourage a diversity of uses in the centre. The encouragement of community and social facilities within the village centre will be important in this regard.
- 5.5 The retail units that remain within Hirwaun are generally of a poor quality. The shopfronts are 'traditional' in design and many are in a state of disrepair. The clustering of shops in local centres means that the cumulative impact of good or bad shopfront design is significant to the quality of those areas. It is therefore recommended that the quality of the local centre needs to be improved with careful consideration of local distinctiveness and the sense of the place. The use of grants and financial assistance can be very important in delivering such changes. A design framework should be completed for Hirwaun (possibly in conjunction with other villages) in order to help revitalise and guide development.

- 5.6 There are currently no large retail units within Hirwaun, although it is unlikely that the village could facilitate such a unit. Providing larger and additional retail units does not necessarily mean that people will use these facilities as retailing is market driven and it is acknowledged that many factors affecting the quality of town centres lies outside the planning system. Future change in retail provision requires the support of local people and the business community.
- 5.7 Attracting more residents to shop in the village should be a major priority and the changes detailed above would go some way towards realising that goal. There is a definite need to encourage residents to use the village shops by way of publicising existing services and facilities. The creation of a lay-by on the High Street would also allow residents an easier access to the shops whilst in the longer term an improvement in the quality of the urban realm and the village centre offer will serve to further increase its local attractiveness.

### **Community facilities**

- 5.8 As set out in chapter 3, there are several community buildings within the village which are located quite sporadically throughout the village and are all of limited size. Whilst the village hall is a modern building, it is not used to its full potential and therefore better use should be made of this building for community uses and activities such as additional evening classes, yoga and aerobics and youth events.
- 5.9 By contrast, the YMCA building is cramped and is unable to achieve its full potential. It needs to expand if it is to properly cater for the needs of the community. However, there is limited space around the building for its expansion.
- 5.10 An alternative, more centrally located site should be sought for the YMCA. This should be able to provide more space for the facility and the potential for future expansion. This could be alongside the village hall or within one of the vacant (large) buildings in the village centre. An alternative would be to establish a new YMCA facility on the iron works site. This site is well related to the village centre and provides a good opportunity to be used for the benefit of the local community. There is sufficient space in this location to provide a high quality building alongside other facilities for the community. A facility in this location would be accessible to all and any conflicts with adjoining land uses could be minimised. If a new YMCA facility is provided at the Iron Works site, then it should be offered as part of a shared multi-functional facility. This would offer benefits in terms of cost and management savings

and would be important in substantially improving the quality and range of the local offer.

- 5.11 In addition, there are a large number of vacant churches within Hirwaun. These should be retained, where possible, as buildings for the community and refurbishment is recommended. Appropriate future uses include a place of worship, well-equipped community centre, an IT suite, training and pre-school facilities or an historical interpretative centre.

### **Access to Information**

- 5.12 Hirwaun currently provides a well regarded library service which is regularly used by the local community. Its popularity has led to the recent extension to its opening hours and improvements to its computer facilities. Whilst this is welcomed, it does not overcome concerns regarding the cramped layout of the building and the limited space for its users. An extension would provide more usable space within the building including facilities which could result in the expansion of distance learning and IT and other forms of training within Hirwaun. A broader range of facilities could then be served in line with the library service objective. A possible well designed second storey extension could provide a more efficient use of the site whilst also providing a focal point for the shopping area.
- 5.13 The YMCA also provides access to information for the local community. This role could be expanded through the relocation of the YMCA into larger premises or at the village hall.
- 5.14 E3 is a wide-ranging extra curricular programme provided by secondary schools within RCT. The programme is Council funded and aims to offer a wide range of sporting, cultural, leisure and new learning opportunities to young people and the wider community, maximising the school and local leisure facilities and overcoming the transport issues that limits access for many. It seeks to build upon the Community Schools initiative, in which the Youth Service has a key role to play, both in terms of enhancing the opportunities and learning experiences available in the E3 schools but also in delivering some E3 activities in community settings.
- 5.15 Further implementation of the E3 programme will provide more learning and leisure activities for the community in coming years. Hirwaun Primary School, the Village Hall and the YMCA can play a key role in providing such opportunities.
- 5.16 There is an evident need to improve the availability of information about the village and local activities. We recommend the need to review the provision and use of

notice boards (there are currently none in the Co-op foodstore or within the High Street). Clubs and societies should be encouraged to make use of village publications to promote events and recruit members. Websites, such as Hirwaun Online, need to be kept up-to-date.

### **Education**

- 5.17 According to RCT's most recent projections of pupil numbers for 2008-2012, the number of pupils that will be attending Hirwaun Primary School will fluctuate between 228 pupils and 226 pupils per annum over the next 3 years with an expected increase to 235 by January 2012. The capacity for Hirwaun Primary School is restricted to 225 pupils and the school is therefore predicted to be over capacity to 2012 at over 104% in some years. The Welsh Assembly Government recommends an optimum capacity percentage of 90%. The primary school will therefore be operating substantially above optimum capacity, although the nursery facility is not expected to be over-subscribed.
- 5.18 Considerable development is proposed on the outskirts of Hirwaun village including the potential development of a large strategic corridor of land south of the A465. Even more pressure is therefore likely to be applied to the primary school in the future.
- 5.19 It is considered that the most appropriate solution to meet Hirwaun's future needs would be the development of a new primary school at the east of the village. It should be located in a location that is easily accessed by a variety of transport modes including cycling, walking and bus. Further future effort should be placed on 'walking bus' schemes, sharing lifts and manned lollipop crossings in order to encourage children and parents to access school by walking and cycling. This will yield wider community benefits by minimising local congestion at school-times whilst also contributing towards an increase in exercise levels by children.
- 5.20 In addition to providing a new school, the existing primary school should also be enhanced. This will be important in ensuring the highest quality of education provision within the village and would avoid the situation whereby the village offered parents a choice of a new, high quality or an ageing, poor quality facility.
- 5.21 All existing and new primary schools should be encouraged to share resources out of hours with the community in order to maximise the wider community benefits that they offer. This is particularly important in relation to IT facilities, classroom space and gymnasium halls. It is important, however, to ensure that the shared use of school

facilities does not interfere with the main educational purposes or create any security concerns. It would clearly be unacceptable to allow members of the public free and unencumbered access to the school buildings during the working day.

- 5.22 Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun Secondary School, in Penderyn, had 870 pupils on its roll in January 2007, with a surplus capacity of 148 pupils (85% of capacity). There are 157 Sixth form pupils on the roll with a capacity for 157 pupils (100% of capacity). It is forecast that the school roll will rise steadily to 946 by 2012. This would equate to 92% capacity – slightly over the WAG target figure of 90%. This, together with any future development may result in a need to extend this school in order to create additional capacity.

### **Health**

- 5.23 A replacement health facility is required within Hirwaun. The location of the existing health facility on the outskirts of the village and its restricted size have meant that the health needs of this area are not being properly met. This situation is likely to worsen in light of the large scale developments that are proposed.
- 5.24 It is therefore recommended that a new primary health care facility should be established. This should be a larger facility, located centrally within the village, where it would be accessible to all and therefore better able to serve the local community. In providing a new facility, consideration should be given to the likelihood of future growth within the village and the new building should be planned so that it can sustain additional demands in the future.
- 5.25 Consultation with the Local Health Board specified that an acre site would be sufficient to accommodate an appropriately sized surgery for Hirwaun. This facility might be provided as part of a wider shared community facility development and the following locations might be considered as appropriate:
- adjacent to the village hall,
  - within the iron works site
  - in close proximity to existing school.
- 5.26 There is considerable merit in seeking to provide the new health centre alongside other community uses in order to enhance the sustainability of the development, the efficiency of the land use and the viability of the location as a community hub. The sharing of the new health centre with a dentist surgery would also seem appropriate considering that the existing NHS dentist's surgery on the High Street is at capacity

and that both uses require a secure building to ensure privacy for patients and overall security.

### **Leisure**

- 5.27 There is a clear demand for the provision of improved community facilities for leisure and sports. Young people are particularly limited in terms of the range and suitability of premises, facilities and services that are currently offered.
- 5.28 There is a demand for a wider range of sporting facilities in the community as well as providing additional equipment to run keep fit classes and for fitness training purposes. Such facilities could be combined with youth provision in order to widen the opportunities for the different age groups in the community. Whilst some of these could be met within an extended village hall, others require an improved outdoor facility.

### *Outdoor Sports*

- 5.29 There is little incentive for people to make the effort to leave their homes if there is nowhere attractive and safe to exercise and socialise. The Council should seek to promote and maximise the potential for a range of suitable uses and investigate opportunities for multi purpose uses to ensure that communities are best served without duplication of effort. Discussions with the local school and the local education authority should seek to explore whether their existing facilities could be made more readily available to the local community with an aim to improve and enhance the range of sports opportunities.
- 5.30 An Open Space Audit and a Needs Assessment of public open space is required to establish whether there is sufficient open space within Hirwaun village. As it stands, it would appear that there is sufficient open space in quantitative terms but that the existing provision is of a generally poor quality. The focus of investment should therefore be the refurbishment, enhancement and maintenance of existing parkland and recreational grounds and play areas.
- 5.31 The main problems that were found in respect of the provision of outdoor sports facilities include accessibility, poor personal security, lack of changing facilities, drainage problems, poor flood lighting and the adequacy of the combined play offer of all open spaces in the area. A qualitative improvement to an existing open space in terms of improved drainage, improved access or an improvement in associated facilities such as changing rooms may potentially be more valuable to the community

than a new facility. Consideration should be given by the leisure department to the provision of a multi-purpose outdoor all weather playing surface and skate board area at the existing recreational ground. A multi-purpose outdoor playing surface could be used for informal practice and training for many sports, particularly during adverse weather when grass areas are unsuitable. This could provide a substantial benefit to the local community in terms of playing provision as in many cases a multi-purpose outdoor playing surface can accommodate up to 15 times as much use as a grass pitch.

- 5.32 Existing children's playgrounds are also problematic in terms of their location and the range and quality of the play facilities that are provided. Many of the elements within the play areas are outdated and in a poor state of repair following vandalism or natural wear and tear. Their value has therefore been very much restricted and a focused approach to improvement and maintenance should be implemented to establish the full value of play areas.
- 5.33 Provision of less structured play areas is also an option that should be considered. These 'playable spaces' seek to move beyond the traditional playground solutions of swings, slides, roundabouts and 'nodding chickens' to provide more creative, informal play spaces which seek to better meet the learning and recreational needs of children. Playable spaces, which can be made available for all children and not just for the very young, encourage a greater level of interaction with one another and with the surrounding environment. They promote more imaginative forms of play which will help children to interact with one another and to learn about their surrounding environment.
- 5.34 The local community can have an important role in making best use of such play areas and creating, guiding new opportunities for play. Good practice case studies include instances where Forestry Commission land in Torfaen was made available for children's education under the Forest Schools Programme. Children were permitted access to the area under supervision by a teacher or qualified Play Officer. In addition the community of Stratford Green in the Vale of Glamorgan used Play Rangers<sup>1</sup> to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Play Rangers' are qualified play workers who work with children and young people in a local park or public open space to facilitate children's play. They are 'detached workers' who can bring equipment and encourage children to make more use of parks and open spaces in their communities. They operate on an 'open access' principle, which means that children are free to come and go as they please; there is no charge and no registration is required. Children and young people are encouraged to use the sessions in the way that they choose with freely chosen, self directed play being the key to service provision (Source: Play for Wales, Summer 2007).

facilitate a variety of play opportunities including arts, den building and sports within informal setting.

- 5.35 The consultation process established that there was a strong emphasis to preserve and enhance the natural environment in the area. Walking, cycling and horse riding are identified as activities that need improved facilities and access. A potential site in which improvements to these facilities could take place is the Iron works site which should be protected as a community facility. Whilst public rights of way exist within the surrounding natural environment these need to be cleared, upgraded and maintained. It is suggested that signs should be posted within the village that provide information on the walks and trails around the community. A well signposted horse trail along the quieter roads around the village could also be promoted. These links and routes should not be constrained to the village itself but should reach out into the surrounding area, making use of the quality of the wider environment.
- 5.36 The Iron Works site provides an ideal opportunity for informal recreation and open space. Land could be used for walking or cycling tracks and space could be made available for informal games or less active forms of recreation. This could be provided alongside the heritage elements which would offer an important boost in provision for local people and visitors. Appropriate uses might include a heritage trail, a small visitor's centre or museum and a series of information boards setting out the importance of the site and the area. This site might also be used for the creation of play spaces. Although comprehensive development of the site would not be appropriate, the inclusion of small-scale facilities to serve the local area would help increase its attractiveness and activity levels in this part of Hirwaun.

### **Indoor Sports**

- 5.37 Residents are not well provided for within the village for formal indoor sports provision. There are no formal indoor sports facilities, save for the limited offer within the YMCA.
- 5.38 It would not be feasible to locate a large-scale indoor sports facility in Hirwaun as the scale of the local catchment is insufficient to justify the investment associated with a free standing leisure centre, which is unlikely to be viable in this location. However, the area could benefit from a small-scale, indoor 'door-step' sports facility. Such a facility should be accessible by all modes of transport and should be both appropriate in scale and fulfilling in terms of the day-to-day sporting needs of the population in which it serves e.g. keep fit/yoga. Such facilities should be flexible in design and

wherever possible cater for a number of activities to be undertaken and should be set within the shared facilities that have been reconsidered elsewhere in this section. Best use should therefore be made of existing facilities in the area such as yoga or aerobic classes in the village hall or in a church hall. The potential relocation of the YMCA could provide a major opportunity to improve the indoor sports offer.

- 5.39 This approach would offer a hierarchical approach to the provision of sports and leisure facilities within the County Borough, with larger leisure centres being located in the main and most accessible principal settlements and with community centres and other local facilities being used in smaller towns and villages to provide for other sporting and recreation needs. We would expect that the type of opportunities provided in such locations would be those that are not dependent upon large, specialist buildings (e.g. swimming or squash) or those that require large pieces of expensive equipment (e.g. cardio-vascular equipment within a gymnasium).

### **Tourism**

- 5.40 RCT's tourism strategy is based upon the importance of promoting three key elements - the natural environment, heritage, history and culture. Although Hirwaun has hitherto played a very limited tourism role, it offers considerable potential to draw upon the heritage and environment elements of the strategy.
- 5.41 Various walks and trails could be developed around the natural environment and the historical heritage features in the village, for example, the history behind the Ironworks and the local historical buildings could be promoted more effectively. The establishment of walking and cycle paths and bridleways would be important in emphasising the links between the local area and the Brecon Beacons National Park. Hirwaun's location provides the opportunity to develop a major visitor offer based on the natural environment and 'the outdoors'. This would link into strategies that are being established throughout RCT and in the wider area and would also be of considerable benefit for local residents.
- 5.42 The consultation process established that the rich local culture and heritage of Hirwaun is extremely important to the local community. However this is not promoted visually within the village. There is a need to find different ways of recording and promoting local heritage as part of the preservation of the local community's identity. The Iron Works site in particular provides an opportunity for the development of the local tourism sector, based upon the heritage value of the local area. The

establishment of a visitor centre or a small museum, based upon the local mining industry might provide an important tourist facility.

- 5.43 The role of local public houses needs to be improved as does the quality of eateries if the aim is to make the village a popular visitor attraction. Furthermore, the sensitive refurbishment and re-use of historic buildings can present particular opportunities for tourism.

### **Sustainable Access to employment**

- 5.44 As discussed in Section 3, the small-scale sources of employment found within the village consist of the primary school, the health centre, and the limited local retail and service providers. In addition, two industrial estates are located to the west of the village at Bryngelli Estate and Hirwaun Industrial Estate. Whilst Bryngelli Estate is in close proximity to facilities and can be accessed by alternative modes of transport this is not the case for Hirwaun Industrial Estate which is somewhat isolated from the rest of the village.
- 5.45 Apart from the limited retail and service providers within the area the employment sources are located some distance outside the core shopping area. Improved access to employment is recommended especially to Hirwaun Industrial Estate. Pavements and cycle paths should be developed further from Hirwaun village to the Industrial estate to improve linkages from surrounding villages and public transport services to these employment sites should be improved where possible.
- 5.46 The viability of establishing workshop units within the derelict buildings that exist within the industrial estate should be explored as a way to provide adequate and suitable premises for some existing businesses and also to attract to new businesses.
- 5.47 The vacant buildings that exist in the shopping centre should also be regenerated and may provide employment benefits. They could be used for business advice training courses or workshops to provide additional information on setting up businesses - for example, as a Co-operative Advisory Centre. The provision of training initiatives will be important in ensuring that local people are able to take advantage of any job opportunities that become available. Such a facility would also be able to offer support and guidance to local job-seekers, to ensure that they are able to find appropriate work in the local area.

## **Public transport and Infrastructure**

- 5.48 Getting people out of their cars and onto the streets enhances sustainability, delivers health advantages and maximises individuals' opportunities to get to know their neighbours and to use local shops. Walking and cycling to improve fitness levels and good public transport reduces congestion and carbon dioxide emissions.
- 5.49 Bus provision within Hirwaun village is currently reasonable with frequent services during the week days to the major centres such as Aberdare, Swansea and Merthyr Tydfil. Bus stops are also found throughout Hirwaun Village, ensuring good access to buses. However, the consultation process established that the bus service is viewed to be infrequent on Sundays, in the evenings and when accessing surrounding local villages or small towns. Direct access by bus to many facilities such as the local hospital is considered poor by many consultees. Consideration might therefore be given to the possible improvement in bus routes and service hours. Better route information and timetables (including real time indicators) at bus stops is also recommended alongside the provision of shelters.
- 5.50 There is currently no railway station for public use within the village and it is not considered feasible to provide one at this stage. However, the Council is recommended to explore further the possibility of re-opening the old railway line that runs through the village for public use. There is concern over the viability of re-introducing a railway service into Hirwaun and it is unlikely that would be realised in the short term.
- 5.51 Whilst there is a perception of road congestion, there is no evidence to prove this according to the Highways Officer. However, the future dualling of the Heads of the Valley Road and the associated closure of one of the main accesses to Hirwaun may result in increased levels of congestion. Careful consideration should be given to address these potential problems and the planned closure of one access to Hirwaun should be re-evaluated on the basis of its possible implications in terms of the sustainability of the village and the ease of movement for the local community and visitors.
- 5.52 Car sharing schemes and public transport enhancements should be promoted to relieve increasing pressure from further disruption in the area.
- 5.53 The village should be improved where possible to be designed around pedestrians and not car drivers. Within Hirwaun village, there is not a good perception of pedestrian safety, with poor connectivity through existing housing estates and with

very few pedestrian crossings. Provision of appropriate pedestrian crossing points e.g. 'build-outs' and pedestrian island refuges is recommended. There is a need to carry out a structured programme of infrastructure improvements, including the upgrading of pavements.

- 5.54 There is a perception of insecurity within the village, especially at night. Street lighting should be improved and expanded to help combat this problem. A uniform standard of lighting throughout the village would be beneficial and could be achieved by upgrading and installing additional lighting where necessary and for which finance is available. The proposals should ensure that any improvements cover all inadequate roads and lanes and deliver a high quality level of provision throughout the village.
- 5.55 'Traffic taming' should be a priority so that young people in particular can reclaim their mobility by foot and bicycle - and travel safely around their homes and to and from local services and schools.
- 5.56 Cycling should also be encouraged for short journeys. Providing lockable cycle parking facilities in central Hirwaun and safe cycle routes would be appropriate.
- 5.57 There are sections of road between the surrounding villages where it can be dangerous to walk or cycle due to the type and speed of vehicles that use these routes. Despite this, the short distances between many of these villages could make it manageable for many to travel by foot or by bicycle. The introduction of and improvements to the pavements and cycleways would strengthen these links between the communities as well as facilitating a healthy and more suitable mode of transport.

### **Capacity for future growth**

- 5.58 Past development trends in Hirwaun have failed to secure an adequate level of community facilities for the area. This unsustainable trend cannot continue.
- 5.59 Although future growth in Hirwaun is likely to be unpopular amongst local residents it is likely to continue. If handled appropriately, growth will not be a negative force but could help to bring further investment into the village and to promote its diversity and sustainability.
- 5.60 The future priority for the area should be to achieve balanced and sustainable growth. Future development should be appropriately located, accessible by a variety of transport modes and should seek to re-address the current imbalance in community

facilities. Fulfilment of these objectives will capture more benefits for the local communities.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The purpose of this report has been to consider the existing provision and supply of local services in Hirwaun and to assess the need for additional facilities in order to meet local needs. The levels of development that have taken place in the past have not been sustainable. They have resulted in a considerable expansion in residential accommodation but without the essential facilities that are required to serve the local communities. This has been detrimental to the area and has contributed towards a need to travel, even for everyday items and services. It has also undermined the ability of the settlement to adequately perform its role in serving the smaller, surrounding settlements.
- 6.2 As the Council seeks to deliver a more sustainable development strategy through its emerging Local Development Plan and to provide a better quality of life for all that live, work and visit the area, it is essential that it responds to the particular challenges that the past patterns of development have created.
- 6.3 In Chapter 4, we identified the vision for Hirwaun as a thriving and attractive village which adequately provides for the day-to-day needs of the local population and visitors and which continues to develop in a balanced and sustainable manner. This is based upon an aspiration to realise its full potential and an appreciation that its long term growth will be subject to clear limits. Hirwaun is a large village but, in spite of the level of growth that is anticipated to arise in the future, it will remain a village. This has clear implications in respect of the nature and scale of development that can and should be accommodated.
- 6.4 It is evident that much needs to be done to enhance the sustainability of Hirwaun and to ensure that the needs of the local community can be more readily satisfied. Whilst the desire and the potential for change is considerable, this would only be achieved if the proposals are deliverable both at the time of implementation and also in their longer term operational phase. The deliverability of proposals depends upon ensuring that they are of an appropriate scale and type to the local area.
- 6.5 Recognition of the current and future role of the village and its limits to development is central to the long term sustainability of the village and must be imbued within any assessment of its future. Whilst there is a need to raise expectations within the village, they must be controlled so that people do not expect the undeliverable and so that the future development of the village is not rooted upon impossible aspirations.

- 6.6 In addition, the viability and long term success of the proposals depend upon achieving public buy-in of and support for the proposals. If local residents do not support the facilities that are provided, they will be unlikely to use them. This would have obvious and considerable implications upon their longer term security. Having undertaken a detailed consultation process, we have been able to establish a clear understanding of local needs and the ways in which these might be better met within Hirwaun.
- 6.7 Chapter 5 details the type and range of the facilities that are required and the nature of improvements that should be delivered in order to enhance the overall sustainability of the village. These recommendations are based upon the consultation with stakeholders and the local community. The purpose of this chapter is to provide recommendations on the delivery of these necessary changes.

#### **Regain the equilibrium of provision.**

- 6.8 Over recent years, the local population in Hirwaun has grown considerably as a result of new house building. This has placed increased pressure upon local facilities and services and due to the scale of provision, people have been forced to travel to surrounding locations for a wide range of shops and services and employment and leisure opportunities.
- 6.9 The primary challenge for the Council as it seeks to move forward must be to regain the equilibrium of provision within Hirwaun. This study has identified the existing shortcomings in provision and the areas of improvement that will help to ensure that the village might once again provide for the needs of the local community and those people living in the outlying settlements. Such a re-establishment of the equilibrium of provision will be critical, not only to the long term sustainability and viability of Hirwaun but also to the achievement of the Council's vision for sustainable growth and the achievement of sustainable communities. It will depend upon a change in development patterns, an enhancement in the offer of the village and a re-thinking in the ways that spaces and facilities are used.

#### **Enhancement of facilities and the village offer**

- 6.10 Regaining the equilibrium of provision can only be achieved through enhancement in the village offer. There is presently a shortage in the level of provision of facilities and, as outlined in Chapter 5, shops, services and facilities should be promoted and enhanced to fill these gaps in a manner that reflects the nature of the settlement and the community.

6.11 However, in seeking to improve the village offer, it is important to recognise the considerable role of the private sector. Whilst it is not possible to force retailers or service providers to trade from Hirwaun, the County Borough Council can support them by creating an appropriate policy context and an attractive environment which is conducive to investment. In addition to physical enhancement works, this might include the identification of a local centre with a policy approach which seeks to promote the establishment and maintenance of retail and service activities, in preference to outlying areas. The enhancement of the High Street area will highlight its centrality within the settlement and will deliver a better range and level of access to functions for all.

6.12 In addition to seeking to encourage private sector investment, it is evident that there is much that the Council is able to do directly to enhance the village offer. Its key focus should be upon the improvement of community, social, educational and leisure facilities to ensure that local needs are better met. In addition, it should seek to enhance the public realm and the appearance of the street-scene by undertaking improvement works. These would help to achieve a greater sense of place and community which would encourage a greater patronage of the facilities and an increased level of interest by operators.

**Ensure that future development trends do not replicate those of the past**

6.13 As the village develops further, it will be important to maintain this equilibrium in the future. It would not be sufficient to enhance facilities to a level whereby they meet – or even exceed – the requirements of the current population, but then fail to meet the needs of the expanding population over coming years.

6.14 The challenge must be to maintain a balanced community in Hirwaun by ensuring that future development is appropriately served by necessary facilities. Although much is required now to address the deficiencies in provision that have been allowed to emerge, the real challenge for the village does not exist at this time. It lies in the future in the Council's ability to deliver a change in development trends and to maintain the balance that is so desperately needed.

6.15 This change might be delivered in two ways:

- through planning policy; and/or
- through the planning obligation system

*The role of planning policy in the delivery of necessary changes*

- 6.16 The preparation of the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP provides a good opportunity to establish the necessary policy support to deliver the changes that are now required in Hirwaun. The overall aim of the RCT LDP is to ensure that:

*'Rhondda Cynon Taf will be a community where everyone who lives, works in or visits the area will enjoy the benefits of a better quality of life, achieving their potential, whilst helping to develop and protect the area for future generations'*

- 6.17 Issues of sustainable development are now at the forefront of public as well as professional thinking. This issue will shape the direction of the LDP and its various policies and proposals will all be directed towards the delivery of this overarching aspiration. The drive for sustainability must therefore similarly shape the emerging plans for Hirwaun. It is recognised that the settlement is presently unsustainable and that action is required to address this. Action to improve the level of facilities within the village will be well related to the overall objectives of the County Borough Council as they will contribute towards a change in the extent to which the local community can benefit from a better quality of life, can achieve their potential and can enjoy their local environment.
- 6.18 LDP policies will be used to direct development in an appropriate manner in Hirwaun. They will provide a basis by which the most sustainable use of land and the most efficient distribution of functions might be achieved. In view of local concerns regarding recent development trends on open land within the village, particular attention should be given to the protection of public open space so that it is not unnecessarily lost to development without replacement. The public open space assessment presently being undertaken for the County Borough will be helpful in providing qualitative support for this policy. In some cases, the release of open land for alternative purposes might be appropriate but this must be carefully monitored and supported by quantitative evidence so that it does not undermine the level or quality of public open space provision. As appropriate, alternative facilities should be provided locally. It should be demonstrated that this alternative provision is better than the existing facility in terms of size, quality or location.
- 6.19 In addition, LDP policy should be used to promote community facilities so that the needs of local residents might be better met. As well as setting out a basis for the types of improvement that are required and the level of facility provision that should be sought within different settlements, this might include the allocation of land for

specific functions which have been highlighted as being required within the village. The specific allocation of land will be important in demonstrating the Council's commitment to delivering the changes that have been shown to be required and in helping to ensure that these can be realised.

- 6.20 It is important that future development trends do not replicate those of the past. This is not to say that future growth within the village should not be envisaged but that it should be tied with an appropriate increase in facilities so that there is an overall improvement in the experience of all members of the population. The LDP can play an important role in this process, firstly by providing a clear understanding on the need for additional housing and other forms of development and secondly by offering policy guidance (including in the form of planning briefs and development guidance in the case of larger sites) on the form and composition of development schemes and the importance of achieving a mix of uses to the benefit of the community. Guidance on section 106 contributions will form an important element of this process.

*Consider the potential of the section 106 process to act as a delivery mechanism*

- 6.21 The purpose of planning obligations is to remedy genuine planning problems and to enhance the quality of development and its contribution to a particular area. Circular 13/97 states that planning obligations to be sought only when they are:
- (i) Necessary;
  - (ii) Relevant to planning;
  - (iii) Directly related to the proposed development;
  - (iv) Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development;
- and
- (v) Reasonable in all other respects.
- 6.22 New residential development will result in an increase in the local population and with this, increased pressure upon existing facilities and services. Developer contributions can play an important role in enhancing the local provision of facilities so that the new development does not result in a loss in the quality of provision or have a detrimental impact upon the experience of existing residents. Contributions, which can take the form of in-kind contributions (where the developer carries out certain work), financial contributions, maintenance contributions or pooled contributions (whereby money from several developments is pooled) might be used for fund a number of improvement schemes, for example relating to public open space, sports and leisure

facilities, education, medical facilities, community facilities, public transport and the local environment.

- 6.23 Supplementary Planning Guidance on planning obligations is presently being prepared for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. This will be important guidance which will provide clarity to developers and to local communities in respect of the likely requirements associated with new development. It will also improve the Council's position in negotiating for contributions and thereby increase the likelihood that an adequate provision would be made.
- 6.24 Despite being important, this mechanism only relates to new development. Planning obligations should not be expected to make good an existing shortfall in provision. It should therefore be used in conjunction with other strategies aimed at increasing the number and range of facilities within Hirwaun.

### **Concentrate upon the ability to share spaces**

- 6.25 In promoting sustainable development in the future, consideration should not just be given to the range of facilities that are required but also to the ways in which these might be provided. Care should be taken to avoid the unnecessary duplication of local provision within the village or in adjoining villages as this might undermine their viability and ultimately result in their inability to remain open. If they were to close they would not be able to serve the community.
- 6.26 Consideration should also be given to how facilities are provided so as to ensure that the most sustainable, efficient and equitable use of land, buildings and resources might be achieved. In many cases, local facilities can be combined into a single building. For example, a youth centre, OAP centre and community centre need not be provided in separate buildings. Such facilities might also be capable of providing a wide range of facilities and activities for all ages including play provision, training, community facilities and 'door step' type leisure facilities. Similarly, the public library could – and should – provide more space for IT facilities and training opportunities (such as day or evening classes) whilst the school might be associated with child-care or leisure opportunities.
- 6.27 The sharing of space means that land and buildings can be used more efficiently, financial savings can be achieved – both in construction and in operation and maintenance – and, importantly, the opportunity can be provided for different sectors of the community to use the same space at the same time for different purposes, thereby creating the opportunity for better community integration and cohesion. Whilst

a larger building would be required to accommodate the various functions, it would represent a more efficient use of the space and would also create the opportunity for a landmark building to be provided and located centrally within the village. Subject to identifying suitable development opportunities, this centrality would be important in helping to meet the needs of all members of the community and in engendering a greater sense of social inclusion. The Iron Works has been identified as appropriate to accommodate community facilities. This site is centrally located within Hirwaun, is sufficiently capacious to accommodate additional facilities and would help to support and strengthen the role of the High Street as the village centre.

- 6.28 However, care must be taken to the ways in which space is used within shared buildings so that different uses do not create a disturbance or a nuisance to one another. This is an important but not an insurmountable matter which, with careful planning and management can be sufficiently addressed. Similarly, care should be taken to ensure that the sharing of space is appropriate and that it does not create any unnecessary security – or other-risks. For example, allowing members of the public to freely access school premises during the day may not be appropriate and should not be encouraged. The sharing of space used for medical purposes might also create similar concerns. Again, these issues can be addressed and should not be taken as an apology for inaction. However, they do clearly demonstrate the importance of adopting a careful approach to the provision of new facilities.

### **Focus on quality**

- 6.29 This report has made a large number of recommendations about the type and range of facilities that should be provided within Hirwaun. In considering the need for and in seeking to provide new facilities within the village, the County Borough Council must focus upon the need for quality as well as quantity. This should include a consideration of the implications of future increases in demand through the development of facilities that are larger than presently required and which therefore have the capacity to accommodate increased future demands without any detrimental impact upon service quality.
- 6.30 Although there would be obvious cost implications associated with the provision of higher quality facilities, it will be important in ensuring the long term sustainability of provision and in ensuring that the current and emerging needs of the existing and future communities are met.

6.31 The focus on quality should relate to new provision in the context of improvements to existing facilities. Many existing facilities in Hirwaun are substandard and improvements are required. These shortcomings would be even more evident if new, alternative developments are offered. Where new facilities are proposed in addition to the existing offer, the Council should therefore seek to consider opportunities to improve the quality of all facilities for the whole community. A failure to do this would result in the risk of increased inequalities as some members of the community are served by well-equipped, high standard and modern facilities, whilst others are served by sub-standard, aged and poor quality facilities. We would be concerned about the implications of this upon community cohesion and recommend that appropriate action is taken by the Council.

### **Maintenance, maintenance, maintenance.**

6.32 The preservation of high quality facilities will be important to ensure that the needs of the local community can be met in the future and not just at this time. The key to this is ensuring that adequate maintenance is undertaken. In many cases, it is evident that public facilities are not being adequately looked after by the local authority, to the detriment of users. In seeking to realise the necessary step change in the ability to meet local needs, the Council should therefore take a more proactive approach to the establishment of maintenance regimes for facilities to preserve quality.

### **Aspiration to become an exemplar of sustainable development**

6.33 Hirwaun is a small settlement but has considerable opportunity for enhancement and to provide a greater level and range of facilities to meet the needs of the local community. The 'no action' option is not appropriate and would result in a continued failure to meet the needs of the community. By contrast, it is possible to establish the village as an exemplar of sustainable community development wherein the level of provision reflects its scale and the appropriate needs of all residents are met within the context of the village.

6.34 In so doing, Hirwaun might now turn a corner and demonstrate that the aspiration for the County Borough as a whole need not relate solely to the larger centres but also to smaller settlements.

### **All about the community...places for people**

6.35 Communities are not about buildings or spaces. They are not even about facilities. They are about people. The needs of the local community in Hirwaun have not been

fully satisfied over recent years and the failure to keep the provision of facilities in pace with population growth has resulted in problems relating to inequality, community satisfaction, sustainability and the need to travel for basic goods, services and facilities. As has been demonstrated, the challenge that presently exists is to tackle these trends and to ensure that the local community might be better served in the future. The vision established in this report and the recommendations set out are designed to help deliver Hirwaun as a settlement that serves all members of the local community and within which no one suffers from social exclusion or isolation. They are designed at ensuring that everyone who lives, works in or visits the area will enjoy the benefits of a better quality of life, achieving their potential, whilst helping to develop and protect the area for future generations.

6.36 Despite the unsustainable patterns of development that have characterised the recent history of Hirwaun, the time of change has arrived. The time has come and the opportunity now exists to give Hirwaun back to its community, and to ensure that it can be a place that they like, that they enjoy, that meets their needs and of which they are proud.

### Summary of recommendations

6.37 For the purposes of clarity, the recommendations set out in chapter 5 are summarised below:

<b>Retail</b>	Support the High Street as the centre of Hirwaun through policy and development control approaches
	Shop front improvement grants and establishment of design framework to improve quality and appearance of shops
	Promotion of reuse of vacant shops and buildings
	Publicise shops and services within Hirwaun
	Create new parking lay-by at High Street
<b>Community Facilities</b>	Encourage better use of the Village Hall
	Relocation of YMCA to larger premises on less constrained site

	Reuse of vacant church buildings
	Creation of shared multi-functional facilities
<b>Information</b>	Expansion of Hirwaun Library
	Continuation and expansion of the E3 programme
	Improvement of availability of information about the village and local activities
<b>Education</b>	Continued physical improvements and maintenance of Primary School
	Development of new school in an accessible location at the East of the village
	Sharing of school space by use by the community out of hours
<b>Health</b>	Replacement health facilities
	Enhancement of local dental facilities
<b>Outdoor leisure</b>	Undertake open space assessment
	Policy protection of public open space
	Examination of adequacy of public open space – in particular, drainage, maintenance, accessibility, lighting, associated facilities and play offer
	Qualitative improvements of open space, e.g. through the provision of changing rooms, drainage and lighting
	Provision of multi-purpose facility
	Enhancement and refurbishment of children's play areas
	Creation of new 'playable spaces'

	Use of Iron Works as an informal space
	Maintenance of open space
<b>Indoor Leisure</b>	Establishment of a 'door step' sports facility
	Better use of existing facilities in the local area
<b>Tourism</b>	Consider long term potential for tourism facilities in Hirwaun, linked to heritage and environmental elements
<b>Employment</b>	Improved pedestrian and cycle links to employment areas
	Skills training
<b>Transport</b>	Improvements to bus services and attractiveness
	Implementation of initiatives to encourage more public transport use
	Improved cycle connections
	Improved pedestrian facilities
	Encouragement of car sharing
	Review of proposed closure of one access into Hirwaun from Heads of Valleys Road

## 7.0 APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Policy context

- 7.1 The purpose of this study is to consider the existing range and supply of local facilities and the sustainability of Hirwaun. In so doing, it will inform the emerging local policy context. However, this should be in accordance with policies at all levels.
- 7.2 This section outlines the relevant national, regional and local planning policy context in relation to sustainable development and public facilities. The review also examines a number of non-planning documents which guide local authority approaches to development and provision of various community facilities in the area.

#### National

*People, Places, Futures - the Wales Spatial Plan (November 2004)*

- 7.3 Local authorities in Wales must have regard to the national policy framework, as well as the Wales Spatial Plan. The plan sets a vision for how each part of Wales should develop economically, socially and environmentally over the coming years and is intended to guide Welsh Assembly Government spending over this period.
- 7.4 Building sustainable communities is an important aim of the Spatial Plan. The Plan aims to reduce the inequalities between communities whilst still retaining their character and distinctiveness. Access to good-quality health and education facilities as well as affordable housing and economic activity were viewed as important aspects to improve upon, especially within the South Wales Valleys.
- 7.5 Along with a number of neighbouring authorities, RCT was identified as part of the South East – Capital Network Zone. The plan sets out a spatial vision for the area:

*“An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life – international yet distinctively Welsh. It will compete internationally by increasing its global visibility through stronger links between the Valleys and the coast and the UK and Europe, helping spread prosperity within the area and benefiting other parts of Wales”.*

*(Source: Wales Spatial Plan, November 2004, page 49)*

- 7.6 The Capital Network Zone exhibits social and economic disparities with heavy commuting flows between the valleys and the coast. In particular the plan identifies the Heads of the Valleys area as having a high concentration of social deprivation and economic inactivity, allied to low levels of educational attainment and skills, poor health and a declining population.

7.7 As a result the Heads of the Valleys corridor is identified as a key area for regeneration focusing on the potential of Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale as key catalytic centres for regeneration in the upper valleys area.

*People, Places, Futures - the Wales Spatial Plan 2008 Update Consultation*

7.8 This draft plan was published on the 31st of January 2008 for a 12 week consultation period closing on the 24th April 2008.

7.9 Similar to the adopted November 2004 plan, this consultation draft is organised around six key themes:

- building sustainable communities
- promoting a sustainable economy
- valuing our environment
- achieving sustainable accessibility
- respecting distinctiveness
- working with our neighbours

7.10 As per the adopted Wales Spatial Plan, RCT County Borough Council is located within the 'Capital Network' (South-East Wales). In particular developments linked to the dualling of the Heads of the Valleys road (A465) and the area around Llantrisant and North West Cardiff form two of three identified Strategic Opportunity Areas (SOA) that have been identified as offering potential regional benefits. Further development will however need to be carefully judged so that excessive strain is not placed on infrastructure and other essential services and to ensure environmental impact is minimised.

*Planning Policy Wales (PPW) (March 2002)*

7.11 PPW sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's land use planning policies. Planning is recognised to have a fundamental role in delivering sustainable development by helping in the process of balancing and integrating the Assembly's sustainability objectives in order to meet current development needs while safeguarding those of the future. The planning system is required to provide for homes, infrastructure, investment and jobs in a way which is consistent with sustainability principles set out in PPW.

7.12 PPW (para 2.2) outlines nine sustainability principles which relate to a wide range of issues; these include:

*"putting people, and their quality of life now and in the future, at the centre of decision-making;*

*ensuring that everyone has the chance to obtain information, see how decisions are made and take part in decision-making;*

*taking a long-term perspective to safeguard the interests of future generations, whilst at the same time meeting needs of people today”*

7.13 In accordance with these sustainability principles, PPW outlines a set of broad objectives which derive from these principles and reflect the wider sustainable development agenda. These principles seek to promote resource-efficient settlement patterns and locate development so as to minimise demand for travel. In addition to this, PPW recognises the need to promote access to employment, shopping, education, health, community, leisure and sports facilities as well as open and green space. Access to such elements is viewed to maximise opportunities for community development and social welfare.

7.14 Interlinked with this objective, PPW states that accessible places help to foster social inclusion by maximising the number and range of people who can benefit from nearby facilities.

*TAN 4 Retailing and Town Centres (1996)*

7.15 National policy seeks to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres. In accordance with this national aim, this TAN outlines a number of indicators which are identified as important in measuring the vitality, attractiveness and viability of town centres. Identified indicators include:

- turnover in relation to floorspace
- commercial yield on non-domestic property
- shopping rents
- the diversity of uses
- retailer representation and change

Amongst other indicators accessibility and vacancy rates were also identified as useful markers.

7.16 Appropriate assessment of development impact on the town centre is an important consideration and all retail applications over 2,500 sq.m should be supported by an impact assessment which provides evidence of the adoption of a sequential approach to site selection, an assessment of likely economic and other impacts on other retail locations, including town centres, local centres and villages, and consideration of access as well as environmental impacts.

- 7.17 TAN 4 also states that similar impact assessments may also be necessary for some smaller developments, for instance those that are likely to have a large impact on a smaller town or district centre.

*TAN 13 Tourism (1997)*

- 7.18 Tourism cannot be regarded as a single or distinct land-use category, the issues it raises should be addressed in preparing or revising development plans and in development control decisions. Specifically in relevance to this study, TAN 13 states that hotel development can bring benefits for the local community and support amenities and activities for residents and tourists. However such development should be compatible with neighbouring uses and care should be taken not to use the planning system to perpetuate outdated accommodation for which there is no longer a market demand.

*Draft TAN 13 (July 2006)*

- 7.19 Tourism has been defined by the Tourism Society as *'the temporary short term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work and the activities during the stay at these destinations'*.
- 7.20 The economic and employment benefits of tourism should be maximised through the encouragement of greater levels of tourist investment and expenditure. The Assembly Government recognises and supports the important contribution that tourism can make to urban and rural renaissance and for increasing the levels of diversity in the local economy.
- 7.21 Consultation closed on this document on 27 October 2006, a new TAN to replace the 1997 document is expected in the next few months.

*TAN 16 Sport and Recreation (1998)*

- 7.22 This TAN outlines the responsibilities of the Sports Council for Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency in relation to sport and recreation planning, and notes the need for planning authorities to consider the relationship between the recreational use of land and the interests of conservation.
- 7.23 The advice does not prescribe national standards for recreational provision and views the process of open space standard-making as a Local Planning Authority (LPA) duty, having regard to local circumstances. TAN16 makes no reference or requirement to carry out Public Open Space Assessments and calls for locally generated standards;

however the document clearly identifies the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) 'Six Acre Standard' document as a basis for standard-making.

*Draft TAN 16: Sport and Recreation*

- 7.24 Draft TAN 16 was prepared in the light of the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAGs) commitments to health and well being, increased participation in physical activity and opportunities for all, as set out in 'Wales: A Better Country' (September 2003) and 'Climbing Higher' (January 2005).
- 7.25 This TAN recommends LPAs to undertake Open Space Assessments, with which local standards and LDP policy concerning open space can be based upon. This includes an assessment of need and an audit of open space supply.
- 7.26 The TAN sets out the various open space typologies, in this context open space in the public realm, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer opportunities for sport, recreation and tourism and can also act as a visual amenity, and may have conservation importance.
- 7.27 Consultation replies are currently being analysed and a new adopted TAN is set to replace the 1998 document in the next six months.

*TAN 18 Transport (March 2007)*

- 7.28 An efficient and sustainable transport system is recognised as a requirement for a modern, prosperous and inclusive society.
- 7.29 This TAN seeks to promote resource and travel efficient settlement patterns. This can be achieved by locating development where there is or will be good access by public transport, walking and cycling thereby minimising the need for travel and fostering social inclusion by ensuring accessibility for everyone. In addition the location of development near other related uses should encourage multi-purpose trips.

**Regional**

*Mid Glamorgan (Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council) Replacement Structure Plan (1991-2006)*

- 7.30 The Structure Plan sets out County Borough wide strategic guidance for land-use development over a period of 15 years, until 2006. Although now out-of-date this adopted plan still forms an important part of the adopted development plan policy framework for the former Mid Glamorgan area. It will be replaced by the LDP in due course.

- 7.31 In terms of housing, the plan sought to focus most housing within the Taff Ely area of the Borough, and to a lesser extent in the Cynon Valley. An adequate supply of housing land continues to remain a vital element of the Structure Plan.
- 7.32 In relation to transportation, Policy T1 of the plan sought early implementation for the improvements to the trunk road system including the A465 (T) dualling between Abergavenny and Hirwaun. This will provide an improved route for through-traffic as well as relief for Hirwaun.
- 7.33 Major improvement is taking place in parts of the Borough, based upon different kinds of tourist attractions. The Borough believes that further designations as priority areas, would enhance their status and encourage co-ordinated management strategy. A major part of the renewal strategy involves the development of tourist facilities, especially in the Northern valleys through the enhancement of the area's rich industrial and historical heritage and local leisure provision. Policy L7 seeks to support such tourism-related development as a specific priority for the northern valleys area.

### **Local**

#### *Adopted*

- 7.34 RCT is divided into three areas known as Rhondda, Cynon Valley and Taff Ely. Each area has its own local plan which I have listed below:
- Rhondda Cynon Taff (Rhondda) Local Plan 1991-2006
  - Rhondda Cynon Taff (Cynon Valley) Local Plan 1991-2006
  - Rhondda Cynon Taff (Taff Ely) Local Plan 1991-2006



(Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf website)

7.34 Rhondda Cynon Taf (Cynon Valley) Local Plan was adopted in January 2003 and covers the period 1991 – 2006. Hirwaun is located within the Cynon Valley region of the Borough.

7.35 The centre of Hirwaun is a designated secondary and local shopping area, whilst there are also several transport proposals and residential allocations within the town. According to the Proposals Map, the Cynon River Park is adjacent to Hirwaun and there are several recreation proposals in this area.

7.36 The Strategy for the Cynon Valley Local Plan is:-

*“To secure the economic regeneration of the Cynon Valley by providing opportunities for new investment through the allocation of land and the control of new development, without prejudice to the conservation and enhancement of the built and natural environment”.*

*(Rhondda Cynon Taf (Cynon Valley) Local Plan 1991-2006, P. 9)*

7.37 The plan provides a significant focus on the environment and deals in detail with design; this is particularly important considering the close proximity of area to the Brecon Beacons National Park (see Policy ENV3).

- 7.38 Policy ENV1 sets out criteria against which all planning applications will be considered, it includes consideration of the proposed development compatibility with the surrounding land uses, its adequacy in relation to privacy standards, accessibility, siting, scale, layout and design. In circumstances where granting consent for major development proposals, the Council will seek the provision of associated environmental and community benefits (Policy ENV7).
- 7.39 Hirwaun High Street was defined as a local and secondary shopping area (SP1) and was found to be in a bad state of repair. The prime aim of designating secondary and local shopping areas is to concentrate commercial activity within well defined areas, thereby preventing sprawl of commercial uses.
- 7.40 New shop fronts should ensure that the design of such proposals are in-keeping with the scale and character of the buildings and the street scene generally (ENV10) and change of use of buildings to residential use within the defined primary and secondary shopping areas is restricted (Policy H7).
- 7.41 Policy S3 favours the conversion of vacant sites adjoining designated local and secondary shopping area to commercial uses provided the location of the property is well located in relation to the existing commercial areas and there are no suitable alternative premises within designated shopping areas.
- 7.42 Policy S4 states that limited additional A1, A2 and A3 development appropriate to the size and function of the centre will be permitted within or adjacent to established groups of shops. Within these areas proposals for the change of use of shops to any use appropriate to a shopping area will be permitted provided:
- (i) An adequate range of A1 remains and that the retail function of the area will not be undermined.
  - (ii) The proposed use would contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre.
- 7.43 According to Policy SP2, provision of shopping, office and leisure facilities will be permitted in secondary and local shopping area such as Hirwaun.
- 7.44 In terms of residential uses, paragraph 5.17 sets out that 2,500 dwellings should be provided in the Cynon Valley between 1991 and 2006, a proportion of which should be affordable housing (Policy H4).
- 7.45 Chapter 8 deals with urban regeneration. An enhancement scheme has been formulated for Hirwaun. This provides more detailed guidance on the future

programmes of environmental improvement and enhancement. Policy URB1 states that development of land considered important to securing the overall enhancement of the surrounding area will not be permitted where it is likely to prejudice the future implementation of enhancement schemes.

- 7.46 Revitalisation of the town centre is viewed as an important aspect of urban regeneration. Policy URB2 seeks to concentrate resources on implementing a range of renewal initiatives including building refurbishment, traffic management measures and streetscape enhancement.
- 7.47 Favourable support is given to the reclamation or cosmetic treatment of a number of areas in the Cynon Valley (Policy URBP1), one of which is the former Hirwaun Ironworks.
- 7.48 This site is 13.2ha and is the subject of a development brief. It is proposed to reclaim the area for a mix of uses including residential development and an informal amenity area.
- 7.49 Policy R1 seeks provision of recreational facilities in accordance with the Council's standards by means of a planning obligation for new residential development. Whilst proposals resulting in the loss of sports grounds will not be permitted except where it can be demonstrated that the facility is surplus to requirements or that suitable replacement facilities can be provided within the locality (Policy R2).
- 7.50 Policy RP1 allocates land east of Hirwaun recreation ground for a full size rugby pitch, to be utilised by Hirwaun Rugby Club. Similarly, land at the Hirwaun Ironworks site is allocated for parkland under Policy RP7.
- 7.51 In relation to transport, the Local Plan identifies the dualling of the A465 between Abergavenny and Hirwaun as a major highway scheme in the Cynon Valley. It is expected that the upgrading of this important strategic route will further assist the economic regeneration of the head of the valleys and in particular the northern part of the Cynon Valley, close to Hirwaun. Other policies in the plan seek to improve the bus service through the introduction of bus priority measures (Policy TP4) and the existing rail corridor from Aberdare to Hirwaun will be safeguarded from alternative development to enable the expansion of the rail service or other appropriate transport facilities (TP9).
- 7.52 In terms of car parking, the Local Plan states that a car park will be provided on the Hirwaun Ironworks site (Policy TP10) and environmental improvements,

including traffic management, landscaping and urban design measures, will be implemented in the shopping centre of Hirwaun (TP11). This was identified as a follow-up to the recently completed Hirwaun by-pass which saw reduced traffic levels in the town centre.

- 7.53 Chapter 11 of the Local Plan deals with community services. They are recognised as essential to the economic and social well-being of the area and as such constitute an important aspect of the Local Plan. Most policies are place-specific, although Policy C1 is more general and seeks to make land available for community centres at suitable locations to meet the needs of the area's population throughout the plan period.

*Emerging Local Policy: Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan (2006-2021) Preferred Strategy*

- 7.54 This document provides a strategy for future planning decisions in the Borough up until 2021. The document is guided by the Community Plan's vision to make a community where everyone who lives, works in or visits the area will enjoy the benefits of a better quality of life, whilst at the same time as helping to develop and protect the area for future generations. The strategy translates this vision into a series of objectives which form the basis for future policy development, these include: providing a mix of housing, in line with needs, promotion and protection of culture and heritage and reducing the need to travel and promote more sustainable modes of transport.
- 7.55 In relation to housing, the strategy seeks to promote sustainable regeneration for the Borough as whole. The document divides the borough into two parts – a northern strategy area and a southern strategy area and seeks to undertake a targeted approach for each.
- 7.56 Hirwaun is located within the 'Northern Strategy Area'. The emphasis in the northern area will be on building sustainable communities and halting the process of depopulation and decline (see Policy SP1).
- 7.57 Within these areas, the strategy recognises the important role principle towns and key settlements play in providing services of both local and county importance. Where possible, development will be focused on the principle towns and key settlements in order to support and reinforce the important role these centres play as places of social and economic activity.

- 7.58 The plan places an emphasis on sustainable development (Policy SP3) and place-making (Policy SP4). All development in the Borough will be determined on the basis of need and appropriate in scale to the environmental and infrastructural capacity. In addition, the strategy seeks to ensure that all development should contribute to creating sustainable places by including, amongst other things, an integrated mixture of uses, high levels of connectivity, high quality public realm and efficient use of land (see Policy SP4).
- 7.59 Hirwaun is identified as one of the eight key settlements in the Borough which is a less significant centre than the other key settlements. Although Hirwaun is found to be in an excellent strategic location, capable of assimilating significant additional residential and commercial development.
- 7.60 In terms of residential development, provision will be made for 14,850 new dwellings throughout the County Borough during the 15 year Plan Period (Policy SP5). The strategy seeks to focus opportunities for additional housing in sustainable locations and at an appropriate scale in mind of the location's capacity for growth.
- 7.61 The northern strategy will seek to favour development of small-scale employment opportunities in areas such as town centres and residential areas provided that development does not have an adverse impact upon the integrity of the area.
- 7.62 In terms of retailing and town centres, Policy SP8 states that proposals for new and enhanced retail provision in, or adjacent to, town and district centres will be permitted where they improve the vitality and viability of the centre.
- 7.63 In terms of the Borough's environment the strategy aims to secure an appropriate balance between protection of the natural environment and historic heritage. Transportation is interlinked with environmental considerations. During the plan period the A465 dualling at Abergavenny /Hirwaun will be completed as well as the provision of a new railway station at Llanharan. Development will be directed to locations that offer a choice of transportation, in order to reduce the need to travel by private car (Policy SP9).
- 7.64 Hirwaun Industrial Estate is identified as one of four sites to provide for a range of waste management options.
- 7.65 A particular emphasis will be placed on community regeneration. Future development should take place in a way which is both sustainable and benefits

the communities of RCT. This aim is particularly important for the northern strategy area which suffers from the greatest deprivation.

- 7.66 Policy SP12 deals with community infrastructure. It recognises that the impact of development on local community infrastructure needs to be addressed by appropriate on-site provision or contributions to off-site improvements. Planning obligations will be sought in relation to a variety of aspects such as affordable housing, open space, highways and/or local education provision.
- 7.67 In order to implement the Preferred Strategy potential key sites for growth are broadly identified throughout the County Borough. For the purposes the LDP strategic sites are sites of more than 20 hectares that will because of the nature, scale or strategic location, significantly contribute to achieving their spatial strategy of the plan.
- 7.68 Site 5 – land south of Hirwaun/ Penywaun forms one of five such sites identified in the northern strategy area. This site forms a strategic corridor of land south of the A465 and may house large-scale employment and some residential uses. Development on this land will be considered in conjunction with emerging Heads of the Valleys Initiatives and discussions with Tower Colliery on the viability of remaining coal resources and future uses of land after coal related operations have ceased.
- 7.69 A number of smaller, non-strategic sites have also been identified to accommodate local growth requirements. A list of sites submitted for consideration through the candidate site process is attached in Appendix 5 and 6 of this report.

### **Other Policy**

#### *Towards Urban Renaissance: Urban Task Force (1999)*

- 7.70 The Urban Task Force's 1999 Urban Renaissance Paper sets out principles for sustainable settlements. It provides guidance adapted from the University of the West of England's Sustainable Settlements Guide and sets out catchment population estimates required to support different facilities, and the types of centres these facilities might be located. The full table and diagram is located in Appendix 2, figure 2.1 below sets out a summary.

**Figure 2.1: Sustainable Settlements Table**

Type of centre	Extent of Catchment Area (radius)	Possible Facilities	Catchment Population
City	4-10 km	Stadium Cathedral City hall Theatre	City City City City
Town or district	2-6 km	Sports centre District centre Library Health centre	25,000 - 40,000 25,000 - 40,000 12,000 - 30,000 9,000 - 12,000
Neighbourhood	400-600m	Community offices Community centre Pub Post office	7,500 7,000 - 15,000 5,000 - 7,000 5,000 - 10,000
Local hubs	150-250m	Primary School Doctor Corner shop	2,500 - 4,000 2,500 - 3,000 2,000 - 5,000

*Source: Sustainable Urban Renaissance Paper by Urban Task Force (1999), Adapted from 'Sustainable settlements guide,' University of the West of England*

7.71 In accordance with this paper a centre such as Hirwaun should typically have a catchment area of 400 to 600 metres in radius, around a 10 minute walk (population 5,000 to 15,000). As such as minimum Hirwaun should include a primary school, post office, public house, community centre, community offices, doctor and corner shop. In accordance with the diagram in Appendix 2, the centre may also sustain a secondary school, health centre, sports hall, small park, shopping hub and church / meeting facility. However the paper does state that there is no blueprint for success and this is strictly relevant to English towns only.

*Turning Heads: A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 (June 2006)*

7.72 This strategy builds on earlier strategies produced by the Heads of the Valleys Programme, namely 'Heads We Win' (March 2005) and 'The Way Ahead...' Towards a Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys' (February 2006).

7.73 The Heads of the Valleys Programme is a 15 year regeneration strategy developed in partnership with five local authorities, including RCT, and other local stakeholders. The aim of the programme is to tackle the root causes of economic inactivity and other key issues in the area within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan.

7.74 *'The Way Ahead ...'Towards a Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys'* (February 2006) put forward the five key themes around which the programme might be built, these included:

- *"An attractive and well-used natural historic and built environment*
- *A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities*
- *A well educated, skilled and healthier population*
- *An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience*
- *Public confidence in a shared bright future"*

7.75 The area is recognised to benefit from some important opportunities, namely the upgrading of the A465, continued major public investment, strong communities and positive developments in the South East Wales labour market. As well as opportunities, there are a number of challenges which need to be addressed in the area, such issues include, a declining population, high levels of economic inactivity, local educational attainment and skills levels and an unfavourable image.

7.76 In light of this knowledge of the area, the document outlines 12 strategic goals and programmes with an action plan for 2006/ 2009. The plan seeks to undertake major environmental ('landscape-scale') projects in 2006/07, then a renewal of key town centres in 2007/08 and development of the tourism and leisure offer in 2008/09.

*Rhondda Cynon Taf Single Education Plan (September 2006-2008)*

7.77 This plan aims to give direction and set intended outcomes for the education services provided by LPAs.

7.78 In terms of Borough population the plan recognises that an increase has occurred in the southern part of the County Borough, near the 'M4 corridor', as a result of extensive new housing development. This has been found to result in an ageing and decreasing population in the northern areas.

7.79 Key aims in relation to the built environment seek to maintain school premises and sites in a good condition which are fit for delivery of the national curriculum. In addition to this the plan outlines aims to ensure that school premises are used for community uses and where possible facilities are shared between different tiers of education (pre-school, primary and secondary) as well as the community.

*Reaching Destination Rhondda Cynon Taf 2007-2013 - Rhondda Cynon Taf Tourism Strategy*

- 7.80 The Borough was visited by 2,398,000 people in 2006, and generated £112.4 million for the local economy (STEAM - Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor research). Despite these figures, the Borough is not yet known as a tourist destination.
- 7.81 This strategy acts as strategic, non-location specific document and is organised around three main aims for tourism in RCT. The first seeks to raise the profile of RCT in the UK tourism map and create a 'destination brand' for the Borough. Aim 2 seeks to develop and raise the quality of the RCT tourism offer and thirdly, to develop effective partnership working within the tourism industry.
- 7.82 The strategy identifies a number of tourism growth products or niche markets that can be maximised. These include walking, cycling, adventure / activity, history / heritage, culture / events, genealogy, golf and equestrian.

*The Rights of Way Improvements Plan*

- 7.83 The Council has launched 'The Rights of Way Improvement Plan' which sets out the Council's rights of way and countryside access strategy for the next 10 years and includes an action plan to deliver these improvements. It provides an opportunity for the Council and other interested parties to work together to improve countryside recreation opportunities for all user groups.

## **Appendix 2: List of Consultees**

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council Departments:

- Tourism (Luan Oestrich)
- Leisure (Martin Sullivan)
- Outdoor Provision (Cyril Chivers)
- Education (Julie Hadley)
- Libraries (Gillian Evans)
- Development Control (Gareth Davies and Huw Roberts)
- Development Policy (Owen Jones and Clare Richards)
- Community Facilities (Nicola Lewis)
- Infrastructure (Bob Harper)
- Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Health Board (Paul Western)
- Hirwaun Community Council
- Councillor Myring (Hirwaun Ward Member)

### **Appendix 3: Sustainable Settlement Diagram**

## **Appendix 4: Major planning applications in Hirwaun Ward**

Major Applications decided in Wards: Hirwaun and Rhigos Between 01/01/2003 and 04/02/2008

Ref Number	Decision Date	Location	Proposal		
03/0484/16	06/06/2003	LAND AT REAR OF 1 TO 6 TRAMWAY, HIRWAUN, ABERDARE.	Five detached dwellings off a Private drive (Reserved Matters)	GTD	MAJD
03/1209/10	03/02/2004	UNITS 43/44 HIRWAUN IND. ESTATE, HIRWAUN, ABERDARE.	Change of Use of existing Retail Units to Class Use B2, erection of storage buildings & external yard, construction of conveyor system.	WDN	MOMD
03/2136/10	19/03/2004	6 ACRE SITE FRONTED BY FOURTH AVENUE & BOUNDED BY A465 HIRWAUN INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, HIRWAUN.	Construction of warehouse portal frame building with plastcol coated steel profile sheeting.	GTD	MISW
02/1726/10	11/06/2004	LAND AT TRAMWAY, HIRWAUN, ABERDARE.	Construction of 9 Domestic Houses and access road.	GTD	MAJD
02/1909/13	18/01/2005	LAND OFF SWANSEA ROAD, HIRWAUN, ABERDARE.	Proposed housing development - erection of 31no. dwellings together with access.	GTD	MAJD
04/2264/10	19/09/2005	FORMER AMAN METAL SPINNERS SITE, GROESFORDD, RHIGOS ROAD, HIRWAUN, ABERDARE.	Erection of 19 dwellings together with garages, estate road & highway improvements (demolition of existing buildings)	GTD	MAJD
05/0111/10	03/11/2005	LAND OFF SWANSEA ROAD, HIRWAUN.	Proposed residential development of 31 No. dwellings including garages and associated roads(Amended plans received 14/03/05, 07/04/05, 24/06/05 and 01/07/05).	GTD	MAJD
06/0299/13	11/04/2006	NANTLLECHAU FARM, HALT ROAD, RHIGOS, ABERDARE, CF44 9UD	Residential Development	DIS	MAJD
06/0315/16	11/08/2006	SITE OF CYNON VALLEY COMMERCIALS, THE BRYN, RHIGOS, ABERDARE	14 No. Detached Dwellings. (Reserved matters)	GTD	MAJD

<b>Ref Number</b>	<b>Decision Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Proposal</b>		
06/1283/10	15/01/2007	SITE OF FORMER BEACONS AND TOWER FLATS, HIRWAUN, ABERDARE.	Residential development of 25 dwellings of 2, 3, and 4 bedroom	WDN	MAJD
05/1850/13	11/04/2007	LAND TO WEST OF 1 - 13 BRONIESTYN TERRACE/PENYARD ROAD, HIRWAUN.	Residential development. (Outline)	DIS	MAJD

Planning application	Date of consent	Site name	No' dwellings
02/0927	03/10/2002	Cefndon Terrace	12
03/1785 89/0149	09/01/2004 27/06/1989	South of Swansea road 'Oakbrook Drive'	34
88/0633 00/4468	24/04/1989 08/02/2001	North of Swansea road, Hirwaun, 'Springfield gardens'	107
05/1775 99/4303	20/06/2006 16/12/1999	Cae Brynhyfryd, Penderyn Road/Opposite Bute Terrace	16

## **Appendix 5: Approved Development Sites Across Hirwaun Area**

## **Appendix 6: Strategic and Non-Strategic Sites Across Hirwaun Area**

## **Appendix 7: Hirwaun Area Public Facilities Plan**

## Appendix 8: Distance Rings Map

## **Appendix 9: Abbreviations**

GIS Geographical Information Systems

ICT Information and Communications Technologies

LDP Local Development Plan

LHB Local Health Board

LPA Local Planning Authority

NLP: Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners

NPFA National Playing Fields Association

OAP Old Age Pensioner

PPW Planning Policy Wales

RCT: Rhondda Cynon Taf

SPG Supplementary Planning Guidance

TAN Technical Advice Note

UDP Unitary Development Plan

WAG Welsh Assembly Government