

Town Centre Topic Paper

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BACKGROUND

In January 2007 the Council issued for public consultation the Local Development Plan: Preferred Strategy. The Strategy was the first stage of the new statutory local development plan (LDP).

The next stage in the plan making process is the production of a deposit draft LDP. In order to ensure the soundness of the emerging LDP and transparency in the plan making process, the Council has produced a series of topic papers.

The topic papers address the main area of policy to be considered in the LDP. **It should be stressed that these papers are a starting point for policy development through the sustainability appraisal process and as the Council's evidence base develops, emerging LDP policy will evolve and be refined.**

INTRODUCTION

Town Centres play a vital and central role in an area. They can be vibrant hubs of activity, which play host to a range of facilities. Town Centres have traditionally acted as a core point for retail activity and contribute greatly to the economy of a settlement.

Over the last few years societal changes have meant that there has been a shift in function of a town centre. Traditionally a hub for retail activity, the Town Centre is now in competition with such trends as out of town retail and Internet shopping which continues to draw shoppers away

from the high street. This has led to a change in thinking regarding what the role of the Town Centre is and will be in future years and an acknowledgment that the policies relating to these areas will have to be more flexible and adaptable which will allow for the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre to be maintained.

The success and prosperity of a town centre is measured by town centre health checks, which measure the vitality and viability of town centres. The Vitality of a town centre refers to how busy a centre is in different parts at different times. Viability refers to a centres capability to attract investment for maintenance, improvement and changing needs.

Town Centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf are an important hub of economic activity with many providing facilities, cultural, heritage and social facilities. However over recent years the traditional town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf as in many valley communities have been in decline. Competition from large centres such as Cardiff and Swansea, supermarkets and out of town retail parks has significantly affected the viability of centres. The Local Development Plan will seek to provide a policy context for creating sustainable, flexible and prosperous town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The purpose of this Topic Paper is to set out the suggested Draft Town Centre Policies to form part of the Local Development Plan (LDP) 2006-2021. Through the Local Development Plan process a range of sites and policies will be identified for Town Centre activity in order to contribute to a strong, sustainable and diverse economy for Rhondda Cynon

Taf and to protect the culture, heritage and prosperity of the Borough's town centres.

In order to do this the topic paper will outline:

- **The Policy Context** for the projections, including an explanation of national, regional and local policy;
- **Issues arising**, in Rhondda Cynon Taf;
- **The Preferred Strategy** including relevant objections, representations and responses to these and
- **Draft Local Development Plan Policy.**

Policy Context

National Policy

People, Places, Futures – The Wales Spatial Plan (adopted 2004)

The Wales Spatial Plan provides a framework for the future spatial development of Wales. Rhondda Cynon Taf along with the neighbouring authorities of Cardiff, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly and the Vale of Glamorgan has been identified as part of the South East – Capital Network Zone. The vision for the Capital Network is:

“An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life – international yet distinctively Welsh. It will compete internationally by increasing its global viability 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”.

Whilst the Spatial Plan may not provide a detailed framework for the development of town centres in South East Wales it does nevertheless provide a number of clear propositions. These include the following:

- The Valleys need to be strengthened as desirable places to live, work and visit; combining a wider mix of types of housing and good access to jobs and services, in distinctive communities set in an attractive environment.
- Development must not compromise the attractiveness of the area's towns and wider environment, which are key factors in the area's success.

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

Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 as the name suggests, outlines a strategy for regenerating the northern Valley areas of South East Wales. In Rhondda Cynon Taf the strategy area includes Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale, Mountain Ash and Aberdare. The objectives of the programme reflect those of the Wales Spatial Plan in seeking to ensure:

- 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, and
- Public confidence in a shared bright future

With regards to Town Centres, Strategy Programme 1: A Sub-Regional Approach to the Regeneration of Settlements comments as follows:

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

Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement 02/2005: Planning for Retailing and Town Centres (December 2005)

Assembly Government retailing and town centre policy is embodied in Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS). The MIPPS revises Chapter 10 of Planning Policy Wales (March 2002). Supplementary guidance in relation to retailing and town centres is contained in Technical Advice Note 4. The Planning Policy Wales Companion Guide (2006)

relates the guidance to the LDP system, identifying clear statements of national policy that should only be repeated in where local circumstance require.

The Assembly Government’s objectives for retailing and town centres are to provide:

- Secure accessible, efficient, competitive and innovative retail provision for all the communities of Wales, in both urban and rural areas;
- Promote established town, district, local and villages centres as the most appropriate locations for retailing, leisure and for other functions complementary to it;
- Enhance the vitality, attractiveness and viability of town, district, local and village centres; and to
- Promote access to these centres by public transport, walking and cycling.

In order to achieve this the Assembly Government will seek to ensure that:

- Wherever possible this provision should be located in proximity to other commercial businesses, facilities for leisure, community facilities and employment.
- Town, district, local and village centres are the best locations for such provision at an appropriate scale.
- Co-location of retail and other services in existing centres, with enhancement of access by walking, cycling and public transport, to provide the

opportunity to use means of transport other than the car.

Technical Advice Note 4- Retailing and Town Centres (1996)

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 4 provides advice on how important town centres are to the economy. It advises how to measure the vitality and viability and attractiveness of town centres. It refers to the importance of managing town centres and how effective strategies and partnerships can increase the productivity of a centre. It identifies that a joined up approach is needed working on factors such as the street scene but also social and environmental issues.

LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

A Better Life – Our Community Plan 2001 – 2014

A Better Life - Our Community Plan sets out a framework for creating a brighter future for everyone who lives and works in Rhondda Cynon Taff. The plan was developed through the Better Life Consortium, during 2003/2004. The Community Plan identifies 5 key themes under which are a series of local level aims. The key themes are:

- Safer Communities
- Our Living Space
- Our Health and Well Being
- Boosting Our Local Economy
- Learning for Growth

The key themes identified in the Community Plan has been developed into strategies for improving the quality of life in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Town centres are considered as part of the Boosting Our Local Economy theme and contained within the Economic regeneration Strategy (2004-2014). The Strategy sets the following themes under Action Areas:

- Action Area 1: Creating more varied and stronger businesses;
- Action Area 2: Tackling Economic inactivity;
- Action Area 3: Stimulating community enterprise;
- Action Area 4: Promoting smarter working;
- Action Area 5: Improving where we live;
- Action Area 6: Spending public money locally;
- Action Area 7: Promoting a positive image.

Of particular relevance to this topic area is one priority set out under the Creating more varied and stronger businesses theme. The priorities seek to promote:

- Creating vibrant commercial centres

Town Centre Strategies

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council have commissioned studies for a number of town centres in the County Borough. These will help form the evidence base for the Local Development Plan and help guide the development required to encourage regeneration of these centres.

The main aims, objectives and priorities are summarised below:

Revised Mountain Ash Regeneration Strategy

Regeneration objectives updated version of the previous Study by Atkins:

The regeneration strategy outlines the following objectives for the settlement:

- Promote integrated sustainable transport networks around the main train line
- Recognise and promote the town's identity and create an image for Mountain Ash that is distinctive from other Valley Towns.
- Create a diverse and inviting town centre with a good quality environment that is attractive for residents and visitors
- Improve easy access into surrounding countryside which benefits residents and is attractive to visitors

- Encourage greater community involvement particularly from those stakeholders with a direct interest in the town centre
- Create conditions that nurture a diverse town centre catchment area, such as diversity in the housing stock, mixed uses and excellent pedestrian links.

Tonyrefail Regeneration Strategy

The main issues arising in the study conducted focused on the condition and deterioration of the town centre including its buildings and streetscape. The strategy identifies a number of development opportunities including:

- There are a number of opportunities to utilise certain redundant land and buildings for future use
- Opportunity to provide youth facilities in the vicinity of the leisure centre and Rhondda bowl
- Opportunities to alter the junction layout on The Square, and
- Opportunities exist to improve the quality and design of commercial frontages and open spaces along the main shopping streets

Llantrisant Regeneration Strategy

The strategy provides a vision for Llantrisant town centre, which is to create:

“A vibrant town centre that is renowned for its historic interest high quality environment, attractive shops, places to eat and visit, while being accessible, safe, and successful place in which to live and carry out business.”

The study considers and makes recommendations for improvements in Built Heritage; Public Realm, Tourism and movements and reuse of vacant buildings.

Pontypridd Regeneration Strategy

The main aims that arise from the strategy are to make Pontypridd:

- **Convenient** – Making it easier to park, live, work or shop in the centre
- **Accessible**- by removing the congestion with a radical new traffic management regime
- **Safe**- by rationalising traffic circulation; enhancing pedestrian facilities/surfaces, improving signage, lighting and security surveillance.
- **Comfortable**- by providing shelter from the elements and creating public spaces and streets, which are enjoyable and stimulating.
- **Memorable**- by reinforcing Pontypridd’s sense of ‘place’: working with its current physical assets (park, river, railway, etc) and the character of its historic physical fabric to create a place which visitors will want to return to again and again.

The strategy identifies a series of key projects including:

- Angharad walk development
- Taff Street
- Penuel Square
- The indoor market/ old town hall site
- CRS/Co-op site Mill Street
- St Catherine’s corner
- Gelliwastad Road
- Lido/Arena
- Sardis Road
- Millfield site
- Pontypridd Rugby Club

Ferndale Regeneration Strategy

The Ferndale study sets out the need for regeneration of this centre stating:

“Ferndale is a vibrant and attractive settlement that still retains the integrity of much of its historical built form. The regeneration must deliver a town that is economically sustainable, attractive to its residents, easily accessible and welcoming to surrounding communities and visitors, and prepared to face the challenges and change possible in the future.”

The strategy identifies the following priorities and actions

- **Transport**- the need to provide a relief road linking Station Road with the Oaklands Business Park to alleviate town centre congestion and reduce the number of pedestrian and vehicular accidents in this

area. As a result of this town centre parking, servicing and pedestrian environment could be enhanced.

- Enhancing Gateways- proposals to create a greater sense of 'entrance' to Ferndale with artworks and new signage designed in collaboration with local schools
- Town centre Enhancements- to improve the public environment to create a more uniform and attractive town centre for residents and visitors. Proposals include the provision of a new 'occasional' space in front of the doctor's surgery for public use.
- Darran park enhancements- focusing on raising awareness of the park, its lake and historic woodland the recommendations include enhancing trails, providing play facilities for all age groups and providing a new 'green' pavilion to provide a range of improved facilities including a café.
- Commercial Improvement Area - to improve the appearance of buildings and focus on new uses to provide economic sustainability for the town centre.
- Improve parking facilities- provisions of improved parking including providing up to 50 spaces in Lime Street.
- Gaps in teeth- a proposal to retain one of the undeveloped sites along Dyffryn Road and provide a new public space to include a new bus stop, CCTV, seating, planting and high quality hard and soft landscaping.

Convergence Funding

The Convergence programme for West Wales and the Valleys comprises funding from two European Structural

Funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Approximately £856 million of ERDF funds will help progress the region's transformation into a sustainable and competitive economy by investing in the knowledge economy and helping new and existing businesses to grow. It will also focus on regenerating Wales' most deprived communities, tackling climate change and improving transport. Some £570 million from the ESF will be used to tackle economic inactivity, increase skills and employment. Together, the funds will total more than £1.4 billion of Convergence spending, which, combined with match funding, will drive a total investment of £3.2 billion in the region.

A key element of the Convergence programme is the provision of funding to improve the Physical regeneration. Through this element of the programme it is envisaged that funding will become available to fully implement the projects and proposals contained in the Council's Town Centre Regeneration Strategies.

KEY ISSUES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The key issues to be addressed by the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP have been identified by making an assessment of the following:

- The results of pre deposit consultation with key stakeholder;
- The results of the Sustainability Appraisal /Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Exercise; and

- A review of baseline social, economic and environmental information.
- The responses from the LDP Topic Paper questionnaire.

Pre Deposit Consultation

Town centre issues identified are as follows:

- Need for access to good quality employment and range of employment opportunities
- Attracting new employment to the north of the borough
- Need to support indigenous businesses as well as attracting inward investment
- Need to retain wealth in the borough through reducing spending leakage
- Creating sustainable communities
- Adaptation to change- needs consistent decision making
- Perception of personal safety needs to change
- Identity and attractiveness of RCT to residents and investors.
- Out of town retail v town centre regeneration

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment

The sustainability appraisal / strategic environmental assessment identified the following town centre issues:

- 17 out Rhondda Cynon Taf's 53 electoral wards are amongst the 100 most deprived in Wales.
- Depopulation affecting the valleys
- Decreasing population overall but an increase in the South
- Poor access to facilities
- Away from the two-north/ south main routes (the A4119 and the A470), accessibility in the County Borough is poor.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf has a rich cultural heritage but few sites are statutorily protected.
- 18.8% of all residents work out side the county borough, the third largest percentage net outflow in Wales

Baseline information

Town centre issues are identified as follows:

- The population of Rhondda Cynon Taf has remained largely unchanged between 1991 and 2001. However this masks significant local variation, between 1991 –2001 the population of the central and northern valleys declined by 5% whilst the population the population of the south increases by 10% (Office for National Statistics)
- The highest levels of 'employment' deprivation in Rhondda Cynon Taf are located in the central and northern valleys (welsh index of multiple deprivation)
-

- The main concentrations of out of centre retail development are in Talbot Green/Pontyclun, Pontypridd/Upper boat and Aberdare/Aberaman areas. Existing out of town centre food floor space amount to 22,500 sq meters (gross) whilst non-food amounts to 50,885 sq meters (gross) (Rhondda Cynon Taf retail survey 2005).
- From 2001-2005 the percentage of vacant retail units in town centres of Pontypridd, Aberdare, Talbot Green, Tonypany, Porth, Mountain Ash, Treorchy, Ferndale and Tonyrefail fell from 14% to 9.5% (Rhondda Cynon Taf retail survey 2005).
- Major retail investment on comparison-shopping has in recent years been concentrated in larger towns and retail parks outside the County Borough. An assessment of comparison goods shopping patterns suggested that comparison expenditure outflow from the County Borough is approximately 60% of total expenditure on comparison goods. (Rhondda Cynon Taf retail survey 2005).
- The highest level of 'physical environment' deprivation in Rhondda Cynon Taf are located in the central and northern valleys (Welsh index of multiple deprivation)

PREFERRED STRATEGY

The preferred strategy provides the following policy framework for the development of town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Objectives of the Local Development Plan

Paragraph 4.2 of the preferred strategy (January 2007) lists 16 objectives for the LDP. The following objectives are the most relevant to the topic area;

- Promote and protect the culture and heritage including landscapes, archaeology and language.
- Promote integrated communities, with opportunities for living, working and socialising for all.
- Provide for a sustainable economy.
- Provide for a diverse range of job opportunities
- Provide a high quality built environment that promotes community pride.

Development Strategy

Paragraphs 6.1 – 6.11 of the Preferred Strategy sets out a development strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf. The strategy area is divided into two distinct parts: -

- Northern Strategy Area, and
- Southern Strategy Area

The Northern Strategy area comprises the key settlements of Tonypany, Porth, Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale, Tylorstown, Mountain Ash and Hirwaun and the principal town of Aberdare. In this area the emphasis is on building sustainable communities and halting the process of depopulation and decline.

The Southern Strategy area includes the principal towns of Pontypridd and Llantrisant and key settlements of Tonyrefail and Llanharan. In the south of the County Borough the emphasis is on sustainable growth that benefits Rhondda Cynon Taf as a whole.

The strategy recognises the important role that principal towns and key settlements play in providing services of both local and county importance. Where possible, development will be focused on the principal towns and key settlements of the County Borough in order to support and reinforce the important role of these centres play as places for social and economic activity.

Town centres and Retailing

Paragraphs **6.17 - 6.21** of the preferred strategy provide a strategy for employment and economic development. The paragraphs are as follows:

“Employment and Economic Development

6.17 *The employment and economic growth needs of Rhondda Cynon Taf are recognised in the Strategy, which*

seeks the development of a business environment, which delivers a strong and diverse economy; quality, well paid jobs, and addresses problems of economic inactivity. The key sectors for employment growth in Rhondda Cynon Taf are: -

- *Built Environment*
- *Social Enterprise*
- *High Tech Manufacturing*
- *Knowledge Based Industries*

6.18 *There have been recent changes in the economy of Rhondda Cynon Taf that are likely to have an impact upon employment land sites. These include decreasing employment in manufacturing sectors; increasing levels of employment in construction; distribution, hotels & restaurants; transport & communications; banking, finance & insurance; etc; and public administration, education & health. Forecasts predict a continued fall in manufacturing employment and continued increase in employment in the service sector. A key issue is to ensure that the changing needs of businesses in Rhondda Cynon Taf are reflected in the supply of employment sites throughout the County Borough.*

6.19 *Recent studies have established that the overall supply of employment land at 195 hectares is healthy although there has been a rapid take up of B1 land (27 hectares April 2005 to Oct 2006). The current supply does not however, meet future needs, in terms of:*

- *Type of employment sites and units available – specifically smaller flexible space*
- *Meeting the demand from micro-businesses*

- *The quality of office space, including town centre provision*
Concerns also exist regarding the redundant nature of industrial

Space – the ‘large box syndrome’ of provision built during the 1980s; the perceived poor environment of some employment sites including difficult accessibility in many areas and a mismatch of supply around the M4 area.

6.20 *The employment market is a dynamic and changing sector. Whilst the LDP will maintain an appropriate landbank for general and business park development over the plan period it will also encourage innovation and diversity in the employment sector. The Northern Strategy will give favorable consideration to the 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 these areas. In the Southern Strategy Area and the A470 / A459 / A465 Corridor the emphasis will be on providing land for companies with potential national and global markets.*

6.21 *The town centres of Rhondda Cynon Taf make an important contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of the area. They account for significant employment opportunities for local residents, provide accessible local services and are a focus of community activity. The Council believes that thriving and vibrant town centres are essential if Rhondda Cynon Taf is to achieve its ambition of building a strong and sustainable local economy. The strategy will seek to support and strengthen the vitality and viability of town centres and recognises the importance of maintaining the attraction of town centres to retailers and consumers in key*

settlements. This also requires positive management to provide an attractive, safe and accessible environment.”

Strategic Policies

The Strategic town centre policy is as follows:

SP8- Retailing and Town Centres;

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. Outside town and district centres proposals will be subject to assessment of need, phasing considerations (particularly where need is linked to large scale strategic sites) and an application of the sequential test. Proposals will only be permitted where they –

- Contribute to sustaining and enhancing town centre vitality and viability
- Reinforce cultural identity and a sense of place
- Improve the quality and attractiveness of the town.”

Representations to the Preferred Strategy

Representations made in respect of policy SP8 are addressed in the Retail Topic Paper. No specific representations were received in respect of paragraphs 6.17-6.21.

DRAFT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

SP8- Retailing and Town Centres:

- Revised Policy SP8- Retailing and Town Centres is contained in the Retail Topic Paper

Suggested additional Strategic Policy for Town Centres

“Development proposals for residential, employment, leisure, heritage, retail, Tourism and Commercial uses within the Principle Towns of Aberdare, Llantrisant and Pontypridd and Key Settlements of Tonypany, Tonyrefail, Treorchy, Mountain Ash, Porth, Ferndale, Llanharan and Hirwaun will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that proposals will promote social, economic and environmental regeneration.”

Justification

Our town centres are at the heart of our communities. They provide local services, business opportunities and a social hub. By working together with businesses we can increase visitor numbers, jobs and prosperity - all of which will lead to vibrant and safe town centres worthy of local pride.

Successful and vibrant town centres are important contributors to local economy and society, acting as focal points for community interaction as well as fulfilling a role as service centres.

In order to ensure the survival of these ‘traditional’ town centres there is a need to diversify the uses within them. Locating a mix of uses including leisure, tourism, employment opportunities and residential will promote social, economic and environmental regeneration.

Town Centres provide an important focus for the provision of a broad range of services and facilities including not just shopping, but recreation, cultural provision, community facilities and transport. Of particular concern is the need to enhance the appearance and vitality of all of Rhondda Cynon Taf's town centres, to ensure that they retain their broad range of functions and contribute to the process of urban regeneration.

The Council recognises the importance of the Town Centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf and their role in meeting the shopping and associated requirements of the Borough's residents and those working in the city. There is therefore a clear need to maintain and improve them.

Area Wide Policies

The vision for the town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf is to create centres, which make an important contribution to economic, social and cultural life of the area. The ambition is to achieve a strong and sustainable economy implemented through centres, which have increased vitality and vibrancy.

The aim is to create town centres that are distinctive in the region so that the town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf become synonymous with unique selling points and a set of positive qualities and characteristics, driven by context, location, history, culture, the community and their ideas and aspirations. Linked with this is the need to promote a diverse, vibrant and creative cultural base for the town including, an improved visitor profile, an increase in leisure and recreational including a thriving evening economy and the use of art to engage the community and promotion of the town.

The Council will seek to ensure the improvement in existing leisure, recreation and cultural facilities and promote the development of new activities in the town centre.

The objective is to promote a diverse, vibrant and creative cultural base for the town including for example, the development of creative and cultural businesses, an expanding visitor profile, an increase in leisure and recreational use of the town centre and the use of public art to engage the community and promote the town. The aim is to create a place where culture in its widest sense and creativity can flourish, as a means of developing the local economy.

Start reinforcing the distinctiveness of town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is recognised that a significant part of a successful town centre will be places to meet and socialise with provision for a wide variety of interests and cultures.

TC1: Development Proposals for A2 uses within Principle Towns and Key Settlements

Development proposals for A2 uses including changes of use and extensions, in the defined Principle Towns of Aberdare, Llantrisant and Pontypridd and the Key Settlements of Tonypany, Tonyrefail, Treorchy, Mountain Ash, Porth, Ferndale, Llanharan and Hirwaun will be permitted where: town centre, subject to the following criteria:

- i) The proposal does not result in the net loss of shopping floor space or frontage at ground floor level in the core shopping areas;**
- ii) The proposal is appropriate in scale, character and design with the surrounding area;**
- iii) The proposal accords with the requirements of Policies ...**

Justification

The Council's Retail Surveys indicate that significant vacant floor space exists in the town centres. This floor space is contained in currently unused buildings and in the upper floors of many retail buildings. This floor space presents an important opportunity to diversify the range of uses in Principle Towns and Key Settlements. Town centres provide important employment opportunities within a range of sectors. It is important to maintain a continued employment role within the town centres to provide employment opportunities in sustainable locations and as part of encouraging a diverse range of uses within town centres in accordance with Government guidance.

TC2: Living Above the Shop

Development proposals for the reuse of vacant floor space in the upper floors of Retail Units in the Principle Towns of Aberdare, Llantrisant and Pontypridd and Key Settlements of Tonypany, Tonyrefail, Treorchy, Mountain Ash, Porth, Ferndale, Llanharan and Hirwaun will be permitted where:

- i) The proposal does not result in the net loss of shopping floor space or frontage at ground floor level in the core shopping area;**
- ii) The proposal is appropriate in scale, character and design with the surrounding area;**
- iii) Provision of car parking and amenity space can be provided in accordance with the Council's approved standards.**

Justification

The presence of vacant floor space in the upper storeys of many retail/ commercial buildings in the Principle Towns and Key Settlements in Rhondda Cynon Taf represents a significant opportunity to provide low cost residential accommodation in sustainable locations. The development of vacant floor space for residential purposes can make a valuable contribution to the delivery of new housing in Rhondda Cynon Taf and to the viability and vitality of Town Centres

Where proposals are well related to local services such as shops, public transport and open space consideration will be given to the relaxation of car parking standards and amenity standards.

TC3 Evening Economy

Proposals which encourage the development of an evening economy, will be permitted subject to the following criteria:

- i) That they encourage and promote improvements in community safety**
- ii) Do not have any adverse effect on the amenity of residential properties.**
- iii) Do not adversely affect the character and appearance of the town centre.**

Justification

Creating town centres which boast a successful evening economy is a method of ensuring sustainability, vitality and viability. One of the objectives of MIPPS is to enhance the vitality, attractiveness and viability of town, district, local and village centres. Paragraph 10.2.4 of MIPPS also identifies the evening economy as a means of ensuring diversity of a town centre, which in turn ensures the vitality, and viability of it.

Northern Strategy Area Policy

The Northern Strategy area consists of the Rhondda Fawr and Fach Valleys and the Cynon Valley. The area is characterised by the steep valley sides and linear pattern of development. Town centres in the northern strategy area are distinctive and alive with character and heritage. The key issues relating to town centres in this area are that they are facing physical degradation. The centres have suffered because of a number of factors including the proximity of Cardiff and Swansea, development of major supermarkets and the presence of out of town retailing in other areas of the Borough and in adjoining authorities. The character of these centres needs to be protected, as it is this very fact that makes them popular local shopping destinations. The aim in this strategy area is to build sustainable communities and to halt the process of depopulation. Encouragement will be given to the retention of existing and provision of new services in areas where there is a clear defined need.

In order to address these issues the LDP will seek to ensure town centres have vibrancy and vitality with a mix of uses, which provide local services and facilities in a sustainable way

Hierarchy and Role of Centres and Protection of Town centres in the Northern Strategy Area

The hierarchy of centres within the borough, defined by their scale and function is-

Principle Towns- Aberdare

Key Settlements: Tonypany, Porth, Mountain Ash, Treorchy, Ferndale and Hirwaun

The strategy will recognise the important role principal towns and key settlements play in providing services of both local and county importance. Where possible, development will be focused on the principal towns and key settlements of the County Borough in order to support and reinforce the important role these centres play as places for social and economic activity.

These centres will be promoted as the principal locations for shopping, offices, entertainment, leisure, cultural and community facilities, with the scale and type of development and changes of use being related to the position of the centre in the hierarchy and subject to any adverse impact of the character, function, form or environment of the centre or the amenity of residential areas.

TCN1 Development in Aberdare

Development proposals within the Principle Town of Aberdare will be permitted which:

- i) Promotes retail, employment and commercial development**
- ii) Promotes leisure, recreation, culture**
- iii) Promotes tourism**
- iv) Protects heritage**
- v) Promotes public realm improvements**
- vi) Promotes residential development in accordance with HousN3**

Justification

The focus for principle towns should be to create affordable, sustainable and attractive places to live, with a good choice of transport to and from employment and services including such services, which are not locally available such as health. The types of uses, which will be appropriate to principle towns, will serve the wider borough. These will include the larger uses such as cinemas, bars, restaurants and various cultural uses. The principle towns are important because they allow a large number of people to access a large number of services in an area, which is a transport convergence hub. This makes the principle towns sustainable locations for the larger uses.

Aberdare is the only principle town identified within the northern strategy area. The town is nicknamed the ‘Queen of the Valleys’ and is located on the cusp of the Brecon Beacons National Park. The town is the largest and busiest of the Cynon Valley and is strategically well located to serve the population surrounding it. The town is steeped in history with many historic building and architecture. The town already has many uses including leisure, recreation and cultural facilities such as a museum. The Vision for Aberdare is to take advantage of its location close to the Brecon Beacons National Park and to encourage tourism uses such as hotels in the centre.

Aberdare town centre is considered to be a special an area of special architectural/ historic interest. It has a Victorian character and appearance, which is desirable to preserve and enhance. The area contains 33 listed structures which house a range of uses from private businesses, public sector use to religious uses. Aberdare is subject to a Townscape Heritage initiative, which will be in place to improve the physical character of the town and also contribute to its regeneration. Developments which support this scheme will also be permitted.

Aberdare town centre also within the Heads of The Valleys region and is seen in the studies completed for this area as being a gateway town, which has great potential for tourism. Initiatives, which support the vision for the Heads of the Valleys including promotion and enhancement of its cultural and heritage offer and improvements to the range and quality of its retail, food, drink and accommodation facilities in Aberdare, will also be encouraged.

Aberdare is also subject to the new European Convergence funding scheme. This scheme currently looking at priority measure 5 physical regeneration proposes a number of projects for Aberdare, which it is hoped, will support the regeneration of the centre. The projects proposed include:

- Townscape heritage initiative
- Public realm improvements
- Creative ventures, which include the creation of a square and public art initiatives.
- Urban design and town remodelling, and
- Enhancement of the transport infrastructure.

The vision for Aberdare will be realised when: The performance of the town centre is above the UK average with low vacancy rates and business turnover. To achieve this the town will need a diverse retail offer, including attracting high street retailers and niche, local stores.

The Council is proposing to implement a Heritage Lottery fund (HLF) Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) in Aberdare to contribute towards the ongoing regeneration of the town centre and to revitalise local communities. Structural and external repair, and restoration of historic features, to historic buildings located within Central Aberdare Conservation Area will be the principle elements of the scheme. The physical work will be accompanied by initiatives to maximise community involvement, such as awareness raising of the heritage and training in conservation skills and techniques. The following projects were completed under HLF stage one:

- Condition and Structural surveys for approximately 86 buildings, property valuations, and schedule of eligible projects
- Equipment Hire / Road Closure Costs
- Conservation Area Management Plan
- Design Guide / Maintenance Guide
- Full Training Plan
- Public Consultation / Exhibition
- Design and print of THI publicity material

TCN2 Development in Key Settlement town centres in the northern strategy area

Development Proposals within the Key Settlements of Tonypany, Treorchy, Mountain Ash, Porth and Ferndale will be permitted which:

- i) Promotes public realm improvements**
- ii) Promotes improvements in car parking, movement and public transport**
- iii) Promotes new employment, tourism and retail development**
- iv) Promotes new residential development**
- v) Promotes the provision of new community facilities**
- vi) Protects the culture and heritage**
- vii) Promotes local services**

Justification

Although less strategically significant than the Principal Towns, Key Settlements nevertheless provide important services and act as centres for commercial and community activity. For the purpose of the LDP key settlements in the Northern Strategy Area are defined as Tonypany, Treorchy, Mountain Ash, Porth, Ferndale, and Hirwaun. These key settlements will act as the focal point for growth in Rhondda Cynon Taf over the plan period.

Tonypany and Treorchy

Tonypany and Treorchy are located in the Rhondda Fawr. The centres depict the traditional valley mining towns and are steeped in tradition and character. The settlements are formed in a linear pattern and they both encompass a main high street. Which is the focus of the retail activity. The design of the settlement is traditional terraces and each settlement has history and distinct character of which it is proud. Both centres serve the local population and the centres are successful and are bustling areas. The character of these towns is distinctive this is especially the case in Treorchy which still exhibits traditional shop fronts. There are many high street retailers but also with a number of successful local shops within the areas bringing character and a unique selling point. Tonypany is famous for the riots, which took place in the 18th Century, and it is the largest centre in the Rhondda Valley. Whilst Treorchy is a cultural and music town, which is famous in part for its male voice choir. It also exhibits a theatre and its high street stretches for nearly a mile along the

valley floor. Both centres are located on the main transport route on the Rhondda rail line.

Treorchy is subject to the new European Convergence funding scheme. This scheme currently looking at priority measure 5- physical regeneration has a number of proposed projects for Treorchy, which it is hoped, will support the regeneration of the centre.

The aim is to promote new development in Treorchy when attracting investment to the area, improves the public realm, increased car parking, reduce the number of vacant units, reduce traffic congestion, increased security and pedestrian safety and provide small units for business uses. Development, which supports these aims, will be encouraged.

Mountain Ash

Mountain Ash is located in the central part of the Cynon Valley. It's termed a 'sporting town, a town full of energy'. The town has existed since the coal boom and became a sizable town in a short period of time. The town has a main street which serves the local population and which houses some traditional, locally run shops. The area is famous for its rugby team, bowls club, rally and the Nos Galan races, which take place every New Years Eve in memory of Guto Nyth Bran who is buried in the churchyard of the local Llanwonno Church. Mountain Ash is divided by the river Cynon and is currently under going major regeneration works.

Mountain Ash has been subject to a town centre regeneration initiative, which sets out projects and criteria to regenerate the

settlement. Development, which supports the regeneration initiatives for Mountain Ash, will be encouraged.

The Regeneration objectives for Mountain Ash include:

- Improve accessibility
- Improve road safety
- Safeguard and creating jobs
- Encourage sustainable modes of transport
- Improvement of commercial facilities, less vacancies
- Provision of new or improved community facilities
- Promote integrated sustainable transport networks around the main train line
- Recognise and promote the town's identity and create an image for Mountain Ash that is distinctive from other Valley Towns.
- Create a diverse and inviting town centre with a good quality environment that is attractive for residents and visitors
- Improve easy access into surrounding countryside which benefits residents and is attractive to visitors
- Encourage greater community involvement particularly from those stakeholders with a direct interest in the town centre
- Create conditions that nurture a diverse town centre catchment area, such as diversity in the housing stock, mixed uses and excellent pedestrian links.

Mountain Ash is subject to the new European Convergence funding scheme. This scheme currently looking at priority measure 5- physical regeneration has a number of proposed

projects for Mountain Ash, which will support the regeneration of the centre. The projects proposed include:

- Town Centre improvements to include- public realm, retailing and car parking
- Creation of a business park Cwm Cynon
- The development of the Cross Valley Link

The vision for Mountain Ash is to create an attractive, safe and memorable environment. To support local businesses and encourage investment within the town centre. Encourage businesses to locate in the town centre, to reduce the number of vacant properties, and to enhance accessibility.

Development which supports these aims will be permitted subject to the criteria set out in other policies.

Porth

Porth is one of the larger retail centres at the gateway to the Rhondda Valleys. However Porth has historically suffered poor quality stock, a lack of parking and increased competition from larger centres. The Porth relief road, which has recently been completed, has given a breath of life into the centre by taking traffic away from it instead of through it. It comprises of some high street stores and a number of local shops. Porth is also home to the pop factory which is famous for its role in pop music and television events.

Porth has been subject to a town centre Strategy that regenerated the centre. The aspirations as set out in the strategy are improved transport and pedestrian access, improved public realm and a return of investment to the

centre. Developments, which support these aspirations and respect the character of Porth, will be encouraged.

Ferndale

A town with a view. Ferndale is located at the highest point of the Rhondda Fach valley. It is dominated by spectacular scenery and is isolated from the other settlements in the Rhondda. Ferndale has a small local centre, which serves the existing community.

The aspirations for Ferndale are set out in the town centre regeneration strategy which include:

- Streetscape enhancements
- Improved town centre facilities including demolition and rebuild of community facilities.
- Developing improved access to new long term car park facility and improve and manage existing short term car park
- Improvements to Darren park and provide better links with the town centre.
- Development of new business units

Developments that support these initiatives will be encouraged.

Ferndale is subject to the new European Convergence funding scheme. This scheme currently looking at priority measure 5- physical regeneration has a number of proposed projects for Ferndale, which it is hoped, will support the regeneration of the centre. The vision for this centre is to

provide an attractive and safe environment and public realm, to encourage investment in the centre, encourage Darren Park as a local attraction and encourage more businesses into the centre. Development, which supports this vision, will be encouraged.

TCN 3 Development in Hirwaun

Proposals for residential, commercial and community development within Hirwaun will be permitted where the development:

- i) Is of a high standard of design and integrates positively with existing development;**
- ii) Makes a positive contribution to the provision and improvement of community and educational facilities;**
- iii) Promotes opportunities for new retail and tourism development;**
- iv) Promotes accessibility to services by a range of modes of transport.**
- v) Does not result in the loss of local retail or community facilities; and**
- vi) Does not result in the loss of important open space within the settlement**

Hirwaun is located in the Cynon Valley close adjoining the Principle town of Aberdare. A modest sized settlement, Hirwaun has seen a relatively large amount of development in recent years. This growth has unfortunately not be replicated in an increased provision of local services and facilities.

This is a trend set to continue with The development of Strategic Site 5; Hirwaun / Penywaun for a large-scale residential and commercial purposes and residential allocations through the LDP. The Council recognises that new development that meets the needs of the community is necessary.

The Hirwaun Village Study assessed current provision in the settlement and makes recommendations for improvements. The study identifies the need for improvements and development in key sectors including retail, leisure, community facilities, education, health and pedestrian, public and private transport routes.

Southern Strategy Area Policy

The Southern Strategy area encompasses the Taf Ely area and the lower part of the Rhondda Fawr including Pontypridd. The Strategy aims to create sustainable growth, which will benefit Rhondda Cynon Taf as a whole. The key issues in the Southern Strategy area are to allow this part of the borough to continue to thrive but to protect the open and green nature, which is characteristic of this part of the borough.

In order to address these issues the LDP policy will seek to ensure town centres have vibrancy and vitality with a mix of uses, which provide local services and facilities in a sustainable way. Whilst protecting the character of the southern part of the borough which will prevent over development.

Hierarchy and Role of Centres and Protection of Town centres in the Southern Strategy Area

The hierarchy of centres within the borough, defined by their scale and function is-

Principle Towns- Pontypridd and Llantrisant including Talbot Green

Key Settlements: Tonyrefail and Llanharan

The strategy will recognise the important role Principal Towns and Key Settlements play in providing services of both local and county importance. Where possible, development will be focused on the Principal Towns and Key Settlements of the County Borough in order to support and reinforce the important role these centres play as places for social and economic activity.

These centres will be promoted as the principal locations for shopping, offices, entertainment, leisure, cultural and community facilities, with the scale and type of development and changes of use being related to the position of the centre in the hierarchy and subject to any adverse impact of the character, function, form or environment of the centre or the amenity of residential areas.

TCS1 Development in Principle towns of Pontypridd and Llantrisant

Development Proposals within the Principle Towns of Pontypridd and Llantrisant will be permitted which:

- i) Promotes retail, employment and commercial development**
- ii) Promotes leisure, recreation, culture**
- iii) Promotes tourism**
- iv) Protects heritage**
- v) Promotes public realm improvements**
- vi) Promotes residential development in accordance with HOUS N3**

Justification

As in the Northern Strategy area the focus for principle towns in the Southern Strategy Area is to create affordable, sustainable and attractive places to live, with a good choice of transport to and from employment and services including such services, which are not locally available such as health. The types of uses, which will be appropriate to principle towns, will serve the wider borough. These will include the larger uses such as cinemas, bars, restaurants and various cultural uses. The principle towns are important because they allow a large number of people to access a large number of services in an area, which is a transport convergence hub. This makes the principle towns sustainable locations for the larger uses.

Leisure, recreation, entertainment and cultural uses within the principle towns are important to encourage diversity. By recognising that the traditional role and function of a town centre has changed is vital to ensure the survival of these centres, this is especially important in Rhondda Cynon Taf as many of the centres have suffered from degradation due to population loss, out of town retailing and physical deprivation. By encouraging this mix of uses there will be other reasons to go to these centres other than retail and attracting people to them for other uses will enable greater vibrancy.

Pontypridd

Pontypridd is one of two Principle towns in the southern strategy area and the County Town of Rhondda Cynon Taf. 'A town for all tastes'- Pontypridd is a bustling traditional market town, leading back to the industrial revolution and coal mining in the 18th Century. The impact of this industrial heritage is evident in the physical environment of the town. Pontypridd has much history characterised in museums and a tourist destination in Ynysangharad Park. Its retailing offer includes many high street vendors as well as smaller local shops. Pontypridd has good transport links to the wider borough and also to the adjoining towns and cites. It serves as a regional centre whilst also providing some local facilities.

Uses that would be encouraged in Pontypridd include leisure, entertainment and culture. Pontypridd already had many of these facilities and also has a limited evening economy, which would be further encouraged subject to health, safety and design issues. Pontypridd needs to take advantage of its

student population at the University of Glamorgan and is well placed to benefit from this by increasing its offer of facilities.

A regeneration study for Pontypridd sets out a number of projects to help regenerate the centre these include making the town:

- **Convenient** – Making it easier to park, live, work or shop in the centre
- **Accessible**- by removing the congestion with a radical new traffic management regime
- **Safe**- by rationalising traffic circulation; enhancing pedestrian facilities/surfaces, improving signage, lighting and security surveillance.
- **Comfortable**- by providing shelter from the elements and creating public spaces and streets, which are enjoyable and stimulating.
- **Memorable**- by reinforcing Pontypridd's sense of 'place': working with its current physical assets (park, river, railway, etc) and the character of its historic physical fabric to create a place which visitors will want to return to again and again.

Pontypridd also has a tourism asset in Ynysangharad Park, which is located within the centre. The park is subject to a restoration strategy, which aims to reinvigorate this facility. The following projects are identified for the park:

- Restoration of all park buildings and kiosks
- Restoration of the Grade II listed lido
- Improved access and linkages to the town centre

- Improved training and interpretation facilities
- Restoration of the historic landscaping and planting
- Improved riverside walks and areas
- Volunteering opportunities

Pontypridd is subject to the new European Convergence funding scheme. This scheme currently looking at priority measure 5 physical regeneration has a number of projects for Pontypridd, which will support the regeneration of the centre. The projects proposed include:

- Further development and refinement of the traffic-calming scheme to the main shopping area.
- Extending the scope of the first phase streetscape enhancements to improve the public realm, Works to include new paving, improved highways, incorporating quality street furniture and improving public spaces.
- Redevelopment of key sites within the town centre to create key focal points.
- Redevelopment of key sites within the town centre to increase retail, leisure and office accommodation
- Develop the Taff Vale precinct to create a mixed-use facility incorporating car park facilities, retail space, office space, residential opportunities and bars.
- Deliver the schemes developed as a result of the Ynysangharad park improvements.
- Improve pedestrian links to the town centre into the park including developing and enhancing the river walkway.

- Improve pedestrian links to the town centre from key transport hubs and car park facilities

Development, which supports these aims and strategies, will be encouraged.

Llantrisant/ Talbot Green

'An ancient hilltop town – a town of contrasts' Llantrisant is a cultural and historic town. Its boasts the title of being one of the oldest towns in Wales. The town comprises of a main historic square called the bullring and is dominated by the Model House which is now a centre for culture, crafts and arts. Llantrisant is host to galleries and museums and is lined with charming 18th and 19th Century cottages. There is also the remainder of a castle located in the town. Llantrisant acts a regional and local centre and benefits from good transport links to the wider borough and adjoining authorities.

TCS2 Development in Key Settlement town of Tonyrefail

Development Proposals within the Key Settlement of Tonyrefail will be permitted which:

- i) Promote public realm improvements**
- ii) Promotes improvements in car parking, movement and public transport**
- iii) Promotes new employment, tourism and retail development**
- iv) Promotes new residential development**
- v) Promotes the provision of new community facilities**

- vi) Protects culture and heritage**
- vii) Promotes local services**

Justification

Tonyrefail

Tonyrefail is an industrial village situated in the Ely valley close to the Principle Town of Llantrisant. The town over recent years has exhibited major growth in residential properties, which include some modern housing estates. Tonyrefail town centre has a variety of land use functions ranging from town centre retail uses to small business and industrial units, residential properties and community facilities. The town serves the local population and includes community services such as a library and community centre.

Tonyrefail is subject to a town centre strategy, which aims to regenerate the town centre the following objectives are set out by the strategy:

Priorities and actions

The main issues arising in the study conducted focused on the condition and deterioration of the town centre including its buildings and streetscape.

- There are a number of opportunities to utilise certain redundant buildings for future use
- There is an opportunity to develop the site of the former pallet warehouse off Mill Street

- There is opportunity to provide youth facilities in the vicinity of the leisure centre and Rhondda bowl
- Opportunities exist to alter the junction layout on The Square, dependant on future developments elsewhere in the town and
- Opportunities exist to improve the quality and design of commercial frontages and open spaces along the main shopping streets

TCS 3 Development in Llanharan

Proposals for residential, commercial and community development within Llanharan will be permitted where the development:

- vii) Is of a high standard of design and integrates positively with existing development;**
- viii) Makes a positive contribution to the provision and improvement of community and educational facilities;**
- ix) Promotes opportunities for new retail and tourism development;**
- x) Promotes accessibility to services by a range of modes of transport.**
- xi) Does not result in the loss of local retail or community facilities; and**
- xii) Does not result in the loss of important open space within the settlement**

Llanharan is located in the Ely Valley and is situated close to the municipal boundary with Bridgend. As with Hirwaun, Llanharan is a modest sized settlement that A modest sized

settlement, has seen a relatively large amount of development in recent years. This growth has unfortunately not be replicated in an increased provision of local services and facilities.

This is a trend set to continue with The development of Strategic Site 8: Former OCC Site Llanilid, Llanharan for a large-scale residential and commercial purposes and residential allocations at through the LDP. The Council recognises that new development that meets the needs of the community is necessary.

The Llanharan Village Study assessed current provision in the settlement and makes recommendations for improvements. The study identifies the need for improvements and development in key sectors including retail, leisure, community facilities, education, health and pedestrian, public and private transport routes

TCS4 A3 Uses in Pontypridd

Proposals for Class A3 uses will be permitted in Pontypridd Subject to the following criteria:

- i) That there is no detriment to the character or amenity of an area by reason of noise, smell, unsocial hours of operation and general activity;**
- ii) That the development is acceptable in terms of highway /parking provision;**
- iii) That there is no adverse detriment to the environment or residential amenity;**
- iv) The proposal is appropriate in scale, character and design with the surrounding area;**

Justification

A3 uses including restaurants, pubs, cafes are important within town centres to encourage and increase the vitality and viability. These uses encourage the evening economy and bring more people into the centres.

Encouraging A3 uses can generate noise and smell nuisance it is therefore important to locate these uses in appropriate locations and to manage them effectively. However these uses are vital to increasing vitality in town centres and can act a mechanism to attract people into the centres.

Food and drink outlets can add to the attractiveness of shopping areas, especially in the evenings. They are essential to the vitality and viability of town centres, however, the primary function of these centres is retailing and while food and drink outlets have an important place, their location within the shopping area must complement this primary function.

Proposals for food and drink outlets can create environmental problems such as noise, fumes, smell, litter, traffic generation and inadequate parking. These effects can be particularly noticeable with take-away food outlets, which also tend to generate a regular flow of short-stay customers requiring short-term and convenient parking provision. These uses also often have late opening hours which may be acceptable in a location where late night activity is more commonly found but in quieter residential areas may cause unacceptable disturbance to occupiers of nearby dwellings.

The council recognises the importance of A3 uses. They include a variety of activities, including take-aways, restaurants, bars and pubs. They can add variety and vitality to town centres and some are an important part of the night-time economy. In local centres they can provide local services to the community. In addition, A3 uses can provide important employment and economic development opportunities for the community.

Further Information

If you require any further information advice or assistance in respect this or other LDP documents or wish to be placed on the Council's consultation database please contact a member of the Local Development Plan Team at:

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