



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

FUTURE ENERGY

2026-2030

Merthyr Tydfil Destination Management Plan A

CROESO
MERTHYR
TUDFUL



VISIT
MERTHYR
TYDFIL

Funded by
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Wedi ei ariannu gan
Llywodraeth y DU





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PLAN ON A PAGE

VISION

Make Merthyr Tydfil one of the UK's most distinctive post-industrial adventure and culture hubs. A vibrant capital of the valleys, and launchpad to activity-rich landscapes. A place that has reclaimed its past to forge its future.

AMBITION 2026-2030

Put in place the foundations required to deliver this bold long-term vision, whilst powering-up immediate growth through a fusion of high-quality adventure, culture and nature experiences, inspired by our industrial past. Deliver a chain-reaction of positive benefits to our communities through well-crafted visitor experiences, which enable us to build for the future.

OBJECTIVES

Economic Value

Delivering:

Growth in economic impact
Tourism investment growth
Employment growth

High quality experiences

Enhancing:

Visitor sentiment and satisfaction
Diversity of the offer
Accommodation diversity and quality

Community engagement

Creating:

Cultural vibrancy
Community participation
Confidence in our self-image

Environmental quality

Developing: Better access to natural environments / Use of public transport and active travel

GROWTH AUDIENCES

Now:

Adventure Markets - Domestic/International
Pre-Family Explorers - Domestic
Active Family Explorers - South Wales

Always:

Local Residents

Future:

Independent Explorers - Domestic
Growth in International visitors

PROPOSITION

Epic adventure

Reclaimed nature

Dynamic culture

Reinvigoration: delivered with post-industrial edge and spirit and an authentic sense of place.

PRIORITIES

Now: Accelerating

Ring of improved experiences:

Adventure experiences
Journeys through nature
Diverse accommodation and hospitality

Ongoing: Reinforcing

Better basics:

Inspiring sense of arrival
Integrated transport offer
Signage, wayfinding and interpretation

Future: Transforming

Improving the core:

Cultural heritage vision
Town centre placemaking
Public realm improvements

ENABLERS

Strategic marketing approaches

Strong support structures

Sustainable delivery

Creative thinking and innovation

An integrated approach to place-led development

INTRODUCTION

DESTINATION MERTHYR 2030

Merthyr Tydfil was the cradle of the global industrial revolution. Today, local businesses and organisations are working creatively and collaboratively to forge a tourism future from the area.A

Steam trains and walking trails wind their ways from post-industrial backdrops to scenic landscapes. Merthyr Tydfil's heritage is being rejuvenated with adrenaline-fuelled adventure: hiking, rock-climbing, mountain biking. Characterful, high-quality places to stay are attracting overnight visitors to community cafes, pubs and restaurants. And a host of attractions like Zip World Tower and Penderyn Distillery are clustering within short-reach of the county borough, bringing a new dimension to the well-established offer in Bannau Brycheiniog to the north, and market towns like Abergavenny and Hay to the east.A

THERE'S AN ENERGY TO THE PLACE

Change is happening: the economic value of the sector has grown by 54% to over £156m per annum over the course of the last Destination Management Plan. New road and rail developments, plus transformative pipeline projects at Cyfarthfa Castle and Park and Rhydycar West, stand to drive another major step-change to our place profile and performance.A

But Merthyr Tydfil isn't yet an obvious or mature visitor destination and there will be a need to take care to build a confident but credible proposition for our future. Perceptions of the area, including self-perceptions, can hold us back. The area's culture and infrastructure aren't visitor-orientated. And much of the recent growth in the visitor economy is happening in the landscapes *around* the town, not on our high streets, at the core of our communities.A

There is latent potential all around us, but there will be a need to be strategic and joined-up to harness the opportunities ahead in ways that deliver transformative and regenerative benefits for all of us in the long-term.A

Our own best businesses, along with other post-industrial destinations around the world (as outlined in this Plan) show us what's possible. And that success will come from leaning-into our edge, our grit, and our post-industrial past, with renewed creativity and innovation.





Our Plan we'll therefore focus on three simple priorities:



ACCELERATING

Continued, focused growth in adventure and activity experiences and diverse accommodation in the landscapes surrounding the town of Merthyr Tydfil.



REINFORCING

Concerted, coordinated efforts to make our communities more visitor orientated – starting with infrastructure enhancements, including a clean, green, welcoming sense of arrival.



TRANSFORMING

Activity that will set us on the long-term journey to transforming our brand through our core offer, by unlocking the potential of our industrial past, and improving the quality of the town centre that sits at the heart of that story.

Growing the visitor economy can bring immediate benefits to our place brand, our commercial performance and social vibrancy. But tourism alone isn't a silver bullet for Merthyr Tydfil and so the Plan has been produced to complement broader, integrated economic transformation programmes at local, regional and national levels.

This Plan sets out our approach to achieving immediate gains, as well as long-term, strategic growth.

DESTINATION MERTHYR 2030A

This Plan has been produced to encompass every tourism and hospitality business in Merthyr Tydfil, as well as the wider community, and to provide an ambitious but realistic roadmap for the next five years.A

However, we're aware that two potentially transformative projects are currently in development at Rhydycar West and Cyfarthfa Castle and Park. While it's unlikely that either scheme will come to full fruition during the timescale of this fiveAyear Plan, their progress during this period could provide a major impetus to the visitor economy of the town, destination and region.

The Plan is designed to enable the destination to respond to any developments, and to lay firm foundations for these kinds of initiatives ahead of 2030.A

But it's also a living document and our intention is to work together to regularly review and realign the approach as the landscape continually changes around us. We'll need to be agile: building new relations with the broader business community locally; adopting new approaches to skills development and economic pathways; with creative placemaking; and in our approach to brand and marketing. The key will be to work together, and with forward momentum.A

THE TWO MAJOR PIPELINE PROJECTS OF RELEVANCE:A

VERY IMPORTANT CYFARTHFA FOUNDATION: CYFARTHFAA CASTLE AND PARK

The Cyfarthfa FoundationA is championing theA transformation of the CastleA and Park into a cultural centreA and visitor attraction of nationalA and international significance.A The vision is to become anA engine of social and structuralA renewal for the town and region.A The Foundation forecasts thatA the number of paying visitors toA Cyfarthfa – currently c.35,000A – could grow to more thanA 300,000 in the first decade.A

RHYDYCAR WEST

The Rhydycar West development proposal seeks to create a world class, year-round leisure resort for Merthyr and for Wales. The resort is anchored around key elements including the UK's longest indoor snow centre, a tropical waterpark, an indoor and outdoor adventure centre, plus a range of hotel offerings and woodland lodges. These would provide over 400 bedrooms, significantlyA increasing accommodationA provision locally.A

“

The transformation of Cyfarthfa Castle and Park will build on the renowned heritage of the site's past to play a key part in the long-term future of Merthyr Tydfil as a powerful engine of lasting social and economic renewal and a celebration of the heritage and community of the town.

”

Jess Mahoney, Chief Executive, The Cyfarthfa FoundationA



WHO ' PLAN IS FOR

This Plan has been **produced by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council** but is designed to **provide a common direction for all public, private and third-sector organisations** with an interest in nurturing tourism locally.

It will be **owned by the Destination Management Partnership**, with priorities reviewed on an annual basis, based on a dashboard of performance measures.

As a key driver of the Destination Management Partnership, **Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is committed to supporting the Plan**. Tourism is a key pillar within its economic strategy, and a dedicated and experienced tourism team will continue to lead its work in this area, but with cross-authority backing and delivery. Additional funding and resources will be required to deliver this Plan's full ambitions (for example, via Welsh Government or Visit Wales grants or regional investment funds). The Council will prioritise the

sector for support should additional funding become available, with a focus on improving business development services for local providers.

As outlined, a small number of potentially game-changing visitor experience and recreation schemes are in the pipeline over the next 5-10 years. This Plan has been created with these in mind, and can be recalibrated to support these projects, should they happen.

But there is also already plenty of potential to be found throughout the destination, and this Plan will accelerate their development, whilst laying firm foundations for the future.



STRATEGY AND POLICY CONTEXT

This Destination Management Plan has been developed to complement and align with a broad range of national, regional and Merthyr Tydfil-specific strategies and policies impacting the destination’s future as outlined below. These include the **Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Economic Vision** and the **Merthyr Strategic Valley Hub Placemaking Plan**.

	General	Tourism-specific ^A
Merthyr Tydfil ^A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merthyr Tydfil CBC Economic Vision, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) • Merthyr Strategic Valley Hub Placemaking Plan (MTCBC) • Merthyr Tydfil Corporate Wellbeing Plan (MTCBC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merthyr Tydfil: Destination Management Plan, 2015-2018^A
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dyfodol Y Bannau – The Future: The Management Plan for Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, 2023-2028^A • Cardiff Capital Region – Various^A • Northern Valleys Initiative^A 	
Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, Wales • Programme for Government, Welsh Government (WG) • Economic Mission: Priorities for a Stronger Economy, WG • The National Events Strategy for Wales 2020-2030, WG • Draft Priorities for Culture, 2024-2030, WG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome to Wales: Priorities for the Visitor Economy, 2020-2025, WGA



CURRENT POSITION

OUR PERFORMANCE

We are in a strong position as a destination.

In 2024 the economic impact of tourism in Merthyr Tydfil was the highest it's ever been.

The sector brought in a record £156m to the county borough's economy, up 54% since the last plan was launched in 2016.

Merthyr Tydfil's visitor economy is transforming at a scale where it's making a significant contribution to our community's overall growth – with over 16.7% of the County Borough's businesses now in the hospitality sector. Tourism matters to Merthyr Tydfil's future.

There's still a way to go before we're an iconic destination but tourism in Merthyr Tydfil has grown at a faster rate than tourism across the wider South East Wales region; and our positive performance comes at a challenging time for the domestic visitor economy across the UK. We're bucking the trends.

This is an important time for our sector.

Over the next few years we'll be navigating important changes, with statutory registration and licencing for all visitor accommodation in Wales. The Local Authority will soon also be undertaking a consultation on the introduction of a potential tourism levy.

This Plan is about working together to respond to change collectively – and harnessing the next five years to take our destination to the next level again.

“
Rhydyicar West is a transformational tourism opportunity for Merthyr Tydfil. It will create a world-class, year-round leisure resort destination that attracts visitors from across the UK and beyond, while supporting long-term economic growth, regeneration and promoting investment and employment in the area.
”

CEO, Rhydyicar West

156m

economic
Impact

54%

real terms growth
since 2016

65%

of economic
impact comes from
staying visitors

TOP TEN FACTS ABOUT THE DESTINATION

- 1 Merthyr Tydfil attracted 1.3 million visitors in 2024 – a slight increase on 2023.
- 2 Crucially, the value of tourism has grown by 54% since 2016, and 14% since 2019 due to a growth in staying visitors to the area. This far exceeds region A wide growth patterns.
- 3 In 2024, 22% of visitors stayed overnight in the area – a significant increase of 7% in a year. 65% of the value of tourism comes from staying visitors, so encouraging overnight stays is key to sustainable growth.
- 4 There has been a 59% growth in direct employment in the sector since 2016; and 1,418 were employed in total in tourism-related industries in Merthyr Tydfil in 2024.
- 5 26% of the economic impact is spent in the food and drink sector; 18% on shopping and 17% on transport – highlighting how the sector brings benefit to the wider economy, including services of value to local residents.
- 6 The latest detailed Merthyr Tydfil Bedstock Survey Report we have for the destination from October 2024 show that the number of accommodation establishments had increased tenfold, from 29 to 315 from 2016 to 2023. The number of bedspaces within these establishments has only doubled, however, because most of these establishments are small, self-catering properties. There was a 392% increase in the economic impact of non-serviced accommodation between 2016 and 2023.

CURRENT POSITION

- 7** VisitBritain occupancy data relating to the short term rentals sector only, suggests that an average occupancy of 55.3% was achieved in 2022 and 51.9% in 2023, slightly above the Waleswide averages of 51.6% and 46.3% respectively. 2024 data suggests a further to around 42% for Merthyr Tydfil and Wales in general, peaking at 55% in August in the Merthyr Tydfil area.A
- 8** The sector is becoming a key driver to the local economy. According to the Wales Visitor Economy Profile: 2024, produced by Welsh Government, 16.7% of enterprises in the county borough are in the tourism industries – the highest proportion in Wales, alongside Gwynedd. The same reports show a decline in the number of serviced accommodation establishments, and beds, in Merthyr Tydfil since 2016.A
- 9** It's important to remain realistic about the relative scale of tourism in Merthyr Tydfil when compared to Wales's iconic, leading and established visitor destinations. There is anecdotal evidence that the area still suffers from negative outside perceptions, and a poor self-image. The area is one of the most deprived parts of the UK. This impacts the town centre experience in particular.A
- 10** However, many of the destination's tourism businesses are positive and optimistic about the future and have investment and development plans in place.A

Sources: STEAM Report for 2023 unless otherwise noted.

The key priority is to build on this forward momentum, accelerating growth based on current capacity – by increasing the frequency and duration of visits, and concentrating on staying visits in particular.

We need to do this while also laying the foundations for continued investment, as we look to expand the product mix and build our future capabilities as an industry. We want to grow a more diverse experience and accommodation mix and use the next five years to drive another step change in our transformation as a key destination for Wales's future.A

59%

increase in direct
employment
since 2016

16.7%

local
enterprises
are in tourism

x10

increase in
accommodation
establishments
since 2016

OUR OFFER

- **A**Merthyr Tydfil has a globally significant story and a strategic location as a hub at the top of the valleys, providing access to outstanding natural landscapes. Its small but driven tourism industry includes long-standing operators like Brecon Mountain Railway and Cyfarthfa Castle and Park with newer businesses helping to revitalise the destination, particularly in the adventure and activity sectors.
- **A**Some of these projects such as BikePark Wales have functioned as catalysts for broader socio-economic growth, sparking new businesses, especially in accommodation. While adventure tourism thrives, with products such as Rock UK, Parkwood Outdoors and a wide-ranging national trail network, cultural heritage offerings need reinvigoration - though there are pockets of excellence here too, at places like Canolfan Soar.
- **A**Many existing operators have ambitious investment plans for the next decade, requiring cross-authority support and collaboration.
- **A**As previously stated, major investment projects could accelerate this Plan's ambitions and there are a number of potentially game-changing initiatives in the pipeline, as outlined. There is a reason these businesses and organisations are targeting Merthyr Tydfil - and

we should continue to harness our strategic location, improved infrastructure, and cultural significance, to attract future interest and investment, too. Nearby attractions like Zip World and Penderyn Distillery can also elevate the area's profile.

- **A**Merthyr Tydfil is surrounded by outstanding and improving natural landscapes and parklands - Bannau Brycheiniog, the Fforest Fawr UNESCO Geopark, local parks and gardens like Park Taff Bargoed, and wilder landscapes like Gelligaer and Merthyr Common. Reclaimed nature and biodiversity are providing new visitor experiences; and the story itself, including the story of the resurgence of Red Kites above the valley, can also serve to shift general perceptions of the destination.
- **A**The wider regional context is strong and there is scope to align Merthyr Tydfil's visitor, and broader, economic growth more strategically with the growth of these sectors - such as the creative industries. Developing a rounded proposition of creative co-working hubs and arts interventions has the potential to turn the heads of visitors and residents and could enhance the overall competitiveness and attractiveness of the county and its place brand.



- **A**Merthyr Tydfil's tourism offer is getting richer all the time, and there's scope to be optimistic about the future, even in the face of significant pressures on the UK market, and tourism industry. However, to achieve our potential, we need to be realistic about what it will take for us to be competitive:
 - **A**Our private sector is delivering high-quality experiences to international visitors, and the quality of local visitor services and infrastructure throughout the destination now need to meet those standards. That starts with an improved sense of arrival, which could be more impactful and welcoming.A
 - **A**Continued reinvestment in adventure and cultural experiences is needed, alongside better promotion of multi-modal routes and trails.A
 - **A**Accommodation is diversifying, but the serviced sector remains stagnant, requiring expansion - including investment in larger, higher-quality premises. There's a need to continually review self-catering's impact on housing and communities.A
 - **A**The food and drink offer is improving, but does not compete with provision in neighbouring areas in terms of breadth and quality, and there is a lack of 'destination' restaurants or pubs.A
- **A**Events could be more ambitious and visitor-centric, integrating adventure, activity, and cultural festivals, with a niche (e.g., challenger adventure events) and mainstream offer.A
- **A**The area's rich heritage is not showcased with as much confidence and originality as we see elsewhere. There is real scope to enhance the town's cultural offer through collaborations with the creative industries, while recognising the significant funding and structural pressures on these sectors at present.A
- **A**Growth is happening on the outskirts rather than in the town centre, highlighting the need for urban regeneration right in the heart of communities. UK and Welsh Government funding for town-centre renewal can be harnessed to deliver improvements that are good for locals, and guests.A
- **A**Learning from best-practice destinations, Merthyr Tydfil can embrace its post-industrial character as a distinctive and authentic asset. Successful transformation requires creativity, vision, and a deep connection to our unique sense of place.A

OUR CURRENT MARKETS

Merthyr Tydfil is currently primarily a day visitor destination, with parks recording high footfall traffic. It is thought that the majority of Merthyr Tydfil come specifically to the area from other parts of the region, often as a stop-off in the destination en-route to other destinations in the region.

Staying visitors are drawn by high quality adventure and activity operators or alternative accommodation in Merthyr Tydfil's hinterland or rural landscapes. Key markets include Mountain Bikers from across the UK and Europe; as well as a growing market of pre-family and family visitors from other parts of Wales and beyond.

Product development in the short term should prioritise characterful, high quality experiences (micro to macro in scale) of appeal to Visit Wales's primary growth audience of Independent Explorers. These adventurous travellers seek unique, alternative visitor experiences and are open to discovering new destinations. They are also interested in new and authentic cultural experiences - providing further growth potential as the area's cultural product offer potentially develops and improves.

In doing so, we need to be cognisant of a downturn in the UK domestic holiday market due in part to the cost-of-living crisis. However, high interest continues for Welsh tourism, and the town is strategically well-located. There's scope to competitively position the area as a high quality gateway hub, offering value-for-money adventure and activities.

There is anecdotal evidence that the 'Merthyr Tydfil' brand suffers from negative perceptions, dominated by social deprivation and town centre experience narratives. Whilst Tripadvisor reviews suggest visitor satisfaction levels when in the area are positive, there is a need to take care that the destination brand aligns with the real experience to build credibility, and the area's self-image.



This Plan therefore adopts a product-first approach to marketing the destination initially, focusing on hinterland experiences 'around' the main town centre, whilst gradually strengthening the destination-wide proposition with a particular focus on cultural heritage. It also supports a flexible cross-border branding strategy, leveraging links with Bannau Brycheiniog partners, Monmouthshire-based organisations and the Cardiff Capital Region, including the Northern Valleys Initiative.

The global experience economy is growing and demand for authentic, enriching experiences rising, and - as outlined - Merthyr Tydfil should integrate tourism with creative industries and technology to secure a competitive edge. Leading destinations increasingly blend sectors to create innovative and fresh destination experiences like graffiti tours, or creative co-working and leisure spaces.



There is a forward energy to the destination. The purpose of this Plan is to provide focus for that momentum - to accelerate our short-term growth within our natural landscapes, to drive long-term regenerative change in the heart of our communities.

LESSONS FROM ELSEWHERE

Merthyr Tydfil is a unique visitor destination – in a strong strategic geographical position, with a striking and significant industrial past and legacy, which brings both opportunity and challenges. To inform the Plan, lessons have been learnt from other destinations across the world that are of relevance to Merthyr Tydfil and its surrounding area. Ensuring that the Destination Management Partnership continues to learn from other peer destinations is a key aspect of this Plan.



LES

raging its global, sport-drivenA
ots pride and community-ledA
lrive new tourism interest and
e.A



EOGANG, AUSTRIA

nation has transformed into a
sm hub by investing in sustainableA
s, including mountain biking,
nd green hospitality infrastructure.A

KEY LESSONS:

A clear vision and focus

Cultural confidence

Creativity and innovation

Community involvement

Grassroots pride



LINZ, AUSTRIA

Linz has shifted from industrial decline to cultural innovation by championing digital media arts, turning the city into a magnet for tech-savvy and culturally curious travellers.



NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA, GERMANY

By repurposing industrial heritage sites into vibrant cultural landmarks, the area has pioneered a model of regenerative tourism tied to sustainability and memory.



NEPA (NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA) USA

NEPA has revitalised its post-industrial identity in a way that celebrates and actively platforms community organisations and volunteers.



AARHUS, DENMARK

Aarhus has rebranded itself as a creative cultural capital through innovative urban design, waterfront revitalisation and immersive digital visitor experiences.

FUTURE PLAN



STRATEGIC PLATFORM

The vision, ambition and aim echo the vision of the Placemaking Plan to *'establish Merthyr as a renown(ed) cultural and recreational tourist destination and a great place to live and visit'* and its goal to make Merthyr the *'tourism capital of the Valleys and Beacons'*. The long-term vision of the Destination Management Plan builds on this by reflecting Merthyr Tydfil's unique potential as the home of the global industrial revolution, and launchpad to outstanding natural landscapes.A

VISION:

Make Merthyr Tydfil one of the UK's most distinctive post-industrial adventure and culture hubs. A vibrant capital of the valleys, and launchpad to activity-rich landscapes. A place that has **reclaimed its past to forge its future.**



STRATEGIC PLATFORM

Achieving this vision will take decades of coordinated effort and investment from the private, public and third sectors. But we are well on our way. Over the last fifteen years, there has been a major gear shift in our visitor experience offer. The focus of the next Destination Management Plan is to consolidate and continue to build on that success, while also addressing some of the foundational challenges we face in becoming a stand-out and leading all-round destination.

AMBITION 2030:

To put in place the foundations required to deliver this bold long-term vision, whilst powering-up immediate growth through a fusion of high-quality adventure, culture and nature experiences, inspired by our industrial past.

STRATEGIC PLATFORM

The purpose of the Plan is to deliver a continually improving visitor economy in Merthyr Tydfil, gradually bringing more spend to the heart of our communities. But it's also about harnessing the wider potential of tourism to reinvigorate the quality of life of local people, as well as our guests, in ways that are regenerative and sustained.A

AIM:

To deliver a chain-reaction of positive benefits to our communities through well-crafted visitor experiences, which enable us to build for the future.A



OBJECTIVES

Our indicative objectives are to deliver economic and wider benefits to Merthyr Tydfil through tourism. The approach aligns with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the core principles of Welsh Government's 'Welcome to Wales' tourism strategy. Together we want to grow:

ECONOMIC VALUE

Delivering:

- **A** Growth in the economic impact of tourism. This includes a measurable increase in spend in the town centre.
- **A** Increase in employment.
- **A** Increase in investment in the sector from the private sector.

HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES

Enhancing:

- **A** Positive visitor sentiment and satisfaction with the destination.
- **A** The diversity of offer with a range of new activity experiences in place by 2030.
- **A** The diversity of overnight accommodation - increasing bedspaces and driving a measurable improvement in quality.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Creating:

- **A** Cultural vibrancy with signature, high quality events for visitors, and locals.
- **A** Opportunities for young people to participate in adventure, activity and cultural attractions and experiences.
- **A** Renewed confidence in the area's self and external place 'brand'.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Developing:

- **A** More partnership projects that enhance access to our natural environments.
- **A** An approach that drives a measurable increase in visitors travelling to and within the destination by public transport and active travel networks.

Specific objectives, measures and KPIs, along with a detailed plan for capturing and sharing the data on a rolling basis, will be developed as a next phase of work. The Destination Management Partnership & the Destination Management Team within Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council will collectively track performance on an ongoing basis, focusing efforts, investments and interventions based on the latest data and insights. We'll also re-evaluate targets annually.

GROWTH AUDIENCES

This Plan is based on achieving a gradual, sustained shift in the profile and performance of the destination –growing steadily up and out from the current visitor base. And the market strategy reflects this approach, with a targeted focus initially, building with time.A

ADVENTURE MARKETS, DOMESTIC & INTERNATIONAL

- **A**Initially, as outlined, this Plan centres on growing our existing adventure offer, and we'll therefore continue to focus on attracting specific adventure markets (including new and return visitors) to stay longer in the area.A
- **A**The adventure market suits the destination's current broader product offer. They are high-spend but looking for relaxed accommodation and food and drink experiences.A
- **A**We will do this by developing strong product-orientated positions aimed at key growth segments, blending Merthyr Tydfil-specific products with opportunities in surrounding destinations, and being ruthlessly market-facing throughout. Specific target markets include: mountain bikers, including domestic and international markets; the rock climbing/caving market - promoting a blend of Merthyr Tydfil and Valleys/Bannau experiences to this niche audience; general adventure/adrenaline markets - promoting a package of Merthyr Tydfil and valleys/Bannau Brycheiniog-wide experiences, in the model of the current Valleys of Adventure campaign; the group market.A

PRE-FAMILY EXPLORERS, DOMESTICA

- **A**We'll also initially target the Visit Wales 'Pre-Family Explorer' domestic market segment - active young couples, looking for high-quality, wellbeing-orientated short breaks in distinctive and memorable locations. There's an opportunity to package-up the area's relatively unknown natural landscapes with the range of adventure, walking and cycling trails available, your best pubs/restaurants, local wellbeing and eco experiences - plus the wider Bannau Brycheiniog offer - as an easily-accessible, 'new' destination to discover.A
- **A**While accommodation options are relatively limited, there is still scope to grow year-round occupancy, and the characterful, Instagrammable nature of some of the provision can shift perceptions of the area, too.A



ACTIVE FAMILY EXPLORERS, SOUTH WALES

- **A**Finally, there's an opportunity to target the Visit Wales 'Active Family Explorer' segment to come for more and longer day trips to the area. This includes a large resident population across South Wales, for whom Merthyr Tydfil is a symbolic and well-known town, but with a bit of a reputational edge. There's scope to do more to position the wide range of walking and cycling trails in the surrounding landscapes to this market, including creating a single circular trail around the town. We can also do more to promote alternative Bannau Brycheiniog experiences and landscapes, and the Brecon Mountain Railway in particular.A
- **A** Merthyr Tydfil, like each of its neighbouring northern valleys, is intersected with a fantastic network of off-road walking and cycling routes. The roll-out of the Metro provides an opportunity (with the right facilities on the trains and in stations) to reposition the valleys experience locally for rail/ride days out.A

DEVELOPING NEW MARKETS

As the product offer evolves through this Plan, especially in relation to the cultural heritage offer and the quality of the overall destination experience, we will look to expand our market appeal to include:

- **A wider ‘Independent Explorer’ domestic visitor cohorts**
 - including the Scenic Explorer Couples and Older Cultural Explorer Couples segments. These high-value visitors bridge activity and cultural interests, reflecting the opportunity to broaden the destination’s market appeal and base around more, and high-profile, product developments.A
- **More international visitors** - as the adventure offer grows, and given the strength of our cultural heritage story, potentially working on a regional basis with partners such as Blaenavon World Heritage Site.A

LOCAL RESIDENTS

This Plan is about creating high quality experiences for Merthyr Tydfil that are authentic to this part of the world and feel inclusive and connected to local people. It isn't about a 'two tier' visitor economy or creating a playground for tourists, which feels distant and detached from local life.

That means including local residents, and the area's young people, within the approach: with experiences that are aspirational but relevant; by creating opportunities for local people to take part in events and activities; by ensuring that entrepreneurship and job opportunities in the sector are actively promoted locally; and by simply projecting the same place brand to our own people, as we do to visitors.

The characteristics and requirements of local residents will be considered when developing new products and experiences through this Plan, and they will also be included in future brand and marketing campaigns – with messaging that is realistic and honest, but also aspirational and shapeshifting. We want to convey a true but confident view of the best of the destination to the area's own young people.

GROWTH AUDIENCES



This will need to be delivered exceptionally carefully, with a focus 'show don't tell' storytelling based on our most credible products, and the voice of influencers – visitors, media, and also some of the area's leading business owners.

Image : Cyfarthfa Foundation

PROPOSITION

The research shows that high-performing destinations have a strong and unifying vision and a clearly defined sense of what they're all about and what they want to be famous for: or their proposition.

There is an energy to Merthyr Tydfil historically, but also in terms of the dynamism of its small core of visitor experience operators. Through this Plan we'll therefore celebrate Merthyr Tydfil as a place of continual **reinvigoration** for visitors, businesses and its communities.

The thematic product focus will align directly with Visit Wales's identified signature products for Wales: landscapes, culture and adventure.

- In the short term, we'll concentrate on the destination's current credible and emerging reputation as a place of **epic adventure**
- We'll also celebrate activity and heritage trails, routes, and journeys, by foot or by bike, by horse or by heritage train, into **reclaimed and outstanding landscapes**.
- We'll increasingly interweave our dynamic **cultural heritage** into all these experiences, with more confidence and creativity, whilst also seeking to completely transform our cultural heritage offer over the long-term, in a way that befits its significance and global status.

Part of this includes **leaning-in with confidence to our industrial and post-industrial identity**.



REINVIGORATION=A



PROPOSITION

Merthyr Tydfil has a heritage to be proud of, beating heart of real, industrial Wales. The population know and live it. While we do face the challenges facing the community, we should acknowledge Merthyr Tydfil's unique creativity and innovation.

We're already starting to see this happening in Merthyr Tydfil, with stunning artwork by Teifi in the town centre, groups like Valleys Street / environments, and striking murals right across the town. This kind of innovation and creativity happens in many ways:

- Some destinations are using old factories, buildings for attention-grabbing visitor experiences - trampolines; former mines, tunnels or towers for immersive theatre, music events, or history
- Industrial spaces are being repurposed into creative spaces with artist studios, markets, and cultural spaces

As part of a more confident approach to celebrating a chance to stand-out by making more use of the idea we own our heritage, and see ourselves as a destination in Wales. This will enable the destination to stand out to the vast majority of people are proud of the Government's tourism strategy and Visit Wales. We will feature Welsh words and concepts like 'Croyw'.

Through the proposition we'll also seek to deliver experiences that should represent the best of 'Bro Morgannwg' as 'Byd' (international relevance).





Photo: Patrick Oliver

PRIORITIES

As outlined, this Plan is about three things:

1

ACCELERATION

We'll embrace the fact that the area's current growth is coming from adventure and activity experiences in the landscapes surrounding the town itself. In the immediate term we'll therefore focus on doing more to champion existing businesses and experiences in these areas. We'll also look to create new high quality experiences within the 'ring' around the town that serve to complement the existing offer and start to build a critical-mass destination 'brand' for the area and become an adventure hub. The experiences will be increasingly infused with cultural heritage to make them distinctive and appeal to broader market groups.

2

FOUNDATION

In many ways, Merthyr Tydfil's recent tourism growth has outpaced the need to ensure that the fundamentals of an established visitor destination are in place. Concerted, coordinated efforts are therefore required to make our communities more visitor orientated, starting with basic public realm and infrastructure enhancements, including a clean, green, welcoming sense of arrival. This work will support existing businesses, whilst laying the foundations required to drive future transformative change.

3

TRANSFORMATION

We'll focus hard over the next five years to ensure that game-changing projects that elevate the area's cultural heritage to its rightful stature and status are prioritised. We'll do this in ways that thrill and excite local communities. We'll also work together to continue to deliver an ongoing and increasingly innovative placemaking programme for the town centre, so that the town can become a credible core of our future visitor proposition and so that the destination also starts to become recognised as a cultural hub.

1 ACCELERATION

We'll accelerate our current performance by building on what we already deliver credibly and well, creating a 'ring' of adventure and activities in the landscapes that surround us. This is our opportunity to re-energise the existing offer, and remain competitive.A



*Photo: Andy Lloyd
www.andylloyd.photography*

1. ADVENTURE HUB DEVELOPMENT

In Merthyr Tydfil, as in many other parts of Wales, we've seen that a destination brand, and place experience, can be transformed by a small number of carefully conceived, market-facing adventure and activity experiences. They have a very clear and defined market; a world-class product offer; excellent branding and marketing; but relatively low environmental footprint given their disproportionate brand and economic impact. The area is of course open to the right kinds of major investment schemes but projects like this are also part of our blueprint for future product development.

Through this Plan we will:

- **Support our existing hero businesses to grow**, ensuring that they have formalised 121 relations with key partners in the public sector; are fully considered and included within publicly-funded investment schemes; and by continuing to focus on adventure as a competitive Unique Selling Point or USP for the wider area. We'll also ensure that they are integrated within any future projects to improve the destination's basic infrastructure, and included on key public transport routes, or readily-connected to bus and trail terminals via trails and signage.
- **Ensure that future adventure developments in the area serve to complement and add value to our current portfolio offer.**
- **Work with regional and national partners to proactively attract and secure new adventure and outdoor activity product investments in the area.** These projects should be brand-defining, whether they are at micro or macro level. Indoor and all-weather facilities will be prioritised.
- **Work collaboratively to devise one, new bookable adventure-specific experience** to help to redefine and grow the destination each year, working across the public sector to support the industry to take these to market directly and via travel trade intermediaries if required. The experience should include several providers, working across borders if market-relevant, and give visitors more reason to stay overnight, in the destination.
- **Work with partners to showcase current adventure and activity events** taking place in the area, and to **grow the niche/challenger adventure event product offer.**
- **Work with local adventure and activity providers, including voluntary associations, to expand the excellent work of certain groups, like the Merthyr Tydfil Angling Association in providing benefits to young people locally. This will include work to grow new skills and improve wellbeing through outdoor activities, creating added societal value through recreation and tourism.**



Lead: Private and third Sectors with support from Merthyr Tydfil CBC and other public sector organisations.

2. JOURNEYS THROUGH NATURE

Merthyr Tydfil is in a strong strategic location and will soon benefit from the roll-out of an expanded MetroA rail service throughout South Wales. It is a gateway town on Visit Wales’s strategic national route, TheA Wales Way; and the completion of the Heads of the Valleys road provides new opportunities to attract visitors from the Midlands. There are opportunities to showcase the fact that a quarter of the countyA borough is within the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, and to explore linkages around the potentialA expansion of the Geo Park.A

Merthyr Tydfil is on several National Walking and Cycling routes: Route 8 (Lôn Las Cymru/Taff Trail), Route 477 – the Trevithick Trail, Route 47 – the Celtic Trail; and Route 46 (currently unbranded at national level) from Bromsgrove to Neath but known as the Heads of the Valleys trail in Wales. It also links into the Three Parks Trail down to Caerphilly County Borough; sits close to several cycling and biking trails within the broader region; and the Tour de France’s visit to Wales in 2027 provides an opportunity to package up the wider trails and routes offer, with Merthyr Tydfil as an accessible hub.A

Through this Plan we will:

- A Work with Visit Wales to promote Merthyr Tydfil as a hub along **The Wales Way**.A
- ACollaborate with relevant partners to continue to develop and improve the area’s **National Walking and Cycling Routes** both as hero National ‘challenger’ routes; as well as a network of fun and accessible packages for pre-family and active family explorer markets.A
- A Work with partners along the **Heads of the Valleys Road and Walking/Cycling Route** to create a joined-up proposition or experience for visitors across the whole route, again promoting multi-modal travel opportunities, including simple day-out circular experience packages from key exit points, e.g., Pontsticill Reservoir rides and loops.A
- ACollaborate with partners **to raise the profile of the Taff, Heads of the Valleys, Trevithick and Celtic Way Trails** as iconic cycling and walking routes for Wales, offering seamless linkages with wider destination brands like the Fforest Fawr UNESCO Geopark.A
- ALook to establish a new branded **circular link of Merthyr Tydfil**, packing up existing trails and routes to create a new product of specific appeal to family markets. We’ll look to infuse the route with a sense of the town’s post-industrial heritage, via purposeful and creative interpretation.A



Lead: Merthyr Tydfil CBC with support from other public and third sector organisations.A

PRIORITIES: ACCELERATION

- **Improve the quality of local trail mapping**, digitally and physically, creating much more of a sense of ‘resort’ within the destination through improved interpretation and maps.
- **Enhance our Town Centre Trails** offering, as part of a wider ongoing placemaking programme.
- **Launch one new thematic walking and cycling trail product or experience for the destination each year**, starting with revamped Heritage Trails. Opportunities to showcase the area’s post-industrial features, including tunnels, bridges, railway-lines should be explored.
- **Focus on creating strategic linkages between public transport and car parking and wider walking/cycling infrastructure** across the destination. Maximise on our strategic location’s potential to make Merthyr Tydfil one of the easiest places in Wales to travel to and explore in future.
- **Support infrastructure developments within local parks, gardens and landscapes**, such as Parc Taff Bargoed, which stand to benefit residents, as well as visitors.
- **Work with regional partners to normalise the concept of the valleys as an accessible, integrated walking and cycling destination**, offering safe, off-road routes and circular links, linking back to key driving/parking spots and public transport. Work with transport partners to deliver a joined-up vision.



“
BikePark Wales is proof that world-class adventure experiences can thrive here. Great trails, big days on the hill and a reason to come back again and again, all helping more people discover Merthyr Tydfil and the wider landscape.
”

Director, **BikePark Wales**

3. DIVERSE ACCOMMODATION AND HOSPITALITY

The evidence suggests that although very limited in stock, Merthyr Tydfil’s stand-out, high-quality and characterful accommodation businesses are performing exceptionally well. There’s scope to continue to support the year-round success of these ventures, while also improving the availability and quality of the wider local accommodation offer. Crucially, there’s a continued need to enhance accommodation stock locally, with a focus on more destination-defining alternative accommodation in the natural environment, serviced destination-level gastro inns and pubs, 4*+ serviced accommodation in the town centre and bunkhouse options. Any growth in accommodation should complement experience development plans – ensuring that the overall product is sustainable, and market-orientated.

Through this Plan we will:

- **A** Commission an **Accommodation Development Review** for Merthyr Tydfil based on the recent Bedstock Survey. This will include an assessment of self-catering provision within the destination, to ensure that a positive balance is maintained with housing stock for local people. This will form part of a broader consultation exercise on the proposed introduction of a tourism levy in Merthyr Tydfil.
- **A** Encourage investment in characterful, perception-shifting, low-impact alternative accommodation provision in the destination, and experiential projects, which complement the wider adventure and activities offer, and that have a strong sense of place.
- **A** Proactively focus on growing serviced accommodation provision across the destination, including **serviced gastropub/inns**, with the potential to act as ‘destination’ places to stay, as well as **4*+ hotels in and around the town centre**. We’ll work across the public sector to ensure that signature town centre accommodation operators are able to focus on attracting high-quality visitor markets, for the benefit of everyone in our communities.
- **A** Support **accommodation provision for adventure and activity markets, including ‘aire’ parking provision, so that we remain competitive** and appealing to fast-evolving adventure group markets.
- **A** Encourage all accommodation providers in the destination to **enhance the sense of place of the offer with industrially-inspired experiences where relevant - by sharing best practice**. Support businesses to appeal to future markets, seeking unique and authentic experiences at all touchpoints. **Promote Walkers’ and Cyclist Friendly accreditation.**
- **A** Work across the **public sector to enhance the quality of local food and drink provision in the destination**. Work together as tourism operators to choose Welsh and local produce.
- **A** Support our industry with the introduction of a future **Statutory Register for Accommodation.**

“
For us, five-star isn’t just a rating, it’s a mindset. We’re proud to be part of a growing and evolving visitor offer in Merthyr Tydfil, where quality and experience really matter.
 ”

Proprietor, **The Pencerrig Collection**



Lead: Merthyr Tydfil CBC to provide a positive environment for private sector investment and innovation.

2 FOUNDATION

We'll ensure that the destination is visitor-orientated, with better basics, including infrastructure that matches the quality of our best operators and that is befitting of a place of such historic significance.A



1. INSPIRING SENSE OF ARRIVAL

A visitor's experience of a destination, their overall satisfaction with their visit, and their intention to return in the future are shaped by all aspects of their experience of a place. Their first impressions can shape and influence the whole experience. Given Merthyr Tydfil's strategic position on the A470, and Heads of the Valleys Road, getting the destination's 'sense of arrival' right also has the potential to turn heads and start to influence the perceptions of a much broader audience about changes happening within the town and its surrounding landscapes, too. This will require cross-organisation/agency collaboration.

Through this Plan we will:

- **Work together to audit all key arrival points to the destination twice annually** to ensure that they provide a quality visitor experience, developing simple action plans to address key issues jointly. Include public and active travel entry-points, as well as road junctions.
- **Ensure that every gateway points to our destination – north, south, east and west – is clean and tidy, rubbish free and features high-quality and well-maintained landscaping.**
- **Look after the architectural features or sculptures** that already exist at key entry points, and **introduce similar interventions across all key entry points to the destination.**
- **Undertake a strategic signage review** at key arrival points to the destination, to ensure that they are vibrant, clear and welcoming.
- **Improve the sense of arrival provided within the town itself**, in line with the Placemaking Plan.
- **Improve visitor information provision at key points of arrival in the town or in the surrounding area** through digital signage and interpretative maps, and by continually improving the destination website.



Photo: Annie Spratt

Lead: CrossAgency, coordinated by Merthyr Tydfil CBC.

2. INTEGRATED TRANSPORT OFFER

Merthyr Tydfil is already in a strong strategic geographical position, and creating a seamless local car, public transport and active travel offer has the potential to elevate our story. Collaborating with innovative organisations such as the Three Valleys Community Rail Partnership will ensure that activity benefits both residents and visitors.A

Through this Plan we will:

- **A**Harness the **Trevithick story to position ourselves as a destination that takes public transport seriously**.A
- **A**Collaborate with public transport providers and partners to ensure that **bus and rail schedules in the area are fully integrated – with specific services and routes tailored to the needs of the visitor and recreation market**.A
- **A**Work with partners to assess the viability of a **bespoke, branded bus service** to surrounding attractions and destinations, including Bannau Brycheiniog sites.A
- **A**Actively improve our **walking and cycling infrastructure** to support the Brecon Mountain Railway.A
- **A**Encourage **public transport providers to cater properly for bikes and cyclists with bike racks and a cyclist-friendly culture** and ensure that public transport hubs feature **safe bike parking/storage facilities**.A
- **A**Work with partners to improve the **safety of public transport travel and our key transport hubs**.A
- **A**Work with to promote **projects such as ‘Window Seater’** which provide those travelling by public transport with an opportunity to learn about the cultural heritage of areas that they travel through.A

Lead: CrossAgency, coordinated by Merthyr Tydfil CBC.A

3. SIGNAGE, WAYFINDING AND INTERPRETATIONA

The area is changing quickly and increasingly connected and intersected by a range of strategic road, rail, walking and cycling routes.A

Through this Plan we will:

- **A**Carefully audit the emerging integrated travel landscape within Merthyr Tydfil, re-mapping visitor journeys accordingly. We'll **review existing signposting and wayfinding infrastructure to ensure that it is up-to-date**. We'll take a minimal and digital-first approach, prioritising high quality materials and digital solutions.A
- **A**Explore opportunities to bring key journeys to life with **imaginative interpretation**, working with contemporary artists.
- **A**Create and stick to **agreed signposting and wayfinding guidance and standards** within the destination and along key National Routes, to ensure a wholly consistent and familiar visitor experience and avoid creating confusion and clutter.A
- **A**Develop **simple projects such as ‘History Points’ throughout our communities**, which provide residents and visitors with simple digital opportunities to find out more about the past.A

Lead: Merthyr Tydfil CBC to coordinate a range of public and third-sector organisations.A

3 TRANSFORMATION

Merthyr Tydfil is an iconic town, of international historic significance. There is scope to more actively celebrate this story within the destination as a signature aspect of Merthyr Tydfil, and Wales offer. There is also much more potential to reflect the richness of this story within the town centre itself, where the experience isn't commensurate with its historic status.A

As outlined, this Plan will focus first on harnessing existing product strengths, on the outskirts of the town centre, and putting the basic infrastructure foundations in place to underpin to drive short-term growth. Continuing to develop a 'ring' of adventure and activities around Merthyr Tydfil, while gradually improving general visitor facilities, will make a big difference.A

However, we also must improve the core or heart of our offer or we risk missing opportunities to make Merthyr Tydfil stand-apart from the rest, and, most importantly, to bring long-term benefits right to the heart of our communities.A

After a strong decade of overall progress within the local visitor economy, this Plan will therefore seek to start addressing some of the fundamental challenges at the core of the destination's future, thematically and geographically: and the untapped potential of its cultural heritage story and assets, including our town centre.A

We know that addressing these issues will take time, and a lot of joined-up working across sectors. We will not completely transform the landscape in the next five years through tourism alone.A

But there's scope to start making important in-roads, and quick wins include leaning-in more to the town's industrial and post-industrial edge with cutting edge arts and creativity, to create something unique and distinctive for Wales. **Cyfarthfa Castle and Park is of course a potential catalyst for this social and economic transformation.A**



1. CULTURAL HUB DEVELOPMENT

Merthyr Tydfil's story is of international significance and relevance. The town was the crucible of an industrial revolution that changed history; and home to the world's first railway steam locomotive. There are numerous examples of cities and regions around the world that work across sectors to bring these stories to life through the creative and digital industries. However, we also recognise that the cultural, heritage and adjacent creative industries sectors are facing significant funding and structural pressures at present, so there's a need to be strategic, and innovative, about the way ahead. As outlined, the Cyfarthfa Project has the potential to both drive forward and be driven forward by this work.A

Through this Plan we will:

- **Work with partners on a strategy and action plan for showcasing cultural heritage in Merthyr Tydfil**, potentially as part of a wider regional study, to prioritise and integrate activities. The aim will be to make a joined-up case for sustainable funding to significantly improve the area's cultural heritage offer over the next ten-years. The strategy should consider the scope of exploring international designations for the area, given its historical significance, as well as opportunities to develop the cultural events offer. The strategy must be underpinned by a commitment to delivery by all key partners.A
- **Prioritise identifying sustainable funding to accelerate developing experiences that elevate the cultural heritage 'icons' of the area including Cyfarthfa, Trevithick, the Redhouse and the Joseph Parry experience.**A
- **Engage purposefully with creative industry partners on a regional level** to capitalise on the growth of the sector to increase Merthyr Tydfil's competitiveness and attractiveness through projects to develop co-working spaces, event hubs or film/television production that serve to elevate the destination, and deliver broad economic benefits.A
- **Work collaboratively across the cultural and creative sectors to raise the profile of the contemporary music and arts scene in Merthyr Tydfil**, improving the credibility of the local night-time economy.A
- **Explore ways of enriching the cultural events and festivals programme**, with the ambition of attracting or developing, signature or flagship cultural events for the destination.A
- **Work with the South Wales creative community to identify at least one signature or large-scale opportunity to tell the story of industry in Merthyr Tydfil via a cutting edge event or artwork scheme.**A
- **Collaborate with partners such as Canolfan Soar to enhance and raise the profile of Welsh language events** and activities within the community, and situate Merthyr Tydfil's bilingual story more purposefully in our future brand approach.A
- **Build on the area's arts heritage - e.g. The Dowlais Settlements - and emerging graffiti and street art culture to explore developing new and innovative arts-based experiences for visitors**, that also serve to include and excite local people. This could also be incorporated within placemaking, as outlined later in the Plan.A
- **Build greater awareness of the town's history and heritage amongst local business owners**, to empower them to bring these stories to life in their own ventures in future.A



Cyfarthfa FoudationA

Lead: Merthyr Tydfil CBC to coordinate a range of public, private and third-sector organisations.A

2. TOWN CENTRE PLACEMAKING

Like many towns in Wales and across the UK, Merthyr Tydfil's high street is suffering. Out-town-retail outlets are thriving, suggesting a market for high-quality but readily accessible and integrated retail and hospitality offer.

Through this Plan we will:

- **A** Ensure that ongoing tourism initiatives support and showcase local **placemaking programmes including the Glebeland site project and the train station regeneration scheme.**
- **A** Work with partners to help develop and promote a transformative, **high-quality 'market' experience in town** centre providing inspiration from best practice examples across Europe (including Newport Market in South East Wales) and working with local businesses to harness the opportunity to promote local produce within the community. We'll consider **using empty retail units in other parts of the town to feature locally made art, craft and creative activities.**
- **A** Embrace **creative approaches to placemaking**, incorporating culture and art within the approach. Consider adopting an Artist in Residency approach.
- **A** Ensure that **major pipeline cultural and visitor experience projects** are considered and integrated, where appropriate, within placemaking programmes - both in terms of spirit, as well as in terms of infrastructure.
- **A** Collaborate with partners **to develop town centre events that align with the destination proposition, are increasingly visitor-centric, and drive overnight stays in the area.** Ensure that these events are better promoted to

visitors, and to tourism operators locally.

- **A** Instigate an annual programme of **best practice visits** to similar destinations in Wales, and across the UK, to learn from best practice in placemaking - e.g., Cardigan, Caerphilly, Frome.
- **A** Work together to make the **town-centre experience safer** for everyone.
- **A** Harness **SMART town technology and data** to become a digitally fluent town and destination, making databased decisions to deliver more place-based interventions that are user-centric.

“

A strong night-time offer helps transform the town centre. Creating a vibrant mix of venues, events, eateries and experiences gives people more reasons to stay, support local businesses and enjoy Merthyr Tydfil after dark.

”

General Manager, **The New Crown Inn / Clwb Crown**



Lead: Merthyr Tydfil CBC through collaboration around the Placemaking Plan.

3. PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTSA

The public realm in Merthyr Tydfil has been shaped by its past, and the area is a mix of heritage and post-industrial buildings, some of which are rich in character. However, the general public realm is not befitting of the area's heritage, nor does it play-up that rich heritage with creativity. One of the goals of the Placemaking Plan is to develop an 'inclusive and engaging public realm' within the town; and the Destination Management Plan aligns with that ambition.A

Through this Plan we will:

- A Work with **partners to ensure that the area's heritage sites are well interpreted and better showcased** through improved lighting and access.A
- ADo more to **highlight the area's most significant buildings and sites** through our destination storytelling and content marketing. This needn't always include 'beautiful' historic sites, and can include post-industrial modernist or brutalist architecture, where relevant.A
- AContinue with placemaking approaches that bring the **heritage fabric of the town centre to the fore**, alongside high-quality contemporary interventions, following the example of other valleys and Welsh towns.A
- AEncourage **tourism and hospitality businesses to lean-in to the area's unique sense of place in their approach to design and architecture**, with an industrial or post-industrial design style in relevant locations, for example.A
- ADeliver projects with **creative industries partners to bring the area's post-industrial heritage to life in bold new ways throughout the public realm** via murals, graffiti, lighting shows etc. Consider implementing a **'graffiti hack'** with world-leading graffiti artists using disused buildings throughout the community.A



Lead: Merthyr Tydfil CBCA through collaboration around the Placemaking Plan.A

ENABLERS

Key to success over the next five years will be a shift in culture, from a destination where tourism happens at the margins, to a holistic destination which recognises the full potential of the visitor economy to shift place profile and performance.



approach, we will embrace:

1. STRATEGIC MARKETING APPROACHES

g is marketing that harnesses market data and the market context to inform the core product and experience offer, not just its promotion.

We will:

1. Take a strategic approach to destination development by sharing data and insights with the Destination Management Partnership.
2. Deliver a marketing programme that echoes the phased structure of this Plan, starting with product-led marketing initiatives, designed to take our current product strengths to the market in a purposeful, targeted way; building out to destination-level brand and communications activity, as the destination brand matures over the coming years. Bring the post-Industrial 'edge' outlined in the Plan to life through innovative place brand marketing. Involve local creatives in the process.
3. Take a storytelling approach to marketing, using the voices of real visitors, businesses and local influencers to show – not tell – our audiences how the destination is changing, with a focus on tangible, high-quality experiences.
4. Ensure that our marketing is shared within the destination, with local residents, and includes messaging that feels relevant, credible and exciting to this cohort, including the area's young people. Ensure that local hotspots (such as retail parks) are maximised as part of this approach.
5. Create a digital bank of assets for the use of local tourism business stakeholders – to grow a strong culture of cross-promotion and partnership working.
6. Work with national and regional partners to support the industry to take well-crafted experiences to market via the travel trade in the UK and internationally, gradually building-up operator interest and business in the destination.
7. Develop our relations with the European Industrial Heritage Tourism Trail and other relevant Welsh, UK-wide and international schemes as our cultural heritage offer develops.

2. STRONG SUPPORT STRUCTURES

The destination benefits from an exceptionally proactive, enthusiastic and skilled private sector, and a functional, focused Destination Management Partnership, chaired by the Leader of the Local Authority. We'll continue to build integrated relations between the private, public and third sectors for the benefit of the destination, and ensure that the business community, and local communities, are supported to help grow the sector.

We will:

1. Consolidate and drive forward the current Destination Management Partnership through this Plan – making collaborating with the Partnership a cornerstone of delivering wider Economic and Regeneration strategies for the County Borough and wider region. The Partnership's Membership will be reviewed and updated, with more meetings held face-to-face. A creative 'festival' or event will be planned annually, based on a compelling theme, to draw the sector together, and provide a hook for engaging with the wider community via accessible talks and workshops.
2. Encourage the private sector to engage with private-sector-led Destination Management/Marketing Organisations of relevance to their business, with a view to growing a Merthyr Tydfil-based DMO for the area through the Plan, to work in collaboration with the public/private Destination Management Partnership.
3. Formalise our tourism partnerships as a Local Authority with our neighbouring destinations.
4. Roll-out a structured, formalised 'account management' approach to meeting with the area's anchor visitor businesses (in terms of scale and/or impact), ensuring that they get the chance to engage with public sector leaders, and each other, on an annual basis at least.
5. Secure funding from a range of sources to provide dedicated business development support to the sector to help businesses put in place bespoke growth plans enabling them to sustain and grow their offer. We'll also signpost existing business service and grant opportunities available locally, regionally and nationally in a joined-up and targeted way. In doing so, we'll recognise the economic benefits of supporting local and family-owned companies, which deliver greater local impact, and less economic leakage, than outside or branded companies.
6. Raise business to business awareness through networking opportunities. This includes providing businesses from relevant sectors with the opportunity to take part in regular familiarisation visits to local and Welsh visitor businesses and experiences; as well as a visit to at least one 'peer' visitor destination area a year to learn from best practice.
7. Work with relevant Skills Partnerships and bodies to provide training to support career opportunities in the sector, as outlined in the Merthyr Tydfil CBC Economic Vision. We'll ensure that local skills and training provision align with the priorities outlined in this Plan and are ramped-up depending on the nature/scale of investment in the county borough over the next 5/10 years.
8. Work with the Education team to roll-out an annual competition to local schools to produce content about the visitor experience in Merthyr Tydfil for residents to send or share with visiting friends and relatives, with a view to gradually shifting levels of self-confidence within the destination.
9. Work with partners such as the Welsh Language Commissioner and Welsh Government to support businesses to make more and better use of the Welsh language.
10. Harness data to evaluate, monitor and grow the destination purposefully.

ENABLERS

3. SUSTAINABLE DELIVERY

There's a need for all visitor businesses to increasingly become sustainable: and this ambition aligns with many of the strategies for the economic growth of Merthyr Tydfil, the 'Northern Valleys' area. Transitioning to Net Zero is an important journey for all of us.

We will:

1. Develop and actively promote public and active travel opportunities to and within the destination, as previously outlined.
2. Work with businesses to raise awareness of responsible travel and tourism among our visitors and guests.
3. Support local businesses to reduce carbon emissions and improve water and waste management - with the aim of achieving net zero or positive carbon position.
4. Support businesses to maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the area, in-line with Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Nature Recovery Action Plan, and raise the profile of proactive activities by local businesses to rewild and improve natural habitats within their sites.
5. Co-opt local organisations.
6. Build a balanced business case.



4. CREATIVE THINKING AND INNOVATION

There's scope to bridge the visitor economy together with adjacent fast growth sectors in South Wales to bring a sense of dynamism and innovation to the approach. This includes the creative industries, new media, and tech and digital sectors. This has the potential to generate new and original 'hybrid' visitor experience concepts and projects in the area, including new creative spaces, events and artworks.

We will:

1. Build strategic relations with the creative industries sector regionally, as outlined.
2. Do more to involve the local creative community in destination marketing activity, using music produced locally in film content; local illustrators to create artworks etc., gradually building a relationship with key influencers.
3. Build structured relationships with key partners in these sectors within the destination, including local colleges, as well as arts/cultural venues.
4. Explore long-term ways in which to grow the sector at Local Authority level, including the formation of the Creative Industries Cluster Hub.
5. Continually learn from the way in which other post-industrial communities have harnessed creativity and innovation to shift their propositions, strengthening our relationship with similar organisations in some of these destinations, and bringing examples of good practice to one Destination Management Partnership session a year.

5. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO PLACE-LED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Finally, we'll work across the Local Authority and with key regional and national partners to ensure that this tourism-specific Plan is delivered in a joined-up way with wider place-led economic growth programmes impacting Merthyr Tydfil. We'll act as a champion for the area's visitor economy businesses and potential, and for the concept of the visitor economy as an important driver of place brand, economic regeneration and future generation wellbeing in Wales's post-industrial areas.

CONCLUSION

Merthyr Tydfil is a destination waiting to be discovered and further developed.

As outlined, our priorities over the next five years will be to:

- **Accelerate** growth based on our current strengths.
- **Lay the firm foundations** of a strong and sustainable tourism destination for the future.
- **Support transformative** projects that will elevate our cultural heritage and town centre experience to its rightful stature.

Merthyr Tydfil was a town that shaped the world. Our priority now is to harness that story to make Merthyr Tydfil one of the UK's most distinctive post-industrial adventure and culture hubs. A vibrant capital of the valleys, and launchpad to activity-rich landscapes. And a place that has reclaimed its past to forge its future.



“

At Brecon Mountain Railway, we're proud to work closely with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to help shape the area's future as a leading tourism destination. By showcasing our industrial heritage and stunning landscapes, we aim to draw visitors from near and far, and contribute to a thriving local economy.

”

General Manager, **Brecon Mountain Railway**





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DIOLCH O GALON.



Mae'r dogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.A

This document is also available in Welsh.A



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County Borough Council