

CONTACT

Achieving the best for the people of Merthyr Tydfil – see page 7



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A Note from the Leader Welcome to the latest edition of your Contact community newspaper.



During these financially challenging times, as Leader of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, I would like to remind everyone of the great things that continue to happen in our County Borough.

You will see from this edition that our communities continue to thrive. Working closely with the community and our relevant partners will ensure that we achieve our goal of Merthyr Tydfil being the central hub of the South Wales Valleys.

There will always be challenges, but we must continue to strive for the best. Merthyr Tydfil is going from strength to strength and we must encourage economic growth and inward investment opportunities for our future generations. Further in this publication I will talk to you about the financial challenges that we currently face as a Council and the plans that we have in place to address these issues.

Included in this edition is information on the new Mayor Elect and Youth Mayor for 2019/20. I would like to congratulate Councillor Howard Barrett and also Krystian Maciejczyk on being elected; they will no doubt be excellent ambassadors for our County Borough.

The Council is also delighted that work has begun on the new town centre bus station, with an expected completion date of autumn 2020. Further details of this new exciting project is featured in page 5 of this publication.

Once again, we're grateful to Welsh Government for offering £10m funding for the development, which will complement its significant investment in the Core Valley Lines Rail Network.

The traffic congestion around our schools is now becoming a serious issue. Myself and the relevant Cabinet Member, Cllr David Hughes, met with officers from Engineering, Traffic, Education and Community Safety to find an urgent solution.

We must tackle this problem immediately and I ask that parents/carers are mindful of the dangers to our young people when school entrances are blocked during drop off/pick up times.

A school travel plan is currently being developed to address these issues. A pilot scheme will be implemented at Twynrodyn Community Primary School with a view to working with all schools in the near future in developing their individual plans.

I will endeavour to keep you updated on how these developments progress.

Thank you

Kevin O'Neill
Leader of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Councillor Howard Barrett, Mayor of Merthyr Tydfil 2019/20

Councillor Howard Barrett was inaugurated as Mayor of the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil for 2019/20 on Wednesday 15th May 2019.

Howard has represented the Vaynor Electoral Ward since 2008 and lives in Cefn Coed. He has one son, Wayne, who lives in Australia with his wife and their two children; he also has a granddaughter, Darcy, who lives in Troedryhiw, who will be accompanying him on some Mayoral visits as his Consort.

Howard was born in Trefechan and went to Ysgol Y Graig and Vaynor & Penderyn School. He then attended Merthyr Tydfil, Pontypridd and Bridgend College.

Howard worked in Vaynor Quarry for 25 years and is a member of the Vaynor Forum and Ponssticil Community Group.

As First Citizen of Merthyr Tydfil, duties include chairing full meetings of the Council and representing the Council at formal and ceremonial occasions in the county borough, regionally and nationally. The Mayor also welcomes visitors to the County Borough and attends and supports events organised by local people and organisations.

This year, Howard has selected a charity that has helped him and some of his family members personally - Macmillan Cancer Support, Merthyr Tydfil. All funds raised will go towards the wonderful work already being undertaken by Macmillan at their special Cancer Unit at Prince Charles Hospital.

Deputy Mayor for 2019/20 is Councillor Malcolm Colbran, Ward Councillor for Bedlinog.

If you wish to invite the Mayor



to an event, then please contact mayoral@merthyr.gov.uk.

New Youth Mayor 2019/20



On Friday 10th May 2019 the new Youth Mayor was inaugurated.

Krystian Maciejczyk, a 17 year old student who attends Merthyr Tydfil College became the 10th Youth Mayor of Merthyr Tydfil and Andrew Millar, a pupil at Cyfarthfa High School, became the Deputy Youth Mayor.

In his acceptance speech, the Youth Mayor outlined his three pledges for his term of office.

His first pledge is to change the perception of immigration, making people realise that it enriches a community and having people

together from all walks of lives enables them to share experiences and their diversity.

His second pledge is to bring to light and work on ongoing issues about homelessness so people become more tolerant of those in society who are most in need.

Krystian's last pledge is to challenge and raise awareness about Human Trafficking and highlighting the fact that this is going on right here right now.

During his term of office Krystian will be fundraising for the Merthyr Tydfil Donation Station to help support those at risk of being homeless.



Youth Conference

The 2019 Youth Spring Conference at The College Merthyr Tydfil saw pupils and teachers join in international Sing-Up Day with a mass rendition of a number of songs.

The programme aiming to bring singing back into schools is celebrating its 10th anniversary, which coincided with Merthyr Tydfil's Annual Student Conference encouraging students to exchange views on topical matters.

Focusing on Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations Act, the event featured presentations from guest speakers on issues affecting children and

young people, including loneliness and isolation.

Speakers included Disability Sport Merthyr Chair Tom Evans, Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil Chief Officer Ian Davy and Council Leader Cllr Kevin O'Neill.

MTCBC Inclusion Manager Sarah Bowen said: "The conference was a resounding success. Once again the future generation of Merthyr Tydfil have had their say on matters that concern them. It is hoped that their voice will influence future planning."

Earlier in the morning, pupils at Pen-Y-Dre High School had also taken part in Sing-Up Day.

Portrait gallery celebrates decade of youth mayors

A proud record of supporting a decade of youth mayors has been celebrated with the unveiling of a gallery of portraits at the Civic Centre.

The Council marked the 10th anniversary of the inauguration of its first youth mayor by inviting the current and previous nine officeholders to attend the event.

Children & Young People's Champion Cllr Chris Davies, said: "The photographs of the 10 Youth Mayors take pride of place on the committee rooms corridor in the Civic Centre. I want to confirm the Council's commitment to our

Young Carers welcomed to the Mayor's Parlour as part of National Carers Week 2019

The Mayor and Youth Mayor were delighted to welcome Members of the Barnardos Young Carers Choir Project into the Mayor's Parlour as part of Carers Week celebrations.

Councillor Chris Davies, Cabinet Member for Social Services and the Council's Children's & Young People's Champion said "It was fantastic! They were absolutely brilliant and a credit to themselves and their families".

Councillor David Hughes, the Council's Carers Champion added "On behalf of the Council I'd like to commend all the great work of carers, the real unsung heroes within our communities."

Councillor Chris Davies and senior managers within Children's Services also visited the young carers group at Dowlais Engine House, where they were enjoying some well-earned 'me time'.

The Council is committed to continuing to support and raise the profile of the work of carers and has commissioned Third Sector partners, who assist carers and their families across the county borough through its Carers' Strategy.

continued work with our young people and to progressing and increasing the participation agenda across Merthyr Tydfil."

The creation of the role was instigated by the Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF), whose Youth Cabinet makes sure young people's voices are heard and make a difference to services for young people.

Other guests at the celebration event included High Sheriff of Mid Glamorgan Mrs Tina Donnelly, Merthyr Tydfil Mayor Cllr Howard Barrett and Council Leader Cllr Kevin O'Neill.





Free Paint Scheme at the Dowlais Household Waste & Recycling Centre (HWRC)

Free paint is available to residents of the County Borough from the Dowlais HWRC.

The paint is contained in the Re-use section of the site alongside the

textile banks.

Paint is stored in order of type and only paint available on site at the time of the resident's visit will be available for collection. There can

be no pre-ordering of paint type, colour and quantity. Any persons who would like to take advantage of this free service must report to a member of staff before entering

the paint re-use container.

Whether you require large or small quantities of paint for whatever DIY jobs you may be doing, we would welcome you to take advantage of

this service and reduce the amount of good quality paint being sent for disposal!

Please note that the service will not be available at the Aberfan HWRC.

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If you give your rubbish to someone without making the relevant checks, it could be fly-tipped. You could also receive a **£300 Fixed Penalty Notice** or criminal record.

IT'S YOUR DUTY TO CARE

Visit dutyofcare.wales to learn more.

NAPPY RECYCLING SCHEME

An upcoming viability study will determine whether a Nappy Recycling Scheme can be introduced in Merthyr Tydfil.

We are currently in discussions with Welsh Government and we will update further in a future edition of CONTACT!



Did you know?

Last year MTCBC issued 56 fly-tipping FPN's and had 10 successful prosecutions for fly-tipping and Trade Waste offences!

If you don't recycle all you can, you need to start now!

Did you know?

If households fail to recycle, the Council can issue fixed penalty notices.

MTCBC is urging residents to recycle all the waste they can in the weekly recycling services provided.

This follows findings from a recent study which highlighted around 45% of the waste in a typical refuse bin could have been recycled.

Welsh Government has set Welsh Councils a target of recycling 64% of their waste this year and early

figures show that if we don't stop putting recyclables in the black bin now, we will not meet this target. Councils are also set targets to reduce the amount of waste they send for disposal year on year and if one or both of these targets are not met, financial penalties will be imposed.

The cost to the Council for not recycling is significant, but also completely avoidable!

Did you know that residents can ask for a member of the Council's recycling team to visit them in their home to show them how to sort and recycle their rubbish? This service is especially important to support the most vulnerable people within our communities.

Visit the Council's website merthyr.gov.uk to find out:

- What you can and can't recycle
- What recycling bags/boxes you may need if you don't already have them, and order them for free online or by phone
- Your collection day
- What support the Council can give you



Pen y Dre High School



Pen y Dre High School has become the first ever school in Wales to win the Welsh Government's Professional Teaching Awards Cymru for three consecutive years! In 2017 Pen y Dre was awarded the honour for Engaging Parents and the Community. In 2018 the school doubled its success by winning the category of Support Worker of the Year. This honour was awarded to the school's Artist in Residence, Mr Adam Griffiths. Remarkably, the school has now scooped a hat-trick of awards by winning the 2019 Inspirational Use of the Welsh Language.

The winning citation noted: "Pen y Dre High School's Head of Welsh, Mr Mark Morgan, is an exceptional teacher, a great man and described as one in a million. He personifies the highest standards and his leadership has seen a surge in the popularity of

Welsh as a subject, and in the examination success of his pupils. He has impacted the school in so many ways and has permanently changed the outlook on Welsh. Mark has been a breath of fresh air to the school and community, encouraging pupils and adults of all abilities to speak Welsh wherever and whenever they can. Pupils idolise Mark, describing him as inspiring and caring."



YNYSOWEN SCHOOL

"Strong and enthusiastic leadership successfully contributes to this exceptional school" – Estyn inspection report February 2019.

Earlier this year Estyn, the office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, judged Ynysowen Community Primary School as excellent across all 5 inspection areas:

- Standards
- Wellbeing and attitudes to learning
- Teaching and learning experiences
- Care, support and guidance
- Leadership and management

This is extremely rare and has only been achieved by a very small handful of schools across the country, making Ynysowen Primary one of the best schools in Wales.

Congratulations to the Teachers, Governors, and of course, Pupils on this exceptional achievement!

We'd like to share with you some comments from the report:

"With the support of highly skilled and supportive governors, leaders create an ethos to ensure that pupils' progress and wellbeing underpins all its activities."

"Teachers plan innovative activities that ensure that nearly all pupils enjoy their learning and become independent learners."

"Pupils' attitudes to learning is exemplary. They show extensive care and respect to both their peers and adults."



MISS SCHOOL. MISS OUT!

#AttendanceMatters

merthyr.gov.uk/attendance



Ysgol y Graig

The official cutting of the sod at the new Ysgol y Graig site will be taking place next month – keep a look out on our website and social media pages for pictures and an update of progress!



20mph speed restriction to be extended on Aberfan Road

Following two rounds of public consultation, the Council will be extending the current 20mph speed limit between Ynysowen School and Ysgol Rhyd Y Grug.

Phase one of the consultation took place in the autumn of 2018, where we asked residents to tell us about the issues they experience there in regards to traffic flow, congestion and speed, and also gave them the opportunity to make suggestions on how they think these issues could be resolved.

In September of the same year Council Officers and Ward Councillors Darren Roberts and Scott Thomas

attended a listening and engaging session at Aberfan Community Centre, where members of the public were invited to come along and have their say.

Based on this information Council Officers then produced three options for consideration, which were put out to public consultation in the spring of 2019.

152 surveys were completed. Although B was the preferred option with 30.3% of the votes (Option B to extend existing 20mph speed limit zone and look at one-way restrictions and parking at various locations), 32.4% of respondents said they did

not agree with any of the proposals. As a result, Merthyr Tydfil CBC will not be implementing any of the suggestions; instead, a 20mph speed restriction will be extended further along Aberfan Road.

A traffic order will now be put in place, with the restriction to be implemented in the coming months, details of which will be shared once available.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond to the survey or come along to the session at Aberfan Community Centre. Your input and comments were greatly appreciated.



JAPANESE BUSINESS VISIT

A delegation of Japanese businessmen on a fact-finding mission to South Wales recently visited the Civic Centre to discuss their plans with Councillors and Economic Development Officers.

The visiting delegation's interests include biochemical research, together with cutting edge battery and solar technology. **The group are interested in investing in South Wales and, in particular, considering a base in Merthyr Tydfil.**

They met Council Leader Cllr Kevin O'Neill and Cabinet Member for

Regeneration and Public Protection Cllr Geraint Thomas, together with Senior Regeneration Department staff.

The visit was co-ordinated by two prominent local business men, Dr John Croad and Dr Colin Hancock.

Cllr O'Neill said: "Our visitors each have separate global business interests and are very keen to set up here in Merthyr Tydfil. We discussed how we could best meet their requirements and are optimistic that they'll go home enthused by the support they know they'll receive from the County Borough Council and



our partners.

"They were pleased to receive some local gifts and particularly delighted to wear their 'Made in Merthyr' sweatshirts!"

Simone's life changed by Bridges into Work 2

A scheme managed by the Council with the aim of getting people into work has 'changed the life' of young mum Simone Williams.

The support of the Bridges into Work 2 project has seen Simone become a qualified Health Care Support Worker with Cwm Taf Health Board.

After working in retail and administration, Simone found herself without a job for three years. She met Bridges tutor Julie Jones in July 2018 and, after showing interest in the Cwm Taf Healthcare framework, was taken through the process.

"I did the BKSb skills assessment first and Julie helped me with interview technique," said Simone. "Next was the interview to get onto the course. I was quite nervous, but the training I had done with Julie really helped prepare me and get through it - she helped build my confidence."

Simone then took part in a

pre-employment course at the Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Gurnos, on improving communication skills and knowledge. "I really enjoyed the group dynamics - in fact, I enjoyed every day."

After completing her training, Simone did three voluntary shadow-shifts at Prince Charles Hospital and completed a file of work, before officially beginning employment with Cwm Taf Health Board.

"My first shift was really challenging. I doubted myself a lot to begin with, but I plunged into the deep end by booking myself another shift straight away.

"Each day is full of the unexpected - you never know what will happen on each shift. It's quite physical - I should get myself a pedometer to see how many steps I do!

"It's important to treat each person with respect and maintain their dignity. I like to try my best to put patients at ease. Little things matter, like holding someone's hand or taking

the time to wash and comb their hair. I really care about my patients. I love listening to their different experiences of life. It's taught me you can't judge someone by what they look like - you'd never guess the incredible lives some of my patients have lived.

"I love it because it gives me more quality time with my kids and it's flexible around my life. I think it has made me a stronger person and a better parent too - more patient, more respectful.

"It's a lifelong journey. I really love it though. I think it's made me a more confident, positive person. It's changed my life so much for the better and I can't thank the Bridges staff enough for helping me make the most of this opportunity."

• Bridges into Work 2 offer free courses such as Food Hygiene, IT, Retail, CSCS Health & Safety in Construction, and many more. Call or email to check your eligibility: 01685 727099 nlc.enquiries@merthyr.gov.uk

European experts meet in Merthyr Tydfil to plan social enterprise economy boost



Merthyr Tydfil was recently the venue for a meeting between Regeneration Officers from across Europe looking to help kick-start economic growth in their local communities.

MTCBC hosted the two-day event on behalf of the Support Network for Social Entrepreneurs (SuNSE), a project comprising 10 North West European transnational partners working to support social enterprises to help regenerate where they live.

The European Commission-funded Interreg VB North-West Europe programme has brought together expertise, support agencies, local authorities, universities and enterprise support specialists to address 'common problems of market failure'.

Partners from Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, England, Holland, Luxembourg, France and Switzerland were in Merthyr Tydfil to attend meetings, workshops and a visit to local social innovation hub Merthyr Tydfil Enterprise Centre (MTEC).

The SuNSE programme is being led by Scotland's Highlands and Islands Enterprise, whose Policy and Projects Manager Kevin McDonald said: "The exchange in Merthyr Tydfil was an excellent opportunity to learn about a different and dynamic environment for social enterprises and share some of the excellent work we've all undertaken in this area."

Merthyr Tydfil Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Public Protection Cllr Geraint Thomas said the programme's core theme was supporting new start-ups and the creation of jobs.

"While it was once the Iron Capital of the World, Merthyr Tydfil is currently the smallest of the local authorities in Wales," said Cllr Thomas. "Whereas heavy industry was once the town's past, it is tourism, retail, light manufacturing and the service and public sectors that are its present. SuNSE aims to encourage and nurture social enterprises to be a significant part of its future."

Work on new bus station starts

Work has begun on Merthyr Tydfil's new multimillion-pound town centre bus station. Construction at the former police station site in Swan Street is expected to be complete in autumn 2020. The current station just off Castle Street will continue to operate until then.

"We're delighted that after years of planning, the contractor is finally on

site," said Council Leader Cllr Kevin O'Neill.

The contractor appointed is construction and regeneration firm Morgan Sindall, which has a proven track record of delivering complex projects on time and within budget.

The company has been involved in an extensive range of building schemes in Wales in recent years,

including the £44m Tonyrefail Community School, the £30m Loftus Garden Village in Newport and the currently in construction £7m Six Bells Primary School in Abertillery.

The project has been co-designed with the Cardiff Capital Regional Transport Authority and the Council will retain the professional services of Capita to support the management of the construction contract.

As part of the contract, Morgan

Sindall will be holding a 'Meet the Buyer' event, offering supply chain opportunities to local businesses.

The new bus station will be located closer to the town's railway station creating a modern, high quality transport interchange facility. It will also allow exciting new development opportunities to be considered for the current bus station site.

"Once again, we're grateful to Welsh Government for providing

£10m funding for the development, which will complement its significant investment in the Core Valley Lines Rail Network," said Cllr O'Neill.

"We're confident that our residents will be delighted with this much-needed state-of-the art facility, which will also be a catalyst for the next stage of a major redevelopment plan for the future of the town centre."

Top consultants sought for ambitious heritage 'Masterplan'



The Council is set to announce the appointment of a team of top consultants to prepare a strategic Masterplan for a visitor attraction of international quality based on the town's pivotal role in the industrial revolution.

The multimillion pound development will centre on Cyfarthfa Castle and its 77-hectare park, once the home of the Crawshay family, ironmasters who helped turn Merthyr Tydfil into the world's largest centre of iron production in the 19th century.

There will be a 12-month masterplanning exercise for a development that has already been designated by the Welsh Government as a key gateway for its proposed South Wales Valleys Regional Park.

The concept is based on proposals set out in the Crucible report by the Design Commission for Wales following a design charrette in 2017. The charrette brought together more than 60 people - design specialists, museum and heritage experts and community organisations - to brainstorm ideas for the area. The report, which was accepted unanimously by the Council in 2018, proposed the investment of more than £50million to create a centre of national importance.

The report concluded: "The town's rich store of heritage assets offers a unique opportunity to achieve the coherence and impact that Merthyr deserves. With bold vision those assets could yet stamp themselves on public consciousness in

a way that befits the town as a place of regional, national and international significance."

In parallel to the masterplan project, a separate timeline and project plan addresses the process of establishing a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), a subsidiary company. It is intended that it will seek charitable status and be operational before the Masterplan is delivered.

The creative, multi-layered masterplan will identify and define the brief for the central visitor attraction and a number of related projects that will be developed over the coming years. The outcome will play an important role in setting a standard for design excellence in future development. It will capture imaginations to attract investment and visitor numbers and maintain local support.

Community Regeneration Manager of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Alun Owen said: "This is a crucially important milestone on the road to realising our ambitious vision for Cyfarthfa and the whole town. We are

determined that this will be a project of the highest quality. I hope it will engage the interest of the best talents in the country and beyond to help us reach our goal."

Design Commission for Wales Chief Executive Carole-Anne Davies said: "Merthyr Tydfil has every reason to expect quality and creativity of an international standard. Cyfarthfa and its environs have a history of globally significant innovation. There is every opportunity to recast that history with renewed ambition, to capture public imagination and galvanise new visitors to Merthyr Tydfil and the wider region."

Consultant to the Design Commission Geraint Talfan Davies said: "We have to ensure that a scheme of this magnitude and scope is built on the surest foundations. This Masterplan exercise will enable us to assess the potential of all the pieces in the jigsaw so that, together, they can do justice to the importance of Merthyr Tydfil's story and excite future generations."

The name of the successful bidder will be announced in August.



MAKE LIKE A VICTORIAN HUNTER ON CYFARTHFA'S ANIMAL TRAIL!



Cyfarthfa Park recently saw the launch of two new exciting adventure activities that are as educational as they are fun – as well as being free!

The Cyfarthfa Park Animal Trail traces the footsteps of hunters from the Victorian era at the time when the Crawshay family lived at Cyfarthfa Castle and hunting was a popular hobby. This time around, though, no animals will get hurt!

People taking part are given a copy of the original game card, which lists

the animals that lived in the park, including pheasants, partridges, Woodcocks and hares.

The 'hunters' go into the woodland, follow the path around the four ponds and see how many animals they can spot – there are nine altogether.

"As well as giving participants the opportunity to enjoy being active in a beautiful environment, the trail game cards also have lots of interesting facts about the animals on the list – the female pheasant can run at a

speed of up to 10 miles per hour, for example. So there's lots to learn!" said Gill Hampson, the County Borough Council's Biodiversity Officer.

The park has also welcomed the return of geocaching - a fun interactive digital treasure hunt, which will also give families the opportunity to explore the animal trail or the rest of the park.

Geocache is the name given to the treasure that needs to be found to complete the game. The caches can

vary greatly in shape and size - from an inch-high container to a large box - and can be hidden or immediately apparent.

To find them, participants need to register online and put co-ordinates into their GPS/smartphones. GPS units and animal trail maps are available from the Cyfarthfa Museum reception and a small deposit is required.

Visit www.cyfarthfa.com for more information.

Parc Taf Bargoed celebrates 20 years

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of Parc Taf Bargoed's transformation from the site of disused coal mines into a haven for wildlife.

Formerly the site of three coal mines – Deep Navigation, Trelewis Drift and Taff Merthyr - the 140-hectare park has also had Green Flag status since 2011, a recognition awarded to well managed parks and green spaces which sets the benchmark for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the UK and around the world.

Based on records from South East Wales Biodiversity Record Centre, over 100 species of birds were recorded within a three kilometre square of the park - 27% of them priority and protected species.

These include birds such as the Cuckoo, Lapwing, Curlew and Spotted Flycatcher, just to name a few. As population of birds is used as good indicator of the broad state of wildlife in the countryside, the diversity of bird species in the park in just a short span of 20 years is to be celebrated.

The park is also home to over a 100 species of invertebrates, 49 species of moths, over 20 species of mammals and butterflies and more than 200 species of plants.

"Parc Taf Bargoed, as one of Merthyr's many green spaces, provides an accessible and safe environment for families and school children to connect and explore the wonders of nature," said Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Public Protection Cllr Geraint Thomas.

Pupils learn the Trevithick story



Pupils from Cyfarthfa Park and Gwaunfarren Primary Schools, Ysgol Gymraeg Rhyd y Grug and Heolgerrig Community School marked the anniversary of the world's first steam locomotive journey by taking part in an artwork and stories competition.

Partners including MTCBC, Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust and Heritage Trust and the Big Heart of Merthyr Tydfil arranged a series of educational opportunities for the

pupils to celebrate Trevithick Day 2019.

They also visited the Trevithick Tunnel, site of the historic moment, and were treated to a lively re-enactment of the event by local heritage interpreter and storyteller Tony Thomas.

The competition was to produce a work of art telling the story of Trevithick's locomotive, and also imagining they were there on the day and writing about what they

saw.

The winning entries are being recorded by the Merthyr Tydfil-born actor Steve Spiers, who has appeared in films such as *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* and as Big Al in the TV series *Stella*. Winner Gwaunfarren Primary School pupil Ellie Hughes and four runners-up were invited to Cyfarthfa Castle Museum & Art Gallery, where Steve Spiers read the pupils' stories.

Meanwhile scheme brings taste of the Caribbean to town centre



Merthyr Tydfil's eclectic food offer has been broadened still further with the opening of the town's first Caribbean restaurant, the latest addition to the Council's innovative 'Meanwhile' initiative.

Caribbean Cariat is bringing a taste of Montego Bay to the High Street - courtesy of Midlands-born Michael Hamilton, whose family hails from Jamaica's most famous city.

Michael's mission to introduce Merthyr to the joys of jerk chicken has been accomplished with help from the Meanwhile scheme, a partnership approach improving the appearance of the town centre by bringing empty premises back to life.

The Council's economic development officers, Merthyr Tydfil Enterprise Centre, Tydfil Training, Business Wales and property owners have all joined forces to provide support including

preparing business plans and finding short-term rent-free accommodation. Caribbean Cariat is the 16th business to have opened in Merthyr Tydfil since the scheme began four years ago.

Michael said: "It's been a long-held ambition to bring Caribbean dining to a Valleys community, and I'm delighted to have this opportunity with the support of the Council's brilliant Meanwhile project."

The Council's Chief Officer for Community Regeneration Alyn Owen said: "The town centre is continuing to grow a culture of niche independent stores that boost our vibrant and varied economy, and the Meanwhile scheme has helped a wide range of businesses."

• If you would like some support from the Meanwhile scheme, please contact Merthyr Tydfil Enterprise Centre on 01685 727509.

HISTORIC CHURCH CONVERTED INTO UNIQUE APARTMENTS IN £1.35M REVAMP

One of Merthyr Tydfil's most historic churches has been brought back into use as residential accommodation after lying derelict for more than 20 years.

The Grade II listed St John's Church in Dowlais, the burial site of former Dowlais Ironworks owner and MP Sir Josiah John Guest, has been converted into 20 unique apartments with the support of Welsh Government funding of £500,000.

Hannah Blythyn AM, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government officially opened Merthyr Tydfil's first residential project under the Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) Regeneration and Housing Programme.

The VVP funding, along with £850,000 from local developers Graft Projects, was used to restore the building's roof and exterior walls and complete a full renovation of the interior. Graft also received £150,000 from the Houses to Homes Loan scheme funded by Welsh Government and administered by MTCBC to assist with repair and refurbishment of empty properties.

Situated at the corner of Upper Union Street and Church Row within the Dowlais Conservation Area, the Church of St John the Baptist was built in 1827 and closed in 1997.

Many of its original features, such as its stained glass windows, wooden



beams and floor tiles – and even the pulpit - have been retained, and members of the public will still be able to access the building at the two main entrances to view a marble memorial to Sir Josiah John Guest and learn about the church's history.

Among the other retained features are a decorative 'Miners' Window', which was financed by the family of Edward Pritchard Martin, General Manager of the Dowlais Iron Company. The Martin family, whose brass plaques and monuments can also still be found in the building, are ancestors of US singer Donny Osmond.

Hannah Blythyn described the project as an excellent example of the benefits the Vibrant and Viable Places programme is bringing to communities. "The development is

ensuring the future of a local landmark, providing much needed housing in the area and delivered community benefits including the creation of new jobs and the development of a local supply chain for works to the building," she added.

Graft Projects Director Emma Thomas said: "Bringing this building back to life was our goal, which was a real challenge - but the history of it was an inspiration," she added. "The local interest has been amazing too, with many residents and ex-worshippers coming to visit during the build."

"Our other goal was to provide excellent living accommodation, which we feel we have achieved. We think the variety in design will appeal to all types of individuals and families."



Message from the Leader of Merthyr Tydfil CBC - Achieving the best for the People of Merthyr Tydfil

You may have seen the recent media coverage highlighting issues that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is currently facing.

All Councils across the country are feeling the strain of continued budget cuts more than ever.

For this Council, with limited budgets and such a lean organisation, it is getting more and more difficult to keep our heads above water.

To be sustainable we need to ensure that we have sound financial capacity, robust governance and strong leadership across all political parties.

At a Council meeting on Wednesday 19th June, 2019 I highlighted concerns that had been previously raised by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) in relation to the sustainability of the Council and the significant budget challenges.

This Council had no alternative but to take action and we approached WG to request assistance. As an authority, our aim is to provide the best service to our residents and ensure that our authority is financially viable and sustainable.

Under section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, we approached Welsh Government to support us in specific areas such as:

- Expertise to ensure that we are making the best use of financial resources within Social Services,
- Review of process to ensure we are maximising all available resources,

- Review of impact of complex, high cost and challenging cases on such a small authority.

The challenge for this Council has been the need to deliver change whilst having to make extremely difficult collective decisions.

A package of support has now been offered by Welsh Government which will help us to address our challenges. I have personally met with the Minister for Housing and Local Government Julie James to discuss this support package in more detail.

It was a positive meeting and it was agreed that further work would be carried out to confirm the details of that support, including jointly-agreed objectives and timeframes. The support could include expertise and guidance from senior former local government officers and politicians.

We have already put plans in place to address these challenges and this further support from Welsh Government will help us maximise all available resources and be a more viable Council moving forward.

As the leader of this Council, I cannot stress enough that to deliver these plans, all politicians and officers must work together.

I firmly believe that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is able to meet the challenges ahead and serve the people of Merthyr Tydfil efficiently and effectively.



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MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNCIL ACHIEVES CYBER SECURITY ACCREDITATIONS



CYBER ESSENTIALS

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council are pleased to be the first Local Authority in Wales to achieve 'Cyber Essentials Plus' certification and 'IASME Governance Standard (Gold Award)' via a Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) funded-project. Both certifications

help organisations to guard against the most common cyber threats and demonstrate their commitment to cyber security and that they are taking good steps to properly protect their customers' information. In 2018 a Concordat between Welsh Ministers and

the WLGA which set out agreed measures to strengthen the resilience and security of Local Authorities in Wales against cyber threats was put in place, and Welsh Government made grant funding available via the WLGA for each local authority to achieve

Cyber Essentials Plus certification.

Deputy Chief Executive, Ellis Cooper, said: "Improving cyber resilience and security is a critical corporate priority for us in order to protect our residents' data. Achieving the certification allows us to demonstrate to both Members and public the level of cyber security measures we have put in place, in order to keep our organisation safe."

Corporate Information Security Officer, Ryan James, said: "Achieving the certification brings

benefits to the organisation and reassures residents and business partners that cyber security is being taken seriously and that we are working to secure our IT against a cyber-attack. The cyber threat is a UK Tier One risk with major consequences for organisations and the people they serve. By adopting cyber security measures we are putting controls in place to prevent or reduce the impact of an attack."

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Pontmorlais High Street traffic reversal now complete

You may be aware that the traffic flow reversal of Pontmorlais High Street came in to effect at the end of May 2019. The reversal

follows a public consultation in 2018 that proposed three options which were identified as capable of improving the air

quality on Twynyrodyn Road without causing significant adverse effects elsewhere. Of the responses received 94%

favoured the option which involved reversing the one-way traffic on both Pontmorlais High Street and Church Street.

We would like to thank residents, business owners and users of the area for their patience and understanding during the works.