

CONTACT



Looking
Back over the past
5 years – **see page 2**
Meet Max the
wellbeing dog –
see page 6



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Welcome to the latest edition of Contact Newspaper.

People in Merthyr Tydfil will soon have their say on who represents their area as the town gets ready for the local elections on Thursday 5th May 2022.

I am sure that my fellow Councillors will agree that this term has been unprecedented and will be a period of our lives that will stay with us forever.

As Leader, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all elected members for their hard work over the past five years. I am sure that residents within your wards have appreciated your support and commitment particularly during COVID.

Whilst responding to and recovering from a global pandemic, behind the scenes this Council has continued to deliver a transformation programme. Working with Welsh Government's Improvement and Assurance Board has helped us focus on the key areas that we needed to improve on. With this support, we have made significant progress with our Education Standards, increased our resilience in Social Services, as well as focussing on our Economic Recovery. Further details on our transformation progress can be found on page 6.

When I look back at what has been achieved by officers, elected members and you, our residents, I feel so proud. We may be the smallest local authority in Wales, but the strength of our communities is second to none.

Adjacent to this column we've put together some highlights of the things the Council has achieved over the past 5 years.

Also in this edition we have some great stories on the success of the Council's apprenticeship programme (page 4), Ty Enfys, Merthyr's Dementia Care Unit, being the first in the UK to achieve the Meaningful Care Matters outstanding accreditation (page 5), and some exciting news about The New Crown owner Jorge D'ascencao's plans for a derelict rugby club (page 7).

Lisa Mytton

Councillor Lisa Mytton
Leader

Annual Residents' Survey - what you told us

Over 500 residents took the time to have their say in our 2021/22 Residents' Survey.

There were concerns raised around:

- Pavement and road maintenance
- Street lighting
- Anti-social behaviour
- Council Tax

With positive feedback in relation to:

- Merthyr Tydfil's strong community spirit
- The regeneration of our town
- The exceptional work of our front-line staff during the pandemic.

Councillor Chris Davies, Cabinet Member for Governance and Resources, said: "Thank you to everyone who took the time to have their say in the most recent Residents' Survey."

"Listening to the views of residents is key to a successful

Council and the survey covered important questions on how the Council runs things, how well residents are kept informed, and how we deliver services.

"The results and comments have been analysed and a project team has been assembled to deal with the issues raised and develop a plan to address them."

"We'll report back on the outcome and plans that we've put in place in the next issue of Contact."

Residents have their say on Council budget setting

Thank you to all those residents who took part in this year's annual budget consultation.

The 12-week consultation took place between November 2021 and February 2022.

The results are now being analysed and will be taken to Full Council on Wednesday 2nd March to be considered as part of the budget setting report for 2022/23.

Some Highlights from the past Five Years

Exciting investment and transformations across the County Borough.

In 2018 we saw the opening of the new £40m shopping centre Trago Mills in our town creating 350 jobs and set to attract many more visitors to the County Borough.



We also saw Rock UK Summit Centre at Bedlinog undergo a £4m redevelopment project, including a 100-bed outdoor education and residential centre, bike skills course, gym, café and children's play area.

An investment of £100,000 was made from the Council's core budget to upgrade local facilities, including the replacement of the Pen Y Dre High School's astroturf pitch with a 3G pitch and the refurbishment of the tennis courts at Thomastown Park.

In November 2020 Councillors gave their unanimous backing to the Cyfarthfa 'masterplan' for the transformation of Cyfarthfa Castle and Park and the surrounding area into a major museum and visitor attraction based on the town's world-renowned industrial heritage.

In 2021 it was announced that the former St Tydfil's Hospital site in Upper Thomas Street was to be converted and its site extended into an 'exciting' development providing 70 much-needed homes. The site will have its Grade II listed entrance block converted and extended to provide seven apartments and a house. The remainder of the site will be developed to provide a mixture of apartments, bungalows, terraced properties, and semi-detached and detached houses.

The Council was also handed the keys to the new £11 Million Merthyr Tydfil bus interchange.



Tackling homelessness head on.

A pioneering project to help reduce the number of homeless people in Merthyr Tydfil was launched. The Council's Housing First Project, run in partnership with The Salvation Army has been seeing rough sleepers, who want to take part, being moved from the streets directly into their own home, with no homeless shelters in between. They are then given support in addressing other issues like substance misuse or poor mental health.

Merthyr Valley homes reassured residents of their safety.

In 2017 following both the Council and Merthyr Valley Homes (MVH) worked together to reassure the public as to the safety of some of their buildings, regarding cladding and other various issues. Those, especially living in high-rise block flats were reassured by MVH that every step had already been taken to ensure their safety.

Supporting residents and businesses through crisis:

Storms Ciara and Dennis

Storms Ciara and Dennis had a significant impact within our community at the start of 2020. In the aftermath of the storm the Council ensured that both practical and financial support were available to residents. As part of the clean-up operation, almost 50 repair schemes were identified, worth almost £9m, as a result of the storm. The final phase of works – Phase 3 – is scheduled to start in April 2022.



COVID 19

In March 2020 all our lives were changed as the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded. It affected us all in different ways and our communities rallied around to help those who needed it most. The Council had to adapt the way it worked to continue delivering as many services as possible to our residents. We also provided a variety of grants to local businesses and individuals across the county borough to ensure that business owners and residents were able to survive through the crisis.



In addition to this Merthyr Tydfil was the pilot authority in Wales to deliver Mass Testing. The Merthyr 'model', as it became known, helped the military in rollout of mass testing across the UK and the people of Merthyr Tydfil were praised by Wales's most senior army officer, thanking them for their support.

Positive education feedback from Estyn

During January, Estyn, the education, and training inspectorate for Wales undertook an inspection of the education services in the local authority. The process included

interviews with partners who work with the local authority as well as school governors, headteachers and officers from across services as well as elected members. Further

information on the inspection can be found here: Latest inspection reports | Estyn (gov.wales)

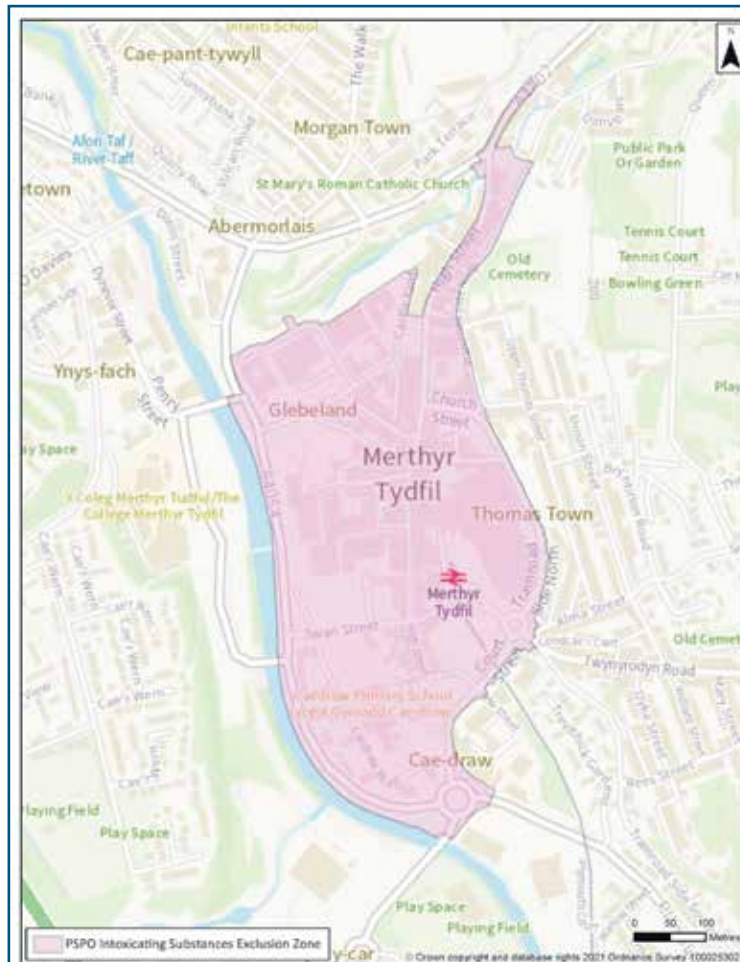
All information contained within this publication was correct at time of print.



16 – 17 year olds and foreign nationals encouraged to vote in local elections

With new rules in place which allow 16 – 17-year-olds and foreign nationals to vote next year in the Council elections, the Council are encouraging them to go register to vote and have a say in the future of the County Borough. In a 2019 survey, only 491 (38.94%) of 16 - 17-year-olds were registered to vote in Merthyr Tydfil. This is a very low number, which the Council would like to see change. MTCBC believe strongly that young people and foreign nationals have an important say in the community and want the numbers that are registered to vote to increase for next year's local elections. It's incredibly important the election has a wide range of

opinions which will hopefully shape decisions in the County Borough. The Council said: "we believe it's so important for 16 – 17-year-olds including foreign nationals to have a say in the decisions we make here at the Council. Young people are affected by decisions every day across the Borough just as adults are, therefore having that opportunity to vote for someone who may speak to them personally is incredibly important to raise their trust and to be heard as residents. Foreign Nationals, equally have a say in the communities they work and live within and have as much as a say as anyone else in shaping decisions across the Borough".



Council consults on PSPO for Merthyr Tydfil town centre

The Council has consulted with residents on the planned introduction of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to prevent street drinking and drug taking in the town centre exclusion zone.

The Order would allow police or Council enforcement officers to issue a fixed penalty fine of £100, and failure to pay this could result in prosecution and a court fine of up to £1,000.

The Council sought public views to gauge the impact intoxicating substance related anti-social behaviour is having on the public in the proposed exclusion zone.

If approved, the Order is likely to

come into force by next summer.

"Public Spaces Protection Orders are intended to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in a particular area that is detrimental to the local community's quality of life," said Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas.

"The main benefits are to reduce street drinking and drug taking that is having a negative impact on communities and the environment, while reducing harmful consumption of alcohol and drugs and protecting vulnerable people."

Diversity important in local elections



We are encouraging people from underrepresented groups to consider standing as candidates at this year's local elections and future ones. Despite some progress in recent years, women account for only six of Wales's 22 council leaders and only 28% of councillors. A further 11% of councillors are disabled, and only 1.8% are from a Black or Minority Ethnic background. According to a 2019 Office for National Statistics analysis in Wales, the five years leading up to 2019 saw the proportion of the Welsh population identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other steadily increase from 1.6% in 2014 to 2.9% in 2019.

The council strongly believe in diversity and equality and, said: "The progress in recent years has improved, however bigger changes are needed to encourage more diverse candidates to stand for Councillor and represent their wards. In addition to representing all their Ward Residents, Councillors could become role models for the underrepresented and inspire a new generation of civic leaders."

The diverse democracy project aims to reassure individuals who may feel put off in running as a Councillor to reconsider and remember that there are many things in place which can assist a Councillor to carry out their work. The Council has approved a Diversity Declaration which commits to coordinated activities to improve diversity in local government democracy, providing a clear, public commitment to improving diversity, staggering council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support councillors with other commitments. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has a strong vision which is set out in our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024. Our Equality Vision for Merthyr Tydfil is: "A place where diversity is valued and respected and everyone can participate, flourish and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential free from discrimination and prejudice".

Covid rent support still available

The Council is appealing to housing tenants who may be in arrears as a result of coronavirus to apply for support from a Welsh Government grant scheme – which doesn't need to be paid back.

Both privately renting and registered social landlord tenants have until 31 March to apply for the Tenancy Hardship Grant for Private Rented Sector Tenants, which is designed to support people who fell behind on their rent by more than eight weeks between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2021 because of the pandemic.

If you are eligible, the grant is paid directly to your landlord or agent to help to clear any unpaid rent and reduce the likelihood of eviction. Eligible tenants must not have received any housing benefits while building up unpaid rent.

Council Cabinet Member for

Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas said: "We know that a lot of people have suffered financially during the pandemic, whether because they were furloughed or actually lost their jobs.

"The aim of this grant is to help them stay in their homes and prevent them losing their tenancies. I'd urge anyone finding themselves in difficulties to come forward and let the Council help you get support."

If you think you are eligible, then please fill out the application online by using this link: <https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/do-it-online/request-or-apply/tenancy-hardship-grant-thg-application-form/>

If you experience issues with the online application process, please contact 01685 725000 or email HousingGateway@merthyr.gov.uk

Council extends invite to Landlord Forum

Local landlords are being invited to attend a meeting with Council officers aimed at listening and responding to any issues they might have.

MTCBC, removed bit in partnership with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, will hold the next Merthyr Tydfil Landlord Forum on 28 April.

The Forum is aimed at landlords who own and rent out a residential property in Merthyr Tydfil or neighbouring local authority areas.

It gives Council staff the opportunity to support and inform landlords about key legislative policy and changes in the private rented sector, and to promote good

practice.

It also provides a voice for landlords to raise issues that concern them and their businesses.

The meeting will be held at the Castle Hotel, Castle Street, Merthyr Tydfil from 10am-1pm. Light refreshments will be provided. Spaces could be limited because of Covid 19 restrictions, so you need to pre-book your place.

Anyone interested in attending this or future landlord forums should contact MTCBC Private Rented Sector Officer Craig Hughes on 07598 404368 or email craig.hughes@merthyr.gov.uk to book a place.

Refurbishment of Glynmil Gypsy/Traveller site

Glynmil Caravan Park at Pentrebach, which has been a residential Gypsy/Traveller site for more than 40 years, is being given a substantial makeover.

Welsh Government has awarded the Council a Site Capital Grant of more than £500,000 to refurbish all 24 amenity blocks on the 8.3 acres of land, which has been used as a caravan site since 1977.

In 2020, MTCBC signed an 80-year lease and took on responsibility for full management of the park, the development and refurbishment of which is paramount to the future operation of a functioning residential Gypsy/Traveller site.

"The aim is to ensure good quality

cultural homes are available within the county borough, while also supporting existing residents' wellbeing," said Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas.

"The funding will create energy efficient, modern homes for 24 residential pitches, community centre redevelopment and redesign of green spaces, ensuring a safe, modern and secure place to live."

The work is planned for completion at the end of September 2022.

Any queries about the site should be emailed to: housing@merthyr.gov.uk

Pupils go digital with health and wellbeing app

Earlier this year, students at Pantysgallog primary school along with school staff and Value-Added Education created a new health and wellbeing mobile app which assists users with tips, challenges, and tools to improve wellbeing. Within the app, there are mindfulness activities for calm and relaxation, exercise activities and augmented reality to bring pupils fitness routines and artwork into both their classroom and home.

The vision for the app came from students when they were discussing how being a Silver Rights Respecting School identifies the importance of investing into their overall health and wellbeing.

The Council's 'RARS' education strategy has a vision and responsibility to ensure mental and physical health support is available for children, young people and school staff member's.

Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Cllr Lisa Mytton attended an online event which students presented the app, and she was incredibly happy to



see innovative ideas like this in schools. She, said: "I have been so impressed with the pupils and staff at Pantysgallog for creating the MIHealth app. The app is perfectly designed, so that pupils, parents, and residents can use it, with content which improves their wellbeing and health in an engaging and accessible way. As cabinet member for education, I would love to see more of this in the future across our schools. The pandemic has been an incredibly difficult time for many pupils and content like this is just one way of supporting them and others, both in school and at home."

Soar's award for governance and contribution



Theatr Soar received a Trusted Charity Mark Award last year regarding its tremendous work as a third sector organisation. We congratulated them on their contribution and dedication in collaborating with the community to integrate the Welsh language into the community, offering a warm croeso to all. Canolfan a Theatr Soar is a Welsh Language, arts, and heritage community hub, and offers rooms for community activities, meetings, courses, and performances. Cllr

Geraint Thomas, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and

Commercialisation and Welsh Language Champion, said: "This recognition is further proof of the incredible work that is carried out in the County Borough by our third sector partners. What Canolfan a Theatr Soar and Manager Lisbeth McLean, Chief Officer of Menter Iaith Merthyr Tudful, provided for Merthyr Tydfil is truly remarkable. Initiatives such as Menter Iaith Merthyr Tudful, Welsh for Adults, Dysgu Morgannwg and Cylch Meithrin Soar have provided a warm welcome to our residents. I wish this organisation the continued success it richly deserves."

Another year of success for Apprentices at the Council

As part of one of the themes 'Build the Future' at Merthyr Tydfil Council, we have been supporting apprenticeship programmes which has seen 7 apprentices join us. The aim of these programmes is to develop and provide on-the-job skills to support our apprentices whilst also studying for a nationally recognised qualification.

Chief Executive Ellis Cooper said: "In 2021's programme, we recruited 7 new apprentices in a variety of key departments across Merthyr Tydfil Council such as Data, Building Control, Learning & Development, Communication, Carbon and Energy and Parks. I think it is important to remember our duty to nurture and help to sustain the Council's growth by developing new employees through such a fantastic programme! In addition to this, our Aspire Programme has continued to support apprentices within the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Aeronautical and Mathematics) sector as well as building relationships with our host employers and working closely with our external partnerships. We have also had lots of existing staff sign up to apprenticeship pathways for qualifications to continually develop in a professional environment. I am overjoyed to see some of the work that is being done in our organisation, it is a very exciting time for Apprenticeships in Merthyr Tydfil Council."

The qualification that each apprentice studies relates directly into the area they work in, which is incredibly effective as it gives them the knowledge to match up with the practical skills they learn in the workplace. This hybrid way of learning allows them to enhance key skills and improve competency when delivering services across the Council.

Here's what some of the apprentices have had to say about the time in their roles so far:

Amy Monger, Aspire Apprentice

"I wasn't sure whether university was the right route for me, so I started researching and discussing apprenticeships and that's when Aspire came into the College. I'm now studying Level 3 NVQ in Engineering Support and I love my job and the people I work with."

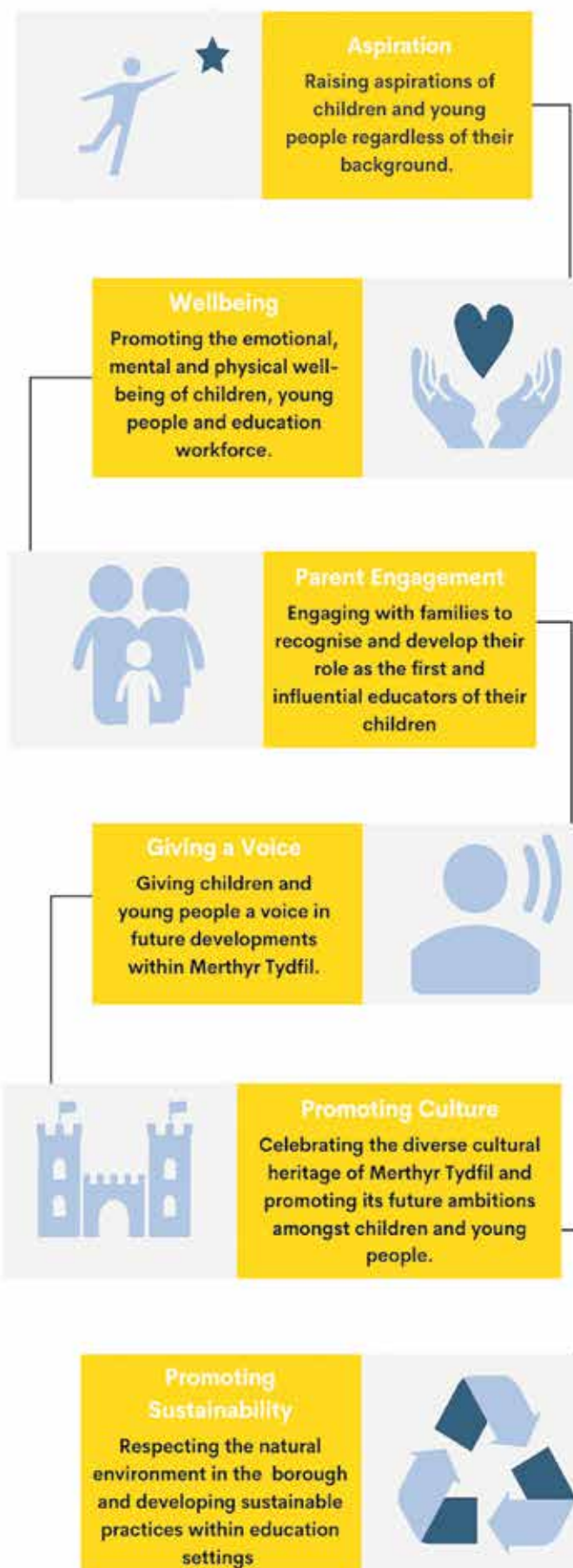
Brandon Burnell, Park Apprentice, Level 2 in Horticulture

"I used to do volunteering before I saw the apprenticeship advertised so I knew the area very well and felt completely at ease. I really enjoy the practical side and have been able to plant trees, double dig flower beds and use heavy duty machinery. I'm learning so much!"



Raising Aspirations Raising Standards

Visions and Values



Max the Cavapoo supporting student wellbeing at Pantysgallog Primary



Last year, as part of Pantysgallog primary school's strategic approach to supporting wellbeing, , Max, the

wellbeing dog was introduced to the school. Born in September 2020 Max joined the team at Pantysgallog in

January 2021.

Before Max started with the school the senior leaders undertook research, speaking to other schools, some in Wales and some in England about the impact of having a wellbeing dog. The headteacher then approached the Local Authority, who supported the idea, as did the school governing body and parents, many who emailed the school directly say 'what an amazing idea' they thought it was.

The choice of Max was deliberate - he is a 'Cavapoo', so naturally has a calm temperament. Before coming into school, Max received obedience

training and since joining the school has also been trained along with staff by 'The Dog Mentor', an organization which runs accredited courses for dogs and staff on how dogs should behave in and around school. Max has received his Gold Award , quickly progressing from bronze and silver.

To ensure that Max's wellbeing is properly cared for, he works on a timetable, 30 minutes with the children followed by at least one hour off. He has designated quiet areas where he sleeps, and he has the run of the school grounds for exercise. His working time is spent accompanying learners at breaktimes, welcoming children at the gates in the morning, being in classrooms for curriculum

time and reading, supporting pupils who become anxious about school and sitting in on Emotional Literacy Sessions (ELSA). ELSA sessions are conducted by trained staff supporting learners who may need a little extra emotional support, developing coping strategies or just having the opportunity to speak to a trusted adult, having Max there gives the learners extra comfort and support.

Headteacher, Darren Thomas, said: "Everyone who visits school loves meeting Max, he has had a positive impact upon the wellbeing of everyone at the school. He sits by the main school entrance every morning, greeting pupils and staff, it really is a lovely way to start everyone's day."

Ty Enfys first unit in UK to receive Meaningful Care accreditation

Last week, Kier Hardie's Ty Enfys Dementia Day Care Unit received the Meaningful Care Matters outstanding accreditation, a first to be awarded in Wales. The audit by Meaningful Care Matters (MCM) found the quality of life experienced by day care patients at Ty Enfys was at the highest level, with outstanding care provided by loving and engaged staff who really cared deeply for their patients whilst bringing joy, dignity and meaning to their care. The Ty Enfys capital project has seen integrated care fund capital of £1.6M utilised to completely transform the physical environment of a joint health and social care dementia day service.

The day care unit's mission is to provide high quality care to support individuals from the age of 55 years old who have been diagnosed with Dementia that is of a moderate or severe nature. The centre supports and manages patients' health whilst helping with memory retention, maintaining independence, and

assisting patients with their social lifestyles. The highly experienced staff ensure that all of this is achieved at every opportunity, but also help with other complex elements of care such as giving medication, helping with personal needs, and assisting patients with eating and drinking.

MTCBC's Head of Adult Services, Angela Edevane, said: "This achievement is the result of a true partnership working and the diligent efforts of the team at Ty Enfys to make this accreditation a reality."

Julie Denley, Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB's Director Primary Care and Mental Health said: "Ty Enfys is an important service that contributes to supporting people with dementia to live at home as long as possible by supporting them, and critically, their carers."

Speaking on behalf of the Regional Commissioning Unit team, Nia McIntosh, Regional Commissioning Officer, said: "Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board are delighted to invest Integrated Care

Funding to this unique dementia service, which has now been recognised with this accreditation. We understand how important it is for families and people experiencing dementia to have a safe and comfortable place to spend time.

Councillor Tony Rogers, Cabinet Member for Social Services, said: "The new Dementia care unit is wonderful, the ideas, conception and result provide a first-class facility for dementia users and their families. The layout is very welcoming, with familiar local additions added. It's a beautiful setting to help some of our most vulnerable residents and I cannot thank the team enough for their hard work in bringing it all together, especially during the hard times we have all faced. In addition to this fantastic facility, hearing the news that they have achieved Outstanding Accreditation just shows the fantastic work of the staff and team and I'm so proud of them all."



Agorwch eich cartref i ddatgloi eu dyfodol

Dewch yn rhiant maeth ar ran Merthyr Tudful.

merthyrtydfil.fosterwales.gov.wales

Open your home to unlock their future

Become a foster carer for Merthyr Tydfil.

Splash Pad work completed

Work has been completed on construction of the new Splash Pad play pool in Cyfarthfa Park.

The Splash Pad will reopen later in the spring after the installation of completely new wet play equipment and water jets, the design of which was agreed after consultation with pupils of Cyfarthfa Park Primary School.

The contractors have also installed a new soft rubber play surface, improved drainage, upgraded plant equipment to make the water pump system more effective, and a new fenced off staff entrance to the plant room to improve health and safety.

Cabinet Member for Regeneration,

Transformation and Commercialisation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas said: "We're very happy to see completion of work on this much-improved version of the Splash Pad, and we'd like to thank the public for their patience as the project did experience delays out of our control."

"The opinions of pupils of Cyfarthfa Park were invaluable in helping the contractors select play equipment that we're sure children from across the county borough will be delighted with." Wellbeing@Merthyr Chief Executive Jane Sellwood said: "This fantastic new facility will complement the highly popular Canolfan, which has also been refurbished to a very high standard."

"We can't wait for the new season to see our children enjoying themselves in the sunshine once again."

MTCBC Transformation update

Throughout 2021 the Council continued its transformation and improvement journey, as well as responding to the pandemic.

A quick recap

Over a year ago the Council developed a 'Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan' to help us recover from the pandemic as well as transform and improve.

The established Improvement Board, made up of Welsh Government Advisors, Elected Members, and Officers has focused on three priorities as part of its transformation. They are:

1. Improving our Education Standards
2. Increasing our resilience in Social Care
3. Economic Recovery

Areas that support the delivery of these priorities were also agreed. They include:

- Recycling and Carbon Management
- Healthy Organisation (staff support and development)
- Digital Transformation (how we can use technology to support the delivery of services)
- Commercialisation (can we develop any commercial opportunities)
- Governance Improvement (ensuring our processes are sound to support transformation)

What have we done?

1. Improving our Education Standards

Earlier this year we launched our 'Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards' Strategy, often referred to as our RARS strategy. This aims to increase the aspirations of our learners. We have started delivering this and are working with schools and others to support learning.

We have helped over 500 previously digitally excluded learners by providing Chromebooks and internet connections. This has helped learning to continue during the pandemic.

2. Increasing our resilience in Social Care

We have needed to adapt to different ways of working to meet the needs of our service users. For example, in Children's Services we have approved Foster Care initiatives in February 2021. In Adult Services we have approved our 'Preparation for Adulthood – Transition Policy' and 'Advocacy Strategy'. We have seen better

partnership working and different approaches such as using technology more.

3. Economic Recovery

We have completed a consultation exercise and developed a 15-year vision for the economy in Merthyr Tydfil. This will help us to better understand the economic position and how to support it. This is complimented by our economic recovery plan and economic recovery board.

Teams from across the Council have helped administer over £20million of Welsh Government grants to support businesses.

A Business, Education and Training Partnership has been established to support learners, the development of skills and to address unemployment.

Supporting the RTI Plan

We are continuing to work on delivering our **Decarbonisation Programme**. This is complementing our **Agile Working Programme**. You may have seen the refurbishments on the Civic Centre building that will help us reduce our carbon footprint.

We are continuing to work hard to meet our **recycling and waste targets**. These were met last year and we must work with our residents and businesses to continue to meet our targets in the future.

As part of our **Healthy Organisation Programme**, we have upgraded our internal staffing systems to help us record staff progress and development. This will help us stay focused on our objectives and provide the support required to achieve them.

Our **Digital Transformation Programme** has supported learners, staff and democracy to work in a far different way to what we were used to prior to the pandemic. This has allowed us to continue to support our residents. For example, we now use MS Teams in the workplace and to hold Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings (as part of our **Digital Democracy Programme**).

A new Commercial Team has been set up to investigate how we can adopt principles of commercialisation and make best use of our resources in doing so.

Our **Governance Improvement Programme** has refocused our key plans and strategies together with how these are monitored. We can now access our data in a far easier way to inform our reports and help make

better decisions.

What's Next?

2022 is going to be another busy year building on the great work of 2021.

We obviously will need to continue to respond to, and recover from, the pandemic.

Further efforts will be placed on supporting our learners to achieve the best outcomes they can. We will work across the Council and with schools and partners to do this.

We will continue to monitor our performance and how we can continuously improve to increase resilience in Social Care and other services.

Building on the outcomes of our 15-year economic vision, we will be able to better target our efforts and support. Achieving this vision will be enhanced by our Commercial Team. We look forward to plans being developed and delivered in 2022 regarding this.

We will build on our digital democracy. We will be able to operate hybrid committee meetings in 2022, allowing Elected Members to attend at the Civic Centre (when safe to do so) or through a digital device.

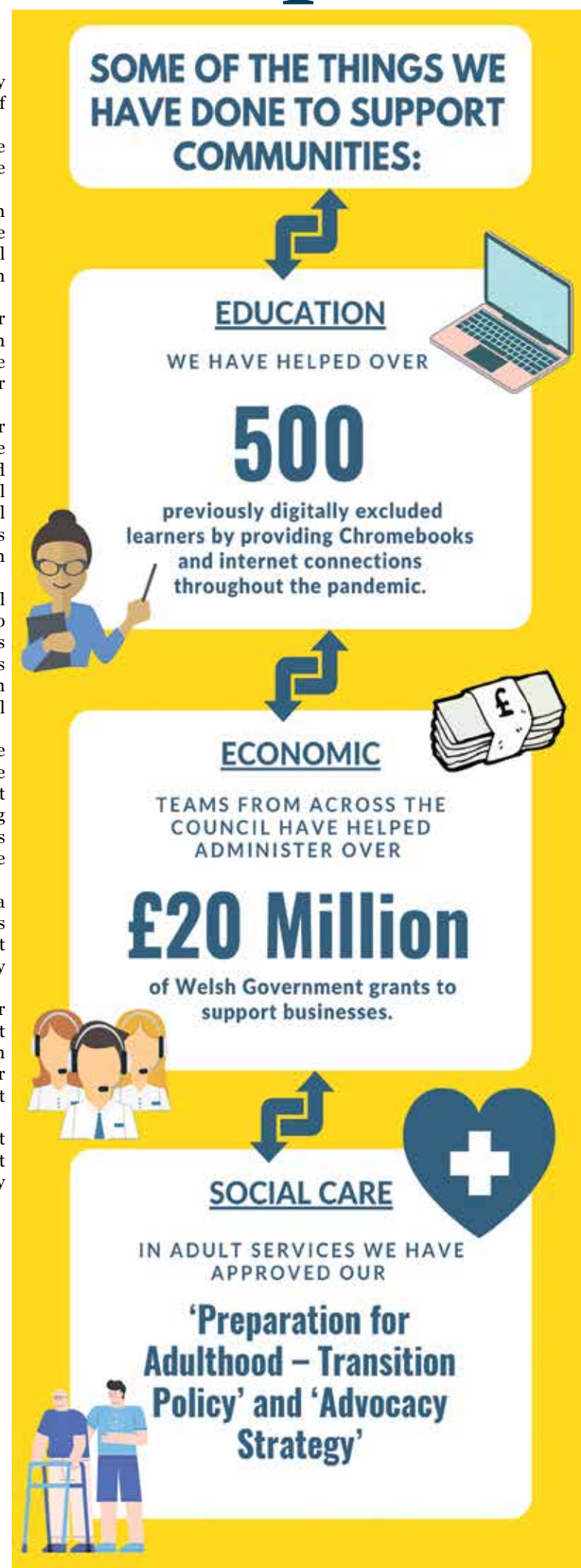
We will continue the refurbishment of the Civic Centre to reduce our carbon footprint and provide a better working environment. New programmes will be developed to help us reduce carbon emissions even further.

When the Council makes a decision about improving its services, we want to be confident that this decision is properly informed by public opinion.

We will continue to review our communications and engagement platforms for you to play a part in helping us to further deliver our transformation and improvement programme.

This transformation will not happen overnight. We must however continue on the journey together to see results.

Let's make Merthyr Tydfil a place to be proud of!





Merthyr Tydfil set to be 'entertainment capital of Valleys'

Merthyr Tydfil could soon become a hub of live music, comedy, food and arts — with plans to transform the town centre's derelict Rugby Club into a vibrant new entertainment venue.

In February 2022 Local entrepreneur,

Jorge D'ascencao, revealed ambitious plans for the site — which will re-open as 'Clwb Crown' in August 2022.

Set to welcome a top-secret line up of world-famous artists, the transformative project has been made possible by an



investment from the Transforming Towns Placemaking scheme, in conjunction with MTCBC.

The 700-person Clwb will become the highest capacity venue in the Heads of the Valleys region, comprising a coffee, wine and tapas bar on one side and a high-spec performance space on the other — to accommodate theatre, dance, comedy and live music.

What's more, the venue will also offer spaces for community collaboration in the town centre, including rehearsal spaces for amateur dramatic companies and choirs, exhibition rooms for artists and modern meeting places for other local groups.

The arrival of Clwb Crown forms a small but significant part of the council's wider masterplan — which aims to transform Merthyr Tydfil into a tourism capital of the Valleys by 2034.

Originally hailing from Portugal, the project's driving force, Jorge D'ascencao, is well-known in the Merthyr Tydfil region for his transformation of the New Crown in 2011 — a formerly derelict pub turned must-visit location for music-lovers and foodies in the town centre.

The 1,000 square metre building will offer refreshments at every time of day — from high-end morning coffees to take-away lunches and Portuguese-inspired dinner service, with thanks to Jorge's wife, Fatima.

Jorge said: "Our aim is to create the

presence of a modern entertainment, music & arts space for the people of Merthyr Tydfil — whether they're popping in for a morning coffee before work, visiting an art exhibition with a friend or joining us for tapas and live music on a Friday night. It's all about creating a new social hub for Merthyr Tydfil and bringing people together."

With a line-up of top name performers and bands set to be announced in coming months, it's hoped that Clwb Crown will also have a positive impact on the town's status as a musical hub.

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation, Cllr Geraint Thomas, said: "Starting life as an RAF Association building in 1978 and later becoming home to the old Merthyr Tydfil Rugby Club, this venue was a hive of activity for decades. So, after years of dereliction we are thrilled to be restoring life back into this wonderful building.

Work begun on NLC's innovative makeover



Work has begun on transforming the Council's Neighbourhood Learning Centre at Gurnos into an innovative training and accommodation centre for the county borough's young residents.

The building, which has been used as an educational base to help unemployed young people and adults get jobs in a range of vocations for the past 25 years, will continue to offer training alongside five self-contained apartments in one of the three blocks.

The aim is to help address a shortage of good quality affordable homes in Wales, while also supporting our young people who require accommodation to live independently while looking to participate in training opportunities to lead to employment.

The Council has been awarded £1,126,174 capital funding for

the project from the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Integrated Care Fund Discretionary Capital Programme, which has identified work with young people and looked after children as a key priority. There will also be £221,000 match funding from the Local Authority.

"The Neighbourhood Learning Centre is starting to look its age and this will be an innovative and attractive makeover," said Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas.

Completion and launch of the new facilities is planned for the end of August 2022.



Iconic Deli returns to High Street after 40 years

Founded by Jim and Joan Johnson in 1982, Johnsons' Delicatessen was once a haven of Italian meat, cheese, and sweet-treats in Merthyr Tydfil — operating for more than a decade.

Now, nearly 40 years later, the much-loved local venue has re-opened its doors in the town centre — with thanks to the original owners' granddaughter, Jessica Howells, who 'grew up' on the original shop floor. The deli's grand return has been made possible by an investment from the Council and its Meanwhile scheme — which supports new enterprises to open in vacant town centre buildings. Plus, additional funding was received from the Targeted Regeneration Investment programme (TRI) from Welsh Government.

The deli offers a sumptuous range of ready-to-eat foods — from Italian-style meats and cheese to coffee, pastries, hot meals, and freshly baked bread, all inspired by the offering of the original shop. All ingredients and food on offer at the deli have been locally sourced — with coffee by the aforementioned Big Dog Coffee, cheeses from Caws Cenarth, eggs from Treacastle Eggs in Brecon and freshly baked bread from much-loved artisan baker, Alex Gooch.

The original deli was inspired by the sumptuous delicatessens of



northern Italy, which Jim Johnson discovered during a European cycling tour in 1954. After being made redundant later in life, Mr. Johnson decided to take the plunge on a new business — opening the original Johnsons' Deli in 1982, with his wife, Joan, as the head chef. The deli and its Italian-style offering quickly grew in popularity, no doubt aided by the large numbers of people with Italian origins living in Merthyr Tydfil and the wider Valleys. With hundreds of happy customers served to date, it's hoped that the same sense of excitement will be enjoyed at the new Johnsons' Delicatessen.

The owner, Jessica Howells, said: "The original Johnsons' Deli is such an important part of my family's history — and I like to think that it's an important part of Merthyr's history too. Some of my earliest memories were made at my grandparent's shop and I love the idea that my 3-year-old son, will enjoy a similar experience."

Safety Partnership investigating off-road ASB

Merthyr Tydfil Community Safety Partnership is aware of current issues with off-road vehicles reported by residents on land across the county borough.

The Partnership, comprising the Council's public protection officers and South Wales Police, are monitoring sites for off-road bikes and cars and will take action against anyone apprehended.

You can report incidents in confidence by emailing community.safety@merthyr.gov.uk



Bus interchange wins third national award

Last year, Merthyr Tydfil's new bus interchange won a third prestigious national award within the space of as many months. After picking up two construction awards in the autumn, the bus station was chosen from a shortlist of eight projects as winner of the RTPI Cymru (Royal Town Planning Institute in

Wales) Awards for Planning Excellence.

The judges described the interchange as "an exemplar project delivering an inclusive approach at design, construction and operational stages that demonstrates how to make a substantive change to how an integrated transport system works.

Funded by Welsh Government, Wales's first fully electric transport hub is the only one that allows for the charging of electric vehicles on site, has no gas or other fossil fuel supplies and a rainwater harvesting tank for the public toilets. In recent months, it has won the 'Sustainability' category in the 2021 Constructing Excellence in Wales Awards, with the Council also winning the Client of the Year accolade at the 2021 Chartered Institute of Building

(CIOB) Awards in London. The bus interchange was one of eight projects shortlisted by RTPI Cymru described as 'exceptional examples of how planning and planners have a positive impact on our quality of life in creating exceptional places and protecting our environment'.

The award was presented to the Council's Director of Planning & Neighbourhood Services Judith Jones and representatives of the project's main contractors Morgan Sindall and

Capita. The bus interchange will now automatically go forward to the RTPI UK awards in London this year.





Average speed camera installation nears completion



The installation of average speed cameras along the A4054 Cardiff Road between Fiddler's Elbow and Pentrebach is scheduled to finish at the end of March 2022.

The cameras were agreed by residents in two phases of consultation in 2021 following multiple speed surveys in the area which identified 'excessive speeding on a continuous basis' along the road.

Councillor Michelle Jones, Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside, said: "It's great to see this project nearing completion. This is a fantastic example of resident's concerns being listened to and acted upon, and I thank the Councillors and officers who have been involved throughout the process for their contribution to making this happen."

This project has been possible thanks to Welsh Government's Road Safety Capital Fund.

Decarbonisation: How you can help!

Climate change is already affecting our everyday lives and urgent action is needed. As a Council we aim to do everything that we can to ensure we can work towards decarbonisation, but to achieve this to the highest possible standard there are many ways you can help.

Transport

- When possible, walk or ride your bike.
- Consider switching to an electric or hybrid vehicle if you are replacing your car as this can save 2 tonnes or carbon per year. If this is not affordable then choose more efficient petrol or diesel vehicles as this could save 0.9 tonnes of CO2 each year.
- Think of how your travel patterns have changed during lockdown and make an effort to continue these habits.
- Eat locally produced, fresh food to reduce carbon emissions of processing, storing and transportation.

Food and drink

- Do not put hot items in the fridge or freezer. Let them cool before putting them in the fridge so less energy is required to keep them cold. Fridges are one of the biggest household consumers of energy, so any added efficiency helps.
- Clean out your fridge more often. You can reduce the energy usage by cleaning out any food that is not going to be eaten. When food sits in the fridge, it takes up space and energy. Clean out your fridge weekly but don't leave it too empty, otherwise it won't maintain its cold temperature.
- The most environmentally friendly way of cooking is using a stove top or microwave.

- Try to grow your own fruit, vegetables and herbs.
- Make an effort to eat less meat or even go vegetarian or vegan.

Water

- Consider solar PV panels or solar hot water at home.
- Use a reusable water bottle to lower your water and carbon footprint. Plastic production leads to a lot of carbon emissions.

Waste

- Give any unwanted items you want to throw away to someone in need or an organisation. These items can be reused and redistributed.
- Reduce, reuse and recycle as much waste as possible. This can include recycling old clothes. By reducing the amount of waste you produce emissions from an average home could fall by 0.25 tonnes each year.
- Consider composting uncooked food in your garden, such as vegetables or fruit peelings rather than using the council composting services. All leftover cooked food has to be put in the food waste bins for collection.

The environment and housing

- Check your loft insulation, doors and windows to prevent heat loss. If you live in rented accommodation check that your landlord is aware on how to keep the building energy efficient.
- Switch to a green energy tariff. This involves choosing a supplier and tariff that only sources energy from renewable generators such as wind and solar. This could reduce emissions by 79%, saving 1.25 tonnes of carbon each year for the average home.
- Consider how much energy you are

using. See where you could use less or switch off appliances. Turning down the heating by 1 degree Celsius can save 3% off your energy bill.

- Make more use of your garden area by growing fruit and vegetables as an alternative to paving, artificial grass or decking.

Energy

- Get a smart meter to help you understand and manage your energy consumption and costs.
- When drying clothes use a clothesline or airer rather than a tumble dryer.

Green infrastructure

- Make more sustainable use of your garden by planting trees or bushes.
- Join a Love Where You Live volunteer group to help the community you live in.

What we are doing as a Council:

- Installing Energy Efficiency measures in 32 council buildings via the Welsh Government REFIT Cymru framework.
- We now have a number of electric vehicles in operation. Our aim is to have an all-electric fleet by 2030.
- Our Countryside Team have committed to planting over 1000 trees in open spaces throughout the County Borough. A lot of nature, such as plants, trees and bushes naturally absorb carbon dioxide during photosynthesis, so preservation of land is vital in the decarbonisation process.
- Our Property Services Team are actively investigating the feasibility of building Net Zero Primary and Secondary Schools.
- Solar PV has been installed in our Recycling Depots to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions

Council teams clears over 2,500 bags of waste from trunk roads

Our Street Cleansing teams have been working hard to clear the sections of A4060 and A470 trunk roads in Merthyr Tydfil. The month-long works take place every year to removing waste items discarded by passing drivers.

At the time of print, with a further stretch of road still to do the team had collected an incredible **1,200 bags of recycling and 1,323 bags of waste**.

Councillor Michelle Jones, Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside, said: "The works carried out by our Street Cleansing teams is essential to keep the roads clear and safe for everyone."

"Unfortunately, irresponsible drivers who litter cost the taxpayer heavily, as setting out lane closures on trunk roads is very expensive but is essential to the safety of the workers."

"I'd like to thank the whole team involved for their hard work."

Bakery to be reborn as hot property hotel

A famous old Merthyr Tydfil bakery is to be brought back to life in spectacular fashion as a luxury boutique hotel and bistro. The former Howfield & Son building on High Street is to undergo a £1.1m refurbishment comprising a bistro/bar on the ground floor, and boutique hotel and self-contained flats - finished 'to a high specification' - on the upper floors.

The Council has helped developer RWP Properties secure grant funding of £462,000 and £308,000 loan finance

from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns initiative.

The project is part of the 15-year Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Masterplan, which links strongly to Welsh Government's Transforming Towns agenda for increasing footfall in the town centres by tackling empty buildings and vacant sites and bring them back into use.

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas said: "We're thrilled



Join your neighbours, recycle your food waste every week!

Many of your friends and neighbours are already recycling their food waste. Will you join them?

Order your food recycling bin today!
www.merthyr.gov.uk / 01685 725000

If each home in Merthyr Tydfil recycled just one tea bag a week, we would collect and recycle 1.5 million tea bags per year!

✓ Its free
✓ its easy
✓ and is the right thing to do

Did you know you can recycle the following items at the kerbside every week?

- Small electricals
- Household batteries
- Textiles and shoes

Important!!!!

Please place brown paper packaging into your cardboard recycling box

Food recycling bags and purple battery recycling bags are provided **FREE OF CHARGE**

collection points can be found on www.merthyr.gov.uk or call **01685 725000** for further information.

Council purchases St Tydfil Shopping Centre



Merthyr Tydfil's indoor shopping centre has been purchased by the County Borough Council with the intention of it playing a major role in the authority's 15-year town centre 'Masterplan'.

Built in 1970, the semi-covered pedestrian St Tydfil Shopping Centre was refurbished in 1993 and contains more than 50 shops, including national retailers and independent businesses. It also has an upstairs indoor market with more than 30 stalls.

St Tydfil was owned by German property investment company Patrizia, and the three centre management staff will be employed by the Council going forward.

"We're very excited to have purchased St Tydfil Shopping Centre," said Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas.

"It's in the heart of the town centre, between the new and old bus station sites, both of which are also owned by the Council. Having the combined sites offers considerable future potential for redevelopment and is central to

regeneration plans for the whole town centre."

The Masterplan envisages that by 2035, the town centre will have high quality residential, office, leisure and retail, new plazas, green spaces and 'an active riverside'. It says the aim is to create a centre 'with inviting streets, squares and routes, where people feel safe, welcomed and uplifted'.

The plan identifies the need for regeneration of the town centre and highlights opportunities for the diversification of the retail and leisure offer of the High Street and St Tydfil Shopping Centre.

"Ownership of the shopping centre significantly enhances potential options to better Merthyr Tydfil and improve the urban fabric of the town centre, across many sectors," Cllr Thomas added.

"In the short term we'll continue to work closely with existing tenants, while also working with partners and the community to develop regeneration plans for the future."

to see the renaissance of Merthyr Tydfil continuing apace with this latest exciting and timely project.

"It will help breathe life into the town centre, creating luxury accommodation of the type you usually only find in cities."

"This will support and enhance the growing tourism sector across the county borough, as well as creating a new residential offer and a high end restaurant to enhance the evening economy."