

CONTACT



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YOUR COUNCIL



Welcome to the latest edition of Contact Newspaper.

It is an honour and privilege to be Leader of the Council in the town where I was born and grew up.

I've learned a great deal about public service over the past five years as an elected member. As the new Leader, I am confident that I can, with the support of my fellow elected members and officers deliver the necessary improvements required to improve the lives of those working and living in our County Borough.

In the current financial climate, this is an extremely challenging time for the public sector with limited budgets. Myself and other Leader's across Wales will continue to lobby Welsh Government for better funding packages to be able to provide value for money services to our communities.

Since the last edition of Contact we've had the May Local Elections. Please see the page adjacent to this column for information on your local councillors. We are fortunate enough to have dedicated and committed members who want to do the best for their communities.

Also adjacent to this column, you'll see an article on the new Cabinet. Our aim as Cabinet Members is to build on our success in transforming the Council and work alongside our excellent officers in making Merthyr Tydfil the best it possibly can be.

We are acutely aware of the current cost of living crisis, and the anti-poverty agenda will be high on our list of priorities. Council colleagues recently organised a summit with various partners to discuss the cost-of-living crisis and what we can do to support our residents. It was very clear from the meeting that there is a lot of work going on in the communities and a lot of support available via multiple agencies. We're now pulling all that information together to bring you a special edition of Contact Newspaper, highlighting all the relevant support available to assist you during these unprecedented times. The publication will be delivered to all residents in the next few weeks and will also be available for you to access on the Council website and social media sites.

In this edition of Contact, we're celebrating some successes from our schools (see page 4), updating you on exciting Regeneration projects (pages 6 & 7), and bringing you your Christmas recycling information (p5). I hope you enjoy reading all the great things happening in our beautiful County Borough.

Wishing you a wonderful Christmas, and a healthy and happy 2023.

Councillor Geraint Thomas
Leader

An Irishman who fell in love with Merthyr Tydfil...

...on a visit 21 years ago has been elected Mayor of the county borough for the municipal year 2022-23.

Cllr Declan Sammon, who lives in Dowlais and has represented the Dowlais electoral ward since 2017, took office at the council's Annual General Meeting in May.

Declan was born in Clarecastle, a

village just south of Ennis in County Clare, and first came to Merthyr Tydfil in 2001 in search of a business property to buy.

"I just fell in love with it," he said. "I've lived in quite a few different places, all of them wonderful, but none compared to Merthyr Tydfil - which I now call home. The people are honest, friendly and welcoming, and it's been a pleasure to work for the residents in my role as a councillor over the past five years."

The new Mayor is supporting two local charities: Cancer Aid Merthyr Tydfil, which helps cancer patients and their families, and the Merthyr Cynon Foodbank.

Declan's Consort for the year is Cllr Paula Layton, his partner of 18 years

and elected to the Council this month.

Deputy Mayor for 2022/23 is the previous year's Mayor, Bedlinog ward member Cllr Malcolm Colbran, who saw his term of office severely curtailed by the pandemic.

To invite the Mayor to an event contact mayoral@merthyr.gov.uk



Merthyr Tydfil's historic new Cabinet

For the first time in Merthyr Tydfil's history, women now make up half of the County Borough Council's Cabinet

The Council has a new Leader following this spring's election and Annual General Meeting, and three of the six Cabinet members are female, two of them new councillors.

The Leader is Cllr Geraint Thomas, who served as Deputy Leader for the previous 16 months, while Cllr Julia Jenkins has been appointed Cabinet Member for Social Services, and Cllr

Michelle Symonds Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Crime and Disorder.

Cllr Thomas said: "This is the most diverse Cabinet in the county borough's history. I'm thrilled to see two talented and ambitious people join our hard working and experienced team, and welcome back Cllr Andrew Barry to his role as Cabinet Member for Governance and Resources, Cllr David Hughes as Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Cllr Michelle Jones Cabinet Member for

Education."

Cllr Thomas retained his portfolio for Housing and Regeneration, while Cllr Barry also became Deputy Leader.



Your Council

Following this year's spring Election, below is a list of Councillors by Ward:

BEDLINOG & TRELEWIS WARD



Councillor
Malcolm Colbran
Independent
Deputy Mayor



Councillor Michelle Symonds
Independent
Cabinet Member for Public
Protection, Crime and
Disorder

CYFARTHFA WARD



Councillor
Claire Jones
Independent



Councillor
Geraint Thomas
Independent
Leader and Cabinet
Member for Housing and
Regeneration



Councillor Michelle Jones
Independent
Cabinet Member for
Education

DOWLAIS & PANT WARD



Councillor David Hughes
Independent
Cabinet Member for
Neighbourhood Services



Councillor
Declan Sammon
Independent
Mayor

DOWLAIS & PANT WARD CONT...



Councillor Paula Layton
Independent

GURNOS WARD



Councillor Jeremy Davies
Independent



Councillor Lee Davies
Independent



Councillor Bill Smith
Labour Party

MERTHYR VALE WARD



Councillor Darren Roberts
Labour Party
Leader of the Opposition



Councillor Scott Thomas
Labour Party



Councillor Clive Jones
Labour Party



Councillor Louise Minett-
Vokes
Labour Party

PENYDARREN



Councillor Kevin Gibbs
Labour Party



Councillor David Isaac
Labour Party



Councillor Jamie Scriven
Labour Party



Councillor Brent Carter
Labour Party



Councillor Gareth Lewis
Labour Party



Councillor Anna Williams-
Price
Labour Party

TOWN WARD



Councillor Andrew Barry
Independent
Deputy Leader and
Cabinet Member for
Governance and Resources



Councillor Julia Jenkins
Independent
Cabinet Member for Social
Services

TOWN WARD CONT...



Councillor David Jones
Labour Party



Councillor John Thomas
Independent



Councillor Ernie Galsworthy
Labour Party



Councillor Gareth Richards
Labour Party



Councillor Ian Thomas
Labour Party



Councillor Lisa Mytton
Independent



Councillor Clive Tovey
Independent

Council achieves Armed Forces Awards

At a meeting of Full Council on Wednesday 5th October, MTCBC's Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Andrew Barry, congratulated the Authority on achieving two coveted Ministry of Defence (MoD) Awards.

In August the Council was awarded the MoD Silver Award for its Defence

Employer Recognition Scheme in acknowledgement of its support to our Serving, Reservist, Veterans and their families within the Armed Forces Community.

And in September, Cyfarthfa High School achieved the Armed Forces Friendly Schools (AFFS) Cymru bronze

status, in recognition of the level of support and the range of activities offered to students whose parents are either serving or have served with the British Armed Forces.

Councillor Barry said: "We are extremely proud to have been recognised by these prestigious Awards in expressing our pledge, demonstration and advocacy support

to our defence and the Armed Forces Community and our aligned values to the Armed Forces family.

"I sincerely thank everyone involved for their hard work and commitment to this very worthy cause."

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

Residents invited to have their say on Council budget

Residents are being asked for their opinions on how the Council should spend its 2023/24 budget.

A public consultation exercise is currently underway and over the next few months the Council's Cabinet will be out and about across Merthyr Tydfil asking you, our residents, what services should be prioritised, as well as how you think Council Tax should be set for the coming year. Cabinet Members will be available to listen to and answer questions and will take your suggestions back to colleagues for discussion.

At the time of print, details of the face-to-face roadshows were being finalised. For the latest information on these please visit our website and social media pages.

An online survey is available at smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Budget2023-2024

Alternatively, you can request a paper copy by calling 01685 725000 or emailing: Corporate.Communications@merthyr.gov.uk. The survey will close at Midnight on Wednesday 18th January 2023.



SOCIAL CARE

Вітаємо всіх українських гостей!
 Welcome Ukrainians

Величезний, теплий прийом із серця Південного Уельсу нашим українським відвідувачам!

Ось корисне посилання для доступу до інформації про освіту, догляд за дітьми, соціальну підтримку, охорону здоров'я та посилання на громадські служби

We're here to help you settle in...

Here is a useful link to access information on education, welfare support, childcare, healthcare, and links to community services.

www.ctmuhb.nhs.wales/UkraineSupport

UKRAINE CRISIS
INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

GIG LIFE NHS Wales

Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council

Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council

Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council

when you foster a young refugee, language doesn't have to be a barrier

Visit fosterwales.gov.wales to find out what support is available.

maethu cymru | foster wales

Thank you to everyone who supported Operation Santa 2022!

Your generosity has always been exceptional, and once again – even during these challenging times – you didn't disappoint.

You've given presents to children who are otherwise likely to have missed out at Christmas time.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you, and Merry Christmas.

From all the staff in MTCBC's Social Services Department

'Listen' to our website if you'd prefer!

Residents with disabilities now have the option to 'listen' to the Council's website, rather than just having to read it

We now have the 'Recite Me' accessibility 'toolbar' on the home page of the website, making it much easier to read, hear and understand how to find information about council services.

Even before we introduced this sophisticated computer software, merthyr.gov.uk was ranked joint first out of all the 403 UK websites tested for accessibility.

The Recite Me toolbar can be used to:

- Have the text on our website - including most PDFs - read aloud
 - Download the text as an MP3 file to play when and where suits you
 - Change font sizes and colours
 - Customise background colour
 - Translate into different languages
- Cllr Gareth Richards, the Council's Equalities and Diversity Champion said: "Some people who access our information may have impaired vision, motor difficulties, deafness, or impaired hearing; others may

simply prefer their information in an alternative language. It is therefore important that our website, content, and documents work for everyone.

"It's vital to continue to work towards digital accessibility when producing information on pages and documents for our website. Through this fantastic new software, the information we provide is more inclusive for you, our residents."

Worried about the cost of living?

Merthyr Tydfil Borough Credit Union provides financial services to everyone within our common bond

- Low cost loans (t&c's apply)
- Hassle Free Savings
- Free life/loan insurance (t&c's apply)
- Junior Savings
- Payroll Savings
- Covered by the FSCS

Tel: 01685 377888

Website: www.mtbcu.org.uk

Location: 139 High Street

Authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. Registration Number: 213643



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.

Applying for support towards your childcare costs is easier than ever with the Childcare Offer for Wales' new digital service.



Are you a parent who is working, in education or training? You could be eligible for the Childcare Offer for Wales!

You could receive up to 30 hours of funded early education and childcare for your 3 to 4 year old, for up to 48 weeks of the year.

Visit merthyr.gov.uk/30hoursto to find out more.

LEARNING

Coed Y Dderwen Eco Warriors

Pupils at Coed Y Dderwen Primary School have been embracing post-lockdown classroom time using polytunnels and forests in their personal war against climate change. Under the leadership of the school's eco-committee, pupils develop strong practical sustainability skills, such as growing vegetables, fruit, and plants in their large polytunnel ecosystem. They also care for insects and birds within the school grounds, take on forest conservation activities, and regularly learn about recycling, waste reduction and water conservation, which they put into action throughout the school.

Headteacher Sarah Townsin, said: "At Coed-Y-Dderwen, the importance of sustainability is fully

embedded throughout our current and future curriculum plans. Our aim is that all our pupils have an awareness of the world around them and how they impact on its future. We utilise our fantastic outdoor space and forest school area to enrich our curriculum, growing our own fruit and vegetables to inspire the wider community to be more sustainable".



New Welsh language nursery Safle'r Gurnos begins a new chapter for Welsh education



Safle'r Gurnos Nursery has opened - a big step forward for Merthyr Tydfil in expanding Welsh language education into the North of the county borough and developing the Welsh language environment. The Council has been working hard for many years to ensure that Welsh language provision and communications are visible across the whole of the Borough, and this is another leap forward in achieving that.

Director of Education Sue Walker said: "The opening of this seedling third Welsh medium school in Merthyr Tydfil is a landmark occasion and comes as the first Welsh medium school - Ysgol Santes Tudful - goes into its 50th year. The growth of Welsh medium education in Merthyr Tydfil is a priority for the Council and we are really pleased to see this provision on the map."

Young leaders push for a greener future at the Young People's Charter conference

An important Climate change conference took place at Merthyr Tydfil College this year, where pupils from across the county borough came together to discuss ideas for the Young People's Charter. Many pupils spoke at the event and highlighted the visions they had for a sustainable Merthyr Tydfil. Cabinet Member for Learning, Cllr

Michelle Jones, said "I am so happy with the passion and dedication pupils from across Merthyr Tydfil have for climate change and taking on sustainable practices. The young people of our borough are the future in ensuring we continue to practice and promote these green initiatives, well done all".

Diversity a grand slam at Edwardsville

Girls at Edwardsville Primary School tackled their way to the semi-final of the Urdd eisteddfod tournaments, playing in a TAG rugby team and championing diversity in sport. The school encourages anyone with a passion for rugby to join regardless of gender, and the rugby sessions involve tackling and TAG sessions which also improve bonding skills. The girls can decide which sessions they want to take part in and what they are comfortable doing, with a mix of no contact and contact rugby games.

Cllr Michelle Jones, Cabinet Member for Learning, said: "As a Mam who has personally championed my daughter and son to play whatever sports they want, it's so wonderful to see this representation happening across the board for all genders in sports within schools. Rugby has always been a massive part of my life having also previously been the Secretary of the Mini & Junior Section of Merthyr RFC for 5 years. It's incredibly important that we see diversity in our schools, further enabling students to pursue their dreams and getting rid of any barriers preventing them from competing. Edwardsville is an example of this, and I will be championing more of this across our schools."



Merthyr pupils' triumph at the Eisteddfod

Earlier this year, pupils from Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful, Pen Y Dre High School, and The College Merthyr Tydfil shared their winning performances from the Denbighshire Urdd Eisteddfod with Councillors.

Welsh Champion, Cllr Michelle Symonds, said: "It was fabulous to see the children and young people perform incredible pieces of music and speeches. I continue to be impressed by the promotion of the Welsh language within our schools in Merthyr Tydfil. I really believe the WESP education strategy is in full swing and this is another example of that. Da iawn pawb!"



Pen Y Dre shoots film shining light on homophobia

Students at Pen Y Dre High School in collaboration with Ffilm Cymru took part in a short film called 'Look at Us' highlighting the issue of bullying, based on sexual orientation. Pupils, with the support of their drama department went on to produce and direct a short film taking on a variety of roles such as acting, camera operating, make-up and post editing, honing their creative skills throughout the process. Cllr Gareth Richards, Equalities Champion, said "I'm delighted to see one of our Schools - Pen Y Dre being involved in the making of this film. Bullying of any sort is not acceptable and I am aware that schools go to great lengths to

address it. However, research seems to evidence that bullying frequently occurs for someone's sexual orientation. This can take many forms from name calling, banter or actual violence. Films like this can only lead to improved understanding, well done Pen Y Dre High School."



GCSE and A Level success for the young people of Merthyr Tydfil

Young people across Merthyr Tydfil collected their GCSE results earlier this year - the first cohort to sit formal exams since 2019.

Leader Cllr Geraint Thomas, said: "It was a privilege to visit all the secondary schools and share the excitement with our young people as they received their results. This cohort have experienced so much disruption during the past two years, and to have achieved what they have is all credit to their resilience and to the teachers and parents who have supported them. We instigated a Raising Aspirations

Raising Standards strategy in Autumn 2020 and are pleased to see the ambitions of this strategy already bearing fruit."

Cllr Michelle Jones Portfolio Lead for Education also commented: "I am so pleased to see the good results the young people have achieved, despite the challenging few years they have had. It is wonderful to see that their hard work has paid off and I wish them every success as they go on to further education, employment, or training."

Climate conscious pupils create app 'Train 2 Sustain'

In the summer, Year 5 pupils from Ynysowen and Troedryhiw primary schools worked together to create an Apple Store app with interactive advice on sustainable practices to tackle climate change.

The idea came from pupils at Troedryhiw who had been inspired by the National Climate Conference and wanted to raise awareness of the need for changes in behaviour to support this agenda.

The pupils worked with external company Value-Added Education to create it. Within the app they used augmented reality features for a more interactive approach which can be seen particularly in their artwork.

The app also has blogs on living a more sustainable life and songs on climate change. Pupils also used 'Minecraft' to create net-zero infrastructure and included maps showing potential locations across Wales for the buildings to be placed.

Cabinet Member for Learning,

Cllr Michelle Jones, said: "The creation of this app has allowed pupils from both schools to develop essential skills and supports the four purposes of the Welsh curriculum, ensuring our young people are ambitious, enterprising, ethically informed and healthy individuals."

The app is available to download for free on the AppStore: apps.apple.com/gb/app/train2sustain/id1625103646





NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Over 80 % of litter waste recycled thanks to Recycling on the Go bins!

You may have noticed our teams installing new Recycling on the Go (RotG) litter bins around Merthyr Tydfil over the past year to help residents recycle whilst out and about.

Feedback from our collection crew is that the bins are being used as intended, so we'd like to thank residents

and visitors for managing their waste sustainably and depositing materials in the correct slots!

Since installing the bins 89 tonnes of extra materials were captured for recycling, which would have previously been sent to landfill.

Here is a breakdown of materials found in RotG litter bins:



Solar Panels helping reduce greenhouse gasses

Solar panels were installed at Aberfan and Dowlais HWRCs last

summer and in the last year each site has managed to reduce its

carbon production by 2,000kg – the equivalent of a large diesel car driving 6,000 miles!

This is a positive step towards tackling climate change and WG's target for all Council's to be Carbon Neutral by 2030.

Help name our fleet and you could win a £50 Amazon voucher

In the summer, the Council purchased 10 new recycling vehicles and we want your help to name them!

Our recycling fleet has been updated to include more efficient vehicles with additional capacity for card, and an upgraded onboard route optimiser, meaning that rounds can be carried out more effectively.

We heard of an English Council giving its residents the opportunity to name their gritting fleet, with some wonderfully creative names being suggested; David Plowie, Gritty Gritty Bang Bang, Walter The Salter

and Spreddie Mercury, to name just a few. So, we didn't want to let this opportunity pass without having some fun with it!

The competition is open to Merthyr Tydfil residents of any age and closes on Tuesday 31st January 2023.

The chosen names will be proudly displayed above the cab of each vehicle and winners will be gifted a £50 Amazon voucher each.

To submit your suggested name(s) visit: smartsurvey.co.uk/s/VehicleNames or call 01685 725000 with your suggestion.



Electric Car Owners get High Voltage Support with EV chargers

The Council is speeding up the growth of electric vehicle charging network points across Merthyr Tydfil to facilitate the growth of electric vehicles, supporting our commitment to becoming a Net Zero Local Authority by 2030. The Council will have 13 chargers built at various public car parks across the County Borough with the support of the Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority and Connected Kerb Ltd who will install the chargers. With the Welsh Government's "Climate Emergency" declaration, the Council have an important role in supporting

net zero ambitions and strengthening sustainable practices across the County Borough.

Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing & Regeneration, Cllr Geraint Thomas, said "The installation of the electric charging points is another example of our commitment to achieving net zero ambitions for Merthyr Tydfil. Not only will the state-of-the-art infrastructure support the wider community of electric vehicle users in the Borough, but it will also take us further into the future in our pursuit of achieving our goals.

Are you considering submitting a planning application?

Did you know the Council offers a pre-application advice service that – as well as telling you what you need to submit – will provide guidance on how to ensure a quick and smooth application process, saving you time and money.

Charges start at just £25 (depending on the type of development). For information visit merthyr.gov.uk/resident/planning-and-building-control/make-a-planning-application/

A465 UPDATE: Jones Street and Rocky Road works

As part of Welsh Government's A465 Heads of The Valleys Road dualling project, the contractor Future Valleys Construction – has confirmed works at Jones Street and Rocky Road involving road closures from Monday 22nd August until 22nd February 2023.

Jones Street closure – a full road closure is in place at Jones Street, Dowlais between Guest Cottages and The Hafod for major construction works to start on the new bridge. Pedestrian access is not permitted.

Pant Road diversion – to reduce congestion on Pant Road whilst the Jones Street closure is in place, there is no entry (except buses) south towards Pant Road and Victoria Street from the Pant Industrial Estate/Pant Road junction.

Rocky Road closure – a full road closure from its junction with the roundabout at Bryniau Road in an easterly direction to its junction with the A465 slip road.

Bus services 33 and 35 are affected by these works visit stagecoachbus.com for information.

For full details on the works being carried out visit gov.wales/a465-section-5-and-6-dowlais-top-hirwaun

Thank you for your continued patience during these works.

Do you own, or are you responsible for, an Air BnB?

If so, we encourage you to contact wasteservices@merthyr.gov.uk or call 01685 725000 so that we can advise you how you can sustainably deal with waste

generated at these properties, to ensure we are maximising recycling. The recycling service is free of charge so please contact us to have your containers delivered.

Your collection days will be one day later over the festive period:	
NORMAL COLLECTION DAY:	WILL BE COLLECTED ON:
Monday 26th December	Tuesday 27th December
Tuesday 27th December	Wednesday 28th December
Wednesday 28th December	Thursday 29th December
Thursday 29th December	Friday 30th December
Friday 30th December	Saturday 31st December
Monday 2nd January	Tuesday 3rd January
Tuesday 3rd January	Wednesday 4th January
Wednesday 4th January	Thursday 5th January
Thursday 5th January	Friday 6th January
Friday 6th January	Saturday 7th January

Bulky household waste collections

There will be no bulky collections throughout the Christmas period. The last day of collections will be Friday 23rd December and they will resume on Wednesday 11th January.

Christmas Tree recycling

Real Christmas trees will be collected on a request basis only. Booking is available from Monday 19th December until Wednesday 4th January.

How to book:

Online: merthyr.gov.uk/book-a-christmas-tree-collection

Telephone: 01685 725000

Collections will begin on Monday 9th January 2023.

Trees must be cut into manageable pieces, no longer than 1.5meters and no heavier than 25kg.

Household Waste & Recycling Centres (HWRCs)

Our HWRCs will be closed on Sunday 25th and Monday 26th December, and Sunday 1st January. Normal winter opening times (9am – 4.30pm) apply on all other dates.

Recycling

Please recycle all you can over the festive period at the kerbside or HWRCs

Top tips:

- Brown paper is classed as packaging and can be recycled in your cardboard box only
- Christmas cards and wrapping paper must be placed in the non-recyclable bin due to the variety of mixed materials found on these products
- Reduce food waste and save money by planning meals with leftovers
- Fold down or break up cardboard boxes so they fit in the recycling box, please remove all other packaging before recycling

REGENERATION



Merthyr Tydfil welcomes Casa Bianca

Casa Bianca, an award winning family-run Italian restaurant chain, has arrived in Merthyr Tydfil.

The new eatery is occupying a prime town centre location, having moved into the former H Samuel jeweller's on the corner of Glebeland Street and High Street, providing a new lease of life for one of the town's empty historical buildings.

Casa Bianca's sister restaurants in Abergavenny and Monmouth won two Blue Ribbons at the 2022 Good Food Awards, and the chain offers outstanding

food quality, service and value.

The Merthyr Tydfil venture was made possible through investment from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Placemaking scheme, delivered in conjunction with the Council.

Owner Andreas Christou said: "We have had great success with La Piccola in Monmouth and Casa Bianca in Abergavenny, and we hope to achieve the same in Merthyr Tydfil, ahead of further expansion across Wales."

"Since opening in 2018, Casa Bianca in Abergavenny has developed a particularly loyal, tight-knit customer base — many of whom regularly travel to dine with us from Merthyr Tydfil."

"In recognition of this, it has been my ambition to open a Merthyr Tydfil branch for some time, and I can't thank the Council enough for helping to make it happen. Merthyr Tydfil town centre is developing at an incredible pace and we're thrilled to be a part of it."

Leader Cllr Geraint Thomas said: "It's great to see another fan-favourite restaurant open in the town centre, and I have no doubt that Casa Bianca will be just as popular here as it is in Abergavenny."

"Andreas Christou is the latest business owner to benefit from Council funding, with his personal ambition — alongside the many other local entrepreneurs we've helped — feeding directly into our long-term masterplan for the town."

Swimming pool redevelopment work begins

Work on redeveloping the swimming pool at Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Centre is set to begin in December, with completion expected by next autumn.

The nearby skate park will be included in a refurbishment project costing around £5.3m in total. Designs for the skate park will be consulted on this winter, with work on relocating it closer to the centre due to commence late winter with completion in early summer 2023.

The Council secured £3,863,924 from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme, with an interest-free loan of £788,697 from Salix Finance and £707,572 from the Council.

We are now also working with Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust and leading UK leisure development experts Alliance Leisure Services on implementing a full decarbonisation programme for the centre based on potential energy

savings, and refurbishment of its changing rooms.

"Welsh Government has an ambition for the public sector to be carbon neutral by 2030 in response to climate change," said Leader Cllr Geraint Thomas. "We'll be supporting this ambition by carrying out a number of initiatives that reduce the carbon emissions of our operations and impacts on climate change."

"As greenhouse gases have increased, Merthyr Tydfil has experienced all of the key symptoms of man-made climate change including erratic weather patterns, air pollution, heatwaves and changes in biodiversity," Cllr Thomas added.

"This has also come with associated economic and social costs as businesses and residents have struggled with issues like flood damage and interruption to their daily lives."



Snap up the perfect office space

Businesses looking for a small but perfectly formed office space geared to meet to all their requirements will find just the ticket in the Council's Orbit Business Centre.

The centre, which opened in 2008, offers a state-of-the-art building and facilities, free parking and ICT support — all included in one dynamic package. It has a total 60,000 sq ft of flexible open plan high quality office space, an executive boardroom, training and conference rooms with hybrid meeting technology and superfast fibre broadband.

There are rooms suitable for all sizes of business, from two to 30


staff available for rent, furnished with desks and chairs and including telephone system and administration and ICT support.

The tenancy also includes access to print, scan, photocopy. News 24 entertainment, dedicated teams

offering on-site business and administrative support and advice, and kitchen and staff room facilities.

Please call 01685 352700 or email info@orbitbusinesscentre.co.uk if you're interested in renting the office.





CHRISTMAS PARKING

As of Saturday 19 November and every Friday & Saturday until 31 December, car parking will be **FREE** in all town centre car parks.




Off to a flying 'art' — Aimie's gallery draws the punters

A local portrait artist who opened the first independent/private studio and art gallery in Merthyr Tydfil has been bowled over by the response.

Aimie Sutton is fully booked until February 2023 after launching 'The Art of Aimie' in the summer, bringing a new burst of colour and culture to the town centre.

It all began after a running injury, which kept Aimie off work for two weeks in 2017. Unable to leave the house, she delved back into her childhood love of art and drew pencil sketches to pass the time, later posting them online for the enjoyment of friends and family.

Aimie soon began to take pencil, acrylic and oil painting commissions from a dedicated Facebook page, which quickly attracted followers from across Merthyr Tydfil, the wider Valleys and beyond.

As word spread, her order book grew, and eventually, the mother-of-three was able to become a full-time

artist — requiring a permanent space for art production and display, now positioned on Glebeland Street.

The venture was made possible by support from the Council's 'Meanwhile' scheme, which supports new enterprises to open in vacant town centre properties.

The Art of Aimie received funding from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Business Fund, while Tydfil Training provided Community Renewal Fund (CRF)

funding and Merthyr Tydfil Enterprise Centre (MTEC) gave business support.

Aimie said: "It's been brilliant to discover how much of an artistic community there is in Merthyr Tydfil — I've met so many people who have popped in to discuss their love of art and share their work with me. The support of the council has been so helpful during my journey and I feel very grateful to live in a town that places so much importance on supporting new local businesses."



REGENERATION

Seven years of start-up success

2022 has marked the seventh anniversary of Merthyr Tydfil Enterprise Centre (MTEC) – a collaborative project between the Council and Tydfil Training, designed to support the needs of start-ups and existing businesses in the county borough.

Born from the need to create a business hub in the town centre, MTEC provides a fresh approach to business support in Merthyr Tydfil – physically providing the facility for test trade, incubation and growth facilities as well as mainstream support. This is all aided by a dedicated on-site support team.

This year, MTEC has seen a huge 36% increase in the number of business support registrations received compared with 2021. In turn, this has resulted in a 20% rise in the number of actual businesses started – with 2022 on track to be MTEC's best year on record.

Over the years, MTEC has aided more than 200 successful start-ups from a multitude of sectors – including retail, manufacturing and hospitality, thereby helping to change the face of Merthyr Tydfil town centre.

The Council's Economic Development team has supported the successful seven-year delivery of MTEC as a pivotal partner, offering additional services such as the Meanwhile Programme, which creates opportunities for business owners to set up in vacant town centre properties.

Tydfil Training CEO Paul



Gray said: "Over the years, MTEC has worked to encourage enterprise, entrepreneurship and employment in Merthyr Tydfil – becoming a central point of contact for new and existing businesses. All aided by a dedicated onsite support team, MTEC ensures that business owners can access the right support at the right time from the right partner.

Adam Smith, owner of Niche Website Development, said: "With thanks to support from MTEC and the Council, I was able to open my business in March 2019. Since then, MTEC has continued to be a fantastic resource – ensuring that I not only opened my business, but that it stayed open, for good. The team are dedicated to helping businesses of all kinds and I can't thank them enough."

Leader Cllr Geraint Thomas said: "The pandemic was a tricky time for local businesses in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales and beyond – so I'm heartened to hear about MTEC's significant rise in business registrations and start-ups for 2022."

For more information on MTEC please contact Karl Griffiths on 01685 727509.

Active Travel improvements

The past year has seen the Council complete work on a series of walking and cycling improvement projects as part of its Welsh Government-funded Active Travel programme. These include:

- A shared route for pedestrians and cyclists running alongside Avenue de Clichy from Caedraw roundabout to the gyratory system; a new parallel crossing; widening of the footpath from 1.3m to 3m; and the installation of a rain garden throughout the length of the scheme ready for the planting of 2,500 trees.
- Construction of a 3.5m wide shared use path for pedestrians and cyclists running alongside Bethesda Street.
- Upgrading the existing crossing point on Victoria Street to a zebra crossing.
- Pedestrian improvements at the Tesco roundabout to make crossing the road safer for pedestrians.
- Introducing a signalised crossing point on Lower High Street between the car park and the shops.
- Improved safety and a crossing point for pedestrians on Court Street.



Tesco Roundabout



Court Street



Chapel Banks



Bethesda Street



Avenue De Clichy

Exciting times for town centre begin

Merthyr Tydfil's Town Centre Masterplan has got off to a flying start, with a number of major components set to reach fruition in the next few years.

Improvements to the railway station/lower High Street and the old bus station site at Glebeland are two of the key projects set to take the centre to the next level in its transformation.



In the meantime, the refurbishment of two prominent once-derelict historic buildings is complete in one case, and nearing completion in the other: the former H Samuel jeweller's is now the Casa Bianca Italian restaurant, and the old Howfield's Bakery will open as a boutique hotel, flats and a bistro/bar in spring 2023.

There will be a continued revival of the traditional townscape, with specific focus on prominent Listed Buildings of social, historic and/or architectural merit - for example, the Synagogue, which is now owned by the Foundation for Jewish Heritage who are aiming to transform it into a Museum for Jewish Heritage.

And at the northern end of High Street, the Pontmorlais Townscape Heritage Programme will see the continued renovation and façade enhancement of important buildings, and the redevelopment of Pontmorlais Park.

Long-term projects to be completed over the 15-year lifespan of the Masterplan are: the General Hospital, on which the Council is collaborating with the private developer to consider options for the site; Theatre Royal, for which funding has been secured from Welsh Government for a feasibility study and options appraisal; the YMCA, where capital works are currently ongoing; and the former St Tydfil's Hospital Site, where it is proposed to create 70 new homes.

Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration Cllr Geraint Thomas said: "The impressive award-winning new bus interchange has kick-started the transformation of our town centre, and - with the help of residents, businesses, shoppers, and the wider community - we can shape further development."

"By 2035, Merthyr Tydfil will have bucked the national trend of high street decline and transformed into a thriving town centre. The work has begun in earnest."

Taf Bargoed Catchment restoration progressing

The major element of a project to improve the waterways of the Taf Bargoed - the water flows of the lake at Parc Taf Bargoed - has been completed on time.

The lake has been made deeper in several places, particularly the canoe training pitch and the north end of the lake, with the silt which had built

up over the years deposited into a new bund in the water.

"That we met the deadline was due in the most part to the participation of the stakeholders, local canoe and angling clubs, Council ward members and officers," said Project Manager Rachel Morton.

"We encountered some unexpected

barriers to completion, but everyone worked together to maximise the outcomes," she added. "The contractor Salix will be back in the spring to plant up this island area - with protection against the geese!"

"For now, protective fencing with safety signage has been put in to stop people and dogs from accessing

the bund. It may look solid but underneath the surface, it will be like quicksand for some years to come.

"We are still working upstream to get some fencing and erosion protection put in and a tyre dump removed from the very top of the river. The project is due to finish in the next few months."

Take the sting out of leasing with help from us!

Are you a landlord with a property to rent? Did you know that you can lease through the Council?

The Welsh Government-backed Leasing Scheme Wales offers guaranteed rental income for between five to 20 years, maintenance, repairs and improvement grants, with benefits including:

- Guaranteed rental income for the period of the lease.
- The property returned to you at the end of the lease in the same condition as it was at the beginning of it, less fair wear and tear.
- All maintenance and repairs managed by the local authority for the term of the lease.
- Rent equal to Local Housing

Allowance rate minus an agreed management fee.

- Grants of up to £5,000 for improvements required to bring the property up to Welsh Government standards, or up to £25,000 for empty properties.
- Tailored tenancy management and ongoing housing support provided by Council support

workers, helping the tenant to maintain their tenancy and the condition of the property.

To find out more contact Craig Hughes

07598404368

craig.hughes@merthyr.gov.uk



In September we joined people around the world in expressing our great sadness on the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Merthyr Tydfil residents were quick to pay their respects to the late Queen, laying floral tributes, signing books of condolence, and attending services in her memory.

During her reign, she was a symbol of stability through decades where the world has seen many changes.

The Queen visited Merthyr Tydfil on a number of occasions, most notably shortly after the Aberfan Disaster, a place she held dear to her heart.

We can look back with gratitude and look forward in offering our support and loyalty to our new King Charles III.

COST OF LIVING

SUPPORT & ADVICE

If you're concerned about the current Cost of Living crisis, we want you to know that the Council is doing all it can to support residents through these difficult times.

We are currently producing a special edition of Contact Newspaper specifically to cover what support is available, from where, and when.

The publication will be delivered to all households in the next few weeks. In the meantime you can visit merthyr.gov.uk/cost-of-living or call 01685 725000 for information.



The Council wants to engage with residents aged 50+ about support and services available within the Community.

To complete our online survey visit: smartsurvey.co.uk/s/MTCBC50PlusSurvey

Paper copies are available at the Civic Centre reception or by emailing ageingwell@merthyr.gov.uk

For any comments or specific feedback, please contact ageingwell@merthyr.gov.uk



The Council is supporting engagement with our local 50+ Forum. The Forum is designed to represent the rights and views of people aged 50+ across Merthyr Tydfil to challenge age discrimination, to consult with and inform people aged 50+ on matters of interest to them and to help tackle loneliness and isolation.

To get involved please contact ageingwell@merthyr.gov.uk



An update for residents of Bedlinog and Trelewis:

We have a new website address bedlinogtrelewis-cc.gov.wales where you can find out information on meeting dates, agendas and minutes, financial information, contact details for your Community Councillors and much more! Our Annual Report for financial year 2021-22 was published on the website in September so take a look to find out what work we carried out within the community.

In October 2021 we launched our **Community Engagement Survey**. 51 % of responses were from Bedlinog residents and 49% from Trelewis residents. We asked how you would like budget prioritised next year and the top four responses were:

- To make more money available to award grants to community groups
- Tackling loneliness within the community
- More provision for young people within the community
- Tackling litter

The Community Council have again funded the **Bedlinog and Trelewis Christmas lights** this year. The cost of the lights has increased so we were not able to install quite as many as last year, although residents told us from feedback in the survey that this was not the main priority for how they wanted budget spent.

We will be working on a newsletter for residents going forward and you can find our latest updates on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.