

APPENDIX C - DETAILED CONSERVATION AREA ASSESSMENT (2020)

- 1 Lower High Street Square, St.Tydfil's Church & Court Street
- 2 Train Station
- 3 High Street Commercial Centre
- 4 Penderyn Square & Castle Street
- 5 Pontmorlais
- 6 Pontmorlais Circus & Pontmorlais West
- 7 (Upper) Penydarren Road

1 LOWER HIGH STREET SQUARE, ST.TYDFIL'S CHURCH & COURT STREET

Layout & Street Pattern

Despite this area having formed the earliest, medieval, core of settlement, most of the historic layout and street pattern has been swept away during second half of the 20th century. At the same time, historic buildings forming High Street's eastern side were removed to create a wider and more accessible Court Street. Ultimately, this also created space for the existing modern square.

The only historic layout and street pattern evident today are the curve of Lower High Street's buildings and St.Tydfil Church's churchyard boundary.

Today, the focus for this area is the pedestrianized square. This serves as the entrance to the town for those arriving on foot from residential areas to the south and east. The main car park and train station are located to the northeast corner of this area, between the square and the train station.

The mid-19th century railway viaduct, running north to south, is a dominant feature that bisects this area and isolates the historic Court House building from the rest of the town centre. The busy Lower High Street road, running east to west, also bisects the area, creating a barrier along the southern edge of the square and isolating Lower High Street's buildings from the town centre.

Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)

Lower High Street square is a significant public open space and is a stark contrast to the narrowness and length of the linear High Street. The square provides distant views to the surrounding hillsides, mostly to the west. As elsewhere through the town centre, these help to provide the context for the town centre, although there are no highly significant views.

The dominant elements of the square's west boundary are the steps and the dominant apsidal east end of St.Tydfil's Church, set amongst a number of mature trees, and the church's tower beyond.

The square is defined by slightly raised seating areas to the north and east, and by the churchyard wall to the west. The off-centre focus of the square is a historic free-standing cast iron drinking water fountain, located to the south side of the square.

Maturing trees provide some shelter and pleasant dappled light for the square's seating areas, and they also help to define the eastern and southeastern sides of the square. Along with the large groups of

mature trees visible within the churchyard and some other soft landscaping, these offer some visual relief after the extensive hard surfaces of the square, High Street commercial centre and the car park.

The free-standing cast iron drinking water fountain was relocated here probably to be a focal point at the end of the town centre. This feels a little sidelined or overlooked, perhaps due to a combination of its relatively remote location and its relatively small size in its current location. Whilst the stepped plinth raises the structure this also makes it less accessible and perhaps even more sidelined. Whilst there will no doubt be some health and safety considerations to be taken, consideration could be given to the opportunity of making this more accessible and to reinstating it as a useable drinking water fountain.

The strengths of the square are the trees and the backdrop that the church forms on its western side when viewed from the centre and eastern end of the square. In addition, the slightly elevated churchyard is rather a green oasis within the town centre, although the churchyard itself lies out of reach behind the stone wall and railings.

Weaknesses of the square:

- poor view of Farm Foods, Top Line Print and the gable end of 18 Lower High Street, all to the south.
- main area of the square is relatively exposed and suffers visual glare from a combination of sunlight and the fairly reflective granite paving. This is probably also quite wind swept a lot of the time. These factors affect its appeal as a place to dwell.
- there is not much life or activity opening out onto this square, although it is clearly well used as a seating area and pedestrian route from residential areas to the south and east.

The car park is well screened from the square by a nicely scaled modern stone wall with bronze railings atop and further trees. The car park's eastern boundary is defined by the railway line's pennant stone retaining wall. This is about two-storeys in height so is a dominant feature. The northern edge is defined by the conservative club building and the southern edge by the rear of Elim Church and a rubbish strewn yard between the church and the infilled railway arches. Some areas of the railway line wall are rendered and there is some blockwork infill to the arches.

The northeast corner of the car park has a large set of modern stone steps and extensive ramp leading up to the train station platform level. A set of about six steps provide access between the car park and Masonic Street. A small seating area probably acts as a collection point for the car park since its aspect is poor and this isn't a place to dwell. The beer garden to the rear of the Crown Inn provides welcome activity at the northwest corner of the car park

On the eastern side of the railway viaduct, the view of Court House is good as Court Street rises although this is marred by the view of its mid-20th century extension.

The western side of the Conservation Area boundary in this area runs along the school boundary to the southwest of St.Tydfil's Church where there is an attractive avenue of small trees. The church's boundary walls are slightly raised up and set back from this path creating a pleasant public space, all grassed with some large trees between the school and the church. The path running along the western boundary of the Conservation Area is dominated by the austere St. Tydfil's Church tower. The path branches around a modern four-storeys block of flats and continues around the school boundary.

A modern stone cobbled path then links up with a wide modern stone flagged path leading up to St.Tydfil's Church's main entrance. This doesn't appear to be particularly well walked because there is a lot of grass growing in the cracks, although the path is otherwise in good condition.

The southernmost end of this formal path has modern cast iron bollards and some low yew bushes and trees either side of the path, acting as a formal gateway. This area seems a little unkempt.

To the southeast of St.Tydfil's Church, a small short stay car park appears mainly to serve the shops on Lower High Street. It has no significance to the Conservation Area. This car park creates a hazardous desire line to cross the busy road.

The southern side of St.Tydfil's Church feels far removed from the character of High Street although it is still a key building within the town and a valuable green space.

Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (features that contribute to its special architectural interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)

St.Tydfil's Church, designed in a Romanesque style and slightly elevated, is the most dominant and imposing building within this area. Viewed from the square, its character is introverted and austere partly because this is the view of its elevated apsidal east end.

The traditional gabled form and historic details of the free-standing Court House are visually attractive. This is the oldest building in the town centre and pre-dates the industrial development of the town. It doesn't share the character of the core of the town centre.

16, 17 and 18 Lower High Street is a three-storeys stone commercial building, built between 1851 and 1875. Late-19th brick and stone two-storeys terraced commercial buildings, and the plain brick and

pebble-dashed three-storeys Ex-Servicemen's Club (built 1911), exist to the south of this. These all follow the historic street line. None of these are architecturally significant.

The form of the elevated stone-built mid-19th century railway viaduct is a dominant feature that bisects this area, although the bridge over Court Street has partly been re-faced using concrete.

Farm Foods, Top Line Print, Harp Funeral Services and Yew Street make no positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings

St.Tydfil's Church, Court House and the drinking water fountain are separately Grade II listed. The (c.1901) wall and railings around the churchyard are also Grade II listed and of good quality.

Court House is Grade II listed for its 'special architectural interest as one of the few medieval houses to retain substantial fabric within the urban context of Glamorgan.'

The (c.1890) 'Macfarlane's' cast iron fountain canopy relocated (from its historic location close to the centre of the modern roundabout) within the modern square is Grade II listed and has lasted well. It seems this was a widely reproduced design and set of patterns, so it is by no means unique, although Sir W T Lewis' and W T Rees' (c.1890.) dedication of the drinking fountain to 'Robert and Lucy Thomas of Waunwyllt, the pioneers in 1828 of the South Wales Steam Coal Trade' is historically significant, and it was clearly well made.

10 Lower High Street (Merthyr Borough Ex-Servicemen's Club) and the former 'Glove and Shears' public house) are locally listed, although the basis for these local listings aren't clear. The contribution of these locally listed buildings to the Town Centre Conservation Area seems low, partly because of their distance from the High Street core, but also because 10 Lower High Street in particular has no architectural significance.

Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

Court House, dating from the sixteenth or seventeenth-century, is believed to be the earliest surviving structure in Merthyr Tydfil and is thought to take its name from an ancient courthouse (the Neuadd) on this site. This was the centre of a small estate built up by the Lewis family, one of several significant land-owning families in the area. The Neuadd had acquired a prominent role by the fifteenth century and was even celebrated in poetry. At that time, the area was predominantly rural, probably comprising

a series of scattered farms, some of which had become the basis of small freehold estates by the sixteenth century.

Merthyr Tydfil has had strong associations with dissent and Court House was 'destroyed' during the 'Merthyr Rising' in 1831.

Arthur Trystan Edwards (1884-1973), the eminent pioneer of town planning and notable writer on architecture, was born at Court House in 1884 [plaque on building].

St. Tydfil's Church is believed to have been built on the site of the martyrdom or burial of St Tydfil in fifth century AD. The present church was rebuilt 1895-1901 to designs by architect J L Pearson of London although the 18th century lower storeys of the tower were retained.

Boundaries, Surfaces & Public Realm

Whilst hard landscaping and street furniture in the square are high quality, with the exception of the churchyard boundary wall and railings and the water drinking fountain canopy, these are all modern. The square incorporates high-quality modern bronze guarding, seating and some cast bronze inserts into modern stone paving. The bronze inserts cleverly include references to Merthyr Tydfil's heritage sculpted and cast into them. Unfortunately, some of these inserts appear to have been cut out, presumably for their scrap value.

Within the car park and along Court Street the mid-19th century railway walls are a significant historic feature.

Whilst not architecturally or historically significant:

- Street lighting and the CCTV camera at the north-west corner of the square are a little conspicuous.
- Low modern pennant stone walls, stainless steel railings and handrails to the two shallow steps and planting areas further define the seating areas and the eastern edge of the square.
- Further trees and some green areas within the car park help to break up the sight of all the hard surfaces in the car park.
- High modern concrete kerbs running up the centre of Court Street aren't attractive, although they are no doubt needed.
- Modern traditionally styled lamp posts and black CCTV camera posts within the car park are visually discrete.

Assessment of condition of the Area

The condition of the area is generally good, although:

- There are some localised areas where rubbish is a problem.
- The main issue is overgrown weeds growing out of the railway viaduct stonework, particularly within the top third of the walls and out of the top.

Negative Features & Issues

Lower High Street, leading to and from the roundabout, and Court Street are extremely busy and many of the cars coming off the roundabout travel too fast. The noise from the traffic is the main negative observation of this area. The occasional queue of traffic trying to get into the petrol station from the roundabout can sometimes make the southernmost end of this area an unpleasant place to be.

The Court Street pedestrian crossing is located some distance away from the natural desire line for crossing this road.

Pavements running through the square's seating areas follows the desire line to the car park on the opposite side of Gillar Street. With cars still travelling relatively fast from Court Street and no island at the crossing point, this seems a slightly hazardous crossing point.

The lane alongside 10 Lower High Street (Ex-servicemen's Club) and the rear of the buildings along Lower High Street are included in the current Conservation Area even though they have no redeeming features. Infact they are unsightly. The lane is particularly overgrown, there is a lot of rubbish, a lot of graffiti on the buildings and bins at the end of the lane are all visually negative.

Infilled railway arches are partly obscured by advertising billboards and there is a lot of buddleia and other plant growth out of the railway arch walls above and behind, particularly out of the top third of the wall.

The view from the car park of the northernmost gable to the Crown Inn is adversely affected by all the services there and the rubbish and bins that are kept there.

Litter is quite noticeable with a lot of rubbish around the wheelie bin store enclosures behind Ty Penderyn and in the yard between Elim Church and the railway viaduct.

The short-stay car park to the southeast of St.Tydfil's Church has no adjacent safe road crossing. Furthermore, this car park is on a potentially hazardous desire line for school children passing through the car park, where there is no walkway, before joining the school path.

2 TRAIN STATION

Layout & Street Pattern

The former Vale of Neath Railway line, constructed in 1853 and still in use today, defines the western boundary of this area. The current street pattern to the east of this is all modern and elevated above the level of the town. These serve the modern train station and the Tesco supermarket that lies just outside the Town Centre Conservation Area.

Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)

The near view is very poor to the east, dominated by the two-storeys Tesco car park. Beyond this are views of housing extending up the hillside and some mature woodland beyond that, along the ridge of the hill beyond.

The main view from the pavement next to the bus stop is of the hillside, the housing rising up, and some distant views of the hills far to the south and west.

The view of the town centre to the west is of the backs and sides of buildings, the most dominant of which is the modern, red brick rear face of 43 to 45 High Street.

The town centre skyline is punctuated only by the copper clad domed cupola of 119 High Street.

None of these views are particularly significant although they provide context for the town.

The railway line is a dominant feature, although the stone retaining wall doesn't visually dominate this area because the train station area is at the higher level. The main views of this structure are of its southwest elevation as it runs alongside the car park and Masonic Street and of its infilled arches when viewed from the eastern end of Court Street.

Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (features that contribute to its special architectural interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)

The only feature of historic interest in this area is the elevated or retaining rock-faced pennant stone mid-19th century railway structure. This doesn't appear architecturally significant.

Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings

None.

Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

None that we are aware of.

Boundaries, Surfaces & Public Realm

The railway line and associated retaining wall and viaduct form a strong western physical boundary. The eastern boundary is very weakly defined by modern roads and the public realm and surfaces are all modern and functional.

Assessment of condition of the Area

There is a lot of plant growth within and out of the stone retaining walls of the railway structure.

Some of the station borders are overgrown and the station forecourt appears a little unkempt, with litter including a lot of cigarette butts and the like.

Negative Features & Issues

Overgrown borders between the roundabout adjacent to Court House and the train station car park.

Although it lies outside of the Conservation Area boundary, the road leading to the supermarket car park is congested with cars.

3 HIGH STREET COMMERCIAL CENTRE

SOUTHERN HALF

Layout & Street Pattern

The southern half of High Street continues the historic linear route that ties the whole town centre together. High Street is currently largely pedestrianized.

Swan Street and Masonic Street cross High Street to provide vehicular access to the rear of High Street's eastern commercial buildings. Other secondary routes run off High Street including lanes alongside Ty Penderyn, High Street Chapel and Three Salmon Street, although only the latter is wide enough for cars.

Modern stone steps and a ramp at the southeast corner of Masonic Street provide an important pedestrian link from the train station to the lower end of High Street, and the proposed new bus station to the west of the town centre.

Three Salmon Street is one of the most historic streets in this area and it probably belongs to the earliest pre-industrial phase of the town's development.

Swan Street is also one of the older streets, although almost nothing of it remains after it was widened in the 20th century and most of the buildings that defined it were removed.

A pedestrian lane runs north to south along this area's western boundary. Cartographic evidence suggest this lane roughly follows the former line of the infilled Plymouth Ironworks' feeder canal.

Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)

The lowest section of High Street, between Masonic Street and Lower High Street Square, has an attractive human scale and proportion to it, with some relatively low buildings and a relatively narrow width creating a roughly square proportion, height to width. Today, the Crown Inn in particular helps create this pleasing human scale because of its fairly low two-storeys. Whilst there are a few existing exceptions, these proportions help retain some of the character of the earliest pre-industrial or early post-industrial phase of the town's development.

Three Salmon Street continues this attractive low human scale, and is clearly one of the few survivals of the humbler buildings that were once widespread to the north and west of St.Tydfil's Church.

The western boundary of the Conservation Area is formed by the modern boundary of the school and the narrow lane running north to south along the east side of the school grounds. This lane is a pleasant pedestrian route also used by cyclists.

The northern side of Three Salmon Street is visually poor and open to modern rear paved forecourts to three large garages with roller shutter and concrete blockwork walls. The view past these to the steep concrete-tiled duo-pitched roof of Hope & Market Square United Church is better, although this is a modern building with no architectural significance.

The modern lane to the north of Ty Penderyn provides a useful short pedestrian link to the car park. This lane has a pleasant scale to it and provides a positive view of the gable fronted 148 High Street building opposite.

One of the best views up High Street is from the Swan Street to Masonic Street crossroads, up to the copper clad, domed roof of 119 High Street in the distance. 119 High Street is an important datum within the town.

The Swan Street to Masonic Street crossroads is a confusing arrangement for pedestrians. Whilst the continuation of the High Street paving unifies High Street and makes it feel like a pedestrian crossing, cars seem to take priority and there are a surprising number of cars coming and going from Masonic Street. This feels hazardous and improvements should be considered. Damaged or run over road signs adjacent to 143 High Street are an indication of how hazardous this area might be for pedestrians.

The recently widened lane alongside High Street Chapel will no doubt provide an important access to the proposed new bus station to the west. The modern brown facing brickwork buildings visible to the northwest of this lane are very unsightly although they lie outside of the Town Centre Conservation Area.

Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (features that contribute to its special architectural interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)

Viewed from Lower High Street Square, the first dominant building on High Street is 149 High Street. This is largely because it is a three-storeys corner building. 148 High Street abutting it maintains this urban scale. Both are gable fronted. These gables and the human scale of the traditional Georgian-styled Crown Inn are the main features of the lowest length of High Street.

The scale of the lower end of High Street steps up to three-storeys to the north of the Crown Inn. The three-storeys scale of 144 High Street is a little at odds with most other buildings along this length of High Street, less human in scale and slightly detrimental to the scale of the street. 144 High Street is probably one of the mid-19th century commercial buildings. This probably illustrates how the pre-industrial or early post-industrial town developed in a rather piecemeal fashion, with no grand plan, as sites or former buildings became available for redevelopment.

The roofs of most of the three-storeys buildings are not a feature since they are of a shallow pitch or set behind low parapets. By contrast, duo-pitched roofs are highly visible on the more-humble and low two-storeys buildings and the gable-fronted 143 and 143a High Street (former Gas Company Buildings) have boldly expressed the gables as a conscious feature.

The scale of the corner buildings to the north of the Swan Street to Masonic Street crossroads drops back down to two-storeys. 32 and 33 High Street in particular retain their historic form and some 1st floor detailing including moulded window surrounds and the form of the historic oriel windows. 33 High Street retains the form of its historic dormers.

Almost all other buildings to the north of the Masonic Street cross-roads are three-storeys in scale and this helps to define the town centre's urban character.

140 and 46 High Street retain their two-storeys historic form and 1st floor fenestration facing High Street although all other historic details have been lost. 140 High Street was probably significantly altered to make it the current corner building when Swan Street was widened. 140 High Street retains the form of its historic dormers although their cladding and all other details are starkly modern. Similarly, the fairly humble two-storeys 32 to 36 High Street retain the forms of their historic 1st floor oriel windows and some dormers, although most of the detailing and materials are now modern and plastic.

Other than the three designated listed buildings in this area, the best survivals of historic buildings along High Street to the north of the Masonic Street crossroads include:

- The row comprising 129 to 131 and 134 and 135 High Street. With their rendered Georgian-styled facades, and some retained historic detailing, these are some of the best survivals of possibly early to mid-19th century town centre building. 133 High Street is probably of the same date although most of the detailing has been replaced. This row is only interrupted by the later brick and stone faced 132 High Street, although this is still a positive building. These suggest a more planned formal block of development, certainly sharing the same architectural style and language.
- 38 High Street. This is a simple traditionally proportioned likely late-19th century commercial building.

- 39 & 40 High Street. One of the dominant buildings in this part of High Street with one of the largest historic frontages on High Street. It is positive as an intact early-20th century façade survival, although it is not a particularly attractive building. It is about to be restored.
- 48, 49 & 50 High Street. Probably originally built as one block. 1st and 2nd floor fenestration remain, although only the form of the historic oriel window to 49 High Street remains.

Whilst the upper storeys of these are largely intact, as almost everywhere through the town centre, the shop fronts are all modern. Most are visually weak or poor although a few have made efforts to restore with some sensibility.

Opportunities could be considered for reinstating historic detailing and materials, and to replacing modern shop frontages, particularly to:

- 32 to 36 High Street;
- 38 High Street;
- 39 and 40 High Street, although works are already underway;
- 46 High Street, although this could be a challenge with so little remaining;
- 48, 49 & 50 High Street, although these are probably now in separate ownership they were probably built together;
- 129 to 135 High Street;
- 140 High Street, although given this has probably been recently renovated and this building has been so much altered, this prospect seems unlikely.

Generally, there is nothing of interest to the rear of the buildings along this length of High Street. Probably the best example of a rear warehouse-type building is at the rear of 40 High Street. The other rear buildings to the east of High Street appear to be mostly utilitarian early to mid-20th century and so do not appear significant to the Town Centre Conservation Area.

This area between Swan Street and Masonic Street crossroads and the junction of Victoria Street and High Street contain a relatively large number of poor or mediocre modern infill buildings compared to the other parts of the Conservation Area. 34 to 36 High Street (Red Cross shop) is an older, likely early-20th century building, although it is currently a visual oddity perhaps following truncation, and it is incongruous now.

Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings

There are three Grade II listed buildings in this area:

- High Street Chapel. A free-standing neo-classically styled chapel, built 1840, and clearly still in good use as a place of worship. One of the most positive buildings in this area, especially following its recent and clearly well-executed restoration. The hall behind, dated 1929, is also included within this Grade II listing.
- Crown Inn. Dated 1785, so a relatively early survival, and retains its traditional informal Georgian-styled character.
- Barclays Bank (47 High Street) is a monumental classical early 20th century banking hall, clearly listed for its architectural significance. Its appearance is quite at odds with the more historic buildings and its materials clearly imported.

1 to 2 Picton House (former Log Cabin public house, on the site of an earlier public house) is the sole locally listed building in this area. The reasons for this local listing are not obvious. The present building externally lacks formal architectural clarity.

Consideration could be given to locally listing further positive buildings in this area, including:

- 129 to 135 High Street;
- 1 and Three Salmon Street.

Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

None that we are aware of.

Boundaries, Surfaces & Public Realm

High Street is paved with high quality modern stone paving, so none of this is historic. Masonic Street and Swan Street have stone flag paving and kerbs as far as the end of the Conservative Club and 1 and 2 Picton House (former Log Cabin public house). There is no kerb to most of High Street. This is slightly confusing since one is not quite sure whether the street is pedestrianized, or not.

Below ground services have been altered within the stone paved area of road adjacent to the Crown Inn, and infilled with a Tarmacadam-type finish. This affects the visual integrity of the high-quality paving there.

With the exception of the cast iron post box that has been relocated close to the south elevation of 140 High Street, there is no historic street furniture.

St.Tydfil's Church's churchyard is raised up about 4ft from the level of Three Salmon Street. The churchyard boundary visible at the west end of Three Salmon Street is a simple pennant stone wall and modern, metal painted railings atop.

Assessment of condition of the Area

The physical condition of this area is generally very good although there are a small number of exceptions where maintenance is overdue (e.g. 38 High Street).

The High Street Chapel in particular is in particularly good condition. It stands out as being really well looked after, particularly after recent restoration.

Negative Features & Issues

Some of the rear yards along Masonic Street are overgrown, with buddleia and the like, and the rubbish bins there are unsightly.

The sight of the rear of the buildings along High Street reveals a lot of modern detailing (e.g. modern pebble-dashed render), materials (uPVC fascias, uPVC rainwater goods, concrete and mineral felt roof finishes), forms (e.g. flat and shallow mono-pitched roofs), accretions (e.g. stainless steel flues and heat pumps), and missing chimneystacks to High Street's buildings. This is particularly noticeable from the train station platform level.

Litter is quite noticeable with a lot of:

- broken glass, cigarette butts and rubbish, at the backs of shops in particular.
- broken glass on the road and pavement along Three Salmon Street which is particularly disappointing given that it immediately next to the primary school's side entrance.

Modern bins set against the northern gable of 143 High Street and on the pavement outside the conservative club aren't attractive, and the latter narrow the already narrow pavement.

There is a lot of conspicuous signage relating to the controlling of vehicles into High Street, although with the retractable bollard seemingly permanently down this appears no longer controlled. The signage is a visual distraction and confusing. The opportunity ought to be taken to remove this signage if it is no longer needed.

Rear gable elevations of 148 and 149 High Street are visible above their garages. Although these are very much secondary elevations they have visually suffered from poor alterations in the past.

NORTHERN HALF

Layout & Street Pattern

The northern half of High Street continues the historic linear route that ties the whole town centre together. Secondary vehicular routes running roughly perpendicular off High Street include Victoria Street, Glebeland Street, John Street, and Church Street. Beacons Place is an enclosed modern shopping arcade that also provides a pedestrian route to the train station and Tesco supermarket to the eastern side of the town centre.

Victoria Street and Glebeland Street are the two main commercial side streets. John Street is currently a dead-end providing service access to the rear of the large Tesco supermarket and as a car drop-off-point for the town centre. Church Street, continuing into Tramroadside North, is the main vehicular route leading up through Penderyn Square and Pontmorlais to Penydarren Road and Pontmorlais West.

Two historic lanes lead from Wheatsheaf Lane, one adjacent to the Narrow Gauge public house on Glebeland Street, and the second, Hong Kong Alley, that joins High Street. Historically these would have linked to some of the backyard industries (e.g. Hong Kong Alley led to Hong Kong Corn Mill) and no doubt humbler buildings and dwellings. These are still well used pedestrian routes, although now linking to the existing bus station. Post Office Lane is a quiet backstreet that provides access to the rear of properties along Glebeland Street and 102 to 116 High Street.

Many of these side streets are survivals of the historic street pattern:

- Victoria Street (or John Street) may have been one of the first formally planned streets in the town and may be
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-
-

Tramroadside North, running down the eastern edge of the town centre Conservation Area, is the former route of the historic (Penydarren) Merthyr tramway and in this area this is currently a relatively busy road providing vehicular access to Thomastown to the east and High Street Pontmorlais to the west, via Church Street.

Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)

The northern half of High Street feels busier and more varied than the southern half largely because of the number of side streets running into it and because the pedestrianized High Street gives way to vehicles entering from Glebeland Street and Victoria Street.

Whilst the width of High Street narrows only slightly, the heights of some of the buildings make this feel like the densest part of the town. There is a sudden contrast at Church Street when High Street's eastern block of commercial buildings stops and the street widens due to St.David's Church being set back within its grounds.

Today, Market Square is largely occupied by the freestanding Specsavers building which offers nothing to the historic streetscape especially due to its largely blind elevations, squat proportions and plain modern detailing. By contrast, 3 Victoria Street is an attractive, well-proportioned historic building retaining a lot of historic detailing at first and second floor levels and overlooking the street.

Glebeland Street and particularly Victoria Street are relatively busy largely commercial streets although they are less commercial than High Street. Both incorporate the only remaining public houses in this core part of the town and a greater number of smaller scale shops and ground floor offices (with shop-fronts) than High Street.

John Street is very quiet largely because there are few buildings along it and it currently forms a dead-end. From the grassed area between Church Street and John Street, views of the adjacent Thomastown Conservation Area (excepting the dilapidated and badly overgrown former Miners' Hall building) are good. The grassed area between Church Street and John Street is a welcome area of 'green' and this is shown on the 1851 Public Health Map as the garden of a large house.

Church Street has no commercial premises and is dominated by St.David's Church on its northern side.

Market Square and the roads running perpendicular from High Street provide more opportunities to appreciate the full height views of building facades at their ends than are possible along the southern half of High Street. Similarly, Church Street provides a view to the east focused on Thomastown synagogue, and the very slender commercial buildings (particularly 114 and 115 High Street) at its western end.

All historic shopfronts have been replaced, and most are now fully glazed, with deep plastic fascias and signage above, and many have opaque external roller shutters. Only a few have attempted to successfully replicate the historic scale, proportions, uniformity and quality of details that these

shopfronts would have once had. The best example is the restoration at 106 High Street although even the modern shopfront of 66 High Street fits better in the Conservation Area than most. Only the banks, public houses and one or two other buildings (e.g. 3 Glebeland Street and 62 High Street) and have remained largely intact at street level.

Spaces & Places

Historically, Market Square would have been one of the most significant public spaces in the town centre. Whilst there is still a market, now located in the vast multi-purpose concrete building to the west of the current Market Square, the original site of the market is now occupied by the freestanding Specsavers (former Poundworld) building.

The current Market Square provides a quieter contrast after the busyness of High Street and is a point at which several routes meet so it is a useful seating area in the town centre, although there isn't much life around it or aspect out of it.

Another, smaller, breathing space and seating area is at the end of John Street. This is quiet because John Street is not a main thoroughfare.

The narrow alleyway alongside The Narrow Gauge public house is pleasant because of its height and short length where it is built over.

The mostly rendered three-storeys buildings along Victoria Street, are a remnant of their historic urban scale, which now ends abruptly at its western end. The proportions of Victoria Street widen towards its western end.

Wheatsheaf Lane and the existing bus station are located perhaps four feet below the level of Glebeland Street.

Views

Looking southwards down High Street, from the junction between High Street and Victoria Street:

- The change in the line of High Street at the Masonic Street junction draws the eye.
- St. Tydfil's Church's clock tower is a dominant feature in the distance, although the clock face is only just about visible. The tops of the mature trees around St. Tydfil's Church and to the distant hillside beyond are also visible and provide visual relief from the hard surfaces of the town centre and context for the town. This is a positive view.

- Gabled frontages along High Street's east side give some relief and height to the view down High Street.
- Three-storeys parapeted rendered elevations half-way along High Street's west side maintain the urban scale. Beyond these, at High Street's southern end, the scale clearly steps down.

Looking northwards up High Street, from the junction between High Street and Victoria Street:

- 119 High Street (Milbourne Chambers) is the most dominant building, and highly positive, partly because it is a corner building and because of its prominent copper clad cupola and clockface. These are an important datum and focal point within the town centre.
- The Town Hall's distinctive colour and clock tower atop make it visually stand out. This distant view of the town hall is positive.

Other positive views include:

- View from High Street down Glebeland Street to the mature trees on Castle Street square.
- Looking eastwards down Victoria Street, the dominant building at the end is 62 High Street, and 3 Victoria Street is also quite dominant at the junction with Market Square
- Looking north-westwards along Glebeland Street, its south side is punctuated by the gables halfway along and by the three-storeys rendered facade beyond.

Other views include:

- Looking westwards along Victoria Street there are glimpses of the existing bus station and some trees on the hillside beyond. Clearly the dense urban area gives way to a much more open landscape to the west of the town centre.
- View at the end of Wheatsheaf Lane opens out past the modern civic buildings, wider open spaces to the southwest and to the hills beyond.
- Secondary distant view down Victoria Street to the hill beyond.

Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (features that contribute to its special architectural interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)

The greatest density of dominant four-storeys buildings are grouped between 116 and 114 High Street, plus 62 and 122 High Street. These all date from the prosperity and confidence that must have been felt at the turn of the 20th century. The Town Hall and sheer size of 62 High Street all reinforce the urban scale of the upper half of High Street and make this feel as though it would have been the heart of the town's commercial centre at that time.

Almost all other historic buildings are three-storeys in height, although a lot of the modern infill buildings are two-storeys.

All of the buildings in this area from the turn of the 20th century are signature buildings each by an individual designer. Designers adopted a different architectural language for each and were able to draw on a variety of imported materials. Finishes include facing brickwork, terracotta, terracotta faience and bathstone. Many are gable-fronted, some with decorative barges and bracketed eaves, whilst others have parapet gables. Some have oriel windows continuing the tradition seen on earlier buildings in the town. Each building of this period is quite individual and distinctive in appearance. The scale, commercial nature, materials and distinctiveness of these individually designed buildings continues along parts of Glebeland Street (e.g. 3 and 4 Glebeland Street).

By contrast, the south side of Glebeland street and, despite a few losses, the northern side of Victoria Street retain a number of survivals from the Georgian-styled period of building when the latter would have been a unified formal row facing the market. In their urban Georgian styling these are akin to 129 to 132, 134 and 135 High Street when a much more unified appearance was sought along these rows.

Viewing the rear of Glebeland Street's buildings from Wheatsheaf Lane, the main things to note are the dominance of the slightly elevated three-storeys central section of the rear of Glebeland Street buildings, as well as the three-storeys derelict house and rear of the four-storeys frontage of 3 Glebeland Street beyond.

At the northwest corner of Market Square, 3 Victoria Street is a distinctive detached building with an almost chapel like appearance resulting from its classical detailing.

St.David's Church is a dominant building, even though it is set back slightly. It doesn't really add much to the urban streetscape but its good quality finishes and its dominance are an important feature.

Opportunities could be considered for reinstating historic detailing and materials, and to replacing modern shop frontages, particularly to any the buildings highlighted as positive on the drawings in Appendix A, including:

- 56 High Street;
- 57 High Street;
- 58 High Street;
- 59 High Street;
- 60 High Street;
- 28 to 30, 32 & 33, 36 & 37 Victoria Street;
- 115 to 119 High Street and 56 & 57 Glebeland Street;

- 3 Glebeland Street (Jonathan House).

Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings

There are two Grade II listed buildings in this area:

- 115 High Street. This is listed by Cadw for its 'special architectural interest as a good example of a late C19 commercial building displaying exceptional use of materials in a highly distinctive and sophisticated fashion. Also, important historically as part of the late-19th development of Merthyr Tydfil.'
- 69 High Street (Lloyds Bank). Described by Cadw as being a 'Finely detailed Inter-War classical bank front'. This is listed by Cadw because it is 'Part of a good group of listed public buildings in town centre.', although the interior is specifically mentioned as having an 'Exceptional banking-hall'.

The area contains a large concentration of locally listed buildings:

- 2 John Street (former post office);
- Belle View public house;
- Wyndham Arms public house;
- Narrow Gauge public house.

The Wyndham Arms was shown on John Woods' 1836 map of the town, making this one of the three oldest public houses remaining in the town centre (the others being the Crown Inn and The Vulcan).

The following are described on MTCBC's on-line heritage map as 'proposed', so these are presumably proposed for local listing:

- 62 High Street;
- Former Temperance Hall;
- 119 High Street (Milbourne Chambers).

Consideration could be given to locally listing other highly positive buildings in this area, including:

- 3 Glebeland Street (Jonathan House);
- 4 Glebeland Street (The Narrow Gauge public house);
- 6 to 9 Glebeland Street;
- 114 High Street.
- 28 to 30, 32 to 33, 36 and 37 Victoria Street;
- 3 Victoria Street.

Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

None that we are aware of.

Boundaries, Surfaces & Public Realm

Other than a few remnants of historic hard landscaping, such as the large kerb-stones in Hong Kong Alley, there is no significant historic hard landscaping or street furniture.

The high-quality modern stone paving throughout the 'core' town centre areas unifies the town centre, although it is of no historic interest.

Modern seating in the Market Square is located to the shady and windy northern side. Consideration could be given to providing more seating in the High Street to give more options of places to sit.

A dominant feature of John Street is the old stone boundary wall to the lane behind 62 High Street.

Trees at the far east end of Wheatsheaf Lane help to visually soften this area and help to obscure the rear of the buildings at the eastern end of Victoria Street.

Assessment of condition of the Area

The physical condition of this area is generally very good although there are a number of vacant properties in this area where maintenance is due.

Negative Features & Issues

Although it provides a useful link to the train station, and protection from the elements, Beacons Place is a visually weak part of the Conservation Area, given that it is all modern.

A slight negative is the view, from the junction between High Street and Victoria Street, past St. Tydfil's Church tower to the top two or three stories of the multi-storey block of flats immediately behind it.

Whilst it isn't visible from the core of Conservation Area, the existing bus station is not an attractive aspect. The windowless rear of the bus station and disused buildings alongside the eastern corner of Wheatsheaf Lane make this area feel out of view and slightly unsafe. This feeling continues along Hong Kong Alley. Hong Kong alley is also not a pleasant route since it is a dark, long and low alley with no relief from its modern and poor modern fixtures and finishes. Furthermore, the lilac colour of the painted plain rendered walls either side of Hong Kong alley has no historic basis.

Whilst there are a few modern establishments (e.g. barber and cafes) serving the bus station, there is not much life along Wheatsheaf Lane, and nothing historic. Construction of the new bus station to be completed in 2021 on a brownfield site further south, and closer to the train station, opens up the possibility of improvement of the existing bus station site.

Rubbish and bins are visually negative and no doubt an attraction for vermin in some places:

- Overflowing bins to the rear of Glebeland Street properties in Post Office Lane are particularly bad;
- Within the lane behind Scala leading to car parking areas behind the various properties here;
- A lot of wheelie bins kept along the pavement to the rear of 28 to 33 Victoria Street may be necessary but are visually negative.

The likely mid-20th century rendered corner buildings (e.g. 124 and 125a High Street) at the Victoria Street junction are visually poor.

The semi-pedestrianised nature of parts of High Street is negative from a safety point of view since one is never quite sure whether it is pedestrianised or not.

Specsavers opticians (formerly Poundworld) is an island building that occupies the site of the historic market square. It is a large detached building with a number of blind walls. This adds little to the street and makes no contribution to understanding the historic use of the market square. Its appearance is squat compared to the vertical emphasis of the historic architecture in the area. Consideration could be given to replacement of this building to re-create the historic market square.

The appearance of the vast, drab and brutal concrete clad multi-use building to the west end of Market Square and western end of Victoria Street is poor. However, this building lies outside of the Conservation Area and appears to be largely well used.

Some localised areas of modern stone paving, for example adjacent to 122 and 123 High Street, have been replaced with Tarmacadam-type finishes, probably during replacement of services, leading to a patchwork effect.

A large modern streetlight has unfortunately been placed tight to the elevation of 32 Victoria Street which is probably one of the oldest buildings in this area.

The past replacement of historic buildings on Victoria Street's north side (e.g. 31, 34 and 38) has affected and unbalanced the appearance of what was probably once a unified formally composed row. This is particularly because the heights, fenestration and finishes of the infill buildings differ.

The view of the large modern flat roofed building at the end of Glebeland Street's northern side is poor, although this lies just outside the Conservation Area.

As one drops down from Church Street to John Street, the overriding poor view to the south is of the services plant on the flat roof of Tesco supermarket. There is also no pavement on that side of the road even though some people desire to walk on that side.

Some historic elements are missing, for example:

- Balcony from the upper floor of 115 High Street;
- Oriel window and ironwork missing from 1st floor of 60 High Street.

Many modern shop fronts have oversized and garish signage and many have opaque external roller shutters.

There appear to be more vacant properties in the northern half of High street than the southern half.

4 PENDERYN SQUARE & CASTLE STREET

Layout & Street Pattern

Penderyn Square is a well-designed and well-detailed pedestrianized modern public square formed after the demolition, in 2011, of the former Castle Cinema that covered most of the site.

High Street maintains its historic linear route through this area although traffic patterns have been adapted to accommodate the pedestrianisation of the square, which provides a welcome relief and variation to the liner and relatively narrow High Street to the north and south. Traffic currently flows one-way from Church Street and up through High Street Pontmorlais largely to access and serve the shops along the latter, but also to access Pontmorlais West and Penydarren Road. Castle Street has been blocked off by the creation of the public square so this now only serves premises along Old Post Office Lane and the remainder of Castle Street.

Castle Street is one of the most historic streets in the town centre, apparently laid down by 1813-14, although now only its line remains, all the buildings having been removed or replaced.

Castle Yard and Post Office Lane are quiet historic back lanes visible on John Woods' 1836 map running parallel to High Street. These would have served High Street's buildings and provided access to humbler dwellings and backyard industries.

Tramroadside North, running down the eastern edge of the Town Centre Conservation Area, is the former route of the historic (Penydarren) Merthyr tramway and from Church Street northwards has become a quiet narrow one-way rear lane serving the rear of High Street's eastern buildings as well as the worker's cottages built alongside it in the early to mid-19th century.

Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)

Spaces and Places

The formation of the new Penderyn Square appears to have been a very successful and positive change. This has created a high quality public space that has been used successfully for public gatherings and events since its formation in 2011. This has given the (Old / former) Town Hall even more presence than it previously had and has reinforced the sense of civic scale that existed in the group of public buildings already there - Hope Chapel, the Old Town Hall, Carnegie Library and St. David's Church. These buildings are all free-standing and set back from the eastern pavement line. Furthermore, the library

and St David's Church have landscaped forecourts that provide some visual relief and soft landscaping after the relatively narrow High Street to the south and Pontmorlais to the north.

One minor downside in forming Penderyn Square is that the demolition of the cinema opened up a view of the utilitarian telephone exchange building to the northwest and also of the multi-storey 'Oldway House' to the southwest of the square.



Poor view of telephone exchange building to west side of Penderyn Square

Tramroadside North is a long and narrow linear route largely defined by stone walls each side.

Views

The wide open expanse of Penderyn Square, and numerous side streets, allow distant views of the town and surrounding landscape, mainly down Castle Street to the hillside beyond. This also opens up views of the Old Town Hall from the square and reinforces this as a major focal point in the town centre.

The view from Penderyn Square down High Street is channelled by the building frontages leading down High Street and to the hillside far beyond.

Looking south from Penderyn Square, there is not much to announce an urban centre, and there is no significant height visible to the buildings beyond 114 to 119 High Street, although this is probably largely due to the lie of the land, falling gently away to the south.

The poor view of the telephone exchange has a negative impact on the new public space and would benefit from screening e.g. with a new tree line or other feature. Oldway House isn't as distracting as the exchange but its sheer size, the detailing of its street level signage and the telecoms equipment on

its roof have a negative visual presence. These buildings do not lie within the Conservation Area, but they are an example of the impact that buildings adjacent to Conservation Areas can have on the area itself.

Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (features that contribute to its special architectural interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)

This area is characterised by a number of distinct free-standing historic buildings to the east of High Street, so there is not much shared between them architecturally although the Old Town Hall and Library are all raised on shallow semi-basement plinths. This gives them a sense of grandeur and helps create their civic appearance. They are all of architectural interest and their original designs remain largely intact.

Hope Church

Hope Church has a stripped-down / functional Victorian Gothic appearance and uses the local snecked, rock-faced stone for walling with freestone or buff brick surrounds to the openings; the ironwork railings to the perimeter wall have been replaced with simple mild steel versions but the substantial piers and low wall with chamfered copings remain; the slate roof has clay ridge tiles but the central turret vent has not survived.



Hope Church

Old Town Hall

The Old Town Hall is by far the most dominant building in this area.

The exuberance and detail of the Old Town Hall (and former County Court) is in dramatic contrast to its neighbours, Hope Church and the library. The red brick and buff terracotta (similarly used subsequently

at the YMCA building, Pontmorlais Circus) are combined to create a lively Jacobethan exterior to all elevations with elaborate gables, turrets and parapets, surmounted by a steep slate roof with lead ridge rolls and capped by a clock turret placed centrally on the west elevation; the cupola over the clock tower has been removed and some of the chimneys have been rebuilt in plain brickwork rather than restoring the original terracotta details.

The Old Town Hall has recently been renovated and is now in use as a venue for creative arts industries.



Old Town Hall

Carnegie Library

The Library is a simple and sparingly detailed pale concrete-faced block, built 1935-36, with wide, overhanging eaves and a hipped (Westmorland) slate roof, laid in diminishing courses, that is quite uncharacteristic of the area and gives the building a fresh and distinctive identity. Designed by Councillor T Edmund Rees (of Messrs Johnson, Richards & Rees, architects of Merthyr).



Carnegie Library

St David's Church

St David's Church was built 1846-7 and was designed by the highly respected T H Wyatt and D Brandon Architects (London). This uses a similar palette of materials to Hope Chapel, however the simple gothic detailing is more typically 'English Gothic' in character.

, squeezed between the church and the tramroad on the eastern edge of the site. This follows the same theme as the church building itself although later additions have a rendered finish to the external walls to the rear.



St.David's Church

Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings

This area contains few buildings, although almost all of them are recognised as heritage assets.

The Old Town Hall is Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre's only Grade II* listed building. It was designed by and built in 1896. It was listed by Cadw because of its:

materials...'

and because:

'The building has important historical associations as the focal point of civic and political life in the town, and is notably linked to Keir Hardie's historic election victory in 1900.'

The area also contains three Grade II listed buildings, and almost every building in this area is listed:

- St.David's Church;
- Carnegie Library;
- Former County Court. This forms part of the Old Town Hall building although curiously it is separately Grade II listed.

This area also includes some Grade II listed structures:

-
- Statue & Plinth to Henry Seymour Berry;
-

The reasons for listing all of the Grade II listed buildings and structures above is because they are '

Hope Church is described on MTCBC's on-line heritage map as a 'proposed' locally listed building.

Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

The Old Town Hall was the

The

Merthyr Tydfil has had a long association with dissent and an urban culture of political radicalism. Significant strikes and protests in 1800 and 1816 were ended violently. These were overshadowed by the Merthyr Rising in June 1831 when at least twenty protesters were shot and killed by British government troops. For the first time, the red flag of revolution was flown as a symbol of workers' revolt, although the protest was effectively ended by the government after a few days. The subsequent trials

of the main people thought to have been involved, and the hanging of Richard Lewis (Dic Penderyn) at Cardiff Market in August 1831 for stabbing a soldier in the leg with a seized bayonet, left bitterness and, for many, created a martyr.

From 1839, Merthyr Tydfil emerged as a main centre for Chartism.

Boundaries, Surfaces & Public Realm

The spaces around the properties have been carefully detailed and designed to enhance the setting of these important civic and religious buildings.

The perimeter terracotta wall, piers and railings around the Old Town Hall basement area include some very good examples of late-19th century ironwork which is matched in the standards supporting the lamps that flank the impressive entrance steps.

The forecourt to the library forms a backdrop for the listed bronze statue of Henry Seymour Berry, although the statue and low railings on a coped plinth, pre-date the library building.

The High Street boundary to St David's Church incorporates a cast iron memorial fountain set within a small stone gabled wall. This interrupts the reproduction railings that surround the south and west sides of the grounds. The modern tap within appears incongruous and it seems to be an overlooked and ill-treated historic detail. A short section of what appears to be the earlier 19th century boundary railings remains in place on the northern boundary of the church. The areas within the churchyard are predominantly grassed with some Tarmacadam-type paths, a drive and a mix of young and mature trees.

The rear boundaries, on Tramroadside North, are generally constructed of roughly coursed or random rubble with matching rock-faced coping details. There is section of modern galvanised palisade fencing elevated behind the Library / Town Hall car park which is not in keeping with the quality of the remainder of the buildings, but its impact on the High Street is limited because of its location. It does however have a negative impact on the aspect from the terraced row on Tramroadside North that lies within the adjacent Thomastown Conservation Area.

Penderyn Square is paved with imported granite setts to create a unified scheme of hard landscaping throughout this area, with well-designed street furniture and visitor information totem. These appear well-detailed and high quality. The granite setts continue throughout the pedestrianised square where there is a visually welcome area of green / grass alongside 97 High Street.

There are good quality, symmetrically placed, street lamps outside the Library that don't feature in early photographs.

Fairly inconspicuous new streetlights and CCTV masts have been used, with only one of the CCTV masts being larger than it probably needed to be.

Assessment of condition of the Area

The physical condition of the area is very good and is clearly being well looked after.

Negative Features & Issues

The view of the telephone exchange building to the west of the pedestrianized square is poor, and ideally should be visually screened (e.g. by a line of trees etc.) when viewed from the Old Town Hall in particular. This screening might also extend to screen the ground floor of the multi-storey building to the southwest corner of the square.

Traffic is, at times, a negative feature through this section of High Street and through High Street Pontmorlais. Church Road bisects High Street as it turns around the corner at the church. A few cars are driven much too fast through this area, and after 3pm this road gets particularly busy.





General views of Penderyn Square

5 PONTMORLAIS



General views up and down High Street

Layout & Street Pattern

(High Street) Pontmorlais continues High Street's historic linear route steadily rising up from St.Tydfil's Church, through the town centre, to the crossing point of Morlais stream at its northern end. The area currently stretches between two focal points, Pontmorlais Circus in the north, and Penderyn Square to the south.

Its route, sinuous in nature, suggests that this is one of the earlier, more organic, phases of the town's development, and it is clearly visible on George Yates' 1799 map of the town.

The 1851 Public Health Map shows a number of alleys and lanes running perpendicularly off and parallel behind the western side of High Street. These included Vulcan Court, Zoar Court, Mill Lane, Bowen's Court and The Castle Yard. These would have provided access to backyard industries and humble

terraced rows of small dwellings. Some of the historic lanes still exist to the west side of High Street Pontmorlais, including Old Mill Lane, and the alleys alongside the Vulcan and leading to Capel Soar. Part of Bowen's Court still exists behind the infilled openings of 8 Pontmorlais. Surviving outbuildings, workshops and stores probably still exist in some places although these are difficult to view from the public realm. One of the more substantial that can be seen is the Old (Grist) Mill on Old Mill Lane. This retains some of the character of the small-scale local industries that would have served the town.

Development behind the eastern side of High Street was much less developed, and restricted by Tramroadside North, although significant gaps visible on John Woods' 1836 town map had been infilled by 1851. Three perpendicular lanes, including Robert's Lane, connected with Tramroadside North and a number of gated alleyways ran beneath terraced rows to provide access to private rear yards, suggesting they had no access from Tramroadside North. Two of the lanes, including Robert's Lane, and two of these gated alleyways have survived to 97 Pontmorlais and 88 High Street.

The stepped terraced dwellings along Roberts Lane and one or two dilapidated dwellings in Bowen's Court are the only survivals of the dwellings that were built along these side lanes.

The (Penydarren) Merthyr Tramroad had been built by 1802 and ran north to south along the eastern edge of the town centre. A few rows of ironworkers' cottages had been built along the eastern side of Tramroadside North by the mid-19th century. One of these continues in use at the southern end of this area, although it currently lies within the Thomastown Conservation Area.

Tramroadside North is currently a narrow one-way lane providing access along the rear of the eastern side of High Street.

Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)

High Street itself is the primary linear focus for the area, with the greatest effort put into the design of the facades facing onto it.

The relatively narrow and gently winding route of High Street Pontmorlais is contained between properties of generally two-to-three storeys in height, built directly at back-of-pavement. This creates a strong sense of enclosure and ever-changing oblique views at street level, with limited distant views up and down the street. The more prominent buildings such as The Imperial Hotel, 75 Pontmorlais and particularly Morlais Buildings, tend to draw the eye as the visual focus on the outside of the bends in the high street.

There are occasional breaks in the largely commercial frontages onto the High Street, such as Wesley Chapel, the missing building immediately to the north of it and modern replacement buildings such as the Voluntary Action Centre.



Morlais Buildings towards middle of High Street (Imperial Hotel to right hand side)



Northern end of High Street

Wesley Chapel is slightly stepped back from the general building line to present an imposing late-classical rendered façade of a generous scale. The site of an earlier building to the north of the chapel has been cleared in the past to form a small car parking area. This gap means the rubble stonework side elevation of the chapel is visible. This 'unfinished' elevation was not originally meant to be seen.



Wesley Chapel with ad-hoc car park alongside where a building once stood

Views

The narrow width and enclosed nature of High Street Pontmorlais means that, other than at its ends, views are mostly of the facades following the gently curving line of the street. These inward looking views are a large part of the character of this area.

Contrast is provided at each end of Pontmorlais with views widening out to the more open space of Pontmorlais Circus to the North and the wide expanse of Penderyn Square to the south.

The few narrow historic side lanes and alleyways provide still important routes and secondary views into informal backyards and courtyards where small scale industries historically took place.

Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (features that contribute to its special architectural interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)

The buildings within Pontmorlais are mostly commercial (usually with dwellings above), public houses and hotels, a few former places of worship (e.g. Wesley Chapel and Capel Soar), or small dwellings, mostly along the side lanes. It seems likely that many of the earliest buildings may have been simple one or two-storeys dwellings before conversion or complete replacement with larger commercial properties. A few of these earlier one and two storeys buildings remain showing that development was mostly piecemeal, although some sites were re-developed in two or three-storeys blocks so that adjacent properties shared common details. Examples include 1-6 Morlais Buildings, 9 to 11 and 16 to 22 Pontmorlais, although different ownerships have sometimes blurred relationships. Only a few of the buildings are free-standing.

Many of the two-storeys commercial properties were probably built in the first half of the 19th century and many have survived, particularly along the west side of High Street. These have a traditional duo-pitched roof form, often with dormers, simple proportions to their fenestration, and stucco rendered walls with decorative moulded 1st floor window surrounds. This created a unified appearance to these rows.

Perhaps because the bend in High Street gave them the greatest visual presence, the eastern side of High Street appears to have experienced the greatest level of commercial development in the late 19th century and at the turn of the 20th century. This side of High Street includes the greatest concentration of three-storeys commercial buildings, helping to create an urban scale. Some of the earliest of these continued the tradition of stucco rendered facades, but increasingly these were developed as signature buildings, designed to impress. These were often gable fronted and used a wide variety of imported materials, styles and architectural details, making them quite distinctive and alien in appearance.

Other building types, such as the Imperial (originally Tiger Inn) Hotel, Vulcan Inn, Morlais Castle and 1-2 Pontmorlais ("Ye Olde Express") provide an alternative to the roller-shuttered shop fronts and do much to enhance and add positive qualities to the townscape.

As elsewhere in the Town Centre Conservation Area, characteristically eclectic late 19th and early 20th century architectural styles and details are still much in evidence along High Street Pontmorlais. The existing original details that remain are an indication of the richness and quality of detailing the facades most of these buildings once had.

Most of the historic ground floor shopfronts and street frontages have been replaced during the 20th century so that only a few details have survived. 9 Pontmorlais may be the best example, and the pilasters subdividing 1-6 Morlais Buildings retain some very good examples of sculptural stone corbels.



9 Pontmorlais



1 Morlais Buildings



1-2 Pontmorlais (Ye Olde Express)

Upper storeys of the 19th century and early 20th century buildings retain a lot of historic details including stucco render, rendered mouldings, joinery details, dormers, oriel windows original fenestration and, to the later buildings, decorative stonework and facing brickwork. However, in the past there has been a significant erosion of character resulting from the loss of timber windows, fascias, bargeboards, dormers, cast iron rainwater goods and chimneystacks. Many buildings on both sides of the High Street have been re-slatted using artificial slate, although this is only really visible on the two-storeys buildings. Some of the characteristic small, pitched roof dormers remain to punctuate the roofline but few retain any original joinery details.

As elsewhere through the town centre many characterful and attractive details visible on historic photographs that are not visible today include:

- shop awnings;
- hand-painted lettering on external walls and glazing;
- natural slate cladding to walls (excepting Capel Soar);
- projecting bracketed signage;
- curved plate glass;
- projecting bracketed lighting.

The urban two and three-storeys scale of most of the buildings on High Street Pontmorlais occasionally drops down to less formal duo-pitched roof buildings with a more human scale (e.g. 14 and 15 Pontmorlais; 88 Pontmorlais; 82 High Street). The side lanes (e.g. Old Mill Lane) also provided space for humble dwellings or backyard industry to take place. Occasionally a distinctive detached building (e.g. 1-2 Pontmorlais (Ye Olde Express)) also interrupt the urban scale of High Street Pontmorlais.

The building-by-building analysis in Appendix C of this (2020) CAA illustrates that the majority of the buildings have been altered inappropriately in the past, although most of these probably happened before the Conservation Area was formed in 2009. Current typical examples of such alterations include:

- 8 Pontmorlais: This is still a small detached building, but the front wall has been extended upwards with a parapet and sideways right up to the neighboring building. This encloses the courtyard historically opening onto High Street. The only benefit of this wall is that it largely hides the ductwork from 6-7 Pontmorlais as well as an overgrown yard.
- 87 High Street: This was once a highly glazed shop frontage extending at ground floor level across two buildings. The glazed shop front at ground floor and 1st floor levels have been replaced in the past. The 1st floor glazing has been replaced with rendered masonry.
- Morlais Buildings: Originally designed as 6no. matching gable-fronted properties. Individual ownership had led to loss of original detailing of shopfronts and replacement of highly-glazed 1st floor frontages. These have diluted the original designs and reduced the group value to the townscape. Some poor original design and construction detailing has led to building fabric problems and some poor solutions.
- Wesley Chapel: The forecourt railings, gateway, gateway arch, low stone walls and stone piers have all been removed in the past. Some higher level mouldings have been removed and inappropriate blue and brilliant white paint finishes have been applied to the front elevation.

A number of positive buildings have recently been successfully restored or reproduced, based on historic evidence, and this has enhanced the appearance of the Conservation Area:

- 97 High Street;
- 98 High Street;
- Vulcan Inn;
- The Anchor Inn;
- 93, 94 & 95 Pontmorlais;
- 5 Pontmorlais;
- 3 Morlais Buildings;
- 73 Pontmorlais (Former Morlais Castle Inn);

Restoration of many of the other historic buildings in Pontmorlais would also visually enhance the Conservation Area.

Some modern infill developments such as the Voluntary Action Centre (VAC) and 92, 93 & 94 and 95 & 96 High Street bear little or no relation to the character or architectural form of historic developments in the area.

Roberts Lane, off the east side of the High Street, has a short, narrow stepped terrace of small, two-storey dwellings on its north side. The materials and finishes have been extensively altered but the terrace's compact scale and topography remain and provide visual interest. The character of the lane is more intimate and domestic, and a pleasant contrast to the commercial High Street.



Roberts Lane

The rear elevations of the High Street properties visible from Tramroadside North retain little evidence of 19th century materials or details apart from the occasional, dilapidated natural slate roof and / or derelict outbuilding. The situation seems better to the west side of the upper length of High Street Pontmorlais where several outbuildings and former workshops appear to have survived probably because of the physical restrictions of limited access along narrow, private lanes and alleyways. These structures are generally of rubble walling, sometimes lime-washed, with brick surrounds to openings and natural slate or later replacement corrugated sheet roofs. Castle Yard has unfortunately not fared so well and suffered from the widespread application of modern sand/cement renders, assumed construction of significant infills or extensions, and loss of all visible historic details.



Poor appearance of buildings along Castle Yard

A number of THI projects have recently been completed within Pontmorlais and these have clearly made a very positive contribution to the quality of the historic townscape of High Street Pontmorlais. Some of the most noticeable improvements have included:

- new and lower key / more appropriate signage;
- reinstating the generally historical vertical emphasis in the elevation;
- retention and repair of existing historic details;
- reinstatement of missing historic details;
- removal of accretions and/or inappropriate claddings/materials;
- re-building of missing chimneystacks.



97 High Street (THI works recently completed)



93 to 95 Pontmorlais (THI works recently completed)



5 Pontmorlais (THI works recently completed)



96 Pontmorlais (Anchor Inn) (THI works recently completed)



9 to 11 Pontmorlais



17 & 18 Pontmorlais

Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings

Pontmorlais has three (listed Grade II) designated heritage assets:

- Capel Soar;
- Capel Soar's wrought iron entrance gates and stone piers;
- Wesley Chapel.

Capel Soar, originally a Welsh language independent chapel, was originally built in 1801, rebuilt in 1825

The chapel is a large building, Vernacular in style, although it is largely hidden away behind commercial properties on High Street. Its only presence on High Street are its attractive wrought iron gates and narrow alleyway behind, leading to its main entrance.

Capel Soar was successfully renovated, extended and converted into Theatr Soar in 2011. An active arts venue, Theatre Soar helps to provide a healthier mix of uses in this otherwise commercial and relatively 'take-away' oriented area. The adjacent rear elevations of buildings along Castle Yard, on the approach to Theatr Soar, are visually very poor and so slightly detrimental to the appearance of the Capel Soar.

Wesley Chapel, originally an 'English' Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, was designed as a gable-entry chapel in a neo-classical style and built in 1862. The building appears to be currently vacant, having

lastly been used as a second-hand furniture shop. The condition and appearance of Wesley Chapel are suffering due to lack of use and maintenance.

Cadw have not given reasons for the designations of Capel Soar and Wesley Chapel. Cadw's reasons for listing the Capel Soar gates and stone posts are for their 'Pontmorlais.'

Pontmorlais contains two locally listed buildings:

- Olde Express Inn;
- Imperial Hotel.

Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

None that we are aware of.

Boundaries, Surfaces & Public Realm

The northern boundary is formed by Morlais stream (Nant Morlais) and the western boundary is largely poorly defined by the modern car park and the visually poor Castle Yard lane. The southern boundary of this area is not physically defined but 97 High Street and Roberts Lane provide a natural break before the character changes to that of Penydarren Square.

The eastern side of Tramroadside North, and boundary of the Town Centre Conservation Area, is, to the northern end, defined by rubble stone retaining walls with an overgrown and steeply sloping embankment beyond. The embankment changes to a row of cottages at the southern end.

The western side of Tramroadside North is mostly formed by the rear boundary walls of High Street properties. Some of these walls are very high and so prevent 'policing' of the lane alongside these, although some are probably historic relating to the 1802 Penydarren (Merthyr) Tramroad, and these should be retained. This is perhaps partly why this is a relatively unkempt route, but it is also very much a back-lane serving the properties and not a main route for passers-by. The road surface is functionally finished with a Tarmacadam-type finish.

High Street is paved using good quality modern Pennant slabs and kerbs. These help to create consistency and visual unity, although none of the paving on High Street itself is of historic interest.

Modern street lighting and bollards are uniformly painted black and cast iron drainage channels are incorporated flush with the pavement surface to carry rainwater drainage beneath the footway.

Some of the historic side lanes and alleyways are paved with old stone used in several ways:

- Roberts Lane has a pavement of stone slabs, but with some Tarmacadam-type replacements;
- 'Rippled' stone slabs east end of the alleyway between The Vulcan Inn and Ye Olde Express;
- Old Mill Lane has stone sett margins to either side of a Tarmacadam-type surface and then opens out into various backyards which still retain their original sett and slab surfaces.

Historic finishes such as these should be preserved, although ensuring they are maintained in a safe condition.

Tramroadside North is finished with a Tarmacadam-type finish throughout with double-yellow lines along both sides. These double-yellow lines are visually quite dominant. The current appearance of Tramroadside North does little to recall its historic industrial importance to the area.

Assessment of condition of the Area

The condition of the area along High Street is generally good, although the condition of some vacant buildings (in particular the former Wesley Chapel) are poor and deteriorating.

Tramroadside North is generally in fairly good condition although the rear elevations of some of the High Street buildings are visually poor in some instances and there are occasionally poor views into unkempt yards, a few filled with rubbish.

Negative Features & Issues

The concentration of take-away food outlets along High Street Pontmorlais contributes little to daytime activity and accentuates the poor mix of uses in this commercial area.



Concentration of (externally) shuttered fast-food outlets
towards southern end of High Street



Typical example of dominating fast-food signage

The quality and appearance of High Street Pontmorlais at street level has the greatest impact on the perception of the street, yet unfortunately this is where most of the inappropriate changes have taken place in the past. For example, unsympathetic shop fronts with external roller shutters, over-dominant lettering or signage, oversized fascia boards, illuminated signs, and inappropriate colour schemes all detract from the area's appearance and conflict with the architectural character of the buildings and the area. Of these issues, external roller shutters drawn fully down during the day are one of the most significant visual and character problems on High Street since they foster a negative and 'dead' streetscape during the daytime.

The amount of advertising and signage relating to the commercial uses is distracting, often poorly / inappropriately detailed and rarely relates to the surviving historic features of the facades. There are numerous projecting, internally illuminated signs and surface mounted flood and spotlights along with their associated cabling, junction boxes etc. Some recently installed take-away signage begs the question whether the existing legislation is providing MTCBC with enough control over such material alterations. The worst of these are either too large or too garish in colour and are a significant visual distraction within the Conservation Area.

Some poor quality infill developments bear no relation to the special character of the Conservation Area. Unfortunately, opportunities for improving these will be very limited in the near future.

There are still many buildings within Pontmorlais that have been inappropriately altered in the past or have lost historic details. For example, there are still many modern flush doors; uPVC (white and brown) rainwater goods, windows, doors, cladding and fascia boards; modern window replacements that sit

flush to the elevation; inappropriate stylised reproductions of windows and shop fronts (sometimes creating a horizontal emphasis whereas historically they would have had vertical proportions) and some large areas of modern sand/cement render. Furthermore, poorly considered fixing of modern services such as satellite dishes, electrical cabling, security alarms and re-routed drainage on the frontage of buildings also detract from heritage value of the properties. These factors are all detrimental to the historic character of the area.



Proliferation of un-coordinated services

Modern colour schemes used of some buildings (e.g. Imperial Hotel) and many shopfronts (e.g. 16 Pontmorlais; and 71 and 72 High Street) are too garish and insensitive for this Conservation Area, and without historic basis.

The western elevations of buildings along Church Yard between Soar Chapel and 97 High Street are visually very poor. Castle Yard now forms an important approach to Penderyn Square from the public car park to the north. Wall finishes include large areas of textured sand/cement render and inappropriate windows and doors have been installed throughout. These very visible elevations could be greatly improved on this important approach.

Furthermore, a small number of likely historic backyard industries and buildings have seemingly evolved with little or no thought to their external appearance. Most are probably not visible, but Furniture Zone is unfortunately a particularly visible example now there is a main public car park and the main approach to Theatre Soar, to the west of it.

As seen elsewhere through the town centre, some localised areas of modern high-quality stone paving have been replaced with Tarmacadam-type finishes (e.g. adjacent to 122 and 123 High Street), probably during replacement of services, leading to a patchwork effect.

Traffic is, at times, a negative feature and after 3pm this road gets particularly busy, with traffic queuing through the northern end of High Street Pontmorlais to access Penydarren Road and Pontmorlais West.

Some old boundary walls along the west side of the Tramroadside North have been lost. This has lost definition and revealed the unkempt rear of some properties, some harbouring a lot of rubbish. Consideration needs to be given to how maintenance and cleaning / clearing of privately owned areas like this can be encouraged and / or enforced since they are detrimental to the appearance and character of the Conservation Area. Residents should continue to be encouraged to keep these areas maintained, clean and tidy or to reinstate missing historic stone boundary walls, not least to screen untidy areas. Graffiti has also been a visual problem along Tramroadside North, although this isn't as noticeable as it was in 2016.



Adjacent buildings visually poor on important approach to Chapel Soar (Theatr Soar)



Typical view of Tramroadside North Pontmorlais



Former sweet factory to rear of 9



Outbuildings to rear of 9 Pontmorlais Chapel (Theatr Soar)



Entrance gateway to Soar



Lane access between 8 & 9 Pontmorlais
Vulcan Inn



Lane access to High Street, alongside The



Missing boundary walls exposing unkempt areas to some properties along Tramroad Side North





Typical graffiti to walls / properties along Tramroadside North



View from High Street opening out into Penderyn Square

6 PONTMORLAIS CIRCUS & PONTMORLAIS WEST



Views of the northeastern side of Pontmorlais Circus

Layout & Street Pattern

The historic crossing point of the Morlais stream, between the higher land to the north and the historic town to the south, gave Pontmorlais its name and the junction on its northern side has become known locally as Pontmorlais Circus.

From the early-19th century, Pontmorlais West and Penydarren Road were developed as vital transport routes for the Dowlais Ironworks' and Penydarren Ironworks' tramroads. The first tramroad followed the line of the currently raised Promenade along the western side of Penydarren Road and ran westwards along Pontmorlais West. The later (Penydarren) Merthyr Tramroad ran down the eastern side of the town centre.

The rising ground to the northwest of Pontmorlais Circus was the edge of the grounds of Penydarren Park until its redevelopment in the late-19th century.

The layout and pattern of the few buildings within Pontmorlais Circus are consequently in two distinct phases of development. Those along Pontmorlais West and to the south and east of Pontmorlais Circus are part of the denser character of the earlier phase whilst the later phase of buildings to the northern side of the Circus are independent free-standing formal buildings. These two groups of buildings are currently physically separated by the busy road running northeast to southwest (Penydarren Road to Pontmorlais West road).

The incline along High Street continues up Penydarren Road and to a lesser extent up through Pontmorlais West.

Pontmorlais West feels like a fairly remote part of the Town Centre Conservation Area although it is important because it retains several buildings from the early-19th century phase of development along the south side of the earliest tramroad route.

Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)

Pontmorlais Circus is an important entrance point to the town centre, particularly for those arriving on foot, from the large residential estates to the northern side of Merthyr Tydfil. Currently, vehicular traffic leaves High Street Pontmorlais from this point, and at busy times the unpleasant traffic queues and resulting fumes extend down into Pontmorlais.

The busy Penydarren and Pontmorlais West roads and derelict nature of the YMCA building do not make this area welcoming for pedestrians. However, the area contains a number of significant formal buildings to the northern side of Pontmorlais Circus. The steeply rising land on which these buildings stand accentuates the civic scale and the dominance of these buildings over Pontmorlais. These buildings and the retaining walls beneath them provide a visual and physical boundary defining the northern half of Pontmorlais Circus.

The rear elevation of the Masonic Temple is a dominant focal point viewed from the top of High Street although its nature and lack of openings on this side of the building are not at all welcoming. The Masonic Temple is the only building in the area to face onto Park Terrace to the north.

The YMCA building is a more oblique focal point and the most dominant of the group due to its close proximity, four-storeys height and because of its distinctive orange terracotta finishes. The current view of the YMCA building from High Street was opened up by the demolition of the prominent corner building in mid / late-20th century.

The war memorial is not small in itself but is visually 'lost' because of the lie of the land, the physical barriers (i.e. high steel railings), the distance between it and the street below, and because it is belittled by the neighboring buildings, particularly the recently constructed three-storeys block of flats.

To the southwest and east of Pontmorlais Circus there was a significant loss of the sense of urban enclosure and grain due to the demolition, in the early 1980s, of the Owain Glyndwr public house and numbers 51 to 55 High Street Pontmorlais. The former corner site is currently a slightly overgrown

seating area and the latter site is a well-used public car park. The major work carried out was presumably to ensure the stability of the watercourse, running underground in this area. It seems a little unfortunate that there is no visible sign of Nant Morlais or 'pont' (bridge) that gave the area its name but this seemed to be the case even before the major engineering works in the mid / late-20th century.

Whilst the car park is clearly a missing piece of the historic grain of the town it is well used and clearly useful at this end of the town. Furthermore, the scale of the trees and design of the hard landscaping along the street help to draw the eye away from the functional car park behind. Conversely the seating area on the opposite side of High Street is an underused and overgrown area and remains a weak and missing piece of the historic grain.

The deeply lying Morlais stream is currently only just audible adjacent to Bolgoed Place and within the car park behind Theatre Soar, so it has very little presence within the Conservation Area. The lack of space alongside Morlais stream and its deeply lying nature mean there is not much opportunity to take advantage of it as a natural feature. However, the route of the stream is visible through the Theatre Soar car park as a dense tree lined edge, and this is visually positive, offering a little visual relief beyond the expanse of the car park and buildings to the east of it.

Views

The view down Pontmorlais High Street, from the northern end of Pontmorlais Circus, is important, and the topography and street, gently curving out of view, draws the eye.

The elevated parking area for the flats recently built off Park Terrace, just above the war memorial, provides a new good view down over Pontmorlais. This would essentially have been the view from the war memorial site, although this site is not normally open, reportedly due to problems with antisocial behaviour.

The best view of the façade of the disused Theatre Royal is from the Promenade on the opposite side of Penydarren Road although, along with Thespian House next to it, these are not attractive buildings externally, having lost some key elements, and these are currently in poor condition. The Theatre Royal no doubt holds significant social and community heritage value even if it doesn't hold a lot of architectural significance externally.

From the pavement elevated above former drill hall on Pontmorlais West there are reasonable views across the roof tops of Pontmorlais and to the distant hills beyond. These help provide context for the town centre.

There is a view down the lane alongside Bolgoed Place, to the three-storeys warehouse building behind Merthyr Upholsterers. The warehouse building appears to be a largely intact survival from the second half of the 19th century phase of development and appears to be in fairly good condition. As a survival of one the historic backyard businesses characteristic in Pontmorlais it offers historic interest. The warehouse is also now visible from Pontmorlais after the demolition of the Owain Glyndwr public house and numbers 51 to 55 High Street Pontmorlais in the mid / late-20th century.

There is a good view of the YMCA building when approaching from higher up Pontmorlais West, although this is currently marred by the building's poor condition.



View from Pontmorlais Circus, looking down High Street

Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (Features That Contribute to Its Special Architectural Interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)

Civic-scale / Public / Assembly Buildings

The prominent group of early-20th century detached buildings, most on steeply rising ground to the northwest of Pontmorlais West and Penydarren Road, create an imposing backdrop to Pontmorlais Circus. These comprise:

- YMCA;
- Masonic Temple;
- War Memorial;
- Former Labour Exchange (façade only);
- Theatre Royal.

The Theatre Royal is included within this group as the northernmost town-centre scale building.

The design of the YMCA building is an interesting early-20th century development of the Classical style and of interest as the first building designed by the highly respected architect, Percy Thomas (later Sir Percy Thomas). The YMCA (built 1911) is more akin to the Old Town Hall (built 1896) largely due to their similar palette of materials. In both cases these were a brave and bold contrast to the relatively drab grey Pennant sandstone that was dominant in most areas of the south Wales valleys.

Unfortunately, the YMCA building is currently derelict and the openings are temporarily sheeted. The original pitched roof and many of the roof level details have clearly been missing for many years. A temporary metal sheet over-roof has been installed as part of the 'holding-works' completed as part of the first phase of THI works. We understand there are still efforts being made to restore it and bring it back into use, and this opportunity should be greatly encouraged.



YMCA building

The Masonic Temple is a substantial formal building. Whilst it does not appear to be architecturally significant externally it retains some good iron railings to its front elevation on Park Terrace. It is also positive in that it is still in regular use, and for its original purpose, so it appears to be in fairly good condition because of this.

The central main entrance façade of the former Labour Exchange has (somewhat incongruously) been retained as part of the development of the land behind, for affordable housing. Whilst the retention of the façade retains some visual and evidential heritage and architectural value for the Conservation Area there is no denying that the former Labour Exchange building, a former chapel, has gone.



Main entrance of former Labour Exchange building behind scaffold

Whilst stood apart, these buildings relate to one another because they share a formal Classical language and civic scale, and because they are roughly grouped together.

Commercial Buildings

This area retains a few good examples of commercial buildings dating from the early-19th century phase of development along the line of the first tramroad, principally Bolgoed Place and 49-50 High Street. These are traditional two-storeys duo-pitched shops with dwellings above. They retain some traditional details such as dormers, stucco rendered walls with rendered moulded 1st floor window surrounds and some good traditional shop front elements. The former 'Flooks' jeweller's shop at 49 and 50 High Street has some of the best surviving late-19th century shopfront details in Pontmorlais with encaustic tiling to entrance thresholds and stall risers, engraved brass sill plates (repeatedly stolen), timber pilasters, cast corbel brackets, cornices and hand painted signage, albeit interspersed with utilitarian external security grilles. 1, 2 and 3 Bolgoed Place have recently been well restored during the second round of THI works.



'Flooks' jewellers



56 & 57 Pontmorlais

Nos. 1 to 4 Bolgoed Place

The demolition works undertaken during the mid / late-20th century in this area have left notable interruptions in the street pattern and resulted in the re-facing of exposed party walls on 4 Bolgoed Place (currently rendered), and 50 High Street and 56 Pontmorlais (finished with red clay facing brickwork). The clearance also revealed the rear elevations of 3 and 4 Bolgoed Place.

Dwellings

Traditional terraced dwellings and some commercial properties had been in the early-19th century, following the line of the Dowlais Tramroad, along the southern side of Pontmorlais West and the east side of Penydarren Road. The of earliest of these are the terraced dwellings at the western end of Pontmorlais West and on Bolgoed Place. On the opposite, eastern, side of Pontmorlais Circus, 28 to 43 Penydarren Road was probably built by the mid-19th century. This terrace extended northwards as far as the line of the (Penydarren) Merthyr Tramroad would allow.

These are of historic significance as survivals of early-19th century worker's dwellings and commercial buildings at least in their form. However, the dwellings on Pontmorlais West and 28 to 43 Penydarren Road have suffered visually from modern replacement detailing and finishes. Their poor current appearance does not reflect their historic contribution to the Town Centre Conservation Area.

Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings

Pontmorlais Circus area has six (listed Grade II) designated heritage assets:

- YMCA (built 1911);
- War Memorial (erected c.1930);
- War Memorial handrails (erected c.1930);
- (Former) Theatre Royal (built 1891);
- Thespian House (adjoining Theatre Royal (built 1891);
- 49 and 50 High Street (former 'Flooks' jeweler's shop), built th century.

Pontmorlais Circus area contains three locally listed structures:

- Masonic Temple;
- Former Labour Exchange (free-standing frontage only remains);
- experiment.

Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

This was an exceptionally important historic event, although it was largely an experiment partly driven by a bet, and trams continued to be pulled by horses. A locomotive wasn't used again in local ironworks until 1829.

Historic maps show the (Penydarren) Merthyr Tramroad (completed 1802) crossing what is now Penyard Road behind 28 Pontmorlais West to run down Tramroadside North.

The existing historic routes of the former (removed) tramroads are significant. It is possible that physical evidence of the tramways, such as stone trackbed blocks, remain hidden beneath modern surface finishes.

Boundaries, Surfaces and Public Realm

Along Pontmorlais West and Penydarren Road the highway is finished with a Tarmacadam-type finish along with the pavement on the northwest side of the road and the raised terrace area above former, infilled, public conveniences. The raised area is currently largely inaccessible although its condition appears to be much better than it was in 2016.



Unkempt 'Promenade'

Adjacent to the mini-roundabout / road junction there is a flight of steps leading up to the raised terrace area (known locally as The Promenade). The Promenade, originally the route of the first tramroad, later provided elevated and ramped pedestrian access between the YMCA building, past the war memorial and beyond the labour exchange to the north. Access along the raised Promenade has now been blocked off for several years.

Public convenience openings, beneath The Promenade, were infilled, probably during the late-20th century, and the whole wall appears to have been clad with pre-cast concrete facings. Historic photographs show that the original balustrade arrangement has been replaced, probably at the same time.

Set back above the terrace, the earlier retaining wall of the Masonic Temple is built of rubble stonework with facing brickwork flanking side-walls, the one to the west in particular is leaning badly.

A late-20th century black painted steel balustrade protects the edge of the raised terrace overlooking the centre of the Circus below. Modern railings have been installed between the terrace and the War Memorial. The War Memorial railings are visually heavy which unfortunately creates a visual barrier to the Memorial. The mix of styles of metalwork appears poorly coordinated and progressively less well detailed and 'cheaper' in character.



War Memorial, gates and railings

The War Memorial appears to be permanently locked-up although the sloping grassed areas around it are clearly being maintained.

There is some good quality original ironwork existing along the forecourt of the Masonic Temple on Park Terrace. The YMCA's Park Terrace boundary is currently defined by temporary Herras type fencing. The view of the dilapidated YMCA building from Park Terrace is a depressing sight and a clear indication of how much needs to be done there to bring the building back into use.



Masonic Temple front elevation on Park Terrace



View of YMCA rear, from Park Terrace

There is no significant historic hard landscaping or street furniture along Penydarren Road or Pontmorlais West. Whilst the quality of the hard landscaping improves into High Street Pontmorlais and up as far as 43 Penydarren Road, including areas of modern stone and granite sett paving, none of this appears historic.

To the northern edge of Pontmorlais Circus, adjacent to 47 to 49 High Street, there is a small sloping triangular forecourt that is finished in large uneven cobbles with a concrete flag margin.

The vehicular exit from High Street is defined by a short section of concrete brick paving, with sandstone margins, before returning to a Tarmacadam-type finish along High Street.

The car park and seating area have low red facing brickwork perimeter walls surmounted by black painted steel railings with intermediate brick piers capped in reconstituted stone. These walls help to define the historic building line although clearly not as well as the former buildings would have.

The seating area and car park have allowed the introduction of some planting and trees that provide some visual relief from the tree-less and urban High Street Pontmorlais to the south. The trees along the car park boundary are helpful in screening the car park and creating a more human scale to the street. The seating area however is now badly overgrown. This helps to screen the area from the busy road but it is unkempt and so currently looks poor.

The mini-roundabout at the centre of the Circus seems to be ignored by most drivers.

The old stone stepped footpath link to Park Terrace pre-dates the YMCA building alongside it and retains its original heavy stone steps and plain cast iron handrails. This set of steps is characterful but affected by rubbish and weeds.

Assessment of Condition of The Area

The condition and appearance of the Theatre Royal, Thespian House and YMCA buildings are very poor and let this area down.

The Promenade remains inaccessible.

The condition of the Bolgoed Place and 49-50 High Street are very good after sensitive restoration.

Whilst the condition of the dwellings along Pontmorlais West is not bad, they have been inappropriately altered in the past using modern materials.

There is a hazardous set of steps leading down to the terrace of 14 to 17 Pontmorlais West. The road surface is also very poor and the lane and yard behind Bolgoed Place are in poor condition.

The condition of the terraced row of 28 to 43 Penydarren Road is not bad although its appearance is mostly poor, with no historic details, and only their historic duo-pitched forms and fenestration remain.

The former drill hall appears to be in very poor condition.

Negative Features and Issues

Most importantly of all, the YMCA building and Theatre Royal remain derelict and without purpose. These, combined with the blind walls of the infilled public conveniences, the busy main road bisecting the area don't make this an attractive place to dwell.

The War Memorial has been fenced off and the surrounding gardens are currently inaccessible as an amenity space. The heavy railings unfortunately create a visual barrier to the War Memorial.

The Masonic Temple's rear elevation, highly visible from the south and centre of Pontmorlais Circus, remains relatively intact, although the modern detailing of the side wings' fascias are visually too heavy and crude. The elevated black painted steel fire escape route to the southeast corner is an unfortunate feature, although probably necessary.

There has been a loss of the sense of enclosure around the centre of Pontmorlais Circus since the demolition of the Owain Glyndwr public house and numbers 51 to 55 High Street Pontmorlais in the mid / late-20th century. These demolitions lost some of the historically tight urban grain. The greatest

loss would have been the removal of the Owain Glyndwr corner building immediately to the south of Pontmorlais Circus. This area is now the little used and slightly unkempt seating area. This building would have been an important focal point at this important gateway to High Street.

The removal of the Owain Glyndwr also opened up the view, from High Street, of the rear elevations of Bolgoed Place and the historic warehouse behind Merthyr Upholsterers.

Some areas appear unkempt, particularly to parts of Pontmorlais West that are harbouring overgrown weeds.

Whilst 49-50 High Street (former CH Flook Jeweller) is one of the more positive buildings its shopfront doesn't appear to be in regular use, so it is almost always roller shuttered. Its brass sill plates unfortunately seem to be regularly stolen / missing.



Unkempt rear elevations of 1 to 3 Bolgoed Place, and badly extended 2 Bolgoed Place

7 (UPPER) PENYDARREN ROAD

Layout & Street Pattern

George Yates' 1799 map of Glamorgan shows that the current layout of Penydarren Road had been established by then. The earliest Dowlais Ironworks' tramroad would have run the full length of the current Penydarren Road whereas the Penydarren Ironworks' tramways occupied most of the eastern side of Penydarren Road. These tramways skirted along the southeast boundary of Penydarren House and Park (built 1786) and along the western side of Penydarren Road. This slightly elevated area later became known as The Promenade. The tramway then crossed Brecon Road (now Pontmorlais West) and continued westwards, at a lower level, along a narrow lane to the south side of the current Pontmorlais West.

The (Penydarren) Merthyr Tramroad, completed in 1802, was laid along a newly formed route running from Penydarren Road, from the location of the current 'Trevithick' monument, southwards along the rear of High Street.

Penydarren Road is now a busy road linking the large residential areas to the north of the town with the town centre and the A470 to the south and west, via Pontmorlais West.

The layout of Penydarren Road is linear and continues the incline seen consistently through the town centre, although Penydarren Road is steeper and there is a sharp bend at its northernmost end.

With the exception of a few buildings close to this sharp bend visible on John Woods' 1836 map, building along (upper) Penydarren Road seems to have been largely prevented until the late-19th century by the tramways occupying large parts of it.

Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)

The western edge of Penydarren Road's upper length is defined by The Promenade's rock-faced stone retaining wall, with cast iron guarding atop, and by a length of the presumed stone boundary wall remaining from the former Penydarren Park.

Most of Penydarren Road's eastern edge is defined by simple late-19th century two-storeys terraced dwellings (Park Place and Prospect Place) although there is a gap towards the centre with some set back modern semi-detached dwellings.

The northern end of Penydarren Road increases in scale with two rows of more formal two-and-a-half storeys gable fronted buildings (Garth Villas) close to the tight bend in the road. Further work is required to establish the date of the existing rows. The original buildings were probably closely associated to Penydarren Ironworks.

Penydarren Road becomes High Street as it rounds the tight bend, providing a view across the road to the distinctive Old General Hospital.

High Street's northern side is defined by high stone retaining walls with three two-and-a-half storeys gable-fronted detached houses, elevated above, dating from the turn of the 20th century. High Street's southern side is defined by mature trees and greenery as the land drops away to the south.

Views

Pedestrians are currently restricted to the narrow pavement along Penydarren Road's eastern side so views are restricted to what can be seen up and down Penydarren Road, from the eastern pavement. When it is accessible, the slightly elevated Promenade would provide the best views of the buildings along Penydarren Road although, other than the view of the Theatre Royal at the southern end of this area, these are not significant views.

This area doesn't contain any significant views although the most dominant views are:

- northwards to the Old General Hospital;
- northwards to Garth Villas;
- westwards to the stone retaining and boundary wall.

Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (features that contribute to its special architectural interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)

With the exception of the Old General Hospital and the modern semi-detached houses (4 to 7 The Rink), the character of the buildings in this area are largely domestic, and in three main types:

- 1) 5 to 7, and 1 to 4 Garth Villas. These are on the site of the oldest buildings in this area, suggesting the original buildings were closely related to the Penydarren Ironworks. The former was designed as a formal symmetrical composition with dominant central gable. The latter is a substantial terraced row with gablets to each property and some surviving oriel and bay windows. Further work is required to establish the date of these two rows.
- 2) Detached villas to the northern side of High Street, and one above Gwaelod y Garth Road, dating from the turn of the 20th century.

3) Prospect Place and Park Place are typical late-19th century terraced dwellings, although a few were clearly used as commercial premises. A common type in the approaches of south Wales valleys' towns.

The Old General Hospital, built 1888, has the character of a late-Victorian rural villa, so quite atypical of the character of the Town Centre Conservation Area.

Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings

This area contains no designated heritage assets.

The Old General Hospital is the only locally listed building. This is a substantial and attractive formal building, designed as a freestanding villa, that retains many good architectural features. Whilst it is set back from main road it is a focal point on the outside of the tight bend at the top end of Penydarren Road.

Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

The existing historic routes of the former (removed) tramroads are significant. It is possible that physical evidence of the tramways, such as stone trackbed blocks, remain hidden beneath modern surface finishes.

Part of the Town Centre Conservation Area includes an embankment that formed part of Penydarren Park. Penydarren Park has been recognised as the site of a Roman auxiliary fort, although none of the former park area has been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument so presumably the likelihood of further archaeology from this period is very low.

Boundaries, Surfaces & Public Realm

This area's most significant boundaries are:

- The Promenade's stone-faced retaining wall and the presumed remaining length of stone boundary wall to the former Penydarren Park, along the west side of Penydarren Road;
- Stone retaining walls along the northern side of High Street;
- Remnants of pennant stone and facing brickwork boundary walls and remnants of good historic railings to west and east sides of Old General Hospital, although all other lengths have been replaced with poor modern brickwork. Most of these are currently in poor condition.

All paving and street furniture are relatively modern and of no significance. Bus stops in particular are of poor / utilitarian 20th century designs.

Assessment of condition of the Area

The Old General Hospital has been vacant for a number of years and its condition is clearly poor, dilapidated and deteriorating.

The dwellings, and few commercial premises within Prospect Place and Park Place, are almost all in good condition although Park Place in particular has visually suffered from replacement of historic features. Individual colour schemes, some not at all historic, have reduced the visual cohesion that these terraces would have once had.

Bus stops are in poor condition and their appearance is not helped by their dated utilitarian design.

Negative Features & Issues

- Poor condition of the Old General Hospital;
- Some poor parts of the streetscape (e.g. bus stops);
- Individual ownerships and resulting loss of historic features and visual cohesion to rows and terraced dwellings. In particular, 5 to 7 Garth Villas was been designed as a formal symmetrical composition although later individual ownerships have led to changes to the principal front elevation that reduces the coherency of the original design intent.