

# Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area

## **CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL & CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN**



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## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This Conservation Area Assessment (CAA) and Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP) has been prepared by Alwyn Jones Architects and commissioned by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) to help the local authority meet their obligation to periodically review Merthyr Tydfil's Town Centre Conservation Area. Such a review includes establishing whether the conservation area boundary needs amendment, and identifying potential measures for enhancing and protecting the special interest of the conservation area.

This document is divided into two parts, Part 1 (the Conservation Area Appraisal) and Part 2 (the Conservation Area Management Plan).

Part 1, the CAA, assesses the special character of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area; identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; and reviews its boundary. The basis for this appraisal has been a detailed building-by-building analysis and a detailed character analysis of the conservation area to help identify which elements contribute to the area's special interest. These detailed assessments have been included as appendices to help keep the core document readable and concise. These have been underpinned by desktop research to gain an understanding of the area's historic development and importance. Whilst these analyses have been thorough and detailed it is possible that some features of interest have been overlooked or not mentioned. The reader should not assume that the omission of any building, feature or space from this appraisal means that it is not significant.

Part 2, the CAMP, aims to provide:

- an analysis of the policy and management needs of the area including an assessment of the effectiveness of current planning controls, the need for any supplementary protection and the identification of ways in which special character can be preserved and enhanced.
- a vehicle for engagement and awareness raising.
- at MTCBC's request, objectives and priorities for the area, rather than policies.

The CAMP is based upon the negative factors and summary of issues identified in the CAA and sets out proposals and policies that can preserve and enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. The recommendations include proposals for enhancement and policies for the avoidance of harmful change.

The CAMP is written with the awareness that, in managing local Conservation Areas, the Council's resources are limited and therefore need to be prioritised. Financial constraints on the Council mean

that proposals, for which it is responsible, may take longer than is desirable to implement. However, the Council will continue to encourage improvements to the Conservation Area in co-operation with property owners, groups and local businesses.

The document is intended for use by planning officers, developers, property owners and landowners to ensure that the special character is not eroded, but rather preserved and enhanced.

If you have any comments or other proposals you would like the Council to consider, would like to contribute and share information on the history of the area, or need any further information, please contact MTCBC's Conservation & Design Officer.

DRAFT



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
**MERTHYR TYDFIL**  
**MERTHYR TYDFIL**  
County Borough Council

## STATEMENT OF MERTHYR TYDFIL TOWN CENTRE'S SPECIAL INTEREST

Merthyr Tydfil is situated at the head of the Taff Valley. It was no more than a small village in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The village centred around a medieval St.Tydfil's Church and a historic crossing over the River Taff. However, Merthyr Tydfil developed rapidly into a town after the establishment of the first ironworks at Dowlais in 1759. Further ironworks were established nearby during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to help meet the growing worldwide demand for iron. As a result, Merthyr Tydfil dramatically grew to become the largest town in Wales and its town centre developed to accommodate and meet the needs of the huge influx of ironworkers and their families.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Merthyr Tydfil had developed a strong regional urban economy. The town's growing regional administrative status around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also helped confidence grow.

The first phase of the town's development during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been largely haphazard, piecemeal and organic with topography still playing a large part. By 1799, the town centre had grown outwards from the traditional village centre, along existing and new transport routes, many extending to and from the new ironworks. The historic line of some streets have survived from this period including High Street, Penydarren Road and Pontmorlais West, as well as possibly Victoria Street and Three Salmon Street.

Whilst the ironworks themselves lay outside of the town centre, their communicating routes, in particular the Dowlais and Penydarren (Merthyr) Tramways and other connecting roads and bridges, had an early and direct physical impact on the development of some parts of the town.

The second phase of urban development at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been more planned. An imposed grid of wide streets was laid down, centred around a formal market house and square and a number of three-storeys formal Georgian-styled stone built stucco rendered commercial rows had been built along Victoria Street and High Street in particular. Two-storeys buildings along the primary streets would have been treated in a similar way and this would have harboured a great sense of architectural and visual unity. During this phase, secondary lanes later known as Post Office, The Castle Yard and Wheatsheaf Lane had also been established running parallel behind parts of the western side of High Street, Cross Street and Castle Street. These, and perpendicular connecting alleyways, would have provided service access to the rear of commercial properties along the principal streets and access to humble terraced rows of dwellings and backyard industries behind. These would have been small simple stone buildings, lime-washed at

best, and many appear, from the 1851 Public Health Map, to have been crammed opportunistically into any available space.

The laying down of the railways allied with the expansion of the steam-coal industry around Merthyr Tydfil and throughout south Wales probably led to the third phase of Merthyr Tydfil's urban development during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre's special architectural interest today lies mostly in the extensive surviving evidence of its third phase of development during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This period probably makes the strongest contribution to the overall character of the Conservation Area today although all of the other principal phases are represented to varying degrees:

#### First Phase – Second-half of 18<sup>th</sup> century

The first phase of building during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is represented today by a small number of buildings including:

- Humble worker's dwellings along the tramroad route on Pontmorlais West.
- The Crown Inn.

Court House was pre-existing at the start of this phase and is probably Merthyr Tydfil's oldest surviving building. The traditional gabled form and historic details of the free-standing Court House are visually attractive, although it doesn't share the aesthetic character of the core of the town centre.

Architecturally these are all relatively simple, traditional buildings so their interest is more historic than architectural, but these are still important.

Other existing buildings, particularly along High Street and Victoria Street may incorporate fabric from this period.

#### Second Phase – Turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century

The more-planned second phase of urban development at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is today represented by remnants of the three-storeys formal Georgian-styled stone built stucco rendered commercial rows built along the northern side of Victoria Street, southern side of Glebeland Street and the western side of High Street. Architecturally these would have been designed and built in blocks. They would have shared the same 'polite' formal Georgian



architectural language, where established good visual proportions and stucco rendered uniformity were key. A number of two-storeys rows with a similar architectural treatment exist along the western side of High Street Pontmorlais and Bolgoed Place.

There are only a few survivals of the secondary streets and perpendicular connecting alleyways from this phase, including Old Mill Lane, Roberts Lane, John Street, Capel Soar's lane, and the alley alongside The Vulcan. There are even fewer survivals of the humble dwellings and backyard businesses that would have been accessed from these. Examples of humble dwellings exist at Roberts Lane, Bowen's Court, 14 to 17 Pontmorlais West, 3 to 5 John Street and 3 and 4 Mile End. The current outward appearance of all of these conceal their historic significance.

#### Third Phase – Second-half of 19<sup>th</sup> century and first quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century

This phase saw the construction of some of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre's largest and most distinctive commercial and public buildings. These were often designed to be eye-catching signature buildings. They were often gable-fronted and their designers used a wide variety of 'imported' architectural styles, decorative details and materials (including dressed freestone, facing brickwork, terracotta, terracotta faience, and expressed timber framing) to impress and as a show of confidence. In most cases this was intended to attract the best custom. Many of the existing landmark buildings date from this phase.

Surviving details from this period are varied given the architecturally eclectic nature of this period. At street level, most of the original details have been replaced or concealed by modern shopfronts but the form of the buildings and many of the details and fenestration to the upper floors have survived.

## **PART 1: CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 CAA Context**

Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest. A decision to designate a Conservation Area is made by a local authority after an appraisal of the area and an assessment of its character. This assessment extends beyond the buildings alone and includes road layouts, street scenes, trees and green areas, all of which can contribute to the special character of an area. Designation gives special protection to this special character and, to help achieve this, the council has extra controls over demolition, certain developments and the protection of trees.

Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area was designated by MTCBC in June 2009 following completion of the first Conservation Area Character Appraisal earlier that year, by The Conservation Studio.

Following this, an Article 4 Direction was put in place over a large part of Pontmorlais to prohibit the type of small alterations that would usually be allowed, under Permitted Development Rights, to houses.

The 2009 CACA summarised the key characteristics of the proposed Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area as:

- A town centre developed from the late-18<sup>th</sup> century as a result of rapid and massive industrial development and population growth, continuing to function as the district's main high street shopping area into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- The concentration of twenty three listed buildings and numerous other locally listed buildings and street frontages, creating an area of high architectural interest.
- The concentration of commercial, civic, social and spiritual uses relating to the development of Merthyr Tydfil as an industrial town of international importance between the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Landmark buildings of particular architectural quality, which emphasise each of the above historic functions of the area.
- Dense urban development of mainly narrow frontages on the backs of pavements, creating varied elevations and a noticeable sense of enclosure.
- A strong linear form created by the long axis of Penydarren Road, Pontmorlais High Street, and High Street, with numerous short side streets providing ready access to and from surrounding areas;
- Attractive views along street lines to focal points, landmark buildings and out to mountain scenery;

- A variety of architectural styles and materials, with details relating to the late Classical, Gothic Revival and Edwardian Baroque movements.

In 2011, architects Donald Insall Associates prepared the Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter Conservation Area Character Appraisal Review (the '2011 Review') and a Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP). These were used to support MTCBC's successful application to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) funding to improve the first ten buildings within Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter.

A 2016 Review of the 2011 Review was prepared by Alwyn Jones Architects and commissioned by MTCBC to support their second series of HLF Townscape Heritage (TH) funded improvements within Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter.

The idea of a Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter came about after the 2009 CACA and is referred to in the 2011 Review. The Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter comprises parts of three of the character areas defined in the 2009 CACA:

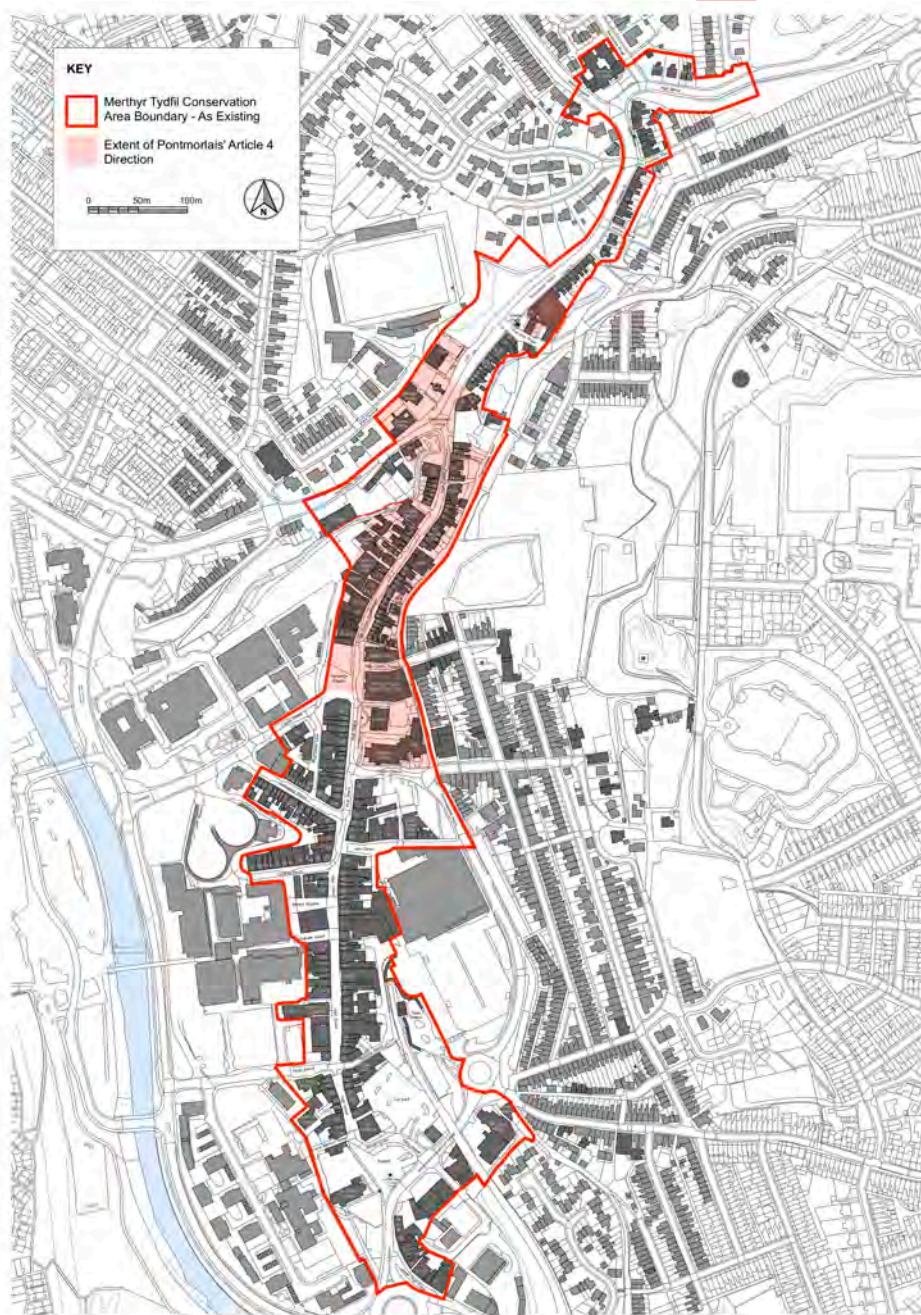
- Pontmorlais Circus.
- High Street Pontmorlais, Commercial Area.
- Hope Chapel, Old Town Hall, Library and St David's Church.

This 2020 CAA makes no further reference to the Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter largely because it spans several character areas identified in this 2020 CAA.

This 2020 CAA is a significant periodic review that supersedes the 2009, 2011 and 2016 appraisals.

## 1.2 Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area boundary was first defined following the 2009 CACA. It is narrow, encompassing both sides of Merthyr Tydfil's main high street, but extends for just less than 1.5km following the gentle curve of High Street from its southern end, rising up through the town centre and beyond Penydarren Road to the north.

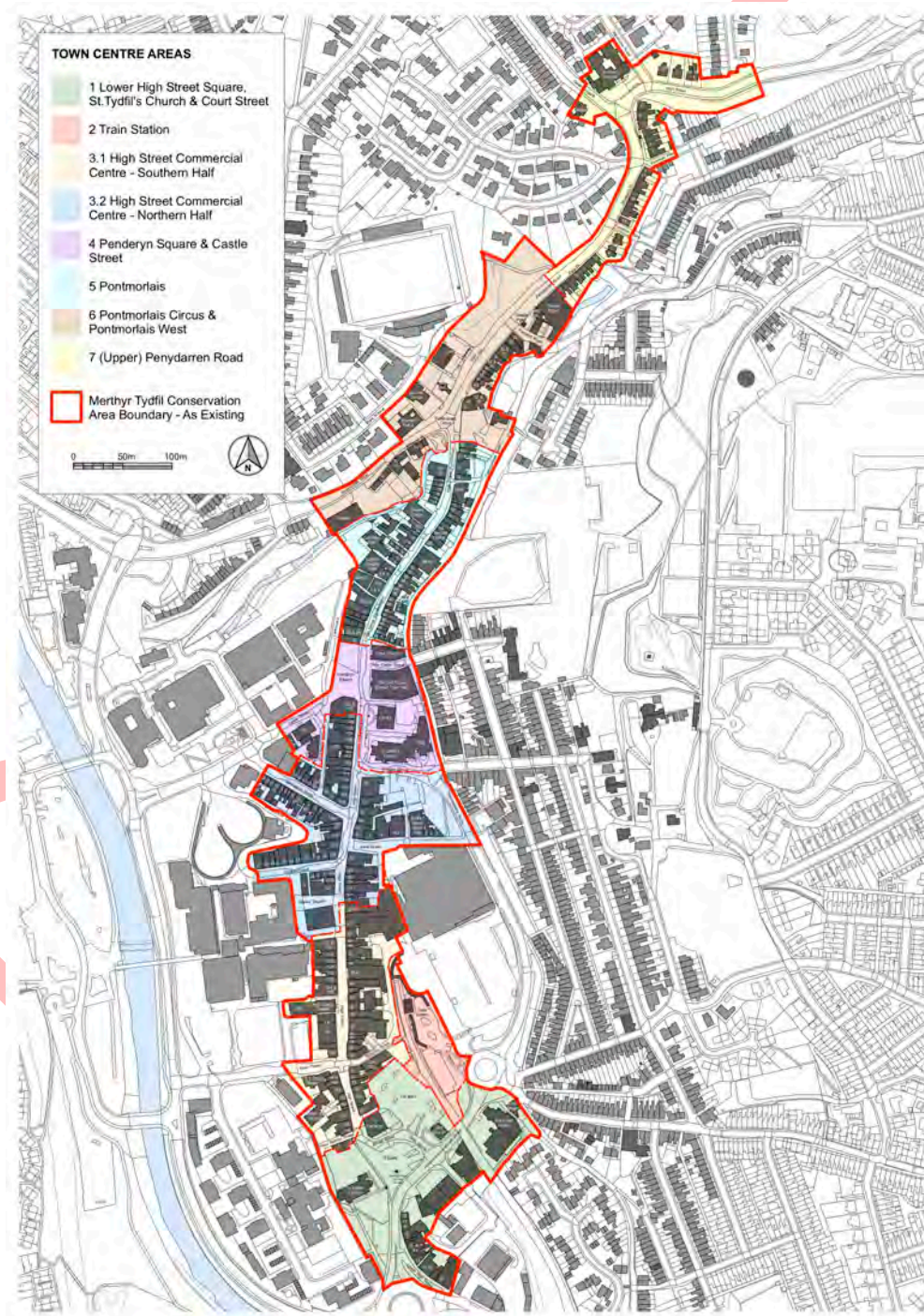


*Extent of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area  
and Pontmorlais' Article 4 Direction*



### 1.3 Character Areas

Whilst the 2009 CACA identified four broad character areas, this 2020 CAA expands these to seven, partly in recognition of their slightly different characters, but also to make the 2020 analysis more manageable.



2020 CAA character areas

#### 1.4 Building-by-Building Baseline Survey

The appended building-by-building assessment (Appendix B) has formed a significant basis for the CAA and provides a baseline for future periodic review. This analysis has included recording the current use, condition, architectural description, and a summary assessment of the building's contribution or significance to the Conservation Area. It seems inevitable that assessment of the building's contribution will be subjective to a certain degree, although the intention has been to identify key buildings, those that might be improved to enhance the area, and those that make no contribution to the special interest of the area.

The focus for the CAA building-by-building analysis has been the existing external / visible features. It has been beyond the scope of this CAA to:

- inspect buildings internally. This would also be beyond the intent of designated conservation areas.
- compare existing features against historic photographs / records (such as the excellent and valuable collection of historic images visible on Alan George's website ([www.alangeorge.co.uk](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk))) to help identify what has been lost since they were taken.

However, such historic evidence and photographs can be invaluable in piecing together the original design intent and appearance and these should be investigated at an early stage when developing proposals for restoration.

The original designers often understood, sometimes by following tradition, how to create attractive, balanced and sometimes distinctive buildings. Usually this created a positive and sometimes distinctive local character that in time may have been worn away. Many of the buildings within the Conservation Area have been altered in modern times, particularly at street level, sometimes with little or no thought for such visual sensitivity.

## 1.5 Conservation Area Character Assessment

The detailed Conservation Area Character Assessment (Appendix C) has been prepared in recognition that it is the character of the area as a whole that is key to the area's special interest, not simply its individual buildings. This character assessment has covered many aspects recognised as being important to Conservation Area character, including:

- Layout & Street Pattern
- Spatial Analysis (Streetscape, Spaces, Places, Setting and Views)
- Architectural Character / Interest & Built Form (features that contribute to its special architectural interest) (Buildings, Styles, Materials & Colours)
- Designated Heritage Assets & Locally Important Buildings
- Historical Associations & Hidden Histories
- Boundaries, Surfaces & Public Realm
- Assessment of condition of the Area
- Negative Features & Issues

## 1.6 Historical Assessment

Assessment of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre's historical importance has primarily been a desktop study focusing on historic maps, photographs, Cadw and RCAHMW site records, earlier desktop studies including the 2009 CACA, Cadw's 2015 publication 'Merthyr Tydfil Understanding Urban Character' and Glamorgan and Gwent Archaeological Trust's online 'Historic Landscape Characterisation of Merthyr Tydfil'. The notes and excellent photographic archive built up by Alan George ([www.alangeorge.co.uk](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk)) have also been invaluable to this assessment. This results of this desktop study are summarised in a timeline to highlight significant events and the historical development of the town centre.



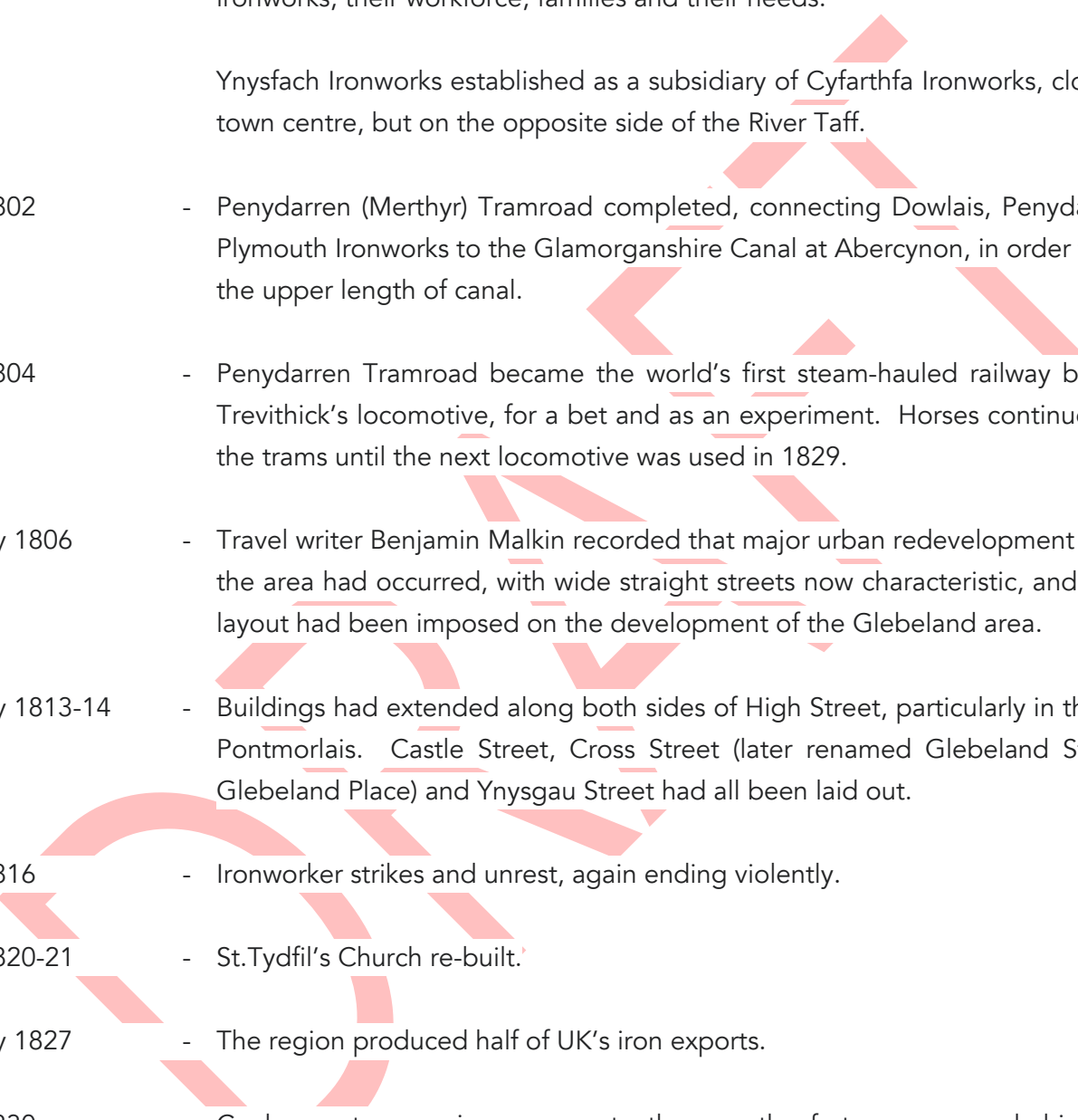
## 2.0 SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST

### 2.1 Timeline

- c.75 AD - Roman auxiliary fortress built at Penydarren (site of Penydarren Park) on the route running south to north between Cardiff and Brecon.
- c.120 AD - Penydarren Roman fortress abandoned.
- Between 5<sup>th</sup> and late 15<sup>th</sup> century - First church dedicated to St.Tydfil built (date of construction not known), and Merthyr Tydfil had been established as a parish by c.1270.
- 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century - 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 16<sup>th</sup> century. One of these, built up by the Lewis family, had already acquired a prominent role by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Court House dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and was the centre of this small estate. It is currently thought to be the most intact pre-industrial building in the town.
- Merthyr Tydfil was a village at this time, centred around St.Tydfil's Church.
- 1729 - Emanuel Bowen's Map of South Wales shows the location of St.Tydfil's Church, a bridge over the River Taff nearby, and trading routes running east, west, north and south.
- c.1750 - Merthyr Tydfil was still only a village with a population of around 400.

- 1759 - Dowlais Ironworks established at the head of the Taff Valley to the northeast of the town.
- 1763 - Plymouth Ironworks established in the valley to the southeast of the town.
- 1765 - Cyfarthfa Ironworks established on opposite side of the River Taff, to the northwest of the town.
- 1784 - Penydarren Ironworks established to the northeast of the town.
- 1785 - Crown Inn built on High Street.
- 1790-94 - Glamorganshire Canal built to west of River Taff to serve Cyfarthfa, Dowlais, Penydarren and Plymouth Ironworks via new horse drawn tramroads. Dowlais Ironworks' tramroad reached the canal via a new stone bridge, Jackson's Bridge, built in 1793.
- 1799 - George Yates' Map of Glamorgan is the earliest map of the town. This illustrated the principal road layout and that an urban centre had developed significantly, albeit largely organically in response to the topography and desire lines. Thomas Street (later renamed Victoria Street) might be the only orthogonal or more-planned exception to this otherwise organic development at this time.

The town centred around the medieval St.Tydfil's Church but extended up the linear High Street as far as Morlais Brook and occupied land immediately to the eastern, town-side, of the historic bridge over the River Taff on the line of the route of the later Castle Street. Other than the industrial developments, most of the earliest developments would have been informal and opportunistic.

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- 1800 - Unrest and protests over the price of food, ending violently.
  - 1801 - Merthyr Tydfil had become the largest town in Wales, with a population of over 7,700. This was directly as a result of the establishment and growth of the ironworks, their workforce, families and their needs.  
  
Ynysfach Ironworks established as a subsidiary of Cyfarthfa Ironworks, close to the town centre, but on the opposite side of the River Taff.
  - 1802 - Penydarren (Merthyr) Tramroad completed, connecting Dowlais, Penydarren and Plymouth Ironworks to the Glamorganshire Canal at Abercynon, in order to bypass the upper length of canal.
  - 1804 - Penydarren Tramroad became the world's first steam-hauled railway by Richard Trevithick's locomotive, for a bet and as an experiment. Horses continued to pull the trams until the next locomotive was used in 1829.
  - By 1806 - Travel writer Benjamin Malkin recorded that major urban redevelopment of part of the area had occurred, with wide straight streets now characteristic, and a regular layout had been imposed on the development of the Glebeland area.
  - By 1813-14 - Buildings had extended along both sides of High Street, particularly in the area of Pontmorlais. Castle Street, Cross Street (later renamed Glebeland Street and Glebeland Place) and Ynysgau Street had all been laid out.
  - 1816 - Ironworker strikes and unrest, again ending violently.
  - 1820-21 - St.Tydfil's Church re-built.
  - By 1827 - The region produced half of UK's iron exports.
  - 1830s - Coal exports grow in response to the growth of steam powered shipping and railways.
  - 1831 - Town's population 22,000 - 24,000.

Merthyr Rising in June 1831. Partly in reaction to a decision by William Crawshay to lower the wages of his employees, an angry crowd destroyed the Court House and laid siege to the magistrates in The Castle Hotel, at the corner of Castle Street and High Street (now the site of Penderyn Square). In the subsequent confrontation, 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.

- 1835
- Raw materials for ironworking were running out and Dowlais Ironworks were having to import iron ore up the Glamorganshire Canal.

- By 1836
- John Woods' map of the town shows a more or less complete town core with a regular orthogonal layout including Thomas (later Victoria) Street, Clive Street (later Wellington Street) and Graham Street. These were all centred around Market House.

Secondary lanes had also been established running parallel behind parts of the western side of High Street (un-named, but later known as Post Office lane and Castle Yard), and behind parts of Cross Street and Castle Street (un-named, but later known Wheatsheaf Lane). These, and perpendicular connecting alleyways, would have provided service access to the rear of commercial properties along these main streets and access to more humble terraced rows of small dwellings and back-yard businesses behind.

The town centre now boasted twelve non-conformist chapels, well over thirty public houses / inns, a hotel, two banks and a post office.

There had been very little development behind the eastern side of High Street and there were still significant gaps along that side of High Street particularly each side of its junction with Castle Street.

Developments, probably mostly worker's dwellings, had also been established alongside tramroads and other roads into the town.

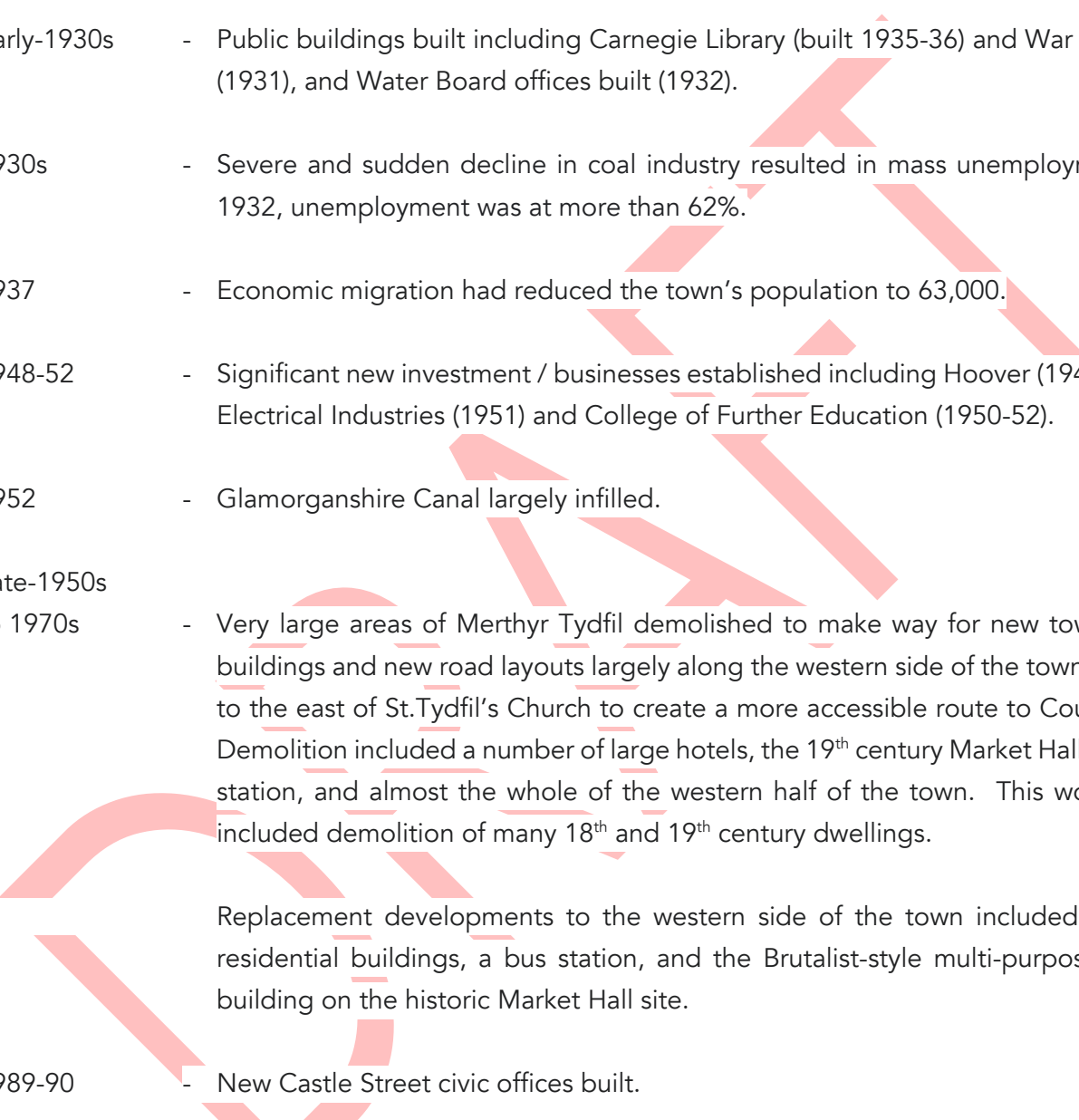
A few orthogonal streets had also been laid down to form a small town centre (George Town) to the west of Jackson's Bridge where the street names and proximity indicate a close association with Crawshay's Cyfarthfa Ironworks.

- 1841 - Taff Vale Railway completed running between Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil. Dowlais and Plymouth Ironworks' were chief promoters. This station was located to the south of St.Tydfil's Church on Plymouth Street.
- 1845-46 - Dowlais Ironworks largest in the world, employing 7,000.
- 1846-47 - St.David's Church built.
- 1849 - Worst of four (1832, 1849, 1854 & 1866) cholera outbreaks when as many as 1 in 25 died in Merthyr Tydfil.
- 1850 - Merthyr Tydfil Board of Health established with responsibility for paving, lighting, drainage and water supply. From c.1860 the Board's responsibilities were extended to building plan controls.
- 1851 - Town's population 46,000.  
  
Detailed 1851 Public Health Map of the town clearly shows the network of tramroads and how the town's 1836 layout had been retained but become denser with buildings as a result of economic boom years during 1830s and 1840s.  
  
The increase in the density of housing throughout the western side of the town and the continued addition of terraced rows of small dwellings behind the main streets, as seen on the John Woods' 1836 town map, are notable. These appear to have been crammed into almost any space available, leaving small yards behind. Access was from shared access lanes, yards or narrow secondary streets.  
  
Rapid expansion of steam-coal exports when The Admiralty selected south Wales coal to power the Royal Navy's ships.
- 1853 - Vale of Neath train station completed. The station was accessed from John Street and occupied a swathe of land behind High Street's east side. This would have

been a catalyst for the new residential development of Thomas Town, extending to the east of the historic town centre 1852-56.

- 1859 - Penyardarren Ironworks closed and Penyardarren Park (and House) sold. Penyardarren Ironworks was in ruins by 1870s.
  - 1861 - Town's population 70,000, still the largest town in Wales.
  - 1864 - Peak production at Cyfarthfa Ironworks of 50,000 tons of iron, although after this there was a rapid decline largely due to diminished local raw materials and competition from better located ironworks.
- It was probably the coal-based economy that supported the expansion and renewal work in the town at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 1865 - Glamorganshire Canal began to be closed.
  - 1870s - Cyfarthfa Ironworks temporarily closed after crippling industrial disputes.
  - 1878 - John Street's train station became the only passenger station.
  - 1880s - Plymouth Ironworks closed.
  - 1884 - Cyfarthfa re-opened as steelworks.
  - 1880s-1891 - Developments extended northwards after clearance of Penyardarren Ironworks' tramways and Penyardarren House and Park. These were largely residential but included the General Hospital (built 1888) and Theatre Royal (built 1891) on Penyardarren Road.
  - 1894-1911 - Merthyr Tydfil Urban District Council formed in 1894, replacing Board of Health; Municipal Borough status received in 1905; and County Borough status received in 1908.

Significant developments included Town Hall and Law Courts (built 1896); St.Tydfil's Church largely rebuilt (1895-1901); 119 High Street; Morlais Buildings (1904); and YMCA (built 1911).

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- 1910 - Cyfarthfa Steelworks effectively closed.
  - 1921 - Town's population 80,000.
  - Early-1930s - Public buildings built including Carnegie Library (built 1935-36) and War Memorial (1931), and Water Board offices built (1932).
  - 1930s - Severe and sudden decline in coal industry resulted in mass unemployment. By 1932, unemployment was at more than 62%.
  - 1937 - Economic migration had reduced the town's population to 63,000.
  - 1948-52 - Significant new investment / businesses established including Hoover (1948), Thorn Electrical Industries (1951) and College of Further Education (1950-52).
  - 1952 - Glamorganshire Canal largely infilled.
  - Late-1950s to 1970s - Very large areas of Merthyr Tydfil demolished to make way for new town centre buildings and new road layouts largely along the western side of the town, but also to the east of St. Tydfil's Church to create a more accessible route to Court Street. Demolition included a number of large hotels, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Market Hall and train station, and almost the whole of the western half of the town. This would have included demolition of many 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century dwellings.  
  
Replacement developments to the western side of the town included high-rise residential buildings, a bus station, and the Brutalist-style multi-purpose market building on the historic Market Hall site.
  - 1989-90 - New Castle Street civic offices built.
  - 2011-4 - Creation of Penderyn Square

## 2.1 Summary Historical Assessment

Merthyr Tydfil in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century was rural, probably comprising a series of scattered farms, with a small village centre based around a medieval St.Tydfil's Church and a historic crossing over the River Taff.

Merthyr Tydfil town centre developed rapidly after the establishment of the first ironworks at Dowlais in 1759. Further ironworks were established in the surrounding countryside during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to help meet the growing worldwide demand for iron. From the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Merthyr Tydfil's town grew rapidly and dramatically to meet the needs of the huge influx of ironworkers and their families. Many of these ironworkers came from other parts of the United Kingdom.

The first phase of the town's development during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been largely haphazard, piecemeal and organic with topography still playing a large part. By 1799, the town centre had grown outwards from the traditional village centre, along existing transport routes, and extended to and from the new ironworks and their new communicating routes. The historic line of some streets have survived from this period including High Street, Penydarren Road and Pontmorlais West, as well as possibly Victoria Street and Three Salmon Street.

Whilst the ironworks themselves lay outside of the town centre, their communicating routes, in particular the Dowlais and Penydarren (Merthyr) Tramways and other connecting roads and bridges, had an early and direct physical impact on the development of some parts of the town. This phase of development, for example, involved the laying down of the first tramroad from the Dowlais Ironworks along the route of Penydarren Road's Promenade and along Pontmorlais West to the purpose-built Jackson's Bridge. Physically the industrial developments only really affected the fringes of the town centre, principally along the routes of Pontmorlais West, Penydarren Road and, later, Tramroadside North. Whilst important to the industry and to the workers living in the terraced cottages that grew up alongside them, they appear to have been fringe developments to the more formal and more commercial town centre. Whilst it can be argued that such fringe development lies outside of the core of the town centre, there is no denying that the industry and its connecting routes played a key role in the economy and growth of the town's commercial centre. This link is presumably why Penydarren Road and Tramroadside North were included within the Town Centre's Conservation Area in 2009.

By 1801, Merthyr Tydfil's population of 7,000 had become the largest in Wales, and its town centre would have been an important commercial centre for the area.



The second phase of urban development at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been more planned. An imposed grid of wide streets was laid down, centred around a formal market house and square. This phase probably also included the replacement or conversion of many dwellings along the principal streets with commercial premises.

By 1836, secondary lanes had been established running parallel behind parts of the western side of High Street (later to become known as Post Office lane and Castle Yard), and behind parts of Cross Street and Castle Street (later to become known as Wheatsheaf Lane). These, and perpendicular connecting alleyways, would have provided service access to the rear of commercial properties along the principal streets and access to humble terraced rows of dwellings and backyard industries behind. These would have been small and simple stone buildings, lime-washed at best. Many appear, from the 1851 Public Health Map, to have been crammed opportunistically into any available space.

For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Merthyr Tydfil continued to command the title of the largest town in Wales, with a population of 70,000 in 1861.

The laying down of the railways allied with the expansion of the steam-coal industry around Merthyr Tydfil and throughout south Wales probably led to the third phase of Merthyr Tydfil's urban development during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Merthyr Tydfil had developed a strong regional urban economy. The town's growing regional administrative status around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will also have helped confidence grow.

The fourth phase of urban development from the end of the 1950s and into the 1970s saw very large areas of Merthyr Tydfil redeveloped and new roads laid down. Development was mostly along the western side of the town centre and also to the east of St.Tydfil's Church where numerous buildings were removed to create a more accessible route along Court Street. Many rows of terraced dwellings were replaced as well as a number of substantial individual buildings.

### 3.0 SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST

Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre's special architectural interest today lies mostly in its third phase of development during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This period probably makes the strongest contribution to the overall character of the Conservation Area today although all of the other principal phases are represented to varying degrees, and survivals of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> phases are also very important.

#### First Phase – Second-half of 18<sup>th</sup> century

The first phase of building during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is represented today by a small number of buildings including:

- Humble worker's dwellings along the tramroad route on Pontmorlais West. These would have been simple stone buildings with duo-pitched stone tiled roofs and external walls finished with lime-wash at most.
- The Crown Inn.

Court House was pre-existing at the start of this phase and is Merthyr Tydfil's oldest building still standing today. The traditional gabled form and historic details of the free-standing Court House are visually attractive. It doesn't share the character of the core of the town centre.

Architecturally these are all relatively simple, traditional buildings so their interest is more historic than architectural, but these are still important.

#### Second Phase – Turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century

The more-planned second phase of urban development at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is today represented by remnants of the three-storeys formal Georgian-styled stone built stucco rendered commercial rows built along the northern side of Victoria Street, southern side of Glebeland Street and the western side of High Street. Architecturally these would have been designed and built in blocks. They would have shared the same 'polite' formal Georgian architectural language, where established good visual proportions and uniformity were key. Two-storeys buildings along the primary streets would have been treated in a similar way architecturally and this would have harboured a great sense of visual unity. A number of these rows exist along the western side of High Street Pontmorlais. Surviving details from this period include stucco render (with lines struck in imitation of ashlar stonework), Georgian-style box sash windows, neo-Classically-styled mouldings such as string courses and window surrounds, and bracketed eaves.

The best survivals of the grandest three-storeys commercial buildings from this period include:

- 28-30, 32, 33, 36 & 37 Victoria Street;
- 129 to 132, 134 and 135 High Street;
- Morlais Castle Inn;
- 83 to 96 High Street (Pontmorlais);
- 6 to 9 Glebeland Street;
- 54 and 55 (Wyndham Arms) Glebeland Street.

The best survivals of the two-storeys commercial buildings from this period include:

- 9 to 12a Pontmorlais;
- 88 Pontmorlais;
- 14 to 22 Pontmorlais.

There are only a few survivals of the secondary perpendicular connecting lanes and alleyways from this phase, including Old Mill Lane, Roberts Lane, John Street, Capel Soar's lane, the alley alongside The Vulcan. There are even fewer survivals of the humble dwellings and backyard businesses behind.

Remnants include:

- 3 and 4 Bowen's Court, alongside Old Mill Lane;
- 3 and 4 Mile End, on Tramroadside North, although these are concealed by modern finishes and they are no longer legible as the separate dwellings they were on the 1851 Public Health Map.
- old grist mill (later The Sweet Factory) on Old Mill Lane;
- 1 to 6 (or 7) Roberts Lane, and 82 High Street (although this is unusual in being single-storey, fronting onto High Street and converted to commercial use);
- 3 to 5 John Street.

As with the simple traditional buildings surviving from the first phase their interest is more historic than architectural, but they are still important, especially as so few remain.

### Third Phase – Second-half of 19<sup>th</sup> century and first quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century

This phase saw the construction of some of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre's largest and most distinctive commercial buildings as well as a number of public buildings. These were often designed to be eye-catching signature buildings, often gable-fronted, and using a wide variety of 'imported' architectural styles, decorative details and materials (including dressed freestone, facing brickwork, terracotta, terracotta faience, and expressed timber framing), to impress, as a show of confidence and no doubt to attract the best custom. Many of the landmark buildings date from this phase. This phase probably makes the strongest contribution to the overall character of the Conservation Area today.

Surviving details from this period are varied given the architecturally eclectic nature of this period. Most of the original details have been replaced or concealed by modern shopfronts at street level, but the form of the buildings and many of the details to the upper floors have survived. Surviving historic details from this period typically include oriel windows, small dormers, decorative bargeboards, bracketed eaves, decorative ironwork, and large first floor showroom window openings. There are many good examples of buildings from this period and many are designated listed buildings. Some of the most distinctive examples include:

- Old Town Hall;
- YMCA building, Pontmorlais Circus;
- 115 & 119 High Street;
- 3 & 4 Glebeland Street.

*St. Tydfil's Church, designed in a Romanesque style and slightly elevated, is the most dominant and imposing building in the Lower High Street area.*

Most of the buildings along High Street are at least three-storeys in scale. This helps to define the town centre's urban character. The roofs of these are not usually a feature since they are of a shallow pitch or set behind parapets. The exceptions are parts of High Street south of the Masonic Street crossroads and parts of High Street Pontmorlais. In these cases, some duo-pitched roofs are highly visible on the more-humble and low two-storeys buildings and, in a few cases, where the roofs were consciously expressed.

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

Many of the buildings from this period are signature buildings 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 beginning of this phase included construction of the railway viaduct and stone retaining wall, St.Tydfil's Church boundary wall and railings, and the cast iron drinking water fountain canopy. These remain dominant and interesting historic architectural features at the southern end of the Conservation Area.

#### Fourth Phase – Second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century and turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century

This period is characterised by the Brutalist multi-purpose market building, and by the high-rise flats to the southwest of the town centre. Whilst these are highly visible from the Town Centre Conservation Area, they lie outside it.

Within the Conservation Area itself, most of the buildings from this period are isolated and of no distinct architectural style, although some could be regarded as loosely Modernist or post-Modernist in style. The few slightly better examples have maintained the scale of the adjacent buildings and used finishes that suit their historic context. None of these are architecturally significant.

#### Fifth Phase – 2009 onwards

This ongoing phase is focused on restoration of important buildings, particularly in Pontmorlais, and urban regeneration of the town.

## 4.0 HERITAGE VALUE

The current contribution of each building to the Town Centre Conservation Area has been assessed in the light of the historic and architectural significance of each, and this assessment has been summarised on the plans in Appendix A. In some cases, this contribution is adversely affected by the building's current condition. Further consultation and research, as well as future restoration works, may lead to changes in their perceived contribution.

Since the heritage value of the Conservation Area as a whole cannot be conveyed on a plan, the evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal values are considered here in turn:

### Evidential Value

Evidential value lies in the visible survival of the layout and fabric of all phases of the town's development. These are less numerous the further back one goes, and much has been lost since the late 1950s, although a lot still remains, including:

- Medieval fabric (principally Court House) and street layout (principally the line of the lower end of High Street and St. Tydfil's Church's boundary);
- Late-18<sup>th</sup> century fabric and street layout (principally High Street Pontmorlais, Penydarren Road and the route and walls along the first Dowlais Tramway along (upper) Penydarren Road);
- Early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century fabric and street layout (principally Victoria Street, Glebeland Street and commercial properties along these and High Street; secondary routes / lanes and their dwellings and backyard industries; and Tramroadside North);
- Late-19<sup>th</sup> and turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century fabric (including numerous commercial and public 'signature' buildings throughout the town centre, most notably to the east of the modern Penderyn Square, throughout High Street and north of Pontmorlais Circus).

Most of these phases are represented in the many designated listed buildings and locally listed buildings in the town centre.

Further evidential value may be found in buried medieval archaeology (particularly around the historic core) and industrial archaeology (particularly along the tramroads).

Further evidential value is held in the great deal of documentary evidence about the town including, but not limited to, George Yates' 1799 Map of Glamorgan, John Woods' 1836 town map, 1850 Tithe map, 1851 Public Health Map, historic ordnance survey plans, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century writings of travel writer Benjamin Malkin, and the exceptional collection of late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs and notes collected by the late Alan George ([www.alangeorge.co.uk](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk)).

### Historical Value

Historical value lies in:

- Merthyr Tydfil's close link to the development, from 1759, of the iron industry in Wales.
- (Penydarren) Merthyr Tramroad became the world's first steam-hauled railway by Richard Trevithick's locomotive;
- Survival of historic routes of the former (removed) tramroads;
- Survival of a few of the once prolific early-19<sup>th</sup> century dwellings and backyard industries;
- Survival of good examples of other building types, particularly commercial, administrative, public and religious, from the medieval era through to early-20<sup>th</sup> century;
- Merthyr Tydfil's history of dissent and urban culture of political radicalism illustrated by uprisings in 1800, 1816 and 1831, and as a main centre for Chartism from 1839.

### Aesthetic Value

Whilst much of built aesthetic value may have been lost since the late 1950s, a great deal of aesthetic value still lies in the:

- Traditional appearance;
- Organic line of High Street, particularly through Pontmorlais and southern end of High Street where the curved street draws the eye;
- Traditional appearance and scale of Court House, and of the few smaller late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> century buildings;
- Unified formal appearance of the remaining early-19<sup>th</sup> century formal buildings;
- Architectural design, detailing and materials of many of the signature public and commercial buildings dating from late-19<sup>th</sup> and turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century;
- Late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs collected by the late Alan George ([www.alangeorge.co.uk](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk)), particularly those recording the historic shopfronts and details that have, in most cases, been replaced;
- Views of the surrounding hills revealing the highland context, at the head of the Taff Valley.

The aesthetically most important buildings in the town centre have been made designated listed buildings or locally listed buildings. There are many of these in the town centre. However, there remain some aesthetically important buildings that may be worthy of locally listing that have not been individually recognised yet.

### Communal Value

Communal values lie in:

- War memorial overlooking Pontmorlais Circus, erected c.1931 and sculpted by L S Merrifield;
- A modern plaque on St.Tydfil's Church's churchyard's eastern gateway stating that the churchyard has been established as a garden of remembrance '*to honour the men and women of the Borough and Wales, from all services, who made the supreme sacrifice for their country*'.
- Monument (erected 1933) to Richard Trevithick's successful world first steam railway locomotive experiment;
- Commemorative drinking water fountain in St David's Churchyard Wall inscribed '*To commemorate the marriage of the Prince of Wales, 10 March 1863*';
- Drinking water fountain canopy commissioned by Sir W T Lewis' and W T Rees' (c.1890.) and dedicated to '*Robert and Lucy Thomas of Waunwyllt, the pioneers in 1828 of the South Wales Steam Coal Trade*';
- Statue to industrialist Henry Seymour Berry (1<sup>st</sup> Baron Buckland of Bwlch) (b.1877; d.1928);
- Memorial headstones within and around St.Tydfil's Church and commemorative windows within St.Tydfil's Church;
- St.Tydfil's Church built on the site of a medieval church, reputedly the place where St Tydfil was martyred in the fifth century;
- Sites related to the Merthyr Rising in 1831 including Court House and the site of the Castle Hotel (now Penderyn Square). The subsequent trials of the main people thought to have been involved, and particularly 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 against authority and, for many, created a martyr. Such symbolic value remains very high, and Merthyr Tydfil still holds deep meaning for many as a focus for dissent and independence;
- Active places of worship in the town centre, such as Hope Church, High Street Chapel and St.Tydfil's Church, still have communal spiritual value for many. However, historically this value would have been much more dominant and more cultural than it is currently;
- Memories and history of the entertainment venues and public houses will hold significance for many, particularly the Theatre Royal since it is probably the only surviving historic entertainment venue;
- As a still busy town centre, comprising many shops, food outlets, entertainment venues, public houses, hotels, dwellings, offices, places of worship, and places of learning, Merthyr Tydfil town centre holds extremely high social value. This has also been the case historically.



## 5.0 STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

The Conservation Area's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities can be summarised for each area:

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

#### Strengths

The greatest strengths of this area are St.Tydfil's Church and its mature trees and leafy churchyard that provide a backdrop to the modern square. The green areas and lane to the southwest and west, outside the churchyard, are also positive.

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, as Merthyr Tydfil's oldest building has historic significance, even though the dominant mid-19<sup>th</sup> century railway viaduct, historically important in its own right, isolates Court House somewhat from the rest of the town centre.

#### Weaknesses

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 view of Court House is good as Court Street rises to the east of the railway viaduct although this view is marred by the view of its mid-20<sup>th</sup> century extension.

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.

- The lane alongside 10 Lower High Street (Ex-servicemen's Club) is particularly overgrown, there is a lot of rubbish, graffiti on the buildings and bins at the end of the lane that are all visually negative.

Lower High Street, leading to and from the roundabout, and Court Street are extremely busy with traffic 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.

### Opportunities

Seek to address the weaknesses of the area, including:

- Consider removing Farm Foods, Top Line Print, Yew Street from the Conservation Area;
- Encourage better maintenance of railway viaduct and other buildings, plots and structures visible to the public.

There is also a question whether the block of Lower High Street on the southern side of Court Street should be retained within the Conservation Area largely because the modern road separates it so much from the Town Centre Conservation Area.

Consideration could be given to making the drinking water fountain canopy more accessible and to bringing it back into use.

## 5.2 TRAIN STATION

### Strengths

The only significant strength is the former Vale of Neath Railway line, constructed in 1853 and still in use today. This defines the western boundary of this area and 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.

### Weaknesses

The near view is very poor to the east, dominated by the two-level Tesco car park. Although it lies outside of the Conservation Area boundary, the road leading to the supermarket car park is congested with cars.

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.

### Opportunities

Seek to address the weaknesses of the area, including:

- Consider removing almost all of this area from the Conservation Area;
- Encourage better maintenance of railway viaduct and other areas visible to the public.

### 5.3 HIGH STREET COMMERCIAL CENTRE

#### SOUTHERN HALF

##### Strengths

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 traditional 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.

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

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

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, 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-19<sup>th</sup> century town centre building. 133 High Street is probably of the same date although most of the detailing has been replaced. These suggest a more planned formal block of development, certainly sharing the same architectural style and language. This row is only interrupted by the later brick and stone faced 132 High Street, although this is still a positive building.
- 38 High Street. This is a simple traditionally proportioned likely late-19<sup>th</sup> 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-20<sup>th</sup> 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. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor fenestration remain, although only the form of the historic oriel window to 49 High Street remains.

### Weaknesses

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 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 modern dark brown brick faced buildings visible to the northwest of the lane alongside High Street Chapel are very unsightly although they lie outside of the Town Centre Conservation Area.

Whilst the upper storeys of the best historic commercial buildings 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 sensitivity.

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.

Below ground services have been altered in places along High Street, and infilled with a Tarmacadam-type finish. This affects the visual integrity of the high-quality modern paving.

The physical condition and appearance of a small number of buildings in this area is poor where maintenance is overdue (e.g. 38 High Street). There appear to be more vacant properties in the northern half of High street than the southern half.

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. These are particularly noticeable from the train station's 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 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.

## Opportunities

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 originally 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.

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

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

This is primarily because they are probably largely intact survivals from the earliest phases of development.

## NORTHERN HALF

### Strengths

Many of the existing streets and at least two alleyways are survivals of the historic street pattern, including:

- Victoria Street (originally Thomas Street) may have been one of the first formally planned streets in the town and may be the only late 18<sup>th</sup> century survival visible on the earliest, 1799, map of the town;
- Glebeland Street (originally Cross Street) had been laid out by 1813-14;
- Graham Street had been laid out by 1836 but exists only in name and in its location now;
- Also by 1836, Wheatsheaf Lane and Post Office Lane had developed as secondary lanes running parallel behind parts of the western side of High Street and behind parts of Cross Street and Castle Street;
- alleyway alongside The Narrow Gauge public house.

The best example of a restored shopfront is the restoration at 106 High Street although even the modern shopfront of 66 High Street fits better in the Conservation Area than most.

The banks, public houses and one or two other buildings (e.g. 3 Glebeland Street and 62 High Street) have remained largely intact at street level.

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-19<sup>th</sup> 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 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).

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 halfway 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 largely because of its composition with its corner copper clad domed roof, 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.

### **Weaknesses**

All historic shopfronts have been replaced, and most are now fully glazed, with deep plastic fascias and signage above. 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.

Whilst the route of Hong Kong Alley survives, its form and depth were altered by the later buildings built around it so that it is now deep and dark.

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 the 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.

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-20<sup>th</sup> 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.

Historically, Market Square would have been one of the most significant public spaces in the town centre. Today, 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. Modern seating alongside this building in the Market Square is located within the shadow of this building. Consideration could be given to replacement of this building to re-create the historic market square.

The appearance of the vast, drab and Brutalist-style 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 replacements of parts of the historic terrace on Victoria Street's north side (e.g. numbers 31, 34 and 38) have affected and unbalanced the appearance of what was once a unified formal row. These replacement buildings are mostly negative because their heights, fenestration and finishes differ from the original facade.

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 the southern / supermarket side of the road even though some people desire to walk on that side.

Some elements are notably missing from some of the historic buildings, including:

- Balcony from the upper floor of 115 High Street;
- Oriel window and ironwork missing from 1<sup>st</sup> 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. Maintenance is overdue on a few of these.

## Opportunities

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.

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 summary plan, 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.

Consideration could be given to providing more seating on High Street to give more options of places to sit.

Construction of the new bus station planned to be completed in 2021 on a brownfield site further south from the existing bus station, and closer to the train station. This opens up the possibility of redevelopment of the existing bus station site.

## 5.4 PENDERYN SQUARE & CASTLE STREET

### Strengths

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.

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

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. 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:

- Memorial fountain in St David's Chuchyard Wall;
- Statue & Plinth to Henry Seymour Berry;
- Post / pillar Box at northeast corner of Old Town Hall.

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

### Weaknesses

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.

Traffic is, at times, a negative feature through this section of High Street and through High Street Pontmorlais. Church Road runs into 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.

### Opportunities

The view of the telephone exchange building to the west of the pedestrianized square 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.

## 5.5 PONTMORLAIS

### Strengths

#### Layout & Street Pattern

The historic route of High Street survives. This is sinuous in nature, illustrating 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.

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.

To the eastern side of High Street, two of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century lanes, including Roberts Lane, and two historic gated alleyways have survived beneath 97 Pontmorlais and 88 High Street.

Stepped terraced dwellings along Roberts Lane, one or two dilapidated dwellings in Bowen's court, and 3 and 4 Mile End on Tramroadside North, are the only survivals of the dwellings that were built along the secondary lanes.

The route of the 1802 (Penydarren) Merthyr Tramroad and its associated flanking stone walls, running north to south along the eastern edge of the town centre, are an important historic feature. A few rows of ironworkers' cottages had been built along the eastern side of Tramroadside North by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. One of these continues in use at the southern end of this area, although it currently lies within the Thomastown Conservation Area.

#### Views

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.



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

Many of the two-storeys commercial properties were probably built in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> floor window surrounds. This created a unified appearance to these rows.

The eastern 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 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 provide architectural interest and positive qualities to the townscape.

As elsewhere in the Town Centre Conservation Area, characteristically eclectic late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

9 Pontmorlais may be the best example of the arrangement of a historic shop front, and the pilasters subdividing 1-6 Morlais Buildings retain some very good examples of sculptural stone corbels.

Upper storeys of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early-20<sup>th</sup> 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.

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).

Roberts Lane, off the east side of the High Street, is a survival from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a short, narrow stepped terrace of small, two-storey dwellings. The materials and finishes have been extensively altered but the terrace's compact scale and stepped form remain and provide visual interest. The character of the lane is more intimate and domestic, and a pleasant contrast to the commercial High Street.

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

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

Pontmorlais contains two locally listed buildings:

- Olde Express Inn;
- Imperial Hotel.

Paving along High Street is high quality. This helps to create consistency and visual unity, although none of the paving on High Street itself is of historic interest.

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 historic stone sett and slab paving.

## Weaknesses

Occasional gaps in the historic urban grain. These include Wesley Chapel's missing gated forecourt, the missing building immediately to the north of it, and missing buildings to the north of 20-22 High Street Pontmorlais.

Most of the historic ground floor shopfronts and street frontages have been replaced during the 20<sup>th</sup> century so that only a few details have survived. There has also been a significant erosion of historic architectural detailing including the loss of many 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 where these have been retained);
- projecting bracketed signage;
- curved plate glass;
- projecting bracketed lighting.

Typical examples of poor alterations in the past 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 remnants of Bowens Court that historically opened onto High Street. The only benefit of this wall is that it largely hides the ductwork from 6-7 Pontmorlais as well as the overgrown courtyard.
- 87 High Street: This once had a highly glazed shop frontage extending at ground floor level across two buildings. The glazed shop front at ground floor and 1<sup>st</sup> floor levels have been replaced in the past. The 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

Some modern infill developments such as the Voluntary Action Centre 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.

The rear elevations of High Street properties visible from Tramroadside North retain little evidence of 19<sup>th</sup> century materials or details apart from the occasional, dilapidated natural slate roof and / or derelict outbuilding. Castle Yard has also suffered visually from the widespread application of modern sand / cement renders, assumed construction of significant infills or extensions, and loss of all visible historic details.

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 due to lack of use and inadequate maintenance.

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. The current appearance of Tramroadside North does little to recall its historic industrial importance to the area.

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

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, opaque 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.

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 the 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.

## Opportunities

Restoration of more historic buildings in Pontmorlais would continue to visually enhance the Conservation Area. Buildings that would benefit from sensitive historic restoration include:

- 1 to 6 (or 7) Roberts Lane

Opportunities for enhancing the Conservation Area could include:

- new and lower key / more appropriate signage;
- reinstating the generally historical vertical emphasis in the elevations;
- 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.

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## 5.6 PONTMORLAIS CIRCUS & PONTMORLAIS WEST

### Strengths

This area has historic importance because, from the early-19<sup>th</sup> 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.

Pontmorlais West is important because it retains several buildings from the early-19<sup>th</sup> century phase of development along the south side of the earliest tramroad route.

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.

A prominent group of early-20<sup>th</sup> 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.

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. Most of these, perhaps with the exception of the Theatre Royal, retain their historic detailing.

The design of the YMCA building is an interesting early-20<sup>th</sup> 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.

The route of Morlais stream, visible through the Theatre Soar car park as a dense tree lined edge, is visually positive, offering a little visual relief beyond the expanse of the car park and buildings to the east of it.

The three-storeys warehouse building behind Merthyr Upholsterers appears to be a largely intact survival from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

This area retains a few good examples of commercial buildings dating from the early-19<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> floor window surrounds and some good traditional shopfront elements. The former 'Flooks' jeweller's shop at 49 and 50 High Street has some of the best surviving late-19<sup>th</sup> 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. The condition of the Bolgoed Place and 49-50 High Street are very good after sensitive restoration in recent years.

Terraced dwellings at the western end of Pontmorlais West, and 28 to 43 Penydarren Road on the opposite, eastern, side of Pontmorlais Circus, were built by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. These are of historic significance as survivals, at least in their form and fenestration, of early-19<sup>th</sup> century worker's dwellings and commercial 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 early-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Pontmorlais Circus area contains three locally listed structures:

- Masonic Temple;
- Former Labour Exchange (free-standing frontage only remains);
- Monument to Trevithick (erected 1933).

## 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 war memorial garden would provide a good view down over Pontmorlais, although this site is not normally open, reportedly due to problems with antisocial behaviour.

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.

### Historical Associations & Hidden Histories

Richard Trevithick was the inventor and builder of the world's first steam railway locomotive which ran from here along the Merthyr Tramroad (part of which is now known as Tramroadside North) to the terminus at Abercynon on 21 February 1804. 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.

### **Weaknesses**

Currently, vehicular traffic leaves High Street Pontmorlais from Pontmorlais Circus, 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.

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 although the latter site is a well-used public car park.

The War Memorial and The Promenade are currently closed to the public, having been blocked off for several years.

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.

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.

With the exception of the recently restored Bolgoed Place, 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 importance.

Public convenience openings, beneath The Promenade, were infilled, probably during the late-20<sup>th</sup> 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.

A late-20<sup>th</sup> century black painted steel balustrade protects the edge of the raised terrace overlooking Penydarren Road. 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.

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.

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.

There is a hazardous set of steps leading down to the terrace of 14 to 17 Pontmorlais West. The road surface there is also very poor. The lane and yard behind Bolgoed Place are also in poor condition, although not in the public realm.

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

Most importantly of all, the YMCA building, Theatre Royal and Thespian House remain derelict and without purpose. They let this area down. 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 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 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-20<sup>th</sup> 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 building would have been an important focal point at this important gateway to High Street. This area is now the little used and slightly unkempt seating area.

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.

## Opportunities

Efforts are still being made to restore the YMCA and to bring it back into use, and this opportunity should be greatly encouraged.

## 5.7 (Upper) Penydarren Road

### Strengths

The western edge of Penydarren Road's upper length is defined by The Promenade's historic 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.

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.

5 to 7, and 1 to 4 Garth Villas are on the site of the oldest buildings in this area, suggesting the original buildings were closely related to the Penydarren Ironworks. 5 to 7 Garth Villas was designed as a formal symmetrical composition with dominant central gable. 1 to 4 Garth Villas 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 and their importance.

### 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 low.

### Weaknesses

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 have 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. Individual ownerships and resulting loss of historic features and visual cohesion to rows and terraced dwellings. In particular, 5 to 7 Garth Villas was 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.

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

### Opportunities

Consideration needs to be given to whether the extent of the Town Centre Conservation Area should be reduced to concentrate on the most important heritage in this area. This is principally The Promenade's historic route and stone wall, the presumed remaining length of the Penydarren Park boundary wall, and Garth Villas (subject to further investigation). This does not belittle the importance of the Old General Hospital, and this should remain a locally listed building.

For all areas that remain in the Conservation Area, encouragement should be given to replace inappropriate modern details, finishes and materials.



## 5.8 THREATS

The principal threats to the character and special architectural or historic interest of the Conservation Area are shared or common throughout all areas. Principally these are the risks of:

- 1) Loss of historic architectural detailing, materials / finishes or forms;
- 2) Prolonged vacancy, potentially leading to inadequate maintenance;
- 3) Inadequate maintenance of the public realm.

## 6.0 BOUNDARY REVIEW

One of the key elements of a CAA is to review the boundary to ensure that the Conservation Area continues to demonstrate clear architectural and historic interest. The review also takes the opportunity to consider whether the Conservation Area boundary should be extended or reduced, or whether there remains justification for retaining its designation if the character or appearance of an area has been diluted.

The conclusion of this review is that the current boundary could be reduced in extent to remove areas that feel too far removed from the character of Merthyr Tydfil's town centre itself or that contain no architectural or historic significance. Further discussion with MTCBC and consultation will no doubt be required before making any changes to the designated Conservation Area boundary. The reasons for the changes proposed in each area are:

### 6.1 Lower High Street Square, St.Tydfil's Church & Court Street

This area contains two important designated historic buildings (St.Tydfil's Church and Court House) that relate to the origins of Merthyr Tydfil; some important historic structures (St.Teilo's Church railings, drinking water fountain canopy and the railway viaduct); and survivals of some of the historic street pattern (Lower High Street, upper length of Court Street, and St.Tydfil's churchyard perimeter). So, this area to the north of Court Street has historic significance.

However, the character of this area is hard to define, largely because the historic fabric that tied this area together has been replaced by a good, but modern, square and because the buildings that remain don't really relate to each other. However, the modern square and St.Tydfil's Church form the core character of this area. The modern square and churchyard are also welcome breathing spaces and a contrast to the linear High Street to the north. These should be retained in the town centre Conservation Area for these reasons.

The buildings along Lower High Street appear to have been built roughly following the 19<sup>th</sup> century building line, and the oldest of these (16, 17 & 18 Lower High Street) appears to date to between 1850-75. Because of this, this block is of some significance, although architecturally its significance seems low. There is a question whether this block should be retained within the Conservation Area largely because the modern road separates it so much from the Town Centre Conservation Area.

## 6.2 Train Station

Consideration should be given to removing this whole area from the Town Centre Conservation Area, although the elevated railway structure is an important historic feature that should be retained within the Conservation Area.

## 6.3 High Street Commercial Centre

### Southern Half

Hope and Market Square United Church does not need to be in the Conservation Area since there is nothing of architectural or historic interest to conserve there.

The garage forecourts to the north side of Three Salmon Street do not warrant being in the Conservation Area, although there may be a presumption against doing this because they probably form part of the curtilage of 148 and 149 High Street.

### Northern Half

Consideration should be given to whether the whole of Beacons Place needs to be retained within the Conservation Area boundary since it is of no heritage or architectural significance.

The former magistrates court site on Church Street is now a car park. There is nothing here or in the car parking areas behind the John Street properties that warrants them being in a Conservation Area.

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 part of the garden of a large house. Consideration should be given to whether this area also needs to be retained in the conservation area.

Consideration could be given to placing an Article 4 Direction on the few early 19<sup>th</sup> century houses on John Street.

The modern Citizens Advice building on Post Office Lane is of no architectural or historic significance, so does not need to be within the Conservation Area.

#### 6.4 Penderyn Square & Castle Street

As one of the core areas of the Town Centre Conservation Area there seems no reason to reduce or change the boundary around the core buildings. However:

- Castle Street's Winchester Bar appears to be a fairly effective Georgian-styled pastiche. Whilst this has been well done it is not architecturally or historically significant. Therefore, this does not warrant being in the Conservation Area.
- Tramroadside North lies within the Town Centre Conservation Area, although the adjacent terraced rows lie within Thomastown Conservation Area. Consideration should be given to whether the cottages should lie within the same Conservation Area as the former tramroad since they seem inextricably linked. Consideration could also be given to placing an Article 4 Direction on these rows overlooking Tramroadside North.

#### 6.5 Pontmorlais

Pontmorlais is clearly one of the core areas of the Town Centre Conservation Area and it retains a lot of historic and architectural interest. As such, it is right that it is included within the Town Centre Conservation Area, and there seems no reason to alter the present boundary line.

#### 6.6 Pontmorlais Circus & Pontmorlais West

Whilst Pontmorlais Circus lies outside the heart of the Town Centre Conservation Area it seems right that it is included because of:

The heritage and architectural significance of its group of designated listed buildings;  
As the historic route of the first tramroad, along The Promenade;  
For survival of its early-19<sup>th</sup> century dwellings and shops.

However:

- The former drill hall is in very poor condition and architecturally it is of no importance.
- Now that modern flats have been built on the former labour exchange site and there is nothing standing on the sloping site to the north of it, it isn't clear why these areas need to be retained within the Town Centre Conservation Area.
- Pontmorlais car park and the steel-clad church (probably built in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century) to the north of it, are of no significance.

Consideration could be given to removing these areas from the Town Centre Conservation Area.

Consideration could be given to recognizing the significance of more of the historic (Penydarren) Merthyr Tramroad route, for example by including the area running behind 28 Pontmorlais West, and

including the likely early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> dwelling alongside the steel-clad church. This would make this heritage more legible although this could be challenging because some of this area appears now to be in private ownership and the former tramway bridge across Nant Morlais could be a challenge to recreate (especially when there is still a substantial bridge alongside).

The historic tramroad routes and associated buildings do not really form part of the character of the core of the town centre although they are of high historic significance. Consideration could be given to their inclusion in their own Conservation Area(s) although this might create difficulty since they are often narrow and extensive routes and might fragment existing Conservation Areas. For example, the group of free-standing buildings to the north of Pontmorlais Circus lie on the opposite side of the historic tramroad from the town centre. An alternative might be to consider renaming the town Conservation Area to recognise the contribution of the historic tramroads or to transferring the group of free-standing buildings to the north of Pontmorlais Circus into the adjacent Morgantown Conservation Area. At the very least, it seems right that the historic tram routes and their associated buildings remain recognised and protected, at the very least, by inclusion within the Town Centre Conservation Area. However, the level of protection for the former tramroad routes and associated walls are not clear since the Conservation Area legislation principally relates to demolition of buildings and removal of trees.

Although some may be now classed as commercial properties, where early-19<sup>th</sup> century worker's dwellings have survived along Pontmorlais West, Bolgoed Place, and between 28 and 50 Penydarren Road, it would be wise to extend the Article 4 Direction to include them, after all this Direction only relates to dwellings.

## 6.7 (Upper) Penydarren Road

This area as a whole does not feel as though it should be part of the Town Centre Conservation Area largely because its character and location are so far removed, but also, with the exception of the Old General Hospital and possibly Garth Villas (depending on their date of construction), the historic and architectural significance do not appear to be high. Further work would be required to establish the date and significance of both rows of Garth Villas.

Furthermore:

- 1) The Old General Hospital and detached villas to the northern side of High Street and eastern side of Gwaelod-y-Garth Road do not reflect the character of the town centre and are physically very remote from the town centre.
- 2) Prospect Place and Park Place are typical late-19<sup>th</sup> century terraced dwellings, common to the approaches of south Wales valleys towns. As such they have little in the way of architectural or heritage significance.
- 3) One single-storey outbuilding on Penyard Rd, behind 28 Penydarren Road, seems an odd inclusion within the Conservation Area. There is nothing visible of significance.
- 4) 4 to 7 The Rink are modern semi-detached houses make no contribution to the Conservation Area.

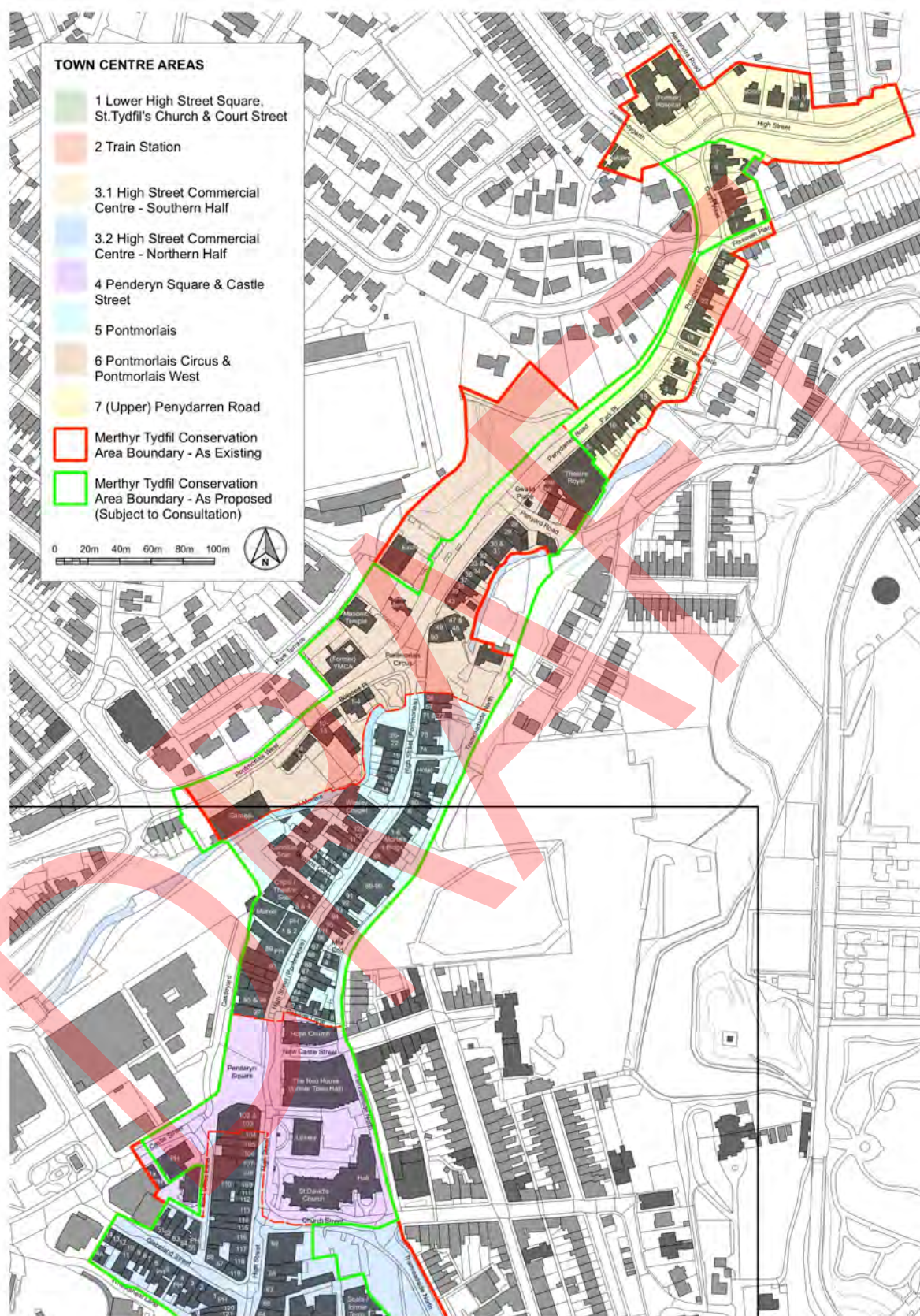
Consideration could also be given to:

- removing the embankment that formed part of Penydarren Park from the Conservation Area;
- placing an Article 4 Direction on Garth Villas, depending on the outcome of further research into their significance.

## 6.8 Plans Showing Suggested Conservation Area Boundary Changes

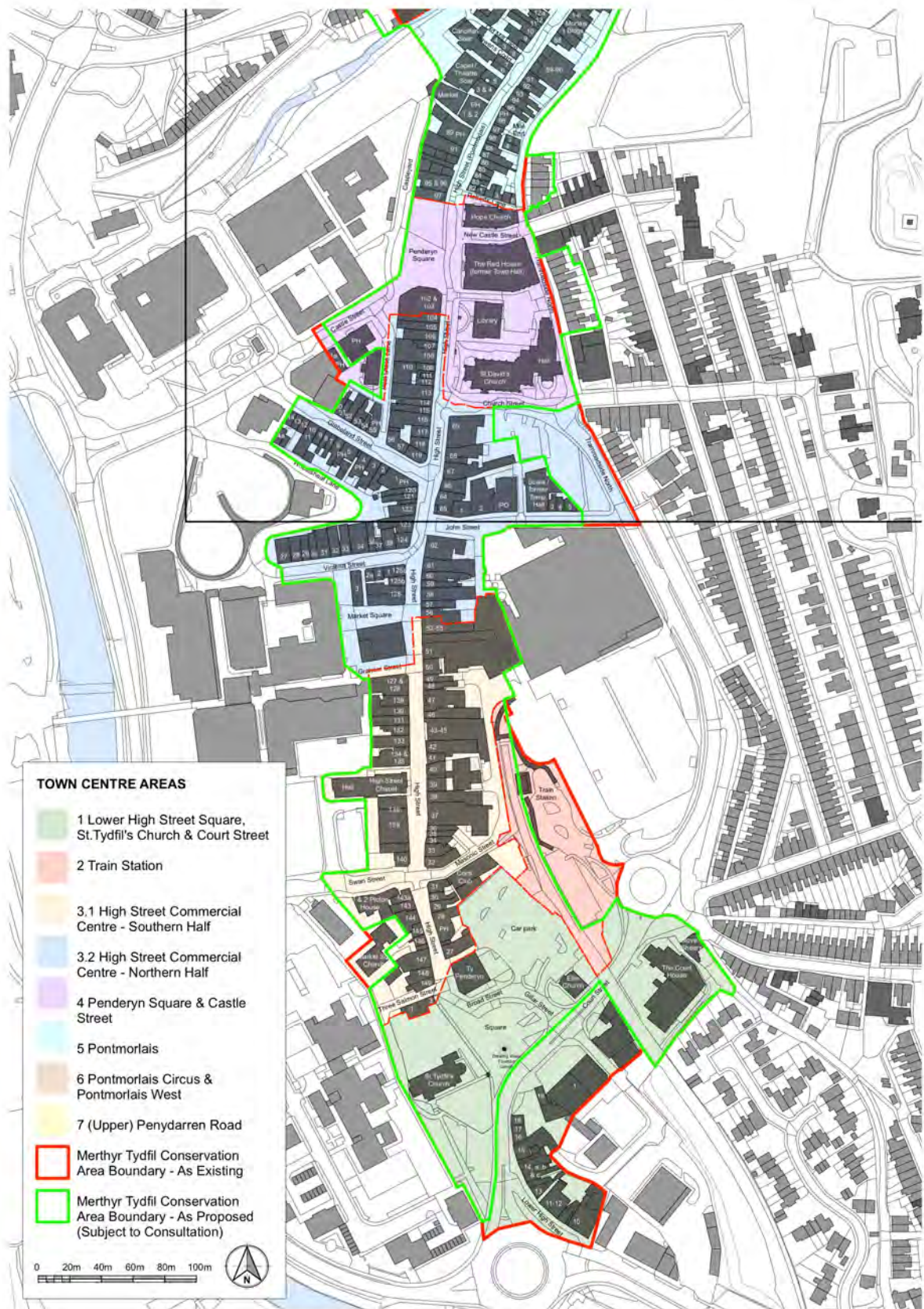
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Suggested revisions to Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area Boundary (1 of 2)





Suggested revisions to Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area Boundary (2 of 2)

## PART 2: CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

The format of this section reflects the two main priorities of a Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP):

- to ensure the ongoing protection of the existing buildings and townscape of the Conservation Area
- to guide its future development in a manner that preserves and enhances its special character and appearance.

The strengths and weaknesses of the Conservation Area have been identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Character Assessments.

The Management Plan details general and specific planning guidance and controls effective across the Town Centre Conservation Area and outlines proposals for its enhancement.

### 7.1 Review

Whilst much of the town centre's historic environment has been designated a Conservation Area, this should not be regarded as an obstacle to change but seen as an opportunity to ensure high quality positive intervention, which consolidates the architectural and historic value of the area. Historic buildings and sites demonstrate qualities of design, workmanship and use of materials that cannot readily be reproduced. Their form and inter-relationship provide an important backdrop to everyday life for those who live, work and pass through the town centre. The past and present functions of a place reflect its interaction with people and affect the values they ascribe to it.

This Management Plan sets out objectives for the long-term protection and enhancement of the Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area. It is intended as an assessment of matters that need to be addressed and makes suggestions for policy aims, guidance and community involvement. Once the Management Plan is adopted by MTCBC it will carry significant weight as a material consideration in determining applications within, or which visually affect, the conservation area.

MTCBC are currently part way through a second successful 5 year Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) scheme funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund for Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter (which constitutes about a third of the Town Centre Conservation Area) that has made significant inroads into improving the character of Pontmorlais.

## Boundary

Best practice prescribes that Conservation Area boundaries should be occasionally reviewed to ensure that the original reasons for designation are still evident and relevant. Where it is appropriate to do so, boundaries should be amended. Reviews of the boundary as well as any accompanying guidance and assessments should generally be undertaken every five years or in response to a notable change, including changes in policy or legislation.

The boundary review undertaken as part of this CAA/CAMP proposes a number of amendments to the current boundary as outlined in section 6.

## 7.2 Aims

The Management Plan has a number of key objectives:

- To raise awareness of the area's heritage
- To increase the diversity and viability of the commercial premises in the area to help create business and employment opportunities for new and existing investors in the area
- To promote Merthyr Tydfil as a visitor destination
- To improve public perception of Merthyr Tydfil, with residents, business owners and investors.
- To improve the built environment of the Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area through co-ordinated enhancement schemes

The strategy for the management of the Conservation Area should not be seen in isolation but within the context of MTCBC's corporate strategies. It should also relate to a prominent heritage protection policy that is enforced through the planning process, the Council's economic development and regeneration strategy, future housing, highway management, environmental health and sustainability considerations and others as they arise.

## 7.3 Character

The special character of Merthyr tydfil's town centre derives from:

- C19 and early C20 dense, urban development of the area as a commercial, civic, social and spiritual centre as a result of the rapid influx of labour to serve the industrial expansion of Merthyr Tydfil.
- A concentration of good examples of C19 and early C20 civic, social, religious and commercial buildings.
- Landscape modelled by the industrial archaeology of late C18 tramway routes linking the ironworks to the Glamorganshire Canal and the subsequent development of the Penydarren



Tramroad by Trevithick, running along the eastern boundary of the area.

- The narrow and gently winding route of High Street, with most properties built directly at back-of-pavement, creating a strong sense of enclosure and ever-changing oblique views.
- The variety of styles and finishes along High Street which result in a visually exciting streetscape.
- Small side streets, alleyways and yards opening off the High Street that form intimate, modest spaces more informal in character.
- Building groups and distinctive individual buildings of significant townscape value.
- The use of local, traditional building materials and details.

#### 7.4 Potential Threats

The special character of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area is threatened by:

- Further loss of architectural detail and historic features such as, shop fronts, chimneys, windows, railings, barge boards and decorative plasterwork.
- Inappropriate modern interventions such as satellite dishes, electrical cabling, security alarms and rerouted drainage on the frontage of buildings; modern roof lights, large external flues and roof vents that stand above the roof line; shop fronts that don't relate to the façade above.
- The concentration of take-away food outlets, particularly along High Street Pontmorlais which contribute little to daytime activity and accentuate the poor mix of uses in this commercial area.
- Numerous unoccupied or partially occupied buildings and 'buildings at risk' including derelict and structurally unsafe property and associated 'temporary' hoardings and sheathing.
- Poor management of domestic and commercial waste; instances of fly-tipping and graffiti in areas that are not on the main thoroughfares.
- Inappropriate modern repairs or replacements such as modern flush doors, PVC 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; pebbledash render; steel palisade fencing and profiled sheet metal cladding to rear of buildings.
- Unsympathetic shop fronts with over- dominant lettering or signage, oversized fascia boards, illuminated signs and externally mounted solid or perforated roller shutters; inappropriate colour schemes that conflict with the architectural detail and subdivision of the buildings.
- Poor quality infill development where new buildings bear no relation to the special character of the conservation area.
- Lack of maintenance resulting in failing roofs and blocked rainwater goods, organic growth, water ingress, failing external finishes; the poor condition and appearance of many buildings due to lack of routine maintenance.

- Loss of enclosure to some areas eg at Pontmorlais Circus following the demolition of the Owain Glyndwr public house and numbers 51 to 55 High Street Pontmorlais in the 1970s.
- The clutter of uncoordinated public realm signage and street furniture.

## 8.0 GENERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 8.1 Introduction

The Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area owes its designation and its protection to national legislation in the form of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The detailed obligations set out in that act are not included in this report, but in summary, the act aims to give protection to areas which are judged to have special architectural or historic qualities. As the title suggests, the emphasis in Conservation Areas is on the area or on groups of buildings, rather than individual buildings. The quality of an area may relate to its historical unity or, in a more mixed environment, to the consistency and harmony between buildings and features of different periods. In this case, a detailed analysis of that part of the Conservation Area has been provided in the Conservation Area Appraisal included as Part 1 of this document.

The designation of a Conservation Area brings into force certain controls over development but the legislation and the official guidance that accompanies it are intended to ensure that change should be managed in a positive way to maintain the qualities that make up the special character of the area in question. All development within the conservation area should therefore be rigorously tested for compliance with national, regional and local conservation policies and other relevant policies of the Local Development Plan. Proper consideration should be given to these in determining all planning, conservation area and listed building consent applications.

In line with the recommendations made in the 2011 Conservation Area Management Plan, MTCBC now have Article 4 Directions in place in the Pontmorlais Quarter to further prohibit the type of small alterations that would usually be allowed under Permitted Development Rights even in a conservation area.

### 8.2 Local Planning Context

This framework includes the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan 2016-2031 (Adopted January 2020). Of particular reference to this report is policy CW1: The Historic Environment from the MTCBC LDP. The key objectives that have a direct impact on the

Conservation Area are:

*The integrity of our historic environment assets will be conserved and enhanced.*

*Development proposals will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated they would preserve or enhance the architectural quality, character or the historic or cultural importance of our designated historic environment assets.*

*Development affecting undesignated historic environment assets including, Locally Listed Buildings or structures, Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales, Urban Character Areas and Archaeologically Sensitive Areas should have regard to their special character and archaeological importance.*

The Welsh Government also has several objectives, which include: -

- Enhancing the historic environment,
- Safeguarding historic buildings, and
- Ensuring that Conservation Areas are protected and enhanced.

Chapter 6 'Conserving the Historic Environment,' of Planning Policy Wales (Edition 7) July 2014, states in paragraph 6.3.2 that 'Local planning authorities are required to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation or enhancement of Conservation Areas. The positive management of Conservation Areas is necessary if their character or appearance is to be protected and enhanced. Authorities should establish consistent criteria against which existing and/or new Conservation Areas and their boundaries should be reviewed.' In paragraph 6.3.3 it also states that 'The preparation of townscape audits and Conservation Area character appraisals can assist planning authorities in the exercise of their planning and development management functions.'

Further guidance is also provided in the Welsh Assembly Government's Technical Advice Note 12, Design (2016) and Welsh Office Circular 61/96, 'Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas' and Circular 1/98, 'Planning and the Historic Environment: Directions by the Secretary of State for Wales'.

The future re-designation of land in or around the conservation area through preparation or revision of the LDP may be detrimental to its character or setting. The special character of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area should therefore be considered before any proposed changes to land designation. The planning measures identified in the following section are intended to guide implementation of future revisions to the LDP. Each policy is structured to show the issues or potential

threats to the heritage value, a recommended strategy and other actions to reduce the threat.

### 8.3 Management Plan Objectives

In the light of national legislation and guidance and local development plan policies, this Management Plan recommends a number of objectives for the protection and enhancement of the Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area. These objectives are based on the analysis of the area in the Conservation Area Appraisal, and they also reflect the outcome of previous consultations with local stakeholders and residents. They are policies which are designed to apply to the whole of the Conservation Area: more detailed recommendations relating to specific parts or elements within the Conservation Area can be found in Section 5 and Appendix C.

It is acknowledged that development over the last 50 years or more both within and adjacent to the conservation area has not adopted a consistent approach and as a result a variety of styles has been employed over this time, some of which are of variable quality. By proposing these objectives, MTCBC is seeking to adopt a framework that will continue to gradually further improve the overall character of the area over the next decade. Much of the development will by its very nature be gradual, but an incremental approach will take its cue from the guidance already in place and from the objectives identified within this document.

#### Objective 1

Developments within and adjacent to the Town Centre Conservation Area should in their scale, height and massing respect the wider setting of the Conservation Area, including views into and out of it.

#### Explanation

National guidance emphasises the need to consider the impact of development on the setting of a Conservation Area and views into and out of it.

Merthyr Tydfil's Town Centre is distinguished by its topography and setting, especially its relationship to the old tramroads and to the wider Merthyr Tydfil landscape bowl in which the town sits. It's limited size means that its urban grain and changing perspective can be fully appreciated as one travels along the main thoroughfare. High or bulky buildings, or other installations, may have a detrimental effect on this wider setting, even though they may be some distance from the Conservation Area boundary.

#### Objective 2

Development within the setting of the Conservation Area which harms its character should be resisted.



Development which positively contributes to the setting of the Conservation Area will be encouraged.

#### Explanation

All areas evolve to meet the changing needs of its populations. Developments within the confines of a Conservation Area should be designed in such a way that they protect and enhance the character of the area in line with Government guidelines. Proposals that actively harm or dilute the special character of the Conservation Area should be rejected.

#### **Objective 3**

Alterations to the streets, roads and lanes in the Conservation Area, including changes to the carriageway, pavements and parking layouts, should have regard to the character of the Conservation Area and its long-term conservation.

#### Explanation

Achieving the right balance between movement and the quality of a place is never easy, even in a reasonably modest town centre. The intention of this objective is to emphasise that the quality of streets and spaces should not be sacrificed to meet the needs of traffic or parking. The retention or reinstatement of historic street layouts and surfacing can often have a more positive effect of traffic calming and regulation than more engineered solutions.

The implementation of this policy will require close liaison between different Council services.

#### **Objective 4**

Uses that would be detrimental to the character of individual buildings and the Conservation Area as a whole will be resisted.

#### Explanation

The uses of buildings and areas are an important consideration in the preservation or enhancement of the special character of the Conservation Area. As a mixed-use area (predominantly commercial and residential uses), Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre continues to retain its original character. Pressures for change of use, for instance from residential and commercial to A3 Food and drink use (particularly evening biased take-away only establishments), can undermine the distinctive character of a Conservation Area leaving many prime locations shuttered up during the day and should be resisted. Generally speaking there is a presumption that the best uses for historic buildings are those for which the buildings were originally designed, or if that is not possible, that alternative uses of a sympathetic kind should be identified. The intention of this objective is not to prevent changes of use, but to indicate that primacy should be given to uses which are historically appropriate to the building or area

concerned.

#### **Objective 5**

Where they make an important contribution to the character of the town centre, there should be a presumption in favour of retaining historic boundary treatments such as hedges, walls and railings, and to limiting on-street clutter.

#### Explanation

The character of the Conservation Area depends in part upon its historic grain, as defined by property boundaries and street layouts. Whilst the majority of commercial building in the area do not have frontages, the larger civic buildings within the area do. These areas contribute as much to the quality of the street as the buildings and a front area behind a wall or hedge is an integral part of the building and its setting. The removal or alteration of such boundary treatments can be immensely harmful to the appearance of an area and is to be resisted. Similarly, the alteration of the rear boundary walls is noticeable in parts (particularly to Pontmorlais' Tram Road North), and the removal or alteration of original boundary walls should be resisted.

#### **Objective 6**

Proposals for energy-saving measures and for sustainable forms of energy supply will be supported where they do not adversely affect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

#### Explanation

The requirement to improve the energy performance of all buildings, including existing ones when altered, lies at the heart of both national policy and local planning policy.

It is important that the introduction of energy-saving measures does not detract from the architectural and historic character of the Conservation Area. For instance, the use of uPVC windows, insulated exterior walling materials or solar panels in roofs all may be harmful to the appearance of buildings, especially ones of traditional form and appearance. Part L of the Building regulations acknowledges this issue by allowing discretion to be used in its application to historic buildings. Under the term 'historic building' it includes:

- Listed Buildings
- Buildings in Conservation Areas
- Buildings on a local authority's 'local list'

Traditional buildings can be adapted to perform well in energy terms, although the cost and visual impact of such measures should not be underestimated. It is generally possible to introduce energy saving measures, for instance carefully installed draught proofing, loft insulation or secondary glazing. The form and nature of Merthyr's town centre means that solar panels or photovoltaic installations are unlikely to be able to be sited in locations where they would not be visually obtrusive. Care should always be taken that any measures adopted to improve energy use do not threaten the long-term conservation of the buildings (e.g. by leading to increased condensation).

## 9.0 ENHANCEMENT: ACTIONS & MANAGEMENT

This section provides guidance for the enhancement of the Conservation Area.

The enhancement of a Conservation Area can take two principal forms:

- The sympathetic redevelopment of sites defined in the detailed appraisal of the area as detracting from the character of appearance of the areas; or
- Pro-active proposals, such as the management and repair of a designed historic landscape, a scheme for the restoration of distinctive architectural features, the reinstatement of historic surfaces, or the reduction of traffic intrusion and the rationalisation of street signage.

This management plan is specific to the Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area. As the area is fairly diverse it is not possible to give exhaustive and prescriptive guidance for all building types but example guidance to help define some of the common parameters is included below. The guidance does tend to focus on the commercial buildings fronting the High Street as the buildings that are more likely to require assistance in their stewardship. The guidance is provided to aid the local authority, building owners and their consultants to make appropriate decisions with regards to the more important features of the buildings that have an impact on the public realm. It should be noted that the guidance provided is not intended as a set of hard and fast rules. Where appropriate justification can be provided in accordance with sound conservation principles, then alternative solutions to those suggested should not be dismissed.

### GUIDANCE

#### Existing Buildings

A good number of the properties within the Merthyr Tydfil Conservation Area are listed and are consequently subject to rigorous consent mechanisms in order for any material alterations to be undertaken. However, numerous inappropriate alterations have been undertaken to the buildings (listed and unlisted) over the years that have eroded some of the qualities of the buildings and detracted from their appearance. Alterations such as the insertion of replacement windows, the provision of modern shopfronts with external roller shutters, changes to dormer windows, roof coverings and other details have been detrimental to the appearance of individual buildings and their immediate setting.

#### Demolition

Whilst most buildings in the conservation area are generally in good condition, it may be inevitable that some buildings will require demolition (in full or in part). Furthermore, opportunities may arise to

improve the wider conservation area by demolishing poor quality or poorly designed buildings in or close to the area.

**Recommendation:**

- There will be a presumption against demolition (including substantial partial demolition or façade retention) of any buildings in the conservation area constructed prior to 1945, including outbuildings and associated permanent structures within backlands areas. The demolition of post 1945 buildings might justify the attachment of conditions requiring archaeological mitigation even if their demolition raises no other issues.
- Proposals for demolition of a historic asset should not be considered in the absence of a detailed assessment / appraisal that demonstrates to the satisfaction of MTCBC that the building cannot be retained. Demolition work that receives consent must not begin until contracts have been let for the approved development.
- Where a building is considered to be in a dangerous condition, advice should be sought from MTCBC prior to any demolition. In such circumstances, all efforts should initially be made to secure the site from public access rather than demolition pending agreement of a way forward. Where feasible, existing structures should be recorded prior to demolition.

Alterations & Extensions

Alteration and extension of the superstructure of a building can lead to the loss of some of its historic value and townscape qualities and can have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the area as a whole. Insensitive and inappropriate rear and side extensions have degraded many of the views of the rear of the High Street. Future extensions should be of an appropriate size, form and scale as well as have a sympathetic approach to detailing and materials.

**Recommendation:** Where alteration or extension is necessary for the continued use of a building or where it benefits the regeneration of the conservation area it should:

- Be well designed and of a quality at least commensurate with the historic buildings and the character of the site.
- not detract from the character and appearance of the area and be subservient to the parent building.
- be prioritised towards the less significant areas of the building (e.g. a rear elevation or previously altered area).
- involve the least possible degree of change to or loss of historic fabric.
- use like-for-like traditional materials where renewing original fabric unless an alternative can be adequately justified in terms of its visual effect on the conservation area.

- leave a record of the date when any significant changes were made.
- where possible enhance the character of the building
- respect historic plots, building / façade lines and maintain historic street patterns.

### Roofs

The original roof coverings to most of the historic buildings within the Town Centre Conservation Area would have been Welsh slate. Current roofing materials identified in the area currently includes natural slate, artificial slate, concrete tiles, profiled metal sheeting and other materials

Recommendation: Where pitched roofs are to be re-covered, they should be re-roofed using appropriate materials to reinforce the character of the area. In most cases this will be natural slate, preferably Welsh slate whenever possible / budget allows.

### Dormers

Dormer windows are a strong and significant feature in many of the commercial properties facing the High Street (particularly in Pontmorlais). Many buildings retain their dormers, but often, inappropriate detailing has eroded their qualities.

Recommendation: Works to existing buildings where dormers exist should include for the reintroduction of proportions and details based on historic research / evidence in order to re-establish the dormer windows as strong architectural features in the area. Where dormers have been removed previously, the reintroduction of suitably detailed dormers should be promoted.

### Rooflights

Numerous properties have had rooflights inserted, predominantly to the rear elevations. As would be expected with individual ownership, the size, type and location of the rooflights varies considerably.

Recommendation: New or replacement rooflights should not adversely affect the character of the building. Where deemed necessary, rooflights should be suitable modern replica metal conservation styled rooflights, installed flush with the plane of the roof covering and where possible, generally in the upper half of the roof.

### Rainwater Goods

The original rainwater goods installed to older properties would have been fabricated of cast iron. uPVC rainwater goods are now most common in the area, and whilst they function to help keep the building face dry, they do not have suitable aesthetic authenticity. The use of appropriately detailed and

selected heritage detailed aluminium guttering would also be an acceptable alternative to cast iron, though it should be noted that the aluminium downpipes are not generally as robust as their cast iron counterparts, which would be a consideration on the street elevation.

Recommendation: New or replacement rainwater goods should be traditionally detailed units of cast iron or cast aluminium to suit the evidenced arrangements (many of the buildings had ogee profiled gutters originally) with smaller diameter (approx. 3") downpipes. Downpipe locations to be considered in relation to elaborate shopfronts and historic features.

### Chimney Stacks

Chimney stacks form a critical element in the roof profile of the area and help provide a perceptible rhythm to the urban streetscape. Numerous stacks have been taken down (likely to arrest damp and maintenance issues associated with them).

Recommendation: Where stacks have been removed, encouragement should be given to re-establishing the chimney stacks (even if not operational) to enhance the street silhouette. New stacks can be constructed with full lead tray arrangements to prevent water ingress.

### External Walls

The finishes to the external walls found within the town centre varies considerably, from the red brick and terracotta or sandstone detailing found on the larger civic buildings, the pennant stone faces of Hope Chapel and St. David's Church to the painted render finishes found predominantly to the commercial buildings (particularly at the upper levels above the shopfronts). The earlier render finishes to numerous buildings have been replaced with modern cement based renders that have a detrimental impact on the historic fabric.

Recommendation: Where original render finishes remain and are sound, these could be repaired using suitable lime based render repairs, and where hard cement finishes exist, the best course of action would be to remove the render and replace it with new lime based render finishes that can be painted using breathable external paints. Alternatively, self-coloured lime based renders could be used if preferred. The wall finishes to the civic buildings should generally be retained and repaired.

### Shopfronts

The installation of unsympathetic shop fronts and associated security measures to a great number of the buildings in the conservation area have been carried out in the past. As a consequence, these changes have not respected the character of the buildings or the conservation area and the impact has been an incremental erosion of the conservation area's qualities. As part of the Pontmorlais Townscape

Heritage scheme, a number of properties in that area have had new shopfront arrangements based on historic details that have greatly enhanced the streetscape. In association with many shopfronts changes, security roller shutters have been installed to the external face of many shopfronts to the detriment of the building and the wider area. This detriment is particularly acute when the buildings are take-away food outlets that remain closed for much of the day and therefore give the street a particularly unwelcoming feeling.

Recommendation: Further encouragement should be provided to have more building owners reinstate the older shopfront arrangements to re-establish and reinforce the character of the area. The need for additional security measures should be carefully considered, and if required, then shutters should be placed on the inside of the shopfront to lessen the impact on the streetscape when the units are closed. A shopfront is part of a whole building, not a separate entity and as such, its design should reflect the style, proportions and detailing of the rest of the building – in particular the main street elevation above. Lateral expansion of shopfronts (across two or more traditional ground floor units) should still give consideration to the traditional rhythm and patterns. Historic shopfront features should be retained and incorporated into new installations wherever possible and the use of traditional materials should be encouraged.

#### Windows and Doors

The vast majority of windows throughout the conservation area have been replaced at one time or another, with most being substituted by inappropriate casement or uPVC arrangements. These changes have a significant impact on the character of the buildings and consequently on the wider conservation area.

Recommendation: As and when replacement becomes necessary, new appropriate painted timber windows should be provided to the window openings (likely sliding sash or casement arrangement generally) with suitably detailed profiles. Traditionally detailed double glazed windows can be created using slim double glazing that would meet the aesthetic and performance requirements of modern day buildings.

#### Equipment / Services

New fixtures, such as extract ventilation, aerials, satellite dishes, roof-lights, signage and air conditioning equipment detract from the character of an individual building and the area as a whole.



buildings, and if necessary, then:

- satellite dishes and aerials should not be visible from the public realm.
- avoid installing ventilators, flues, soil and vent pipes on roofs or elevations fronting the public highway or on visible side elevations; where they are absolutely necessary their visual impact should be minimised in terms of their position, configuration, size and design.

### Colours

The use of inappropriate and modern colours detracts from the overall ambience of the town centre. In particular the use of modern brilliant whites on joinery and wall finishes along with the use of particularly brightly painted render finishes draws the eye and has a detrimental effect on views of and within the Conservation Area.

Recommendation: Encourage the use of a limited palette of traditional colours, particularly a single off white for general use on windows and joinery components. A select palette of suitable colours for various elements to be prepared with colour references to aid building owners in their selection.

### Buildings in Poor Condition

Poor condition of an individual site or building can be detrimental to the appearance of the area and may set a bad example to other owners. This is a particular problem where buildings are unoccupied or only partly occupied or where there has been a lack of routine maintenance.

Recommendation: The local authority will consider serving Section 215 notices where the condition of a building or site is detrimental to the character or appearance of the conservation area. Where it is clear that emergency or immediate repairs are required to any listed unoccupied building, or part of a building, in order to protect its heritage value and contribution to the character of the conservation area the authority will:

- contact the current owner (as recorded at the Land Registry)
- advise of the need to keep the building in good repair
- if the owner refuses to carry out the necessary repairs, consider serving a Section 54 (Urgent Works) notice

### Change of Use

Change of use of a building can lead to a number of incremental changes that over time erode the value of the building and the character of the area, as may the mix of uses.

Recommendation: In considering applications for change of use, the Council will:

- request information on the design of refuse storage, parking, waste pipes, ventilation fixtures, satellite dishes, aerials and any other fixtures, such as signage.
- ensure that proposed changes of use are of an appropriate scale in relation to neighbouring buildings.
- ensure that proposed change of use or new development do not result in a detrimental change to the character of the area.

### Listed Buildings

Alterations to listed buildings, such as the insertion of replacement windows and changes to dormer windows and roof coverings, may be detrimental to the appearance of individual buildings and their immediate setting, and may also set a poor precedent to other owners.

Recommendation: Any proposed alterations to a listed building should be sympathetic to its historic fabric and appearance, and be fully justified. Owners of listed buildings will be notified of unauthorised changes to their buildings. Where evidence is available, (e.g. in the form of dated photographs) enforcement action will be taken to ensure that either the original fabric is reinstated or an application for retrospective consent is made for alterations that are considered acceptable.

### Other Buildings of Heritage Value

Alterations to other (unlisted) buildings of heritage value have been carried out in the past, most notably the removal of architectural features, inappropriate repairs and replacements, and the installation of unsympathetic shop fronts and associated security measures. These changes have not respected the character of the buildings or the conservation area. The impact has been an incremental erosion of the conservation area's qualities.

Recommendations: Through example and encouragement the local authority will promote the reinstatement of historic features and the replacement of unsuitable modern elements and will also take the opportunity to secure improvements to existing detrimental features (for example, inappropriate windows) as part of any new building work.

### **New Buildings and Infill Developments on Gap Sites**

As a tightly arranged urban environment, the town centre has only limited opportunity for the provision of new buildings. Some isolated gap sites do exist following previous demolitions / clearance works and there are opportunities to improve the character of the area should opportunities arise to develop some of the mid/late 20<sup>th</sup> Century buildings.

The setting of existing buildings of heritage value and the character of the conservation area as a whole can be adversely affected by new development and views into and out of the conservation area may be compromised. The quality of new buildings may also be inadequate and may lack the design attributes of the historic buildings that characterise the conservation area, thereby failing to preserve or enhance its character. The predominantly C19th character of the town centre may also be diluted by the design and appearance of new buildings within the conservation area. Furthermore, there is a risk that the scale, massing, proportions or position of new buildings and infill developments may be at odds with the pattern of existing buildings.

#### Recommendations:

In order for future proposals for new buildings to be considered it is important that a clear understanding of the special qualities of the Conservation Area be demonstrated and that stringent design criteria in determining future planning applications be adopted. Submissions should include sufficient relevant design details and the submission of pre-application design statements for complex or large development proposals should be encouraged as a basis of discussion between the developer and the planning authority.

The following items should be given particular consideration

- Setting and Context - Applications for planning permission for new development within the conservation area should if appropriate, include an impact assessment to demonstrate that views into and from the conservation area are not adversely affected and that the setting of existing buildings is preserved or enhanced. The prominence of the site should be a key issue along with the impact that the proposed development will have on key approaches within the conservation Area.
- Quality of Design - There will be a strong presumption in favour of using materials traditional to the area as identified in the CAA, particularly for smaller developments. Artificial materials (e.g. reconstituted slate) should be avoided. Modern materials of good quality may be appropriate if it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that they do not have an adverse effect on the character of the conservation area. New building work must respect the design and detailing of existing buildings of heritage value in the conservation area – this is not intended to lead to pastiche designs, but rather respectful good quality contemporary design. Larger developments should

generally be of high quality contemporary design that should reflect the overall character of the area through the careful use of materials and textures.

- **Scale and Proportion** - Relative positions of existing buildings and their relationship to the road, pavement and site boundaries should be respected. General proportions and massing of existing neighbouring buildings, including ridge and eaves heights, should guide new development within and close to the conservation area. New development should respect the established building pattern or rhythm as defined by historic ownership boundaries throughout the conservation area; infill development on gap sites should be influenced by historical precedent and the nature of adjoining buildings of heritage value. Where already diluted by modern alterations, new developments should seek to restore the original relationships and hence contribute to the heritage focus of the conservation area.

## Architectural Character & Detail

Details, materials and finishes contribute to the architectural or historic character and appearance of a building and their alteration or loss can be detrimental to the property and the area. In particular, shopfronts of poor design and ground floor street frontages that don't relate to the façade above may have an adverse effect on the character of an individual building and the appearance of the conservation area.

### Recommendations:

Building on the constructive improvements already undertaken as part of the Townscape Heritage project in Pontmorlais, a greater understanding of the architectural character and detail within the wider conservation area should be promoted. This should include the promotion of a Shopfront design guide, and where necessary, additional guidance and support should be given. Through example, good conservation practice should also be promoted in the area for the more significant assets (including recording of existing features to significant buildings in advance of any works taking place), while sympathetic change should be encouraged for the less significant buildings that nevertheless play a part in the character of the area. Enforcement action should be taken against unauthorised work where appropriate. The majority of buildings in the conservation area are commercial and as such would require planning consent for works that materially affect the external appearance of the building, including the removal of building features.

The following items should be given particular consideration :

Details, materials and finishes

- Existing original features and previous good quality, sympathetic repairs or replacements should be retained if at all possible. Where their renewal is necessary, it should generally be on a like-for-like basis in terms of design, materials and workmanship. Any changes to primary features such as windows, doors and chimneys should be carefully considered by the local authority and the decision to change justified as part of any application.
- Repair of worn or damaged features should be considered the default position as opposed to replacement; for example, partially decayed timber doors and windows may be economically repaired by a suitably skilled joiner allowing the retention of original historic fabric and detail.
- Upgrading should be considered before replacement to meet modern requirements; for example, draught stripping and secondary glazing of existing windows should be considered in preference to wholesale replacement.

### Shopfronts

- Promote reinstatement of historic features and replacement of unsuitable modern elements.
- Take the opportunity to secure improvements to existing detrimental features (for example externally fitted security shutters) as part of any new building work.
- Historic architectural features should be retained and, if replacement is necessary, traditional design, materials and workmanship should be used to replicate the original.
- Resist internally illuminated signs and ensure that all signage is of a quality suitable to the building to which it is attached and respects the character of the conservation area. Backlit signage is favourable.
- Fascias and signage should be in proportion with the building and shopfront and should not extend above the natural shopfront cornice level.
- Traditional swing signs are often appropriate, subject to size and design.
- The colour palette of a shopfront and its signage should reflect the traditional, historic character of the streetscape
- Traditional awnings maybe appropriate, subject to design but flags and similar features are unlikely to be.

### Hard and Soft Landscape

#### Soft Landscaping

As an urban town centre location, the extent of soft landscape within the town centre conservation area is limited. The following areas provide most of the contribution:

- The steep sloping ground to the rear of the Masonic Temple

- The Pontmorlais Memorial Garden
- The small landscaped garden on the site of the demolished Owain Glyndwr public house at Pontmorlais Circus
- The car park on the site of the demolished 51-56 Pontmorlais
- Open grassed area to part of Penderyn Square (site of the demolished Castle Cinema)
- Planting to the frontage of Carnegie Library
- St. David's Churchyard
- Open ground bounded between Church Street, Johns Street and Tramroadside North
- St Tydfil's Churchyard

These areas do provide some relief from the tight urban character and the green foliage is often a welcome backdrop giving a sense of enclosure around the edges of the area.

#### Recommendations:

Trees that contribute to the character of the conservation area will be retained or where they need to be removed for reasons of health and safety, replaced by trees of appropriate species and maturity. When new trees are planted the impact of the tree on important views, both now and when it reaches maturity, will be considered.

#### Hard Landscaping

Much of the core of the conservation area, particularly the pedestrianised parts of the High Street, has been re-surfaced in recent years with good quality modern materials that are appropriate to the conservation area. Poor or inappropriate hard landscaping around buildings of heritage value can significantly detract from their setting, particularly where significant areas of car parking are proposed around historic buildings. Historic boundary walls, railings and gates contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area and their loss, alteration or unsympathetic replacement can adversely affect the area.

#### Recommendations:

A detailed landscaping scheme must be submitted with all planning application for new buildings or significant alteration to existing sites.

Parking provision and anticipated vehicular movements must be considered along with the occupancy level and use of any proposed building. Proposed uses for existing buildings where the scale of car parking detracts from the character of the conservation area will be rejected.

New boundary treatments should reflect the prevailing historic boundary treatments of the area.

Surfacing for yards, car parking, paths and hard-standing must be of good quality and use appropriate traditional materials.

Existing historic boundary walls and gateposts should be retained; their alteration as part of any planning

permission will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and when fully justified and mitigated. Demolition of historic lines of enclosure will be strongly discouraged.

Repairs or renewal of original boundary details will be carried out using like-for-like traditional materials.

Reinstatement of historic features and replacement of unsuitable modern elements will be actively encouraged where any alteration works are being considered.

## Public Realm

Merthyr Tydfil town centre has the potential to be a place known for its high quality public realm, drawing on the precedents set within the existing streetscape fabric. The quality of the streetscape can be used to enhance and celebrate its distinctive features and buildings. Outside of the recently renovated core the quality of the streetscape can, however, be fragmented due to incremental changes and a lack of strategic thinking about the streetscape as a whole and how individual parts relate to the whole. It is essential that a holistic approach to the public realm informs proposals for its improvements to avoid such fragmentation.

### Pathways & Pavements

The public realm surface finishes to most of the High Street have been upgraded in recent years with stone paving being used for the pavements and pedestrianized areas. Subsequent works (presumably related to services installations) have been undertaken and inappropriate materials have been used to make good (macadam).

**Recommendation:** Ensure that repair and maintenance of pathways and pavements are carried out regularly, and that any making good following new works to services (particularly by statutory providers) be carried out using like-for-like traditional materials or reusing the existing paving materials. In addition, take the opportunity to continue reinstating historic finishes to the wider conservation area including side roads and access roads off the main thoroughfare.

### Street Furniture & Signage

Street lighting, pedestrian signage and other street furniture design requires careful consideration, both within the town centre and in the immediate surroundings in order to preserve and enhance the setting of the conservation area; similarly highway markings, signage and other features can be detrimental to the character, appearance and setting of the conservation area, being visually intrusive and of inappropriate design.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that all highway and pedestrian signage and street furniture is necessary and of an appropriate design and construction
- Ensure all new surfaces respect and enhance the character of the area (e.g. avoid discordant colours and over-complex designs).
- Remove visual clutter where the opportunity arises (e.g. remove or integrate free-standing signs, CCTV masts and lamp posts).
- Co-ordinate the design, materials and colour for all street furniture items.
- Ensure that lighting is designed such that source and level of illumination respects and enhances the character of the area.
- Use only road markings and signage that are the minimum necessary to comply with highway safety.

Management

The management of the wider public realm, particularly away from the main thoroughfare can clearly prove to be challenging with instances of graffiti and fly-tipping taking place.

Recommendation: Encourage reporting of occurrences of fly-tipping and graffiti etc. and put procedures in place to swiftly remove material that is harmful to the visual amenity and character of the conservation area. The local authority will consider serving a Section 215 notice where the condition of property is detrimental to the character or appearance of the conservation area.

Prepare and agree a long-term maintenance plan for the area, including targeted maintenance and monitoring regimes, and carry out physical improvements where necessary.

Traffic Movement

The town centre has depended on movement for its existence following the construction of the tram roads. The significant change in modern times is of course the rise of the motor car, and the pressure that car use puts on streets and roads designed for the pre-car age. One of the significant threats to the quality of conservation areas often comes not from the way buildings are treated but from the negative effects of traffic and parking.

It is often assumed that the best solution to this conflict is to ban the car and introduce pedestrianisation, but the adoption of that solution can also have negative effects, especially at times when streets are not busy. A moderate degree of traffic, as well as having practical benefits, enlivens a street. The issue is finding the right balance between vehicles and the quality of the place they serve.



The town centre is already an area that has a mix of traffic movement status with the lower town being substantially pedestrianised as far as St David's church. Pontmorlais Circus is a busy traffic hub with significant numbers of vehicles passing through all day long. The current one-way system operating up Pontmorlais High Street limits the amount of traffic passing through, though it continues to create queuing traffic at certain periods which has a detrimental effect on the ambience of Pontmorlais High Street. The use of short stay parking bays on the High Street would seem welcome to encourage trade, though over-staying appears to be common.

Recommendation: Continue to monitor the traffic priorities through the conservation area in order to ensure that the proposals suit the area, particularly as increased investment may change the dynamic of the area. Ensure also that parking restrictions are enforced in order to allow the on-street parking to be used as intended.

## 10.0 PROTECTION

### 10.1 Existing Designations

The existing designations within the Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter are shown on Plan 1 of the Conservation Area Appraisal and are recorded in the CAA.

### 10.2 Extent of the Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal has assessed the current Conservation Area and Article 4 Direction boundaries. Changes to the boundaries have been proposed in order to rationalise the extent of the Town Centre Conservation Area.

In particular the CAA argues that the Town Centre Conservation Area extends beyond its natural boundary and that reducing the its size would allow for a greater focus on the area that makes the most significant contribution to the qualities of the town centre.

A process of consultation and consideration will need to be followed prior to any amendment of the current boundary being adopted.

## 11.0 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

### 11.1 Introduction

The previous parts of the report have examined the measures required to protect and enhance the Conservation Area including specific recommendations for elements within the area.

This part of the report looks at how these measures should be implemented, i.e. which organisations or groups should be responsible for them, how they might be funded, and over what timescale the proposals should take place. The division of responsibility in caring for any Conservation Area is bound to be complex, and it hoped that some of the recommendations in this report can be implemented very quickly, whilst others will be ongoing, or should be programmed within a specific timeframe.

### 11.2 Community Engagement

The principal responsibilities for the stewardship of the Town Centre Conservation Area fall jointly on Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and the local residents / owners. Whilst some of the local businesses and residents are interested in the history of the area, they may not be fully aware of the benefits of the Conservation Area and how they can influence its future. MTCBC on the other hand have the advantage of an overview of the wider area and following the success of National Lottery Heritage Fund Townscape Heritage funded projects in Pontmorlais it is vital that they continue to take the lead in the stewardship of the historic environment.

Successfully engaging the local community with their heritage creates an ethos of conservation that can become almost self-regulating as members of the community learn about their environment and how to best look after it. The Merthyr Tydfil Heritage Trust already exists and could perhaps provide a platform to encouraging this engagement.

Communities often have various skills and expertise within them that are underused, but additional training and education in traditional skills can be used to help maintain and repair historic buildings from within the community or locality.

A number of recommended actions are listed below that would help further engage the community with the heritage and significance of the town centre:

- Establish a mechanism for dialogue between local residents groups, business groups and landowners to support businesses in terms of maximising viability and economic potential.
- Build on the Townscape Heritage project in Pontmorlais to continue to promote enhancement

and maintenance works within the conservation area.

- Build on previous engagement activities with local school children by hosting further workshops / educational trails linked to the national curriculum.
- Continue to make conservation area information readily available to residents, e.g. ensure that appraisals, management plans and strategic documents are readily available in local libraries and on the internet.
- Encourage the involvement of the Merthyr Tydfil Heritage Trust to help preserve the conservation area's special character and to instigate enhancements where appropriate.
- Continue to engage with local residents' groups in the recording of the area in terms of its present day character and historical development.
- Ensure that Merthyr Tydfil is promoted in local and regional tourism initiatives and to support the development of events to encourage the use of Merthyr Tydfil town centre by local people and visitors.
- Continue to celebrate Merthyr Tydfil's heritage through interpretation, events, festivals and awards.

### 11.3 Actions

Conservation area legislation and official guidance deal mainly with local authority powers and responsibilities, but a Conservation Area is the responsibility of all the building owners, users and others who enjoy the area, acting in partnership with the local authority to protect and enhance its character. Whenever possible this Management Plan identifies actions which can be shared amongst those who have an interest in the Conservation Area.

The resourcing and programme for the actions are often difficult to give in detail, but an attempt has been made to give an order of magnitude to different actions, plus an indication of where the priorities should lie.

The actions are described here under the following headings:

#### Development Control

The first and principal line of protection for the Conservation Area lies in development control by the planning authority. This covers demolitions and alterations to unlisted buildings, new developments in the Conservation Area, other works affecting the streetscape and the felling and lopping of trees. It also covers changes of use. The listed buildings within the Conservation Area are protected by virtue of their status and works to any listed religious buildings that fall under ecclesiastical exemption would require the appropriate consents from the appropriate bodies.

Programme: Ongoing

Responsibility: Local Planning Authority in conjunction with Cadw (where Listed Building Consent applies) and the appropriate religious bodies (where Ecclesiastical Exemption applies).

Resourcing: Development Control will require regular and consistent input from conservation professionals. The protection of views and the preparation of development briefs may require some increased resourcing by the Local Planning Authority.

### Enforcement

In the case of Conservation Areas, the mechanisms of Development Control may be strengthened in three ways:

- The application of Article 4 Directions. Article 4 Directions are in place for the Pontmorlais quarter.
- The monitoring of buildings at risk.
- The serving of urgent Works notices or section 215 notices. No recommendations for the use of urgent works powers are included in this plan.

Programme: Monitoring of Buildings at risk: ongoing.

Responsibility: Local Planning Authority.

Resourcing: The use of Article 4 Directions may involve a modest increase in Development Control work. Monitoring buildings at risk and the serving of an urgent works notice also have only modest implications for resourcing. If however, a significant number of listed or unlisted buildings fall into disrepair there would be a need to apply additional resources to meeting that challenge.

In addition to legislative mechanisms, a desire to oversee and regularly review the changes to a conservation area are a key part to ensuring that changes are appropriate and in the best interests of the area. The local planning authority should :

- Maintain a stringent approach to enforcement as a means of preserving and/or enhancing the character of the conservation area
- Make efficient use of existing legislation, where necessary, and use the full range of powers available.
- Give priority to reported breaches of planning law in the conservation area
- Conduct an enforcement audit of the town centre each year
- Make a Regulation 7 Direction to restrict deemed consent for the display of most classes of advertisements under The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992

### Enhancement

Proposals for the enhancement of this Conservation Area are discussed in detail in section 8 of this plan. They apply in particular to the improvement to the streetscape of the town centre and the strengthening

of its links to its heritage.

- The Existing Buildings  
Responsibility: Owners and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council  
Resourcing: Potential Public Funding.
- Public Realm Improvements  
Responsibility: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council  
Resourcing: Potential Public Funding.
- Gap Sites / Missing buildings  
Responsibility: Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council with Developers  
Resourcing: Potential Public Funding or Public / Private collaboration.

#### Maintenance

The proper maintenance of buildings, street materials and other features is crucial to the long-term care of the Conservation Area. Whilst the Local Authority are responsible for the public realm, and will provide as much assistance as possible (eg by implementing and administering various grant schemes), the responsibility for the maintenance of buildings lies with the individual owners.

This falls under the following headings:

- Existing Buildings  
As a result of the tight urban nature of the area, there are opportunities for owners to cooperate in the maintenance of their properties in order to reduce costs and disruption to their businesses. This can be encouraged through guidance literature and other advice.  
Programme: Ongoing  
Responsibility: Building owners  
Resourcing: Principally a matter for collective decision-making by building owners.
- Street Paving & Furniture  
Historic paving materials are a key aspect of the Conservation Area, for which special provision needs to be made as part of street maintenance and replacement. This is particularly relevant to the town centre where extensive recent works have been successful in improving the street finishes to much of the area.  
The Local Authority should make maximum use of its powers under the New Roads and Streetworks Act to inspect works by utility companies and to apply financial penalties for

inadequate reinstatement.

Programme: Ongoing

Responsibility: Local Planning and Highways Authorities.

Resourcing: The use of historically appropriate materials may be an additional cost in carrying out street works. Highways contractors may need specialist skills for maintenance. In respect to the inspection of works by utility companies, provision exists for costs to be recovered from the companies, but increased awareness and early liaison could prevent damage to historic fabric in the first place.

- Public Open Areas

The care and maintenance of public open areas is often key to their continued use, be that open areas such as Penderyn Square, Lower High St Square or on the site of the old Owain Glyndwr public house at Pontmorlais Circus.

Programme: Ongoing

Responsibility: Local Authority.

Resourcing: Maintenance of the key open areas throughout the town centre is already budgeted for by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

- Boundary Walls

Historic stone boundary walls are a key aspect to certain parts of the Conservation Area, for which special provision needs to be made as part of its maintenance and replacement.

Programme: ongoing

Responsibility: Building owners

Resourcing: Principally a matter for building owners, but advice on the retention and repair of masonry walls could be provided by the Local Planning Authority along with encouragement to reinstate previously removed stone walls.

Community Engagement

Developing a forum or mechanism for dialogue and the promotion of the town centre's heritage between local residents and the wider community with the support of the Local Authority, perhaps via the heritage trust. The trust could take on the responsibility for promoting the enhancement and maintenance works within the area as well as making information more readily available to local owners and residents. In addition, various events including training workshops in traditional building skills as well as wider community celebrations could be arranged and promoted.

Programme: ongoing and dependant on local interest

Responsibility: Local residents & Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Resourcing: The implementation of this protection will require some additional resourcing.

### Guidance

This plan has identified three specific areas where the production of guidance literature would be useful in protecting and enhancing the Conservation Area, building on the Shopfront Design Guide that is already in place:

- Design guidance on appropriate materials and techniques for the repair and restoration of buildings within the town centre, including roof coverings, windows, doors, dormers, render etc.
- Advice to building owners regarding the use of a suitable palette of colours for general use.
- Maintenance advice including clearing of rainwater goods and drains; keeping paths, fences and gates and other means of access in good condition; dealing with litter, waste collection and disposal; addressing vandalism; landscape management; redecoration cycles.

Programme: The preparation of such design guidance will be ongoing.

Responsibility: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Resourcing: The preparation of guidance may require additional resourcing during the next 5 years.

### Traffic and Movement

The role that traffic and movement have in the Conservation Area have been identified in numerous places throughout this plan, and consequently some specific recommendations are dealt with under other headings (public realm, paving etc.).

As such no specific recommendations for action have been included within this document.

## **11.4 Funding & Resourcing**

The plan has previously noted that the care of the conservation area should be a shared responsibility. The development of the Heritage Trust could be a significant asset to the local community as a whole, and would likely be well placed to identify and encourage partnerships that can take forward the actions identified in this plan.

Inevitably, a large proportion of the burden of caring for the Conservation Area falls upon the Local Authority because of the obligations placed upon it by the planning legislation. It is essential that the authority commits adequate resources to enable it to exercise its powers and responsibilities.

In recent years Townscape Heritage (TH) grants administered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund have been an important source of finance for enhancement projects in Pontmorlais. Further funding may also be available from other sources to provide match funding. The Local Authority and other stakeholders should continue to seek alternative revenue streams to continue protecting and enhancing

the town centre.

### 11.5 Monitoring and Updating this Plan

The effectiveness of the Management Plan will depend upon the way its policies and recommendations are administered. It is key to recognise that Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre Conservation Area is a living place that will continue to change and evolve. The principal challenge to the area is to manage that change in a way that allows the area to thrive as well as safeguarding and enhancing the special qualities, character and appearance of the conservation area.

Three key factors need to be in place to successfully implement the plan:

- The commitment of all relevant Local Authority departments to the protection and enhancement of the Conservation Area. Other stakeholders, including government agencies (eg Cadw), local organisations and building owners also have a key role to play.
- The application of sufficient resources, not just to enable the Local Authority to carry out its statutory duties but also to help initiate (in partnership with others) the enhancements recommended in the Conservation Area Management Plan.
- The review of the Management Plan after five years.

It is important that the CAMP is regularly reviewed and where required updated in light of changing circumstances. The local Authority will aim to implement a monitoring programme including consultation with stakeholder groups and liaison with other statutory bodies. In order to aid with the monitoring of the town centre, a database of buildings has been compiled as part of 2020 CAA in order to provide a baseline to allow for the convenient evaluation of the assets within the area and to build on the previous Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter database that formed part of the 2011 and 2016 Heritage Quarter CAA's .

The regular updating of this database will allow the Local Authority a convenient method of recording where works with and without consent are being carried out and provide clear information as to whether any intervention is required.



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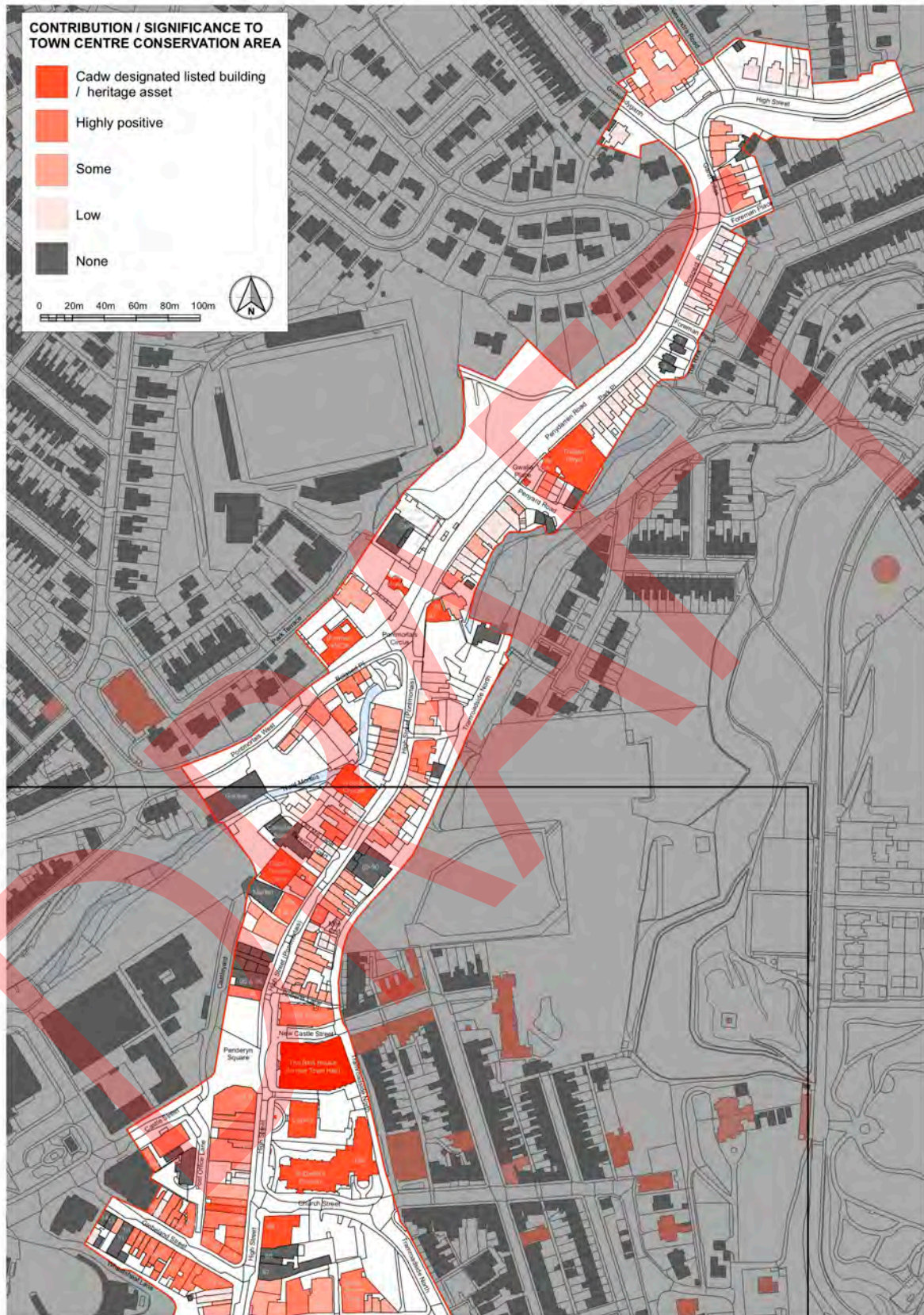
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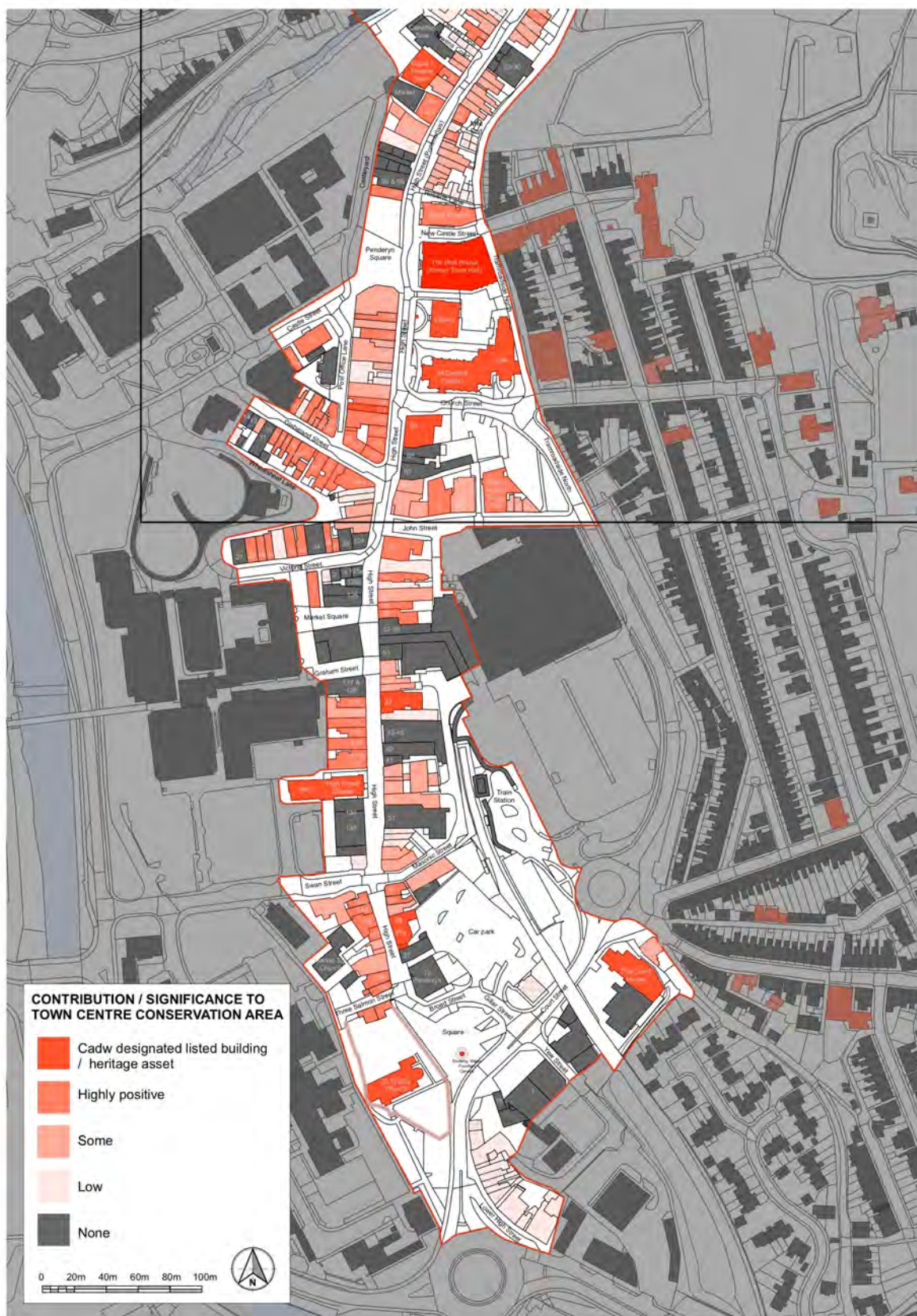
APPENDIX A - PLANS OF MERTHYR TYDFIL TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION  
AREA: SUMMARY ASSESSMENT OF EACH BUILDING'S CONTRIBUTION TO  
THE CONSERVATION AREA'S SPECIAL INTEREST

DRAFT



*Perceived current contribution of each building to the Town Centre Conservation Area's Northern Half*





*Perceived current contribution of each building to the Town Centre Conservation Area's Southern Half*

## APPENDIX B – BUILDING-BY-BUILDING APPRAISAL

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## APPENDIX C - DETAILED CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

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