

SECTION 6

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY PLAN AREAS

As an integral part of plan preparation the Council is required to devise a settlement strategy for the County Borough. In order to facilitate this work the Planning Division has undertaken a functional analysis of the five Community Plan Areas, namely the:

1. **Upper Rhymney Valley** – incorporating Bargoed and Upper Sirhowy Valley
2. **Mid Valleys West**
3. **Mid Valleys East**
4. **Lower Sirhowy Valley and**
5. **Caerphilly Basin**

A) Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area: UPPER RHYMNEY VALLEY (incorporating Bargoed) AND UPPER SIRHOWY VALLEY

A1. Overview

A1.1 The Upper Rhymney Valley had a population of 28,111 in 2001 – a decrease of 8.2% since 1991. It comprises a cluster of relatively small former mining settlements along the line of the River Rhymney and its tributary, the Nant Bargoed Rhymney. The Valley sides are generally very steep but broaden out at the Heads of the Valleys into a rather bleak plateau. The area is among the most deprived in Europe – all nine wards in the district are Community First wards.

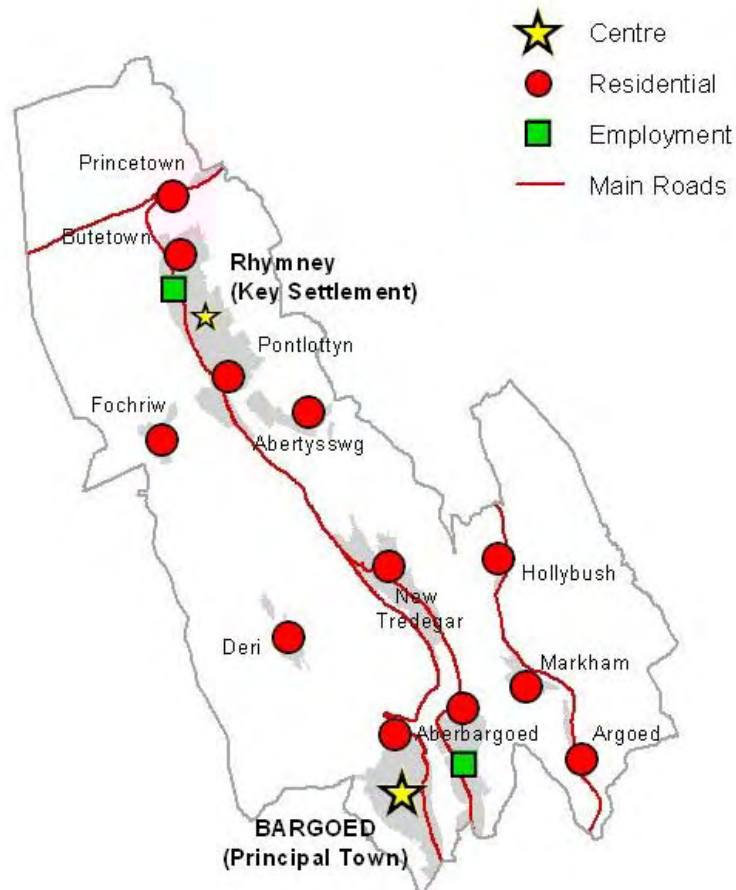
A1.2 The Upper Sirhowy Valley comprises the villages of Argoed, Hollybush, Markham and Manmoel in the Argoed Ward. Although they are located in the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration area, they have strong links with Blackwood, unlike the Upper Rhymney Valley Settlements.

A2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions 2006

A2.1 **Principal Town: Bargoed** is the Principal Town of the Heads of the Valley Regeneration Area. It is the largest town in the area with a population, including the suburb of **Gilfach**, of 8,300. It contains the only significant shopping centre with over 100 commercial units, although no major supermarket, a comprehensive school and swimming pool and a range of minor urban services.

A2.2 **Key Settlement: Rhymney** is the second largest town with a population of around 5,500. Its comprehensive school, further education college, community hospital and discount supermarket give it the potential to be a key settlement for the villages in the northern part of the district.

Main Settlements – Roles and Functions



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A2.3 Residential areas: New Tredegar (itself a cluster of five distinct settlements) **Aberbargoed, Deri, Fochriw, Pontlottyn, Abertysswg, Markham, Argoed and Hollybush** and a number of small hamlets are predominantly residential villages. Some have tourism potential.

A2.4 There are three large **industrial estates** - Heads of the Valleys, Capital Valley and Maerdy - located in the vicinity of the settlements of **Rhymney** and **Pontlottyn** (a total of 45.4 Ha of land). In addition, there is an industrial estate south of **Aberbargoed** (18 Ha of land), and a new development of small workshops in New Tredegar. These industrial sites emphasise the role of the Upper Rhymney Valley for employment uses, especially as only 4% of land in this area is currently vacant (Caerphilly Employment Sites Supply and Market Appraisal Study, 2006).

A2.5 New Tredegar is an exemplar of comprehensive regeneration. Over the past two years a mutually supporting set of initiatives, including a new community school, new road, incubator industrial units, environmental improvements, engineering works to river retaining structures and a comprehensive safe routes to school footpath network including two major footbridges, has been implemented in a £20m + package financed from a number of sources.

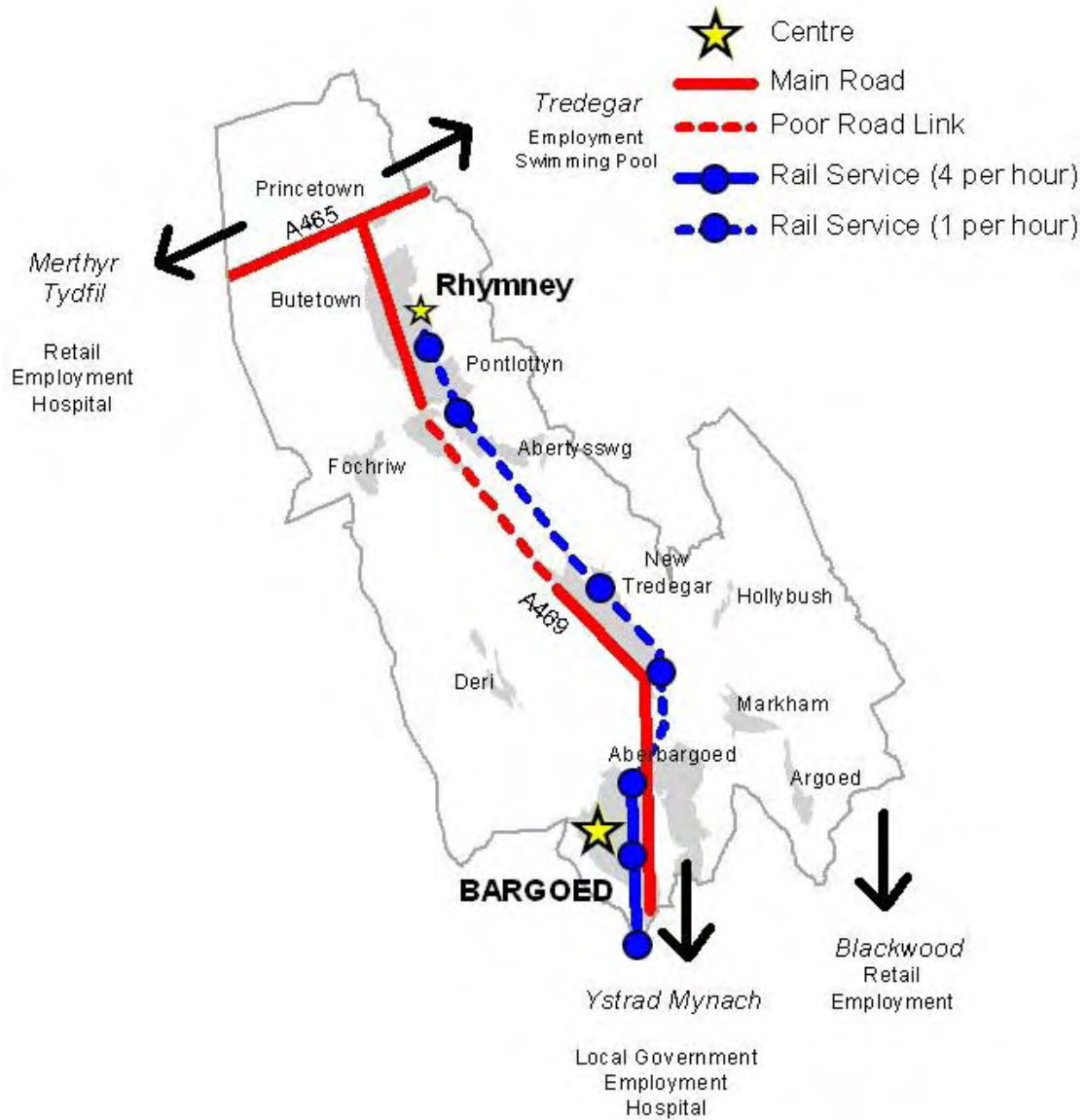
A3. Transport and External Linkages

A3.1 South: The A469 is the main road route south to **Ystrad Mynach** (location of Caerphilly council offices, Further Education College, proposed new general hospital, employment sites). The Rhymney Valley railway line connects Rhymney, Pontlottyn, New Tredegar, Bargoed and Gilfach to **Ystrad Mynach, Caerphilly** and the national and regional centre of **Cardiff**. There is an hourly train service from Rhymney to Cardiff, with a more frequent 15 min service from Bargoed to Cardiff. There are also regular bus links to Ystrad Mynach.

A3.2 North-West: The A465 links the district to employment opportunities along the A465 corridor and to the Sub-regional centre of **Merthyr Tydfil** (shopping and current general hospital). A minor road from Fochriw can also access Merthyr. A bus service operates from Bargoed to Merthyr Tydfil via Rhymney.

A3.3 North-East: The upgraded dual carriageway section of the A465 connects the district to employment opportunities along the A465 corridor and the historic town of **Tredegar** with its leisure centre and swimming pool. A sub standard minor road from Abertysswg provides an alternative access to Tredegar. There is a bus route to Tredegar from Bargoed and an hourly bus service linking Tredegar to Rhymney Station.

Transport and External Linkages



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A3.4 **South-East:** A poor network of minor roads leads to the sub-regional shopping centre and major employment centres around **Blackwood**. There is, however, a regular bus from New Tredegar and Bargoed to Blackwood.

A3.5 There are no direct road or rail links to the **North**, where the county borough borders the Brecon Beacons National Park.

A3.6 The A4048 trunk road runs north to south through the Upper Sirhowy Valley linking Argoed, Hollybush and Markham. There are no train links in the valley and the Blackwood to Tredegar bus service provides the public transport for the area.

A4. Tourism Potential

A4.1 The area has the potential to make a major contribution to the VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK.

A4.2 **Landscape:** the hillsides are dramatic and magnificent views are obtained from the minor roads and long distance footpaths along the ridgeways. Most of the countryside is common land, including the extensive and historic landscape of **Gelligaer Common**. The northern part of the area contains a number of small lakes and reservoirs, including Parc Cwm Darran lakes, Rhaslas pond, Butetown reservoir and Jepsons pond.

A4.3 **Country Parks:** there are two major Country parks at **Cwm Darran** (Deri and Fochriw) and **Parc Coedtir** (Bargoed-Aberbargoed); Bryn Bach Park lies just across the border in Blaenau Gwent. Potential exists at the former Markham Colliery for the site to make a significant contribution to the Valleys Regional Park.

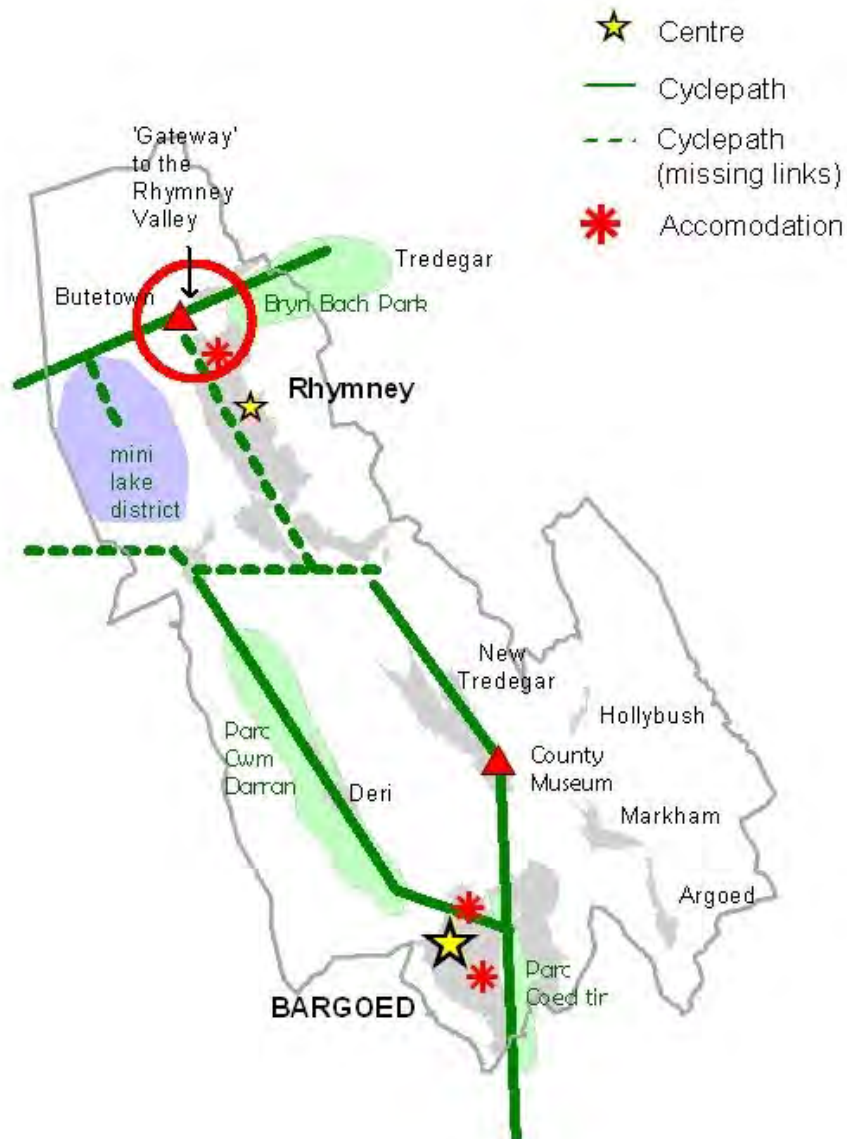
A4.4 **Cyclepaths:** the **east-west cyclepath** from Merthyr to Tredegar passes through the historic hamlet of Butetown and leads to Bryn Bach Park. A **north-south cyclepath** runs through Parc Coedtir and up to Abertysswg and another cyclepath connects Bargoed through Deri to Parc Cwm Darran.

A4.5 **Heritage:** Butetown (Welsh 'Drenwydd') is a Nineteenth century 'model' settlement, dating from around 1835. It contains 44 listed buildings. The county borough museum is being constructed in the former mining village of New Tredegar. Roman and prehistoric remains are found on Gelligaer Common - a designated 'historic landscape'.

A4.6 **Events: Bargoed** is seeking to establish a regular annual fair in its large urban park at Heolddu. This year the event was entitled **Bargoed Big Bed**. The annual British **Giant Vegetable Competition** at Abertysswg may have some tourism potential if marketed imaginatively.

A4.7 **Accommodation:** Bargoed and Rhymney have small hotels and there is a campsite at Parc Cwm Darran.

Contribution to Valleys Regional Park Map



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A5. Analysis

In order for the urban cluster to function effectively the following issues need to be addressed in this district:

- New shops and commercial businesses need to be developed in the district's main centre at Bargoed. Attracting a major food retail 'anchor store' is a fundamental requirement.
- The formal Leisure offer also needs to be developed. Bargoed's swimming pool is 30 years old and only available to the public at weekends and evenings. There is no cinema or theatre or 'family' pub/restaurants.
- The further education facilities at the secondary centre of Rhymney could be expanded further if this were compatible with developments in further education elsewhere in the Heads of Valleys sub region.
- Railway services are infrequent and need to be increased, especially between Rhymney and Bargoed.
- Road links will be improved with the construction of Angel Way (Bargoed relief road) in 2006-08 but the A469 between New Tredegar and Pontllytyn is poor and acts as a fundamental constraint on the proper functioning of the district, deterring movement between the Principal Town of Bargoed and the settlements to the north in the Heads of the Valley Regeneration Area. With the scheduled opening of a new general hospital for the county borough to the south at Ystrad Mynach, the need for improvement to this section of the A469 will become even more acute.
- Road links are also poor between the district and the developing employment opportunities north of Blackwood, restricting the ability of the large numbers of unemployed and economically inactive in this area to access the growing employment opportunities along the mid valleys corridor.
- The surrounding attractive and accessible countryside provides a very positive environmental setting and the smaller settlements could provide desirable residential locations if the choice of housing they offer were not so limited. Most of the current housing stock is council rented or 19th century terraced and there is a need to develop a wider choice of modern housing in most of the settlements in order to retain and attract people to bring a halt to the rapid population decline of recent decades.
- The east-west and north-south cyclepaths need to be connected to each other and to the cyclepath network to the south in order to form an effective part of the regional network.
- The rather bleak 'mini-lake district' in the north of the district, between Rhymney and Fochriw has been identified for a strategic landscaping initiative that should greatly enhance the potential of that part of the district to function as a pleasant residential area and visitor destination.
- The historic hamlet of Butetown is located just off the junction of the A469 and the improved A465 heads of the Valleys Road. It has the potential to become the centrepiece of a landscaped 'gateway' to the Rhymney Valley from the north.

In order to function as part of the *South East Wales integrated city region*, the following issues need to be addressed:

- The district's potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park needs to be fully exploited.
- Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive and new residential sites identified in order to halt net migration outflow from the heads of the Valleys.
- The rail service to Cardiff should be improved and in particular a greater frequency of service provided, particularly from Rhymney.
- The A469 through the area needs to be substantially improved to facilitate access to employment facilities and services in the Mid Valleys corridor.
- Transport links to the Oakdale / Blackwood sub-region need to be improved to provide access to jobs.

A6. Functions of Settlements and Future Opportunities

Bargoed

A6.1 As the Principal Town in the area, Bargoed provides a range of functions and services and its position on the Rhymney Valley railway link is important in maintaining links to the Upper Rhymney Valley to the north and Ystrad Mynach, Caerphilly and Cardiff in the south. However, Bargoed cannot offer the range of goods and services that Caerphilly or Cardiff can offer and its good rail links may also result in a loss of local trade due to the relative ease of accessing larger towns.

A6.2 The proposed town centre regeneration scheme, in addition to the town bypass, Angel Way, has the potential to expand the town functions and increase the sphere of influence, encouraging people in the Upper Rhymney Valley who may currently use Merthyr Tydfil as their primary centre to shop and use services within the County Borough. Whilst the town is constrained by its topography, there may be limited opportunities for new residential, leisure and office development, supported by the new transport links, particularly on the Bargoed plateau.

Gilfach

A6.3 Gilfach is a small residential area directly south of Bargoed, which has coalesced with the town. It has a small number of local shops on Commercial Street, but is subservient to the role of Bargoed. There is some limited opportunity for residential development, although its role is likely to remain as a suburb of Bargoed.

Aberbargoed

A6.4 Aberbargoed's function is as an employment and residential location, with a range of businesses located on industrial estates to the south of the settlement. Since the development of the plateau and removal of the spoil tip,

the town has a better relationship with neighbouring Bargoed but poor road links between the two is a current constraint, which will be alleviated by the Angel Way bypass. Aberbargoed has the capacity to accommodate some additional housing through opportunities created by the road.

A6.5 There has been a decline in community facilities in the area with the closure of Bedwellty School in 2005 and the proposed closure of Aberbargoed hospital due to the new hospital development in Ystrad Mynach, so the town's role as a facility provider is declining. Better connections between Bargoed and Aberbargoed, and the improved road network may reduce the impact of this.

New Tredegar

A6.6 The urban area of New Tredegar comprises five distinct settlements, namely Tirphil, Brithdir, Elliotstown, Philipstown and New Tredegar, with each village characterised by terraced housing constrained by the steep topography. Major regeneration has occurred in recent years through the development of an innovative community school, new doctor's surgery, workshop units and road bypassing the centre, and it is important that this regeneration work is continued in order to encourage new residential development to increase the mix of housing types in the area.

Deri

A6.7 The village of Deri is a predominately residential area located in the Darran Valley. The settlement is isolated due to the steep topography and poor road links to the closest major town of Bargoed, but there has been limited self-build residential development, which has increased the mix of dwelling types in the area and could be continued in the future if appropriate sites are identified. Deri also has an important tourism role due to its position directly south of Parc Cwm Darran and there is the potential to expand this role in the future.

Fochriw

A6.8 At the northern end of the Darren Valley, Fochriw is a remote settlement with poor links to any other settlements in the County Borough. There is great potential for further development in the area subject to the LDP Strategy as it does not have the topographical constraints of other settlements in the Upper Rhymney Valley, but its isolated position means that there is likely only to be limited demand for additional development. The area could expand on its tourism role due to its location north of Parc Cwm Darran.

A6.9 Due to the close proximity to Merthyr Tydfil and the separation of the village from the Rhymney Valley, there is a strong relationship to areas outside the County Borough, which is unlikely to change due to the physical boundaries.

Rhymney

A6.10 As the northern-most town in the County Borough with close proximity to the A465, Rhymney has an important role within the Upper Rhymney Valley. The town has an important educational role due to the location of

Rhymney College, part of Ystrad Mynach College, offering important training opportunities to the Upper Rhymney Valley.

A6.11 Rhymney also has an important employment function, with the town providing a large area of employment land across three sites. Capital Valley and Heads of the Valleys Industrial estates are car-dependent and therefore limit their relationship to Rhymney itself, an area characterised by low car ownership. However, proposals to regenerate the town may provide opportunities for improve the character of the area and increase connections to employment opportunities.

A6.12 Whilst there have been a number of self-build developments in the town, Rhymney is characterised by high levels of public sector housing, and further investments in the mix of housing would be necessary to increase the role of the centre.

Butetown

A6.13 As a conservation area comprising three rows of terraced housing, the small village of Butetown has little residential potential, although the village offers tourism potential.

Princetown / Llechryd

A6.14 The small villages of Llechryd and Princetown to the north of Rhymney on the A465 function as residential settlements offering a range of different housing types. Llechryd offers some potential for additional housing depending on the LDP Strategy due to its flat plateau location. Due to its location north of the A465 and the fact that the village is split between Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly CBC, Princetown is unconnected from Rhymney and relates more to the settlement of Tredegar than to Rhymney.

Pontlottyn

A6.15 Whilst in close proximity to Rhymney, Pontlottyn maintains its own identity offering several retail units and a train station. It comprises mostly terraced housing, although larger executive housing is developing to the north of the village. The village is constrained by the A469 but has some potential on the western hillside if there is demand and subject to the strategy.

Abertysswg

A6.16 Abertysswg is a linear residential settlement south east of Rhymney comprising mainly terraced housing. Due to the topography there is only limited opportunity for further development, although there is a need for a mix of housing types in the area. There is a clear relationship between Rhymney and Abertysswg, with Rhymney providing a number of services for the area.

Markham / Argoed / Hollybush

A6.17 These smaller villages in the Sirhowy Valley are primarily residential. Although they are located in the Heads of the Valleys strategy area, they have strong links with Blackwood, unlike the Upper Rhymney Valley Settlements. In the plan period, however, they are likely to develop links with Bargoed also, once the town centre has been redeveloped. No major change is envisaged

for these rather isolated areas, though the surrounding countryside, which includes the Markham Colliery site, could make a significant contribution to the Valleys Regional Park.

B) Northern Connections Corridor: MID VALLEYS (WEST)

B1. Overview

B1.1 Situated around the centre of the Rhymney Valley, the Mid Valleys West comprises the Principal Town of Ystrad Mynach, the Key Settlement of Nelson and several large villages – all of which have strong associations and in most cases roots in the mining industry. Altogether the population was 23,300 in 2001 (Census), a small increase on the 1991 figure of 22,000. Geographically, the district is roughly cross-shaped, with the relatively steep-sided Rhymney Valley running along a north-south axis, and an east-west gap rising to plateaux near Nelson (east) and Maesycwmmmer (west). In common with the wider valleys, development has historically spread in a rather random and haphazard way along the linear valley bottoms, old railway corridors or near former coal mines. There are sizeable areas of reasonably fertile agricultural land rising to upland moors.

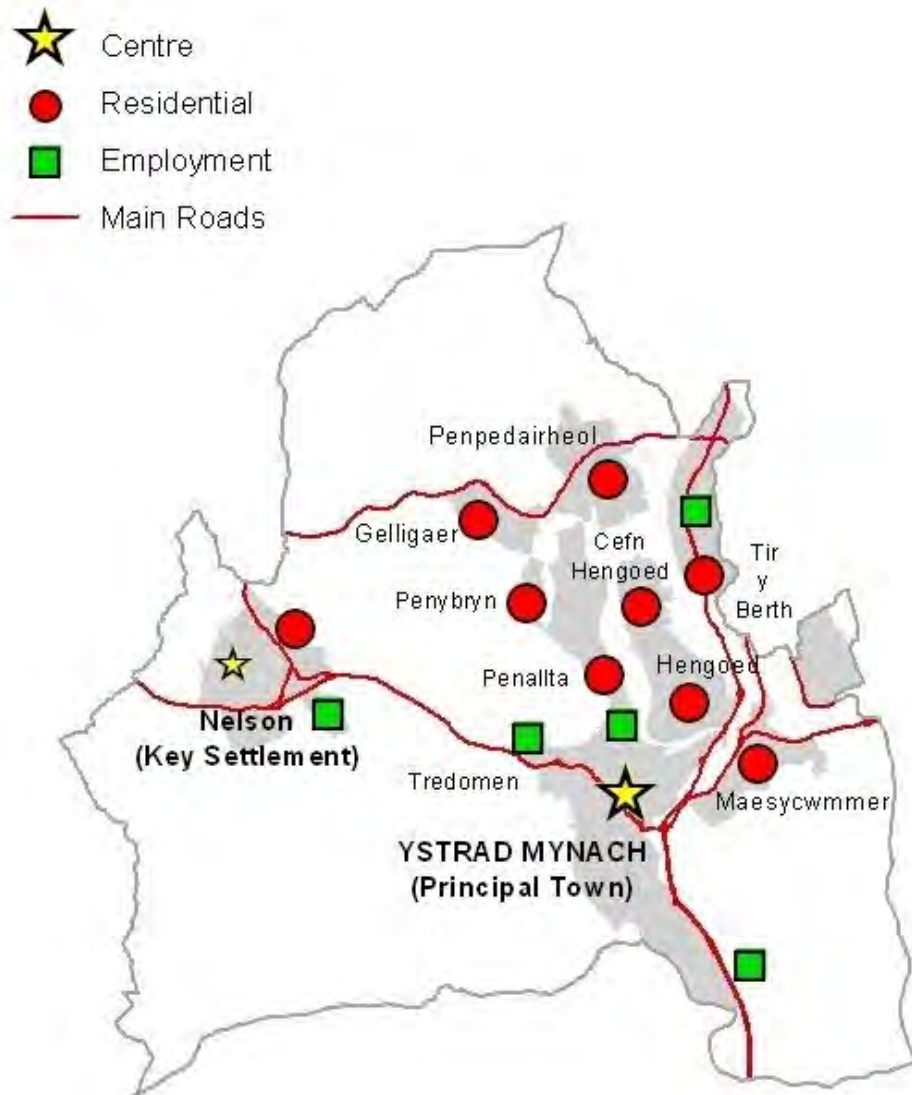
B2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions

B2.1 **Principal Town: Ystrad Mynach** is one of the Principal Towns in the Northern Connections Corridor although not the most populous – the total, including the suburb of **Tredomen**, being 4,000. Here the main shopping provision comprises two national supermarkets, namely Tesco and Lidl and over 80 other commercial units, a comprehensive school, leisure centre and a range of minor urban services. It is a main administrative centre for the county borough as the location of Caerphilly council headquarters and a main police station, together with a Further Education College and will be the site of the new general hospital. In addition there are a number of employment sites.

B2.2 **Key Settlement: Nelson** is a key peripheral settlement that has a small supermarket and range of small shops, with a population of around 4,500. Somewhat separate from the main district towns, it is closely related to the Treharris, Trelewis, Quaker's Yard and Abercynon belt of settlements, which lie in neighbouring county boroughs.

B2.3 **Residential areas: Hengoed, Cefn Hengoed, Gelligaer, Penpedairheol, Penybryn and Maesycwmmmer** villages are mainly residential. Some have tourism potential, particularly around nodes of historic buildings and landscapes in the area.

Main Settlements – Roles and Functions



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B2.4 Industry: Main industrial sites are located south of Ystrad Mynach at **Dyffryn Industrial Estate**, and to the north of the town at Penallta. There are smaller mixed developments lining the A469 through **Tiryberth** and A472 at **Tredomen Business Park**.

B2.5 Regeneration: Penallta Colliery Redevelopment Scheme is one of the most exciting regeneration projects in the county borough, on land reclaimed since the pit's closure in 1991. Here historic mine buildings are being restored and partially converted for other uses. A pioneering new mixed-use development is to be built, incorporating the Cwm Calon housing development, a primary school, public open space and leisure facilities.

B2.6 Nearby the old tips have been landscaped and an attractive Community Park laid out. This includes the impressive horse sculpture set into the hillside, and a viewing platform overlooking the valleys below.

B3. External Linkages

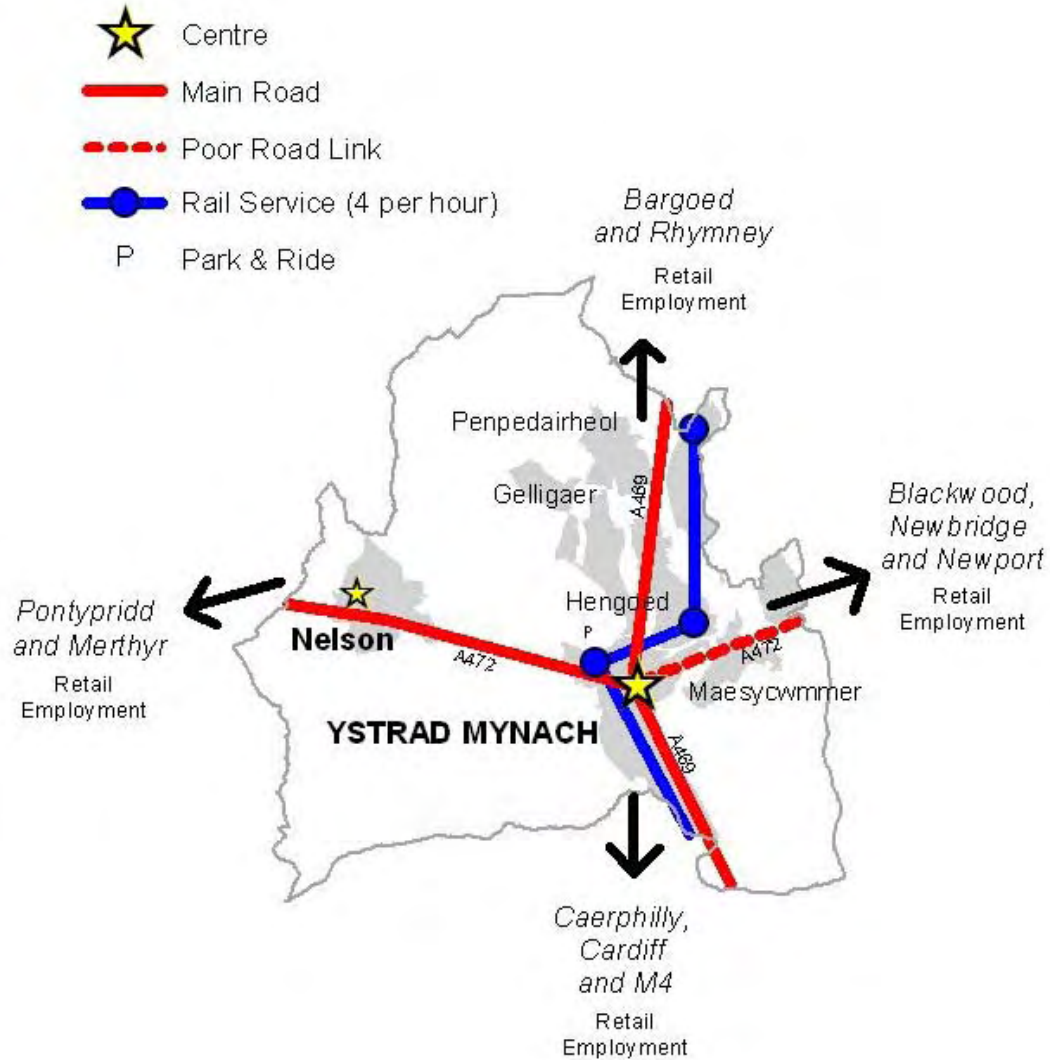
B3.1 North: Much development lies along the area's main spine road (A469) which links to **Bargoed, Rhymney** and the A465 Heads of the Valleys road. Parallel to this runs the A4049 road to New Tredegar. The Rhymney Valley railway line extends to **Bargoed** and **Rhymney**.

B3.2 South: The A469 road is the area's main route to and from **Cardiff** city running via **Caerphilly**. The Rhymney Valley railway line also connects **Caerphilly** and **Cardiff** providing a vital commuter artery.

B3.3 West: The A472 is a major east-west route which from Ystrad Mynach continues to Nelson and eventually a junction with the main **A470 Cardiff-Merthyr** trunk route just outside the county borough at **Abercynon**.

B3.4 East: Crossing the Rhymney Valley at Ystrad Mynach, the A472 is a single strategic link to the **Blackwood** and **Newbridge** conurbations. Whilst it bypasses these as a dual carriageway, that section within the district remains a single lane highway. It is the main route from the area to **Pontypool** and **Newport** (A467) and has links to roads serving **Ebbw Vale** (A4046) and **Brynmawr** (A467).

Transport and External Linkages



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B4. Leisure & Tourism Potential – Contribution to the Valleys Regional Park

B4.1 Landscape: Striking geological features such as the bowl shaped landscape at Ystrad Mynach and rock formations overlooking the Tredomen-Nelson 'vale' can be found in the area. Whilst there are a number of steep hillsides around with minor roads and long distance footpaths along the ridgeways, there are several sections of broader and gentler valley landscapes, much of which has been developed. A substantial swathe of countryside to the west of the district forms part of **Gelligaer Common**.

B4.2 Country Parks: Prominently situated above the valley floors, **Penallta Community Park** features landmark sculptures and creative landscaping. Also Gelligaer Common has the potential to be a major component of the **Valleys Regional Park**. This long term project could build upon the existing network of parks in close proximity, such as the Taff Bargoed Millennium Park between Treharris and Bedlinog. At Nelson, **Wern Crescent Woodland Park** is an attractive facility with similarly high quality landscaping. The park links into the village centre and nearby sites of nature conservation importance.

B4.3 Cyclepaths: A dedicated east-west cyclepath runs across the Rhymney Valley on the line of the dismantled Nelson-Pontypool railway. This forms part of the national cycle network (Route 47) and several small schemes under a strategy called 'Loops & Links' to improve access points are in progress.

B4.4 Heritage: Gelligaer Common has been designated a 'historic landscape' where the legacy of Roman and prehistoric civilisations can be found. **Gelligaer** village itself contains the 13th century **church**, whilst further west lies the well-known early 16th century manor house of **Llancaiach Fawr**. A historic sporting facility can be found at **Nelson** – the **Handball Court**.

B4.5 Striding across the Rhymney valley between **Hengoed** and **Maesycwmmmer** is a substantial 19th century **viaduct**, restored for cycle/footpath use – a reminder of the industrial age when coal was transported along a once comprehensive valleys railway network. The viaduct lies near a meeting point for two long distance footpaths and **Maesycwmmmer Woollen Mill**.

B4.6 Events: There are a number of entertainments held at Llancaiach Fawr Manor House shaped around a 17th Century theme. At present the area itself lacks a high profile flagship event, but with the nearby Caerphilly Big Cheese, Blackwood Big Balloon and Bargoed Big Bed festivals, there are a number of visitor-generating attractions close at hand.

B4.7 Accommodation: At the centre of the high standard golf course at **Bryn Meadows, Maesycwmmmer**, there is a hotel and leisure club. Although there is no holiday accommodation in Ystrad Mynach itself, there are hotels and bed & breakfasts near **Nelson** (such as Llanfabon and Llechwen Hall) and **Penpedairheol**.

Contribution to Valleys Regional Park Map



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B5. Analysis

B5.1 A number of actions are required on the following issues in order for the district to fulfil its economic potential and ideally prosper:

- Dependence on centres outside its boundaries is a major factor. The main town of Ystrad Mynach is small in comparison with other commercial centres and whilst benefiting from a superb strategic location offers only a limited range of shops and services. Currently there are no facilities offering overnight accommodation in the town itself. There is poor connectivity to the larger and better-resourced town of Blackwood, which offers an alternative to Caerphilly in terms of retail and employment opportunities.
- Population growth has been relatively slow requiring a concerted effort to arrest and reverse the long term population decline in the wider Valleys. Good all round provision of housing for the affordable, family and particularly executive sectors needs to be maintained.
- The industrial legacy continues to influence the sprawl of many settlements into virtual coalescence, without the associated benefits of improved facilities provision for clearly recognisable population centres (and thus markets).
- The road network has improved immeasurably since the opening of the A469 Llanbradach bypass and nearby A472 Pontllanfraith-Newbridge dualling. However, exacerbated by heavy traffic along this improved section to the east, the A472 road tends to become a congested bottleneck at peak times around Maesycwmmmer. This is a high priority strategic improvement.
- Reflecting the north-south geography of the Rhymney Valley, there are no clear main east-west routes other than the A472 corridor. The B4254 Pengam-Treharris road should be improved to offer an alternative route to the A470. This could be in tandem with further upgrading of the A469 linking to the Bargoed bypass.
- In relation to rail transport, the Rhymney Valley line is not a long distance route (running as far as Rhymney to the north with more frequent services from Bargoed), and with the other valley lines does not really form part of an integrated or coherent network. Achieving swifter, more regular services within the valley as well as to Cardiff is a prime target.
- There is a distinct lack of any east-west linkages whatsoever, despite significant areas of population around Ystrad Mynach (particularly to east). There are no direct connections with the new Ebbw Vale line reopening which passes through Newbridge.
- There is a shortage of leisure and entertainment facilities such as a swimming pool, cinema or bowling alley.
- Main industrial provision has traditionally been located in and around the southern environs of Ystrad Mynach. There is scope for further development within existing sites and any moves to significantly extend

this development threatens to undermine the valuable open space between the town, Llanbradach and eventually Caerphilly.

B6. Future Opportunities

B6.1 Ystrad Mynach: Currently the civic centre for the county borough, Ystrad Mynach needs to further promote its identity as a complementary administrative centre to Blackwood and Bargoed and therefore as a natural location for administrative headquarters – the hospital and police presence also here could potentially attract private sector interest. Creating a more identifiable centre requires building and enhancing Ystrad Mynach's retail and visitor accommodation (achieving provision equal to that in eastern areas of the Mid Valleys), better integrating its suburban housing hinterland and resolving flood risk issues. Also developing Ystrad Mynach's role as a major transport interchange to serve Pontllanfraith and Blackwood. The current rail provision could be improved on the Rhymney Valley line itself and with more regular and high profile feeder bus services.

B6.2 Nelson: An attractive Greenfield site has been allocated for industry at Ty Du, Nelson for many years. Given the proximity of the Ty Du site to the prestige office complex in Ystrad Mynach an opportunity exists to promote Nelson as an excellent location for the development of innovative employment opportunities or as a centre for higher education facilities to complement the Tredomen Business Complex. Recent environmental improvements in the village centre which contribute to Nelson's attractiveness as a sustainable shopping and residential location could be further complemented especially in view of the heritage and countryside attractions around.

B6.3 Hengoed/Cefn Hengoed: Without a clearly defined centre or boundaries, these conjoined residential settlements contain severely deprived wards in the Communities First programme. As they are in any case so dependent upon Ystrad Mynach (as district centre) for shops and amenities, there may be long-term benefits in integrating them into a larger and more recognisable urban area. There is scope for further streetworks and landscaping under the heritage theme as the conservation area extends from here to Hengoed around the viaduct.

B6.4 Gelligaer/Penybryn: Considerable house-building here has helped to offset any out migration that might have been expected following the collapse of the coal industry. Proximity to the dramatic countryside of the common and the historic core need to be capitalised upon with development restricted to high quality schemes that consolidate the residential function. These villages would be more sustainable with better public transport links to shopping and business centres, particularly Ystrad Mynach, and the community/leisure facilities to be provided at the new Penallta urban village. The pit head complex at Penallta Colliery is another iconic image to be promoted.

B6.5 Penpedairheol: The focus for retail and general amenities for Penpedairheol tends to be towards Bargoed (to which it is nearer than Ystrad

Mynach). Hence facilitating quick, regular public transport links here (as well as Ystrad Mynach) as an alternative to car use is important in such a housing dominated area by improving the B4252 and A469 roads for example.

B6.6 Maesycwmmer: Again this is a dormitory residential settlement serving the Blackwood conurbation as well as Ystrad Mynach. There are small shops here but linkages with Ystrad Mynach should be strengthened especially with the opening of the viaduct providing a pedestrian link. The good work of installing public artwork reflecting the conservation area status of part of the village should be supported by streetworks and landscaping to highlight this central design theme.

C) Northern Connections Corridor: MID VALLEYS EAST

C1. Overview

C1.1 The Mid Valleys East is located in the north of the former Islwyn Borough, West Gwent. The area stretches from Pentwynmawr in the south, Markham in the north, Hafodyrynys in the east and Fleur de Lys in the west.

C1.2 The district has an area of 57 square kilometres and embraces the valleys and adjacent uplands of the Rivers Ebbw and Sirhowy. As of April 2001 the district has a population of approximately 42,000 people, concentrated around the main urban centres of Blackwood and Newbridge.

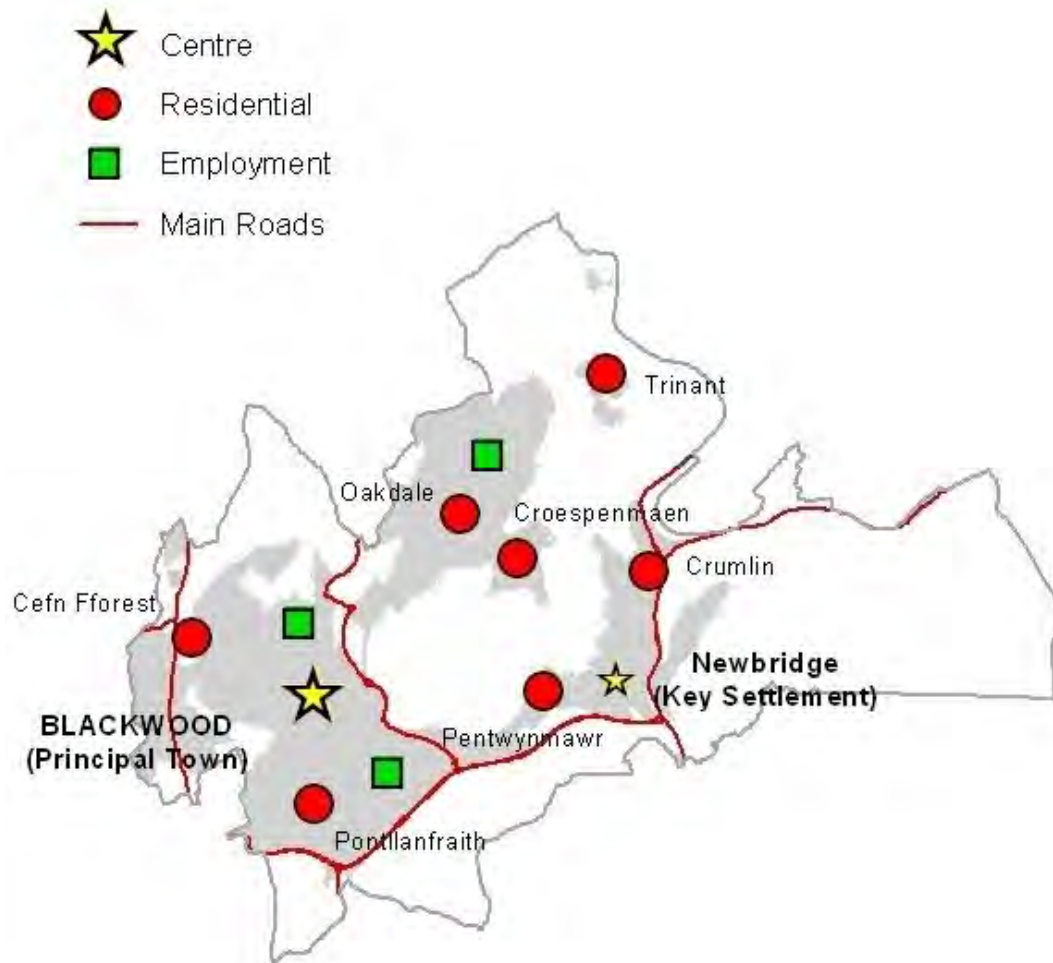
C1.3 Over 70% of the district is undeveloped and is used mainly for agriculture and forestry. These activities have created a distinctive landscape and an attractive environment. Successive land reclamation schemes have further enhanced the area. The district is characterised by small rural villages to the north and larger residential areas to the south.

C2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions

C2.1 **Blackwood** is the Principal Town within the Mid Valleys East and is the second largest within Caerphilly Borough as a whole, with a population of 23,000 (as of 2006). The town functions as a sub-regional centre, containing 183 retail units, together with a variety of leisure and community facilities serving a larger catchment area (including Argoed, Cefn-Fforest, Penmaen, Pengam, and Pontllanfraith). The High Street is relatively vibrant and is the focus of retail and services within the mid-valleys corridor.

C2.2 Although Blackwood is one the principal town centres in the Northern Connections Corridor its potential is hindered by poor access to the northern aspects of the county borough and the heads of the valleys regeneration area due to the topography of the County Borough.

Main Settlements – Roles and Functions



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C2.3 Key Settlement: Newbridge is the second largest town within the Mid Valleys East district, with a population of around 6,000. It comprises a small town centre serving local needs. The town serves an important role in providing leisure and community facilities, particularly Newbridge Leisure Centre, Newbridge Rugby Football Club Ground, Bowling Green, and the Comprehensive School.

C2.4 Newbridge benefits from a strategic location along the A469 transport corridor. By virtue of this location it relates to other towns and villages along this route rather than settlements within the community plan area to the west.

C2.5 **Blackwood** is, and **Newbridge** will be, the focus of town centre enhancement schemes. The emphasis of these schemes is to improve the quality of the town centre environment and strengthen their existing roles within the area.

C2.6 Residential Areas: Cefn Fforest, Croespenmaen, Crumlin, Oakdale, Pentwynmawr, Pontllanfraith and Trinant are the predominant residential areas supporting the larger Principal towns and Key settlements in the district. A diversity of housing types can be found in most settlements with the exception of smaller homes attractive to younger professionals and first time buyers. The diversification of house tenures may provide an opportunity to reverse the trends of outward migration by attracting more young professionals and first time buyers to the area.

C2.7 Employment Sites: Oakdale Business Park together with Penyfan Industrial Estate comprises approximately a square kilometre (106 hectares) of existing and planned employment land. Access to these sites has been significantly improved from the south with the opening of the Sirhowy Enterprise Way. Woodfieldside and Springfield business parks also provide subsidiary employment sites within the area.

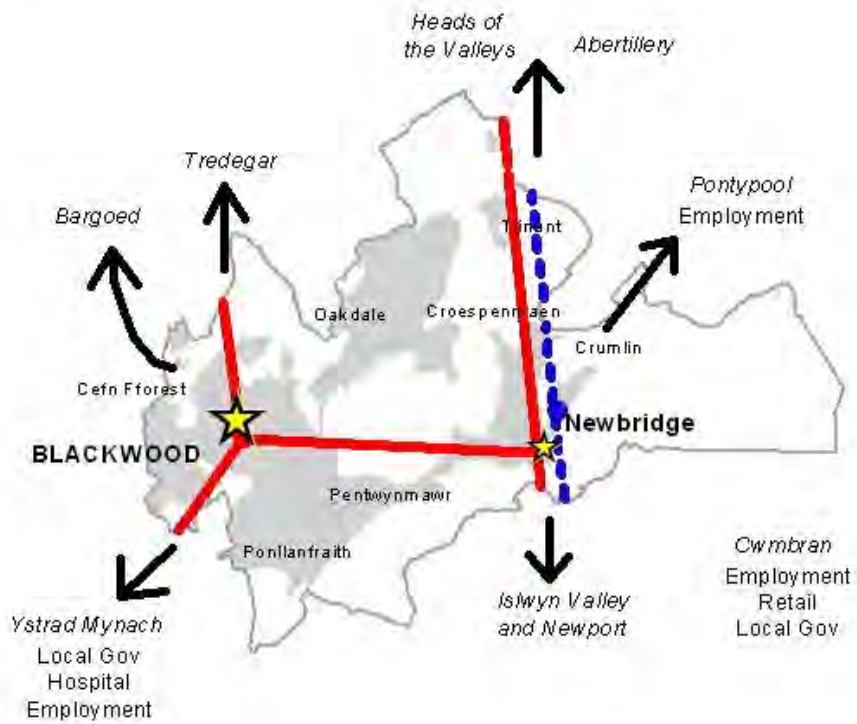
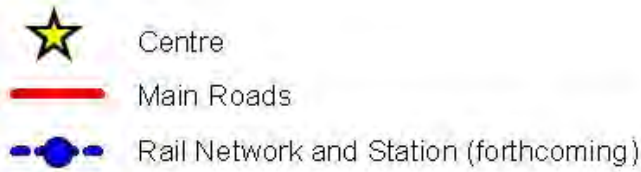
C3. External Linkages

C3.1 North / South: The district benefits from strong southward links connecting the area with the towns of Abercarn, Risca and Newport via the A467. This road extends north of Crumlin providing access to the towns of Abertillery and Ebbw Vale outside the borough. There are limited transport links north of Blackwood to the Heads of the Valley Regeneration Area with the only access provided along the A4048 to Tredegar.

C3.2 The district suffers from an absence of active passenger rail lines. The nearest rail link being Ystrad Mynach Station on the Rhymney Valley Line which connects with Blackwood town centre via a once hourly bus service.

C3.3 Proposals for the re-opening of the Ebbw Rail Line have been approved which will provide linkages through Crumlin and Newbridge to Ebbw Vale and Cardiff, and at a later stage Newport.

Transport and External Linkages



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C3.4 **East / West:** The primary links in this district are of an east / west grain. The A472 provides the primary cross-valley linkages joining Newbridge, Pontllanfraith, Maesycwmmmer and Ystrad Mynach. In terms of relating to settlements outside the borough, the A472 extends further east to Pontypool.

C4. Area Potential

C4.1 The area has the potential to consolidate its growth and develop its strength as a sub-regional centre.

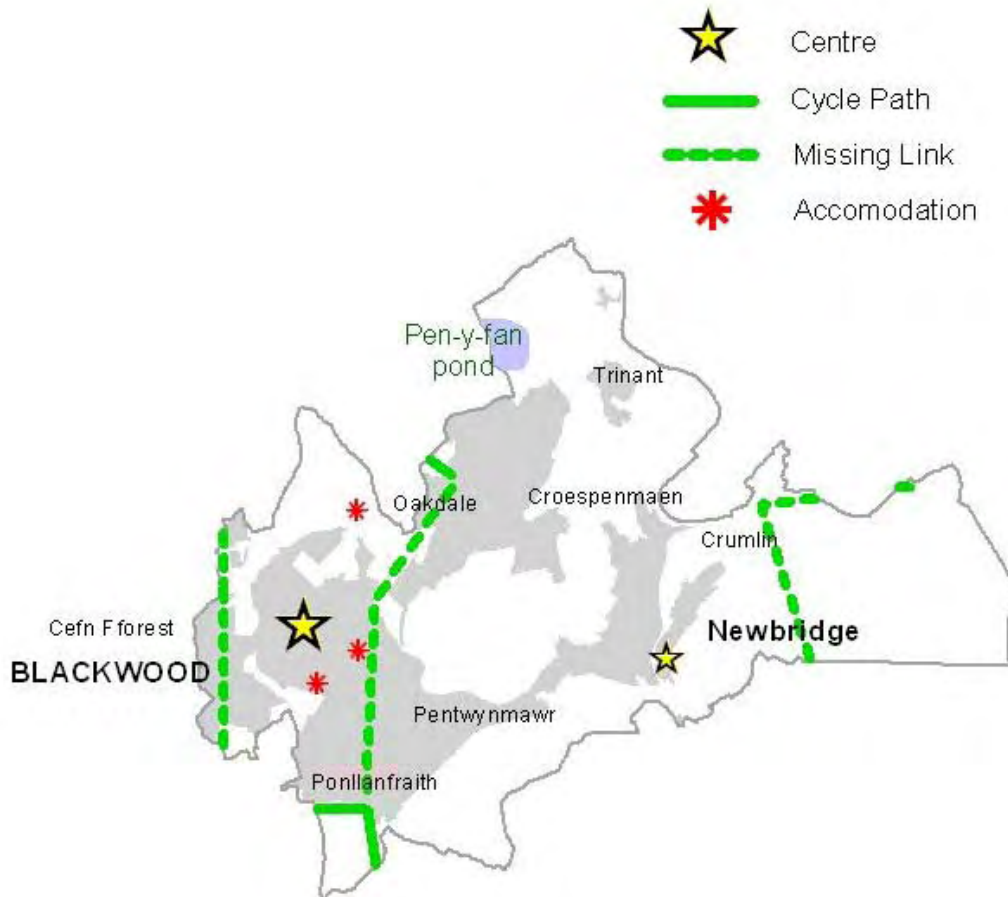
C4.2 **Blackwood and Newbridge:** Building on its existing strengths Blackwood has the potential to provide greater variety of consumer goods supporting needs at the sub-regional level. This has been in part achieved with the development of new retail units on the edge of town and environmental improvements to the existing urban fabric of the town centre. Access to and from the town centre will be improved following the completion of the new bus station.

C4.3 **Newbridge** has already established itself as an area for sports and recreation. This will be enhanced with the opening of the new rail halt providing improved access to recreational facilities, the riverside environment and the surrounding landscape of the Crumlin Valley. Exploiting these benefits there will be the opportunity to establish more service based commerce such as cafes and bars serving the needs of people visiting the area for its recreational value. The ongoing refurbishment of the 'Memo; also provides a unique cultural facility within the area that will have the potential to attract visitors.

C4.4 Together with other settlements located along the A469 transport corridor, the opening of the Ebbw Vale rail line will for the first time provide increased connectivity with Cardiff. This may provide an opportunity to tap into a new market and encourage inward migration into the area.

C4.5 **Events:** Caerphilly balloon festival, held in Blackwood, continues to attract visitors to the area throughout its duration. This event could be further capitalised with successful marketing. Staging other events (i.e. town festival/culture festival for the valleys etc) around the same time may provide a stronger hook for tourism with a potential fortnight or month of events throughout the borough. Events held at Butetown Conservation Area, Bargoed Big Bed, Caerphilly Big Cheese, Blackwood Balloon festival, foreign food markets etc would culminate in a period of tourism based activities, which together may work more successfully in attracting people to the area.

Contribution to Valleys Regional Park Map



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C4.6 Industry and Employment: Sirhowy Enterprise Way (SEW). The scheme is located in the heart of the Sirhowy Valley and improves the A4048/A472 strategic highway network through the mid valleys east district. It consists of a new single carriageway road 3.4km long with two key cross-valley links. The '**Chartists Bridge**' provides the primary cross-valley linkage from the A469 north of Blackwood to Oakdale Business Park. In addition, the landmark bridge provides a key focal point an attraction to the town.

C4.7 Completion of the scheme has already been instrumental to the development of Oakdale Business Park and has the potential to open up more land upon Oakdale upland plateau for business use.

C5. Analysis

C5.1 In order for the urban cluster to function effectively, the following issues need to be addressed in the district:

- Blackwood town centre needs to diversify its constituent units to incorporate more leisure uses reflecting local demand.
- Formal and commercial leisure opportunities need to be further developed with improved access to facilities in Markham, Argoed and Trinant. There is currently no cinema in the district with the closest multiplex found outside the borough in Nantgarw, (RCT).
- Newbridge needs to embrace the opportunities of the new rail halt and establish itself as a focus for sports and recreation.
- Road links between Blackwood and the Heads of the Valleys towns need to be improved allowing access to employment sites at Oakdale and Penylan. Currently there is indirect access via Bargoed / Cefn Fforest-Aberbargoed.
- Capitalise on the intrinsic environmental attraction of the Crumlin Valley around Newbridge as more people are accessible to the area via the new rail halt.
- No rail link in Blackwood, despite it being the major town centre in the centre and north of the borough. Improved inter-modal transport options between Blackwood and Ystrad Mynach, Blackwood and Newbridge are imperative to allow access to facilities and employment in and outside the area.
- Penylan Ponds and the wider rural area has the potential to play an increased role as an area of informal recreation.

C5.2 In order to function as part of the South East Wales integrated city region, the following issues need to be addressed:

- Improvements in inter-modal transport options need to be established linking Blackwood efficiently with Ystrad Mynach train station and the forthcoming rail halt at Newbridge. This will allow

improved access to Cardiff, Newport and the Heads of the Valleys and reduce commuter traffic.

- Existing residential areas need to be made more attractive and new residential sites identified in order to halt net migration outflow from the Mid Valleys Corridor. This should include a wider mix of housing, prioritising locations with easy access to sustainable modes of transport, particularly in view of the re-opening Ebbw Valley rail link.
- Provide improved access from the Blackwood/Oakdale sub-region to the heads of the valleys regeneration area. Improvements to the strategic road network linking Penyfan / Oakdale business parks with the north would provide increased employment opportunities.

C6. Individual Settlement Functions and Future Opportunities

Blackwood

C6.1 The town functions as a sub-regional centre whose sphere of influence runs across the mid-valleys conurbation of the northern connection corridor. The town has the potential to increase service provision with improved transport links following the redevelopment of Blackwood Bus Station and the as a result of the development of new retail units on the periphery of the town. The completion of the Sirhowy Enterprise Way also provides the opportunity to attract further inward investment to the town in the form of larger commercial and industrial units.

Newbridge

C6.2 The town serves an important role in providing local amenities and services. In addition, Newbridge has established itself as an area for sports and recreation. There will be the opportunity to expand this further with the opening of the Ebbw Valley Rail Line, which will allow improved access to Newbridge. This in conjunction with the enhancement of Newbridge town centre and riverside environment will greatly improve Newbridge's appeal as a place to visit and make a home. Exploiting these benefits there will also be the opportunity to establish ancillary commerce such as cafes and bars and the development of cultural facilities at the 'Memo' serving the needs of people visiting the area for its sporting facilities, pleasant riverside environment and attractive town centre.

Pontllanfraith

C6.3 Pontllanfraith functions as a residential settlement with house types ranging from small family homes to larger executive housing. The village contain three small neighbourhood centres serving local needs, although primary provision is provided by nearby Blackwood town centre.

Oakdale

C6.4 Oakdale serves a dual purpose. Its initial function is that of a residential settlement within the direct influence of both Blackwood and Newbridge. However, following further to development at Oakdale business park and the opening of the SEW, its role within the plan area is changing. Oakdale is now

becoming synonymous with its business park, which constitutes much of the upland plateau to the rear of the settlement. It is likely that further development spurred by the SEW will consolidate its role as a key employment site within the plan area.

Trinant & Aberbeeg

C6.5 Trinant serves predominantly as a residential satellite village to the north of Croespenmaen. The village is isolated with poor transport communications and contains few services or amenities. The topography of the land and substandard communications dictates that it relates poorly to other settlements within the borough.

C6.6 Aberbeeg functions as a small residential hamlet, although containing a small district hospital- due for closure. Its location dictates that it relates more to Ebbw Vale and Abertillery rather than other local or sub regional centres within Caerphilly County Borough.

C6.7 There is potential for the expansion of these settlements for further residential purposes, although this is unlikely given their location.

Crumlin

C6.8 Crumlin serves as a residential suburb of Newbridge, and benefits from its own small neighbourhood centre. The former Navigation Colliery Site is located at the heart of the village comprising a complex of impressive listed buildings that are capable of redevelopment for beneficial use.

C6.9 By virtue of its strategic location along the A469, Crumlin relates more to towns located along this transport corridor including Abertillery, Abercarn and Newport rather than towns within the community plan area. It is likely that the re-opening of the Ebbw Valley rail line will increase the town's desirability, although there is limited opportunity for further expansion due to the topography of the land in this area.

Cefn Fforest / Fleur-de-Lis / Pengam

C6.10 These villages form part of the 'greater' Blackwood area and largely constitute residential settlements that have coalesced over time. Due to their proximity to Blackwood town centre, these villages primarily function as residential neighbourhoods.

D) Southern Connections Corridor: LOWER ISLWYN

D1. Overview

D1.1 The Lower Islwyn area lies north west of Newport in the old county of Gwent. The Census shows that approximately 23,000 people lived there in 2001 (13.6% of the Borough's population) – this number represented a decrease of 0.5% from that recorded in 1991.

D1.2 The area comprises the wards of **Abercarn, Crosskeys, Risca, and Ynysddu**, which extend over 4430 hectares. The vast majority of this land is either moorland, grazing land, or woodland. There are two steep-sided and narrow valleys, carved out by the River Ebbw and its tributary, the River Sirhowy, which are surrounded by mountain plateau. The urban settlements cover a relatively small percentage of this area, and in the main, they occupy the valley floor. The town of **Risca-Pontymister** grew up as a metal fabrication centre, while most of the remaining settlements originated as coal mining villages.

D1.3 **Flood risk** advice from WAG identifies some significant areas of the valley floor as potentially at risk from flooding in the future given the effects of global warming on increased rainfall.

D2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions 2006

D2.1 **Principal Town: Risca-Pontymister** together with **Crosskeys** is the largest town in the area with a population of approximately **14,500**. Risca-Pontymister is the only significant shopping centre with 96 retailing units (2005), and is defined as a Strategic Local Centre in terms of retail hierarchy. The area comprises a comprehensive school and associated leisure centre and swimming pool, and a range of public and commercial services. It is also home to the local NHS units and area offices of the Local Authority dealing primarily with Housing and Social Services provision.

D2.2 The commercial function of the area is largely overshadowed by its close proximity to Newport and to some extent Blackwood. However the possibility exists to restructure the town centre to attract inward investment and improve the attractiveness of the area to residents and visitors alike.

D2.3 **Abercarn** and **Cwmcarn** comprise small village centres, with 14 and 19 retailing outlets respectively, although there are also neighbourhood centres at **Ty Sign** and **Cwmfelinfach**.

D2.4 **Residential Areas:** The main settlements are **Risca-Pontymister** with **Ty Sign, Abercarn, Crosskeys, Cwmcarn, Cwmfelinfach, Wattsville and Ynysddu**. There are also a number of minor hamlets / villages such as Pontywaun, Brynawel and Wylie.

D2.5 **Industrial Estates:** A large industrial estate is located at **Abercarn**, while smaller ones are located at **Crosskeys, Cwmcarn, Cwmfelinfach, and Wattsville**, giving these settlements an employment role as well. In addition, **Risca-Pontymister** has a number of large and small industrial sites, some with single occupiers and others with multiple users.

D2.6 **Education Hubs:** In addition to the Risca Comprehensive School at **Ty Sign**, there is an independent comprehensive school at **Cwmcarn**, and a large further education / sixth form college which serves the eastern half of the county borough is located at **Crosskeys**.

Main Settlements – Roles and Functions



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D3. External Linkages

D3.1 **South:** The A467 road is the main route south for both valleys to the **M4** and **Newport**, and to the national and regional centre of **Cardiff**. The imminent Ebbw Valley passenger railway services will connect the settlements in that valley to Cardiff initially, and Newport thereafter. Immediately to the south in Rogerstone is a Morrisons superstore, which serves a large part of the area.

D3.2 **Northwards in the Sirhowy Valley:** The A4048 links the settlements there to the nearby sub-regional retail centre of Blackwood, and also to the other employment centres and facilities in the Mid Valleys West area.

D3.3 **Northwards in the Ebbw Valley:** The A467 and the imminent passenger railway services connect the area to Newbridge Town Centre, to employment opportunities in the Mid Valleys East area generally, and the A465 corridor beyond.

D3.4 **West:** There are no good road links into the Rhymney Valley from the area. The only exceptions are a number of relatively poor quality minor roads, which lead over the mountain from Risca to Lower Machen, and from Crosskeys to Machen and to Bedwas.

D3.5 **East:** There are no direct main roads or rail links to the east either, although **Cwmbran** is indirectly accessible by road via Crumlin to the north and Rogerstone to the south. However, there are a number of relatively poor quality minor roads that lead over the mountain.

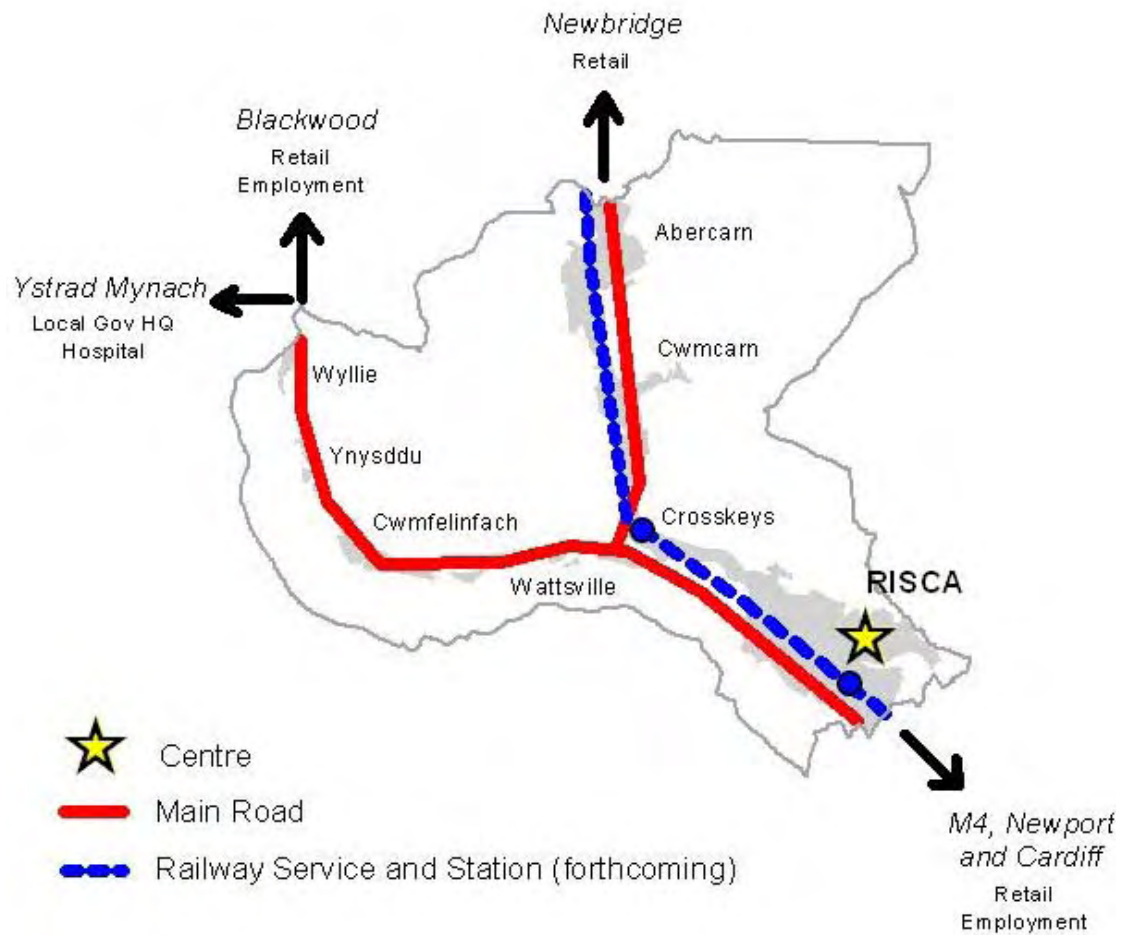
D4. Regeneration Potential

Risca-Pontymister Regeneration Scheme

D4.1 The closure of the Risca Foundry has enabled a review of the redevelopment potential of this industrial area and other sites in the town. While the Foundry was still operational, it had not been possible to develop an area of land allocated for industrial use on its northern boundary. The difficulty has been caused by the combination of its long thin shape and a site access constraint, created partly because of the location of this old works. In addition to these two sites, there are other areas in the town whose existing use is either inappropriate in their context, or in decline. If these were redeveloped for appropriate alternative uses they could potentially be of tremendous benefit to the function of the town.

D4.2 A possible regeneration scheme involving land adjacent to the River Ebbw could bring new **employment** opportunities, **retailing** units and **residential** development to this part of the town. This would improve the range of the housing stock, promote greater local shopping expenditure and increase local employment opportunities.

Transport and External Linkages



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D5. Tourism Potential and the Valleys Regional Park

D5.1 Landscape: The hillsides rise sharply from the river valleys and lend a visual emphasis to the enclosed and largely built up valley bottoms. The hilltops are wild areas dramatically contrasting with the urban areas nestling below them. Magnificent views are obtained from the minor roads and long distance footpaths along these ridge-ways.

D5.2 The area has significant potential in terms of contributing to the Valleys Regional Park and therefore has significant potential in terms of attracting visitors to the County Borough.

D5.3 Country Park: The **Sirhowy Valley Country Park** is good for both walking and cycling. A small farm trail is open all year round and nearby a Local Nature Reserve, which an ancient and beautiful mixed woodland. There is another Local Nature Reserve alongside the River Sirhowy.

D5.4 Forest Drive: The **Cwmcarn Forest Drive** allows visitors to sample a hillside forestry area by car or cycle or on foot. The main attractions are the various views around the circuit and access to **Twmbarlwm**, the highest point locally with fine views over the Bristol Channel. Also on site is a nationally acclaimed mountain bike facility, including a downhill track and a circuit, and a campsite.

D5.5 Cycle Paths: Route 47 of the National Cycleway passes through the area from Newport to Nelson via Risca, Crosskeys and the Sirhowy Valley Country Park. A local cycle route is also planned from Crosskeys northwards in the Ebbw Valley.

D5.6 Accommodation: There are no major hotels in the area but there is accommodation in a pub in Risca and a guesthouse in Crosskeys. However, the majority of facilities are related to the existing tourism sites: bunkhouses at Ynys Howell Activity Centre in the Country Park, a campsite at Cwmcarn Forest Drive, log cabins near the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, a guest house alongside the canal, and farm cottages on the hillside between the canal and Twmbarlwm at Risca.

D5.7 Heritage: There is a conservation area at Pontywaun and numerous listed buildings, but these are of architectural or local interest only and are unlikely to provide a tourist attraction in themselves.

Contribution to Valleys Regional Park Map



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Gall hyn arwain at erlyniad neu achos sifil. Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili, 100025372, 2007.

D6. Analysis

D6.1 In order for the urban cluster of settlements to function more effectively the following issues need to be addressed in this area:

- The retail function of the area is overshadowed by nearby centres, such as Newport and Blackwood. Despite this situation, there is still scope to attract new shops and commercial businesses in the area's main centre at **Risca-Pontymister**. The imminent reopening of the railway to passenger services is likely to enhance the status of the town in this respect.
- The surrounding attractive and accessible countryside provides a very positive environmental setting and many of the settlements could become more desirable residential locations if the range of housing were not so limited. There is a need to develop a wider choice of modern housing. This is most easily rectified by the regeneration potential in **Risca-Pontymister** town centre but there is also some potential arising from other brownfield sites and allowing small developments elsewhere.
- The area's attractive and accessible countryside could be the basis of even further tourism potential. In addition to enhancement of the existing leisure facilities, there could be scope to build on the area's strengths by implementing the Canal restoration project and possible development of the adjacent Risca Quarry for associated leisure uses. The potential of the riverbanks for leisure purposes are also largely ignored at present.
- There is no themed regular annual event in the area to compare with Blackwood's Big Balloon or Caerphilly Town's Big Cheese. Such an event might create some tourism potential as well as local interest if marketed imaginatively.
- For those services and facilities that the area will never be able to fulfil, the public transport links to other areas need to be improved and service frequency increased. This will enable residents to reach those services elsewhere, and especially the developing employment opportunities of Newport and Cardiff.

D7. Future Expectations

D7.1 **Overall:** The envisaged improvement in the range and quantity of the housing stock should encourage the retention of the area's existing residents. It may also attract migrants from other areas who recognise the beauty of the area and take advantage of the increased accessibility to other parts of the region. The potential leisure enhancements will be of benefit to residents and also highlight the area as a more worthy destination for visitors.

D7.2 **Risca-Pontymister:** As the Principal Town in the area, Risca-Pontymister fulfils a wide range of functions. The envisaged residential development in the town should seek to enhance the range of housing

provision. This would enable it to become a more popular residential location, particularly once the rail passenger service is open. The envisaged improvements to retail provision in the shopping centre may lead to the town meeting the daily needs of a third of the area's population. By taking advantage of redevelopment opportunities as they arise, the town could also develop an enhanced employment role as a rail-oriented location for small and medium sized office-based businesses. The town possesses a wide range of educational and leisure facilities, including a comprehensive school library leisure centre and playing fields. These should be renewed and enhanced as necessary. Significant environmental improvements to the public realm and improvements to the fabric of buildings in the main commercial street would serve to enhance the image of the town.

D7.3 Crosskeys: The primary function is as a residential area, but there is also a strong educational role because of the presence of the Further Education College. Crosskeys is also an industrial employment centre, and this function should continue. However, with the improvements to public transport connections residents will also be within easy and sustainable commuting distances of employment and other opportunities elsewhere in the region.

D7.4 Abercarn / Cwmcarn: The primary function of Abercarn and Cwmcarn is as residential. Where possible, there should be new housing provision and environmental improvements, particularly in the village centres, so that the villages becomes more attractive places to live. Cwmcarn lies just north of the Cwmcarn Forest Drive and the end of the Canal, which adds to its attractiveness. Abercarn is an important industrial employment centre, and this function should continue. However, with the improvements to public transport connections residents will also be within easy and sustainable commuting distances of employment and other opportunities elsewhere in the region.

D7.5 Residential areas: Cwmfelinfach, Wattsville, Brynawel, Pontywaun, Wyllie and Ynysddu are predominantly residential areas. This role should be enhanced where appropriate, by increasing the range and type of housing available. Good public transport links are vital to ensure that these areas can access the full range of services required by local residents.

E) Southern Connections Corridor: CAERPHILLY BASIN

E1. Overview

E1.1 The Caerphilly Basin is the southernmost Community Plan area within the Authority, being located at the southern end of the Rhymney Valley. The Census shows that approximately 53,000 people lived in the Basin area in 2001 (31.25% of the Borough's total population), an increase of almost 5% from the 1991 population.

E1.2 The area comprises the wards of **Aber Valley, Llanbradach, Bedwas Trethomas & Machen, St James, St Martins, Penyrheol and Morgan Jones**, covering some 7936 hectares. The vast majority of this land (81.3%) lies outside of the existing settlements and comprises a mix of agricultural and open land that is largely identified as Special Landscape Area, seeking to protect the valuable landscape quality. The remaining land is covered by the main settlements of Caerphilly, Abertridwr, Senghenydd, Llanbradach, Bedwas, Trethomas, Graig-y-Rhacca and Machen, whilst smaller rural villages are present to the southeast at Waterloo, Rudry and Draethen. The basin area is the subject of significant development pressure, due to its location in close proximity to Cardiff and the M4 Corridor. The exception to this, however, are the Aber Valley settlements of Abertridwr and Senghenydd, both of which display characteristics similar to those experienced by settlements further north in the former coal mining areas.

E2. Main Settlements – Roles & Functions 2006

Principal Town: Caerphilly

E2.1 Caerphilly is the largest town within the County Borough, accommodating over 18.25% of the total population within the authority area. Caerphilly's origins date back to the construction of the Norman castle, which was started in 1267. A settlement quickly sprang up around the castle and remained largely unchanged until after the Civil War, when the settlement developed into a market town. In the nineteenth century the industrial revolution fuelled the growth of the town and Caerphilly emerged as the main town in the area.

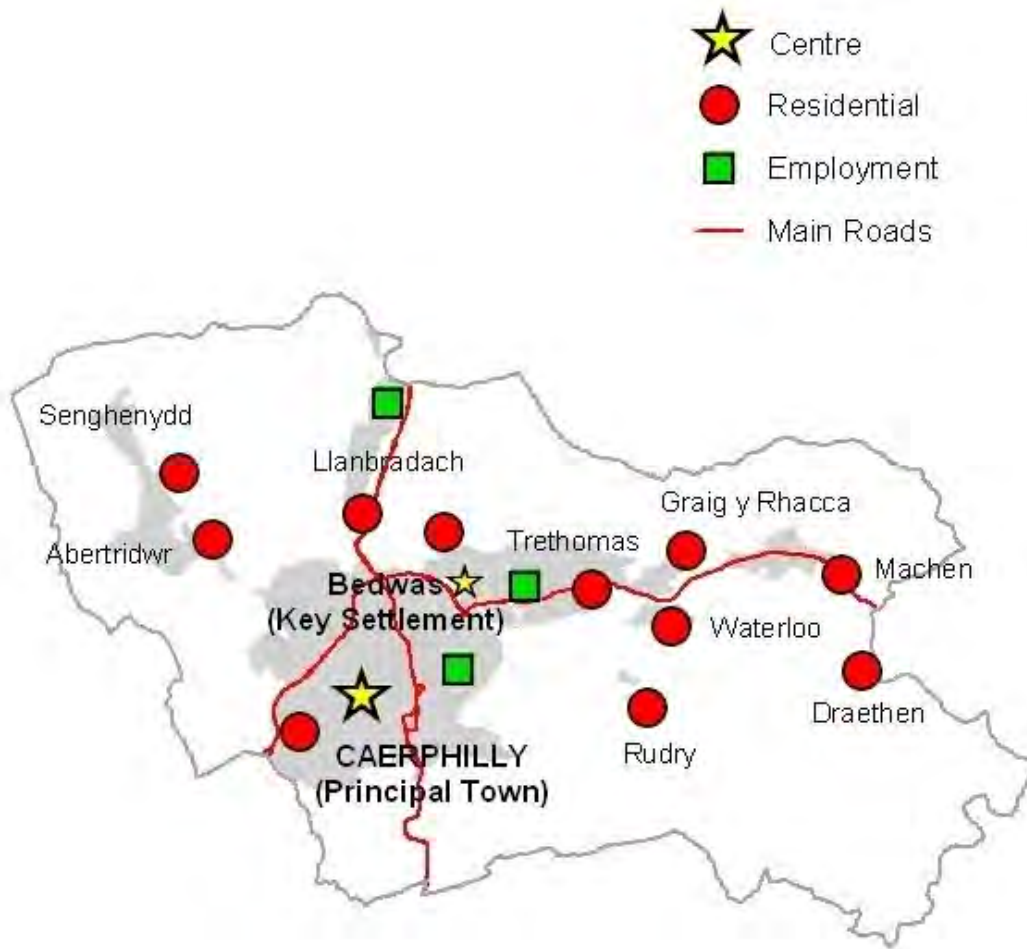
E2.2 Caerphilly is an important sub-regional centre comprising 179 retail units. It has a relatively strong retail base with nearly 30% of the units being occupied by multiple retailers. Caerphilly has, over the last few years, been the subject of significant retail development, and is still the subject of continuing development and redevelopment pressure that will assist in the continued improvement to its the retailing provision.

E2.3 Caerphilly does suffer from competition with the Regional Centre in Cardiff and, to a much lesser extent, the major sub-regional centre at Newport. As a result a significant level of retail spend is being lost to these other centres.

E2.4 Caerphilly is one of the centres of employment within the County Borough, comprising 5 existing employment sites totalling 58.43 hectares, as well as employment provision within the town centre itself.

E2.5 There are 9 primary schools, 2 welsh-medium schools and three comprehensive schools, of which two have sixth form levels. Caerphilly also accommodates a range of public and commercial services.

Main Settlements – Roles and Functions



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E2.6 The **Castle** is a significant tourist attraction, drawing in excess of 80,000 visitors very year. In addition to this the Caerphilly Big Cheese event is also a significant attractor.

E2.7 Caerphilly also plays an important role in the strategic context as a satellite and dormitory town for Cardiff. Caerphilly undoubtedly provides housing for the employment base in Cardiff, and a significant level of retail expenditure is also lost to the capital city, however there is potential for the Town to function as a district centre for North Cardiff.

Bedwas: Key Settlement - Residential, Employment and Local Retail Role

E2.8 Bedwas is predominantly a residential area comprising a local retail centre, which serves the needs of the resident population. It also has its own Comprehensive school. Bedwas is also a significant employment centre, accommodating 2 employment sites totalling 60.78 hectares (which could be increased with the inclusion of the Waterloo paint works site at 15.6 hectares). Bedwas is a residential and employment centre in the Caerphilly Basin.

Llanbradach

E2.9 Llanbradach is largely residential in nature although it contains a local retail centre. The village is sandwiched between the main northerly road (A469) and the steeply sloping hills to the west. It is severely constrained by the potential for land to flood. A significant amount of land within the settlement lies within the Flood Zone C2 as identified by the Environment Agency. Sensitive uses, such as housing, are not suitable within these areas. North of Llanbradach there is an employment site of 4.82 hectares.

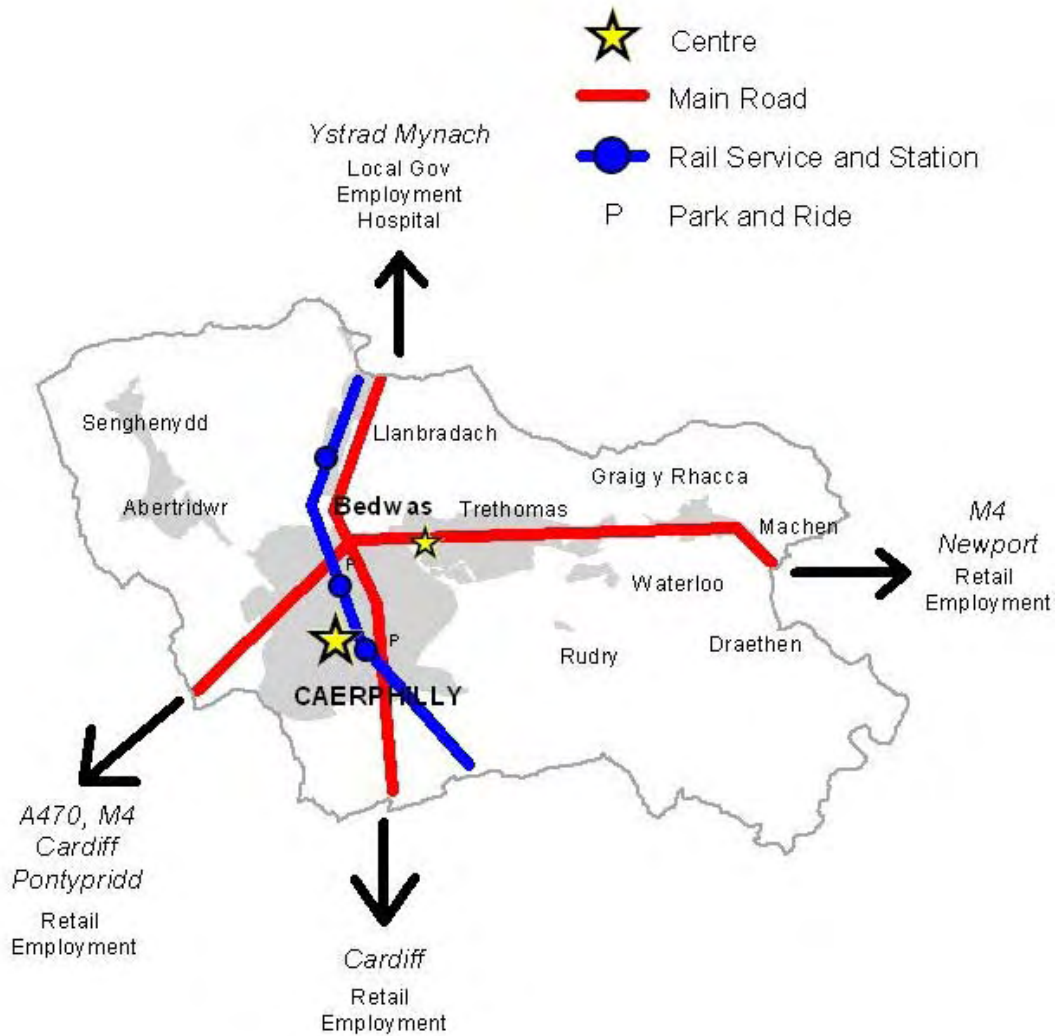
Abertridwr and Senghenydd

E2.10 Abertridwr and Senghenydd are the main settlements within the Aber Valley. They are predominantly residential in nature. Both villages have local retail centres. These settlements portray characteristics of settlements located to the north of the County Borough, within the former coalmining areas, e.g. little development pressure, reducing population. This is in stark contrast to the remainder of the Caerphilly Basin, which is characterised by high levels of development pressure and a potential for significant in-migration. The residential role and function of these two settlements complements the overall functioning of the Basin as a whole.

Machen, Trethomas, Graig-y-Rhacca, Waterloo, Rudry and Draethen

E2.11 All of the remaining settlements within the Caerphilly Basin are predominantly residential in nature, although most villages also comprise small neighbourhood shops, public houses etc. Rudry and Machen have been identified as rural villages whose services should be protected.

Transport and External Linkages



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E3. External Linkages

E3.1 The Caerphilly Basin lies at the crossroads of north-south and east-west routes from outside and within the County Borough Area. To the north the A469 provides access to services and facilities in the other settlements of the Rhymney Valley and also provides access to the main A472 cross-valley link.

E3.2 To the south the Mountain Road provides access to Cardiff for commuters and for those who wish to access the services and facilities that the Capital City affords.

E3.3 To the east the A468 provides access to Newport and the eastern M4 Corridor, whilst the Caerphilly Northern Bypass and the A468 to Nantgarw provides access to the west to the A470, to Cardiff, Pontypridd and other valley areas.

E3.4 The Rhymney Valley rail line provides a frequent rail service from Cardiff to the Rhymney valley. There are no east-west rail links within the Caerphilly Basin.

E3.5 The Machen to Caerphilly section of the National Cycle network runs in an east-west direction.

E4. Issues and Potential

E4.1 In the Caerphilly UDP the Basin area (with the exception of the Aber Valley) was included within the Strategy Area of Consolidation. This sought the restriction of development within tight settlement boundaries to protect the environment. The aim of this strategy was to divert development further north into the valley within the central area. The strategy also provided a tool for resisting the significant development pressure that exists across most of the Basin. However, the strategy of consolidation has undoubtedly affected the potential for growth in the Basin.

E4.2 Traffic congestion, both within Caerphilly town and on the core network (Caerphilly Northern Bypass and A469) is a key factor for the future performance of the Basin area. The Council recently adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance that formalised an obligation for house building to contribute towards improvements to the core network. However this obligation only seeks to mitigate against the effects of the traffic generation of the housing sites themselves, and does not seek to reduce traffic congestion to below existing levels. If growth for this area is proposed then significant improvements to the highway network will be required. The subject of a Southern Bypass for Caerphilly has always been contentious. However consideration needs to be given to all schemes that could relieve congestion on the Core Network.

Contribution to Valleys Regional Park Map



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E4.3 Improvements to the rail service throughout the Rhymney Valley are to be implemented over the next few years. This will increase the capacity of trains servicing the valley, affording opportunities for increased rail commuting and park and ride. These improvements, along with the opening up of the Ebbw Vale Line, will provide significant opportunities to enhance rail transport within the County Borough.

E4.4 There are currently proposals for further redevelopment of Caerphilly Town centre. Such redevelopment would be a significant improvement to the retail offer in the Town and Community Plan Area. There is evidence to suggest that demand exists to continue the development/redevelopment of Caerphilly Town Centre and the enhancement of the retail offer. This would strengthen the retail function of the town centre and may help stem some of the lost expenditure to other centres, particularly Cardiff.

E4.5 The Basin is one of the employment centres within the County Borough, providing over 130 hectares of existing industrial land. These sites have high occupancy levels although there are opportunities for redevelopment of some parts of the estates. It should be noted that the Waterloo Paint Works site (identified as an existing industrial site in the UDP) is currently being considered for mixed-use development, which could remove much of the existing 15 hectares of employment land from the total stock. One issue that needs to be addressed for the future is whether the provision of employment land in the Basin needs to be increased with new allocations. The take up of land in this area is relatively good and new sites are likely to be taken up over a relatively short space of time and the employment base in the area would be stronger. However, this is likely to have adverse effects on other areas with surplus land that are seeking employment development.

E4.6 Tourism is playing an increasingly important role in the Basin Economy. The Castle attracts 80,000 people a year and the annual "Big Cheese" and the Caerphilly International Festival are landmark events in the basin calendar. The Basin is also blessed with high quality rural landscape and has two golf clubs. There are two major hotels within Caerphilly that provide accommodation. There is scope for the improvement of the tourist product in the basin, but this needs to be undertaken as a complete package with other tourist facilities throughout the County Borough. Consideration is currently being given to enhancing the tourism product of the castle, and future links to the conservation quality in the basin area could also be utilised.

E5. Analysis

E5.1 In order for the urban cluster of settlements to function more effectively the following issues need to be addressed in this area:

- Traffic congestion within the area needs to be addressed.
- The issues relating to the Aber Valley settlements need to be addressed, to encourage development and enhance their role in the Basin.

- The key issue of whether to further consolidate (and to some extent constrain growth in) the basin area, is key to how the role of Caerphilly town and the other settlements in the basin area evolve over the forthcoming plan period.
- Whether to enhance the area's role in the strategic context.

E6. Future Expectations

E6.1 Overall: It is unlikely that the roles of the settlements themselves, or the area as a whole, will change over the LDP Plan period. The future for the area depends upon strategy decisions over constraint or growth.

E6.2 Caerphilly: Will remain as one of the Principal Towns within the County Borough. Continued enhancement of the retail functions and some growth in residential provision is likely to be the main factors for the future. Key strategic decisions will impact upon how other functions (employment, service, commercial) will develop over time.

E6.3 Aber Valley: This is an area that needs active intervention. The settlements exhibit characteristics of more deprived settlements located within the former coalmining areas. Positive action is required to improve the fortunes of these settlements to bring them in-line with the remainder of the existing area of Consolidation.

E6.4 Bedwas: Bedwas Colliery is a potential mixed-use site that would see the residential base of the town increase. Key strategic decisions will influence how the employment and dormitory functions will develop.

E6.5 Llanbradach: Proposals for improved Park and Ride at the Rail station could have important impacts for this settlement, particularly as part of the regional dormitory area for Cardiff. The flood constraints within the settlement mean that there is little scope to increase the residential base in his settlement.

E6.6 Waterloo: The redevelopment of the former paint works site for mixed use would result in a massive increase in the size of this settlement in residential terms. Consideration could also be given to the further expansion of this village into a new settlement.

E6.7 Trethomas and Graig-y-Rhacca: These settlements could accommodate residential development and enhance their residential role. However these settlements are constrained to some extent by land of ecological value, and development opportunities may be restricted.

E6.8 Rudry and Machen: It is unlikely that these rural settlements will be the subject of any significant development during the LDP period.

