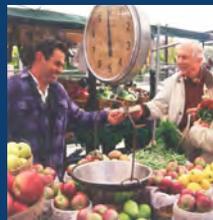
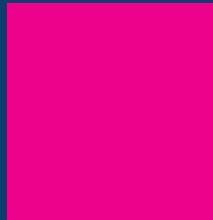
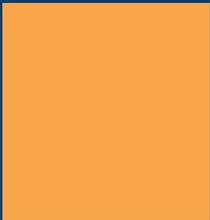
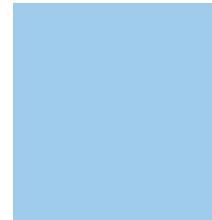


SD89

# Abertillery : *regeneration strategy*



## Final Report: November 2006



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# 1.0 Introduction & Purpose

## 1.1 Turning the Town Around

“This is the last chance to fix Abertillery. If we don’t succeed now, my business will not recover and I’ll be forced to close.” (Abertillery Businessman)

The thought of a once prosperous town like Abertillery succumbing to the familiar spiral of decline is inconceivable. Yet it is happening and this is the reality facing local people, businesses, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC) and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

But **the town can be repaired**. Abertillery has a wealth of opportunities which many towns this size would envy: a stock of fine buildings, a unique landscape setting, a ‘planned’ townscape, national retailers and committed local businesses.

Yet there is much to do. The process ahead will require unpopular and brave decisions. It will include implementing projects that are difficult and complicated in the short term but of critical importance to the long term future of the town.

This report provides the vision for change, strategies to guide that change and some of the projects that will deliver it.

There is no easy, quick fix, but working through the recommendations of this report in a logical fashion will first arrest decline, then provide the basis for lasting stability before promoting progressive projects that will complete the reversal of fortunes.

“Great untapped potential exist(s)... strong communities with a clear sense of purpose, a high quality natural landscape on the doorstep, an ever-improving physical environment, rapid road and rail links to the Capital City and wider region... are attributes and opportunities which need to be harnessed.”

(Heads of Valleys Strategy `Heads We Win’)

## 1.2 Structure of Report

This document builds upon the Abertillery Town Centre Issues Report (November 2005) and the Abertillery Town Centre Options Report (January 2006). This draft report will refer to, rather than repeat these documents.

The draft report will therefore outline:

- the **History of Abertillery**: outlining factors which will act as cues to the regeneration of the town
- the **Ambition for Abertillery**: a picture of daily life in 2016
- **Clarifying the Challenges**: the scale of issues the strategy should address
- **Regeneration Objectives**: tying the strategy to projects and themes
- **Presenting the Strategy**: the Sub-Regional strategy and the Town Centre Strategy
- **Overview of Projects**: A review of the significant actions
- **Delivery and Phasing**: Recommendations guiding implementation
- **Conclusions and Next Steps**: Moving to forward

## 2.0 Understanding some of Abertillery's History

The history of the town will have much bearing on our response to its future.

Much of the fabric of the old Abertillery, dating back to the boom years between 1881 and 1921, remains. There have been few comprehensive redevelopments and limited clearance programmes. The lack of sites available for development has also limited the construction of new buildings. In fact, in terms of buildings little has changed other than the fact that many of them have been disfigured by insensitive alterations.

However, the economic fortunes of the town have changed and this is the crux of the problem and the opportunity facing the town today. The photographs from the town's halcyon days provide a stark picture of how far the town has fallen and outline the scale of the task ahead. We need to find a way of re-using and showcasing the best of these buildings whilst providing people with a reason to go there. What is clear though, is that the economic opportunity and wealth experienced in the images on these pages will not be recaptured to the same extent and to achieve similar levels of vitality the town will almost certainly have to adapt.

Visits to the Abertillery Museum as well as reference to [www.abertillery.net](http://www.abertillery.net) highlighted that much of the character of the town remains and materials from these sources captures the town in its heyday. These images of Abertillery highlight that whilst economic fortunes have changed the infrastructure for creating a successful and distinctive town centre remains.



## 3.0 Understanding the Place

The success of the Regeneration Strategy will depend on the manner in which it addresses the problems facing Abertillery and the way it maximises the opportunities.

The audit of the Town Centre and the relevant policy and strategic context are dealt with in considerable detail in the Issues Report (November 2005, Appendix A). However, it is worth reminding ourselves exactly what we are dealing with and the key factors that the strategy needs to address.



Despite improvements, Abertillery's gateways lack impact, largely due to lack of buildings

### 3.1 Movement

#### Issues

- Limited regional connectivity
- Limited car parking spaces
- Poor legibility of traffic circulation system
- Few opportunities for short stay parking without fundamental review of traffic management regime
- Inadequate signage
- Too many restrictions to the current traffic management arrangements which makes it difficult to police
- Poor gateways
- Links with the community campus need to be improved
- Weight restrictions on Foundry Bridge

#### Opportunities

- Strategic improvements in the local rail network are planned. Building upon these will help to enhance Abertillery's strategic connections.
- Replacement Foundry Bridge to improve access and gateway to the town centre
- Potential to release land at Tillery Street for additional car parking
- Review the pedestrianisation of Church Street and Somerset Street with a view to a one way shared street incorporating short stay parking
- Review the one way system
- Traffic calming on the roads around the town centre (e.g. Division Street, Alma Street etc)
- Better management of traffic circulation could create: increased pedestrian priority, better driver legibility and more on street parking

**"Use this strategic framework to guide the area's development and ensure that it links directly to improvements in public transport and prioritises high quality and sustainable town centre development."**

(Heads of Valleys Strategy 'Heads We Win')

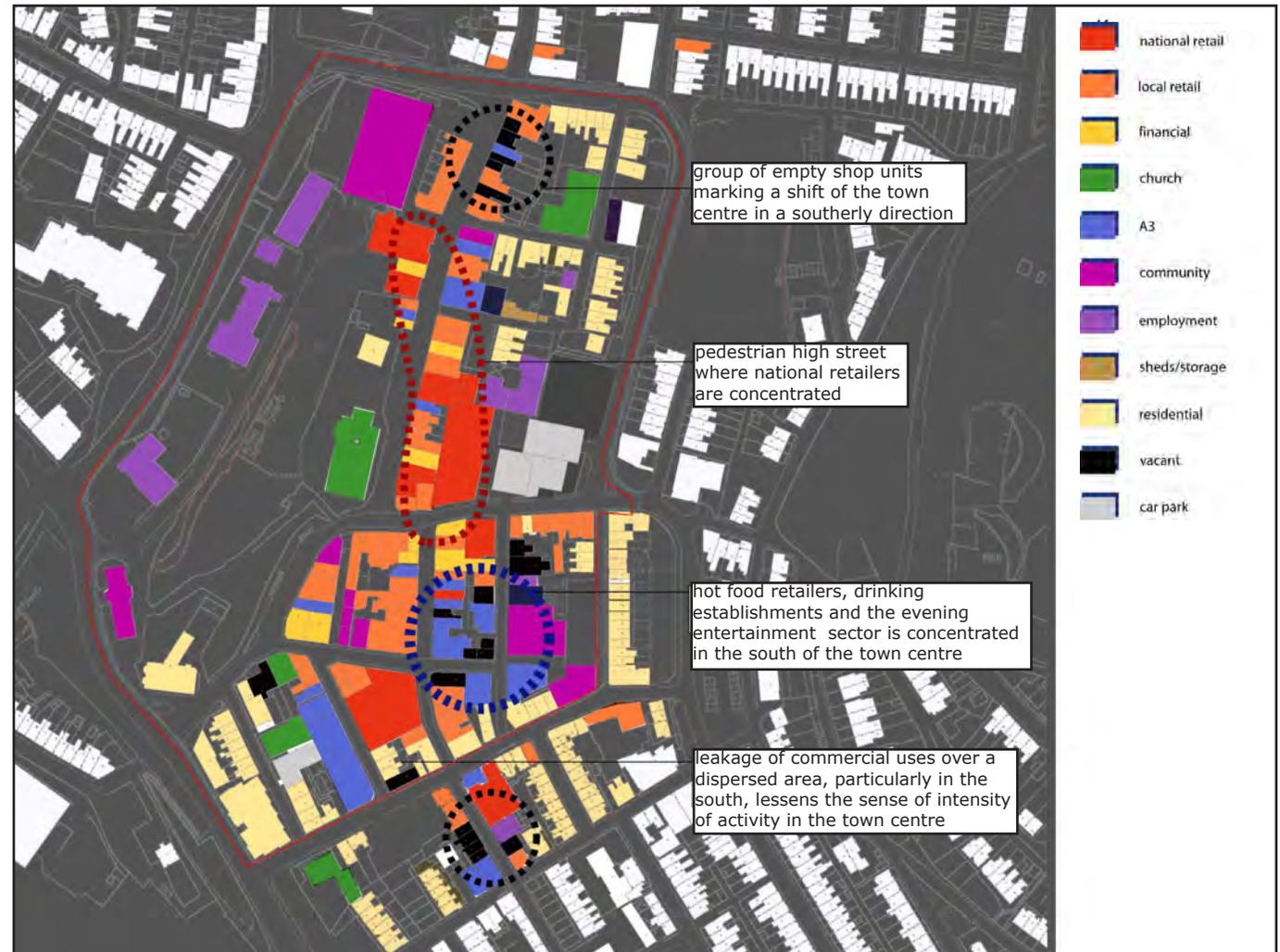
### 3.2 Land Use

#### Issues

- Higher than average level of vacant units
- Groupings of vacancies in the northern and southern peripheries of the centre
- Lack of employment uses
- Lack of youth entertainment
- Perception that the excess of single person rented accommodation is causing trouble in the town
- Several public buildings not located in the heart of the town centre

#### Opportunities

- Broad mix of uses
- Large proportion of local retailers
- Concentration of pubs and cafes in the south eastern part of the town centre, clustered close to the Metropole



Land use pattern, showing concentrations of voids

### 3.3 Summary of Character Area Audit

#### Issues

- Tight urban grain restricts vehicular and pedestrian movements
- Small urban blocks limit opportunities to hide servicing at the back of block
- Lack of defined gateway to the town centre
- Entrance to the town centre is traffic dominated and largely represents a townscape void
- Fine urban grain limits the accommodation of retailers and employers who require large premises

#### Opportunities

- Fine urban grain
- Deformed grid layout provides good permeability through the centre
- Strong linear nature of Church Street, highlights its importance as the primary shopping street
- Streets respond to topography, and therefore maximise views, and aid legibility through consistency in the built form
- Proposed new Foundry Bridge will contribute to a more defined sense of place at Northern end of the town centre



Fine urban grain and grid layout, but this restricts some movement and limits the size of units

### 3.4 Townscape & Visual Appraisal

#### Issues:

- Some buildings in very poor condition and others which are architecturally inferior
- Poor quality buildings tend to be found in the areas peripheral to the centre, thus creating poor gateway conditions
- Some views are terminated with unsightly buildings
- Loss of perimeter blocks in the west, eroding the urban character of the town
- The main bridge in the town does not appear like a bridge, but a road.

#### Opportunities

- Several landmark buildings and some other good quality background buildings
- Quality buildings concentrated at the heart of the town centre
- Richness and diversity of street scene
- A strong sense of place
- Some positive views to the excellent landscape setting and vistas terminated by key landmark buildings
- Improve the appearance of key building facades, prioritising facades terminating key views and centrally located

“the car park should be improved. It’s an eyesore and attracts trouble at night.”

(Local resident)



“our town centres generally fall below the standards expected by modern society. Urban decay is all too evident... with limited retail, cultural and social facilities on offer.”

(Heads of Valleys Strategy ‘Heads We Win’)

“Abertilly could be an attractive town!”

(Local resident)



### 3.5 Landscape Audit

#### Issues

- Inappropriate and ineffective pedestrianisation of Church Street
- Poor quality and condition of surfacing in the public realm
- Poor quality and condition of street furniture and lots of clutter
- Poor continuity of public realm spaces and links
- Poor hierarchy of public realm spaces
- Dereliction and poor condition and quality of building façades detracting from the public realm experience
- Poor legibility at town centre gateway areas
- Poor pedestrian and visual links between Tesco site, adjacent parking and the town centre, exacerbating difficulties of topography
- Cluttered street environment - the CCTV poles are very unsightly, could some of them be wall mounted?
- Poor pedestrian links to the Sports Centre

#### Opportunities:

- Current public realm ready for replacement
- Improve the legibility, hierarchy and sense of place in the public realm.
- Creation of a hierarchy and sequence of key open spaces and nodal spaces each with defined sense of place.
- Potential to open up access around St.Michael's Church on Church Street and the creation of a new town square
- Improve the bus station as an important town centre transport node and open space
- Removal of the pedestrianisation on Church Street and the introduction of short stay parking spaces to revive the use of this central retail street.
- Capitalise upon the attractive landscape setting in which the town is located, identifying and retaining key views
- Reinforce the woodland character of the river corridor whilst promoting this pedestrian link
- Incorporate better linkages to the surrounding open space
- Recently improved public realm quality of riverside / woodland path link.



Some of the public realm offers opportunities to create interesting spaces, (above - note CCTV pole) yet some areas are in desperate need of attention (below).

### 3.6 Socio - Economic Review

#### Issues

- Declining and ageing population
- Low wages and skills
- Speculative office development extremely unlikely
- Narrow choice of local housing
- Extensive retail leakage
- Spatial disbursement of town centre
- Accommodation unsuitable for multiple retailers
- Variable quality and gaps in the leisure offer (e.g. little family or youth focussed commercial facilities)

#### Opportunities

- Good mixture of local retail, national retail and local services
- Industrial estates are a good source of local employment but not capable of contributing high value-added jobs – sustainable access to such jobs elsewhere are therefore important
- Need to build upon the existing local business people
- Abertillery has a clear role in the wider Cardiff and Newport City Region
- Considerable scope for improving business incubation and enterprise development
- Scope to locate more public sector office staff in the town in the future

### 3.7 Community & Social Issues Appraisal

#### Issues

- Need to concentrate community facilities into more suitable premises in more accessible locations
- Street lighting is poor and fear of crime is high
- Youngsters are bored and have little to do – annoyance, vandalism, lack of respect are common
- Abertillery is vibrant on weekend evenings, but policing is made difficult by poor lighting and dense urban street network. Anti-social behaviour arising from excessive alcohol consumption is therefore common

#### Opportunities

- A wide range of community facilities, headquarters and services
- The town is busy in the evening, better policing and encouraging acceptable behaviour can help to build this vibrancy and a sub-regional role for the town
- The customers of the future are currently being marginalised as they have little positive contribution to the town centre
- There is good CCTV coverage in the town



NatWest

HIGH STREET

AGENT AGENTS

RESIDENTIAL LETTING AGENTS

WANTED HOUSES, FLATS TO RENT

INDEPENDENT ESTATE AGENTS

GUS JONES

JEWELLERS

DOUG BOOKMAKERS

ABERTHAWY FESTIVAL

DRY CLEAN TO DRY 01433 214444

DOUG BOOKMAKERS

## 4.0 The Ambition for Abertillery

“Abertillery stands at a threshold of change, yet it is also at the edge of irreparable harm. This is the final chance to make an impact in Abertillery and the final chance to deliver lasting change. If not the town will surely succumb to the problems which have been consuming it for the last twenty years. The public sector, the business community and local people have an immense responsibility.

What needs to be done will be difficult and will certainly consume time and money. The tasks ahead will almost certainly not please everyone, but in the long term will be of benefit to the town. There are no magic fixes for Abertillery, it is way beyond that point. Only if all the projects pull in the same direction will Abertillery again be a town centre where people like to go. If the projects pull apart, then Abertillery will also fragment.

If the core elements of this strategy are implemented, by 2016 Abertillery will be a popular, interesting, thriving little town. It will thrive because people will have the choice of working in the valley, Newport or Cardiff and will want the advantages of achieving a better quality of life than they could in the cities to the South.

Many of these people may sometimes shop in the cities but will also often stay in Abertillery to buy a few items, use the library and perhaps have a coffee or a beer. Whilst they are in town they will more than likely bump into friends or see people stopping in town who are doing similar; or browsing in the specialist outdoor and cycle shops; or see office workers unwinding in the centre during their lunch break.

Despite its current malaise Abertillery has huge scope for renewal and the remainder of this report will outline how we think this can be achieved.”

#### 4.1 Strategic Objectives

Tackling the problems, the symptoms of those problems and realising the ambition will only occur if all of the following objectives are met.

- 1: Consolidate and improve the *environmental quality* of the town centre
- 2: Improve the way that traffic and pedestrians enter and *access* the town centre
- 3: Develop Abertillery's *strategic transport linkages* within the wider Cardiff & Newport City Region
- 4: Work comprehensively with the town's *business community*
- 5: Re-use and *improve the town's built fabric* through re-use, building improvement and management
- 6: Encourage additional land uses in the town centre area and encourage greater *housing choice*
- 7: Enhance *community safety*
- 8: Enable *community facilities* and *employment uses* to contribute towards the town's vitality
- 9: Work with *young people* to improve and develop youth activities and business opportunities in the town centre



## 5.0 Making the Ambition a Reality: From Vision to Strategy

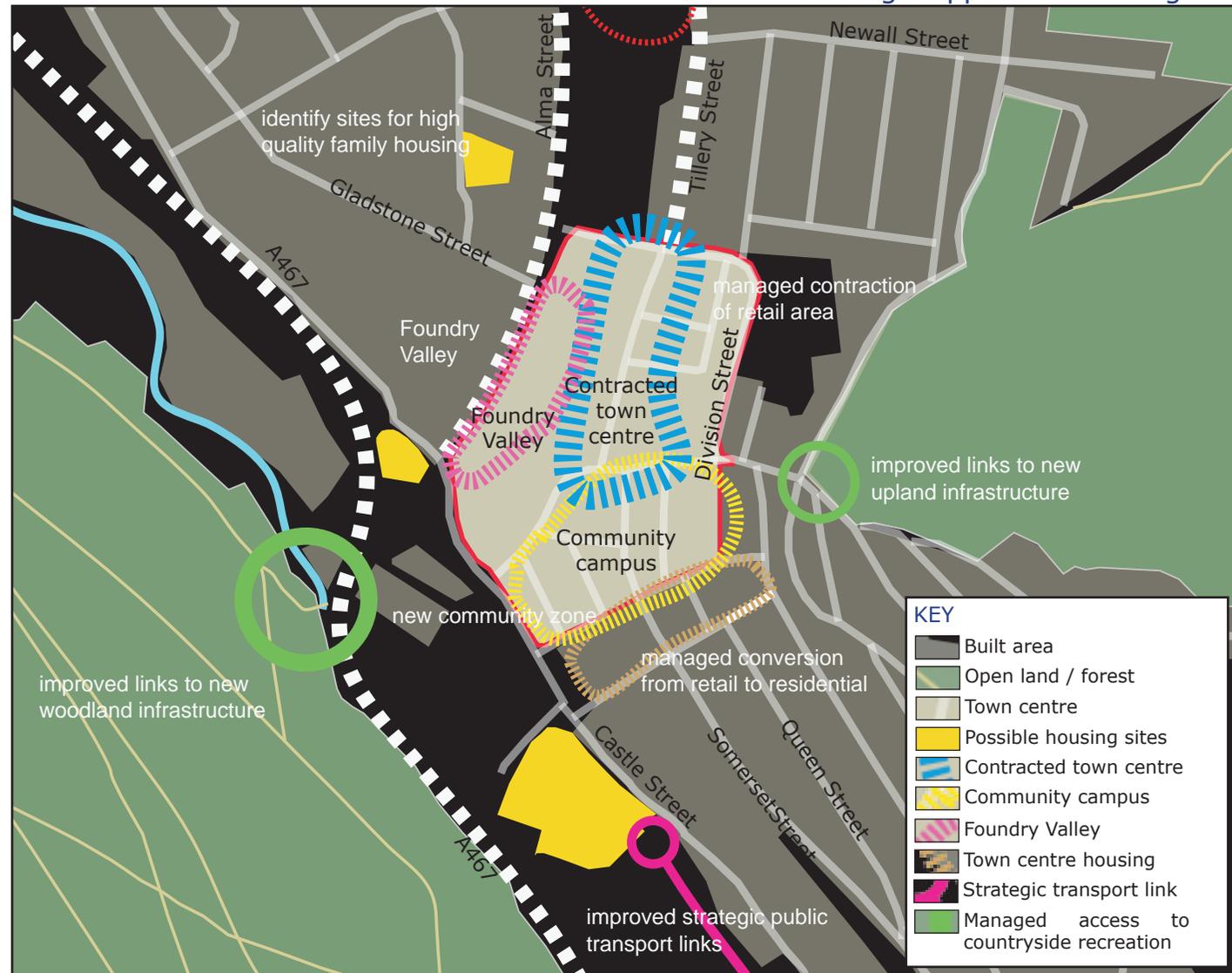
A clear strategy is required to provide deliverable responses to the regeneration objectives of Abertillery. The strategy needs to work at two levels to be effective: the macro scale and the town centre scale.

The broader regeneration strategy will define Abertillery's future role. This role will in turn help to determine the strategy and projects at the detailed scale. Carefully nurturing this role will be critical to the regeneration of the town. Each of these strategy concepts feed into the projects, yet project champions should not lose sight of the strategic things that need to happen for the renewal of Abertillery to succeed.

### New Sites for Family Housing

There are already opportunities to increase the amount and relative prosperity of Abertillery's catchment area. Short and long term opportunities such as those at Castle Street (to the south) should be assessed against their appropriateness for housing. Displaced demand from the wider Newport / Cardiff City Region will make new residential developments viable for regional scale developers. These houses will be attractive because of the relative value compared to the Southern cities and will also offer an enhanced quality of life based upon

strategic opportunities diagram



# Overarching Regeneration

proximity to open space and countryside and a rejuvenated town centre. New residential opportunities will attract additional spend into the town centre, meaning that physical improvements and adjustments to the town's environment to get new residents into the habit of doing some of their shopping locally are vital. Sites for housing around the town centre should be used for housing types that are not already represented elsewhere in Abertillery.

### Improved Links to the Countryside

Abertillery must develop its strengths to overcome its weaknesses. One such strength is the position of the town relative to either woodland or upland landscapes. New infrastructure is required to enable people to use these environments, rather than them just being a passive background to the town. These environments have the opportunity to add to the quality of resident's lives and provide a magnet for attracting increased visitors. The spin-offs from achieving these goals alone are significant. The better the infrastructure for the use of these environments the more tangible the benefits will be for the town and its residents. One such opportunity is to explore the scope for mountain biking as a way of 'opening up' the natural setting of the town. This will be explored in more detail on p. 30.

### Improving Strategic Transport Links

**“sustainable transport linkages will enable people who rely on the centre of the City Region to enjoy the benefits of living on the periphery of it.”**

Abertillery Town Centre already bears the physical manifestations that times are changing. People commute further and their choices about where they live are often closely related to how they work. The continued emphasis on the service economy and the growth strategies of Newport and Cardiff means that they are the most significant centres of local employment as well as shopping, entertainment and leisure. Allowing easy access between Abertillery and these places will invigorate demand for housing and services and in turn the town centre itself. The most significant current barrier to this happening is access. Improving strategic and sustainable transport linkages will enable people who rely on the centre of the City Region to enjoy the benefits of living on the periphery of it. Once again, better infrastructure will encourage greater use and with that will flow additional benefit.

### Reorganising the Town Centre's Role

# Strategy & Role of the Town

Abertillery currently has a smaller number of shops than it used to have but the centre still covers the same area as it has done for many years. This imbalance between the number of shops, the distribution of these businesses and the amount of available units is the single most important factor that must be addressed by this strategy. If this isn't tackled the distribution of shops will remain broad, whilst the quality and amount of shops will reduce as will the quality of the environment. This process is already happening and if it continues and accelerates people will shop elsewhere on a greater scale than they already do.

Abertillery therefore, must change. The ambition and the roles established for Abertillery provide an agenda for how the town should change. Abertillery is not going to buck national trends. People aren't going to stop shopping in Newport, Cardiff, Cwmbran and Cribbs Causeway to shop here. But people should be able to use Abertillery town centre as a local town centre for its convenience. Abertillery's role will be to offer somewhere where people can do some comparison shopping for a range of goods, access local services, socialise and work. Eventually, Abertillery may act as a service centre for the new recreational activities in the woodlands and uplands and in time may develop some niche shopping activities and business opportunities to cater for this highly specialised clientele.

To do this, Abertillery will need to change and will become more like a very large busy village or compact small town. Understanding its place and how it is to fulfil its function will be key to Abertillery's success. It will rely upon **future retail activity being consolidated into a vibrant and compact area**. This will be supported by retail uses relocated from peripheral parts of the town centre which, once vacant, can be converted into homes from shops, community and other uses.

A **Community Campus** will add a range of services, utilise otherwise vacant floorspace and stimulate footfall and activity and promote Abertillery as a local service hub. This part of the town centre will include cultural facilities like the Metropole, as well as local services like Libraries. In future this part of the strategy could attract uses like social services, police, health, local housing offices into this part of the centre so that it becomes like a 'mini-town hall'.

Meanwhile the area alongside the river, close to the existing fire station will be developed and branded as **Foundry Valley**. This area will be part of the town

centre where young people and small businesses will benefit from the infrastructure that they require. The raison d'être for **Foundry Valley** will be business incubation, engaging local businesses with young people and encouraging young people to start their own enterprises. One particular focus for **Foundry Valley** could be as a hub for ICT businesses, media and creative industries and link to training at Coleg Gwent at Cross Keys.

At the town centre scale these key strategy elements will have a profound guiding influence on the projects that local people, business, BGCBC & the WAG develop and work towards over the next ten to fifteen years and will outline the scope and scale of town centre in the future. These are represented at the local scale in the regeneration strategy plan.

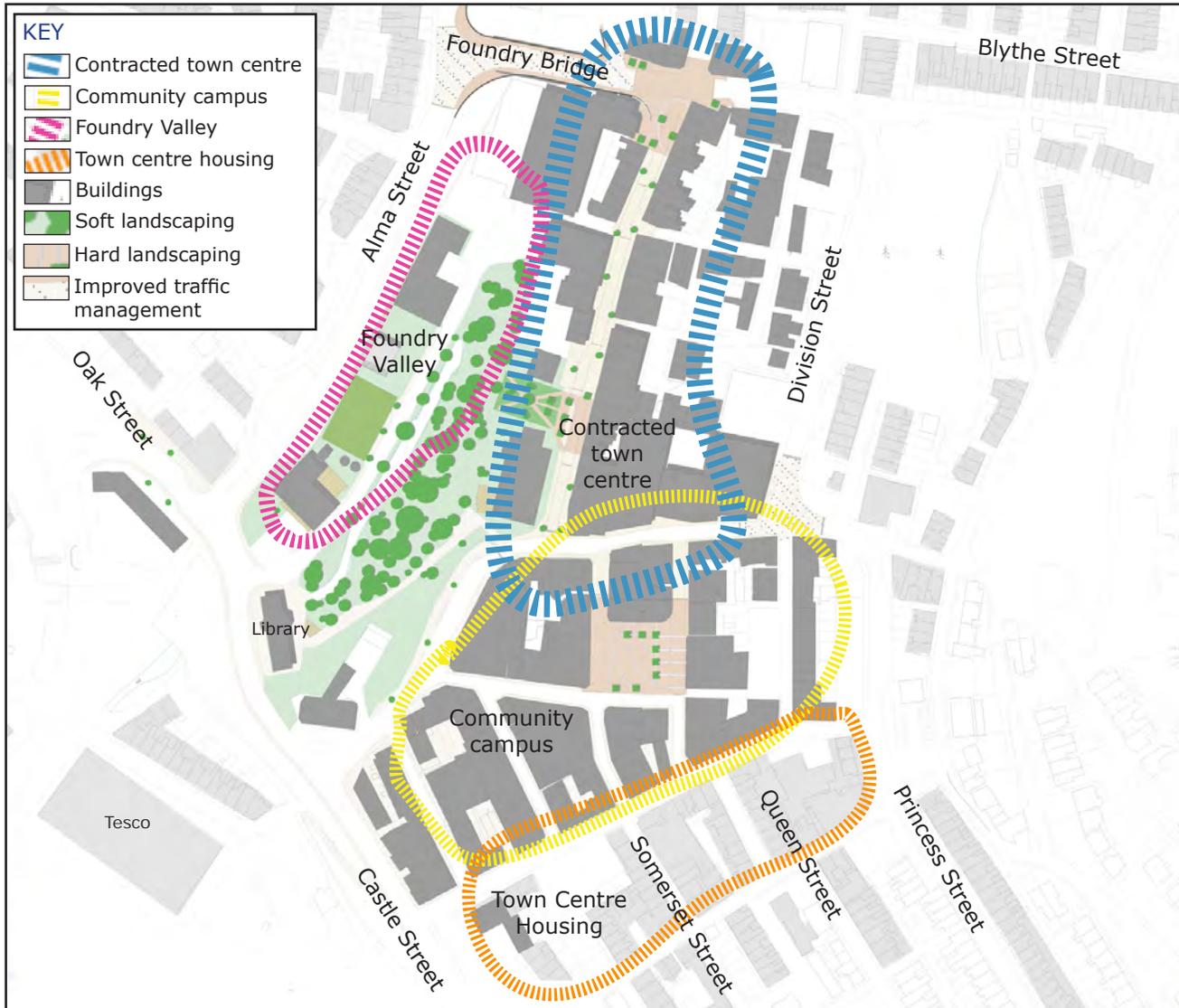
The Heads of Valleys Programme seeks to:

**"Encourage much higher rates of innovation, entrepreneurship and business growth, especially in high value added sectors such as media and e-commerce by specifically targeting additional resources... through Business Support and Business Development programmes."**

(Heads of Valleys Strategy 'Heads We Win')

# Town Centre

## town centre regeneration strategy



“The distinctiveness of the area, the character of its communities and the richness of its heritage gave the Heads of the Valleys a unique sense of pride and identity. It is vital that this is both retained and built on. But there is a pressing need to increase confidence and aspiration within many... communities”  
(Heads of Valleys Strategy `Heads We Win’)

# Regeneration Strategy



## 6.0 Making the Strategy Happen: From Strategy to Projects

A carefully selected suite of projects will be required to deliver the strategy and the sustainable regeneration of Abertillery.

Together these projects will apply to the key themes outlined in the earlier Issues Report (November 2005) and have been selected on the basis of their impact, deliverability and usefulness in realising the Objectives on p.11.

These projects have been categorised in order to provide a thorough, but clear guide to the steps that need to be taken to deliver change. However it is important to emphasise the order with which change will occur. Projects designed to prevent further decline and re-structure the town centre are the most important. These projects will be the foundations upon which the rest of the strategy will be built. We have then selected some tangible, or visible projects designed to raise awareness and confidence which will also be required at an early stage. To complete the strategy will be the aspirational projects which will bring the finishing touches to the town and complete the strategy.

The project hierarchy will therefore be:

### Priority Quick Wins:

Initiatives that simply must happen for the strategy to succeed and which can either be commenced or completed quickly

### Priority Projects:

Initiatives that simply must happen for the strategy to succeed – the underpinning elements of the strategy upon which later schemes will be built

### Other Key Projects:

Projects that can be delivered very quickly and will have a cumulative impact upon the overall strategy

### Aspirational Projects:

As the name suggests, projects which are more difficult to deliver and do not necessarily deal with the most pressing problems but are desirable and effective when complemented with the above.

“there is... a general lack of confidence about the area. This results in a tendency for individuals and their representative organisations to aim low.”

(Heads of Valleys Strategy ‘Heads We Win’)

“These towns have the opportunity to become attractive and affordable places for people from across South East Wales to live, work and visit. By doing this we could help to stem the tide of population loss and attract major investment to the area.”

(Heads of Valleys Strategy ‘Heads We Win’)

# priority quick win projects

## 6.1 Priority Quick Win Projects

There are several projects which will be important in setting the scene for regeneration and should be commenced immediately.

### 6.1.1 Planning Policy Alterations

The current UDP is about to be adopted subject to resolving some issues around minerals. The LDP process in Blaenau Gwent has not started yet. The LDP process is likely to take around four years from Summer 2006. In taking the project forward and ensuring its delivery on the ground policies in the LDP need to be developed to reflect and facilitate the consolidation of the town centre and identify appropriate uses within the town centre. In addition, the LDP should develop a policy which identifies appropriate uses for buildings subject to applications to be converted to other uses in the town centre. The LDF should also identify sites suitable for new residential developments within access of the town centre.

### 6.1.2 Supplementary Planning Document

In parallel, supplementary planning guidance for the area needs to be prepared. The Supplementary Planning Document will need to outline the extent of the new town centre and the range of uses that will be supported. It should also outline the grant regime which should reflect the importance of the town centre sub-ar-

reas in section 5 and give priority to the Retail Heart and the principal buildings in each sub-area. The SPD could also make clear the power (such as s.215) that the Council has to improve the environment of the centre, where grants are not utilised.

Organisationally, BGCBC, if they do not already do so, should consider allocating Building Control and Development Control and Building Conservation Officers to Abertillery and badge these officers as points of contact to people needing development advice.

### 6.1.3 Appoint Town Centre Manager

Town Centre Management (TCM) is an important management and maintenance tool which is increasingly being used around the UK. The recognised benefits include:

- Increased footfall and thus increased sales;
- Reduced vacancies within the commercial sector;
- Improved security and street cleanliness, including reduced graffiti;
- Redesigned store fronts;
- Increased Central Area residential populations,
- Increased employment opportunities.

TCM plays a key role in achieving the public/

private collaboration and delivery of agreed initiatives. It brings a wide variety of town centre stakeholders together who work cooperatively to improve the performance and image of the town centre. The TCM initiatives could manage a diverse spectrum of activities ranging from basic streetscape maintenance and improvements, through to marketing and events. The post of Town Centre Manager could be shared between a number of local towns.

### 6.1.4 Public Realm Quality Review

A detailed inspection of the town centre is required in order to understand the items, or detritus that have collected in the town centre over time and are now having a deleterious impact on environmental quality. These include bits of fence, random boundary treatment and ad-hoc accumulation of street furniture that will all need to be dealt with as part of the Public Realm Strategy.

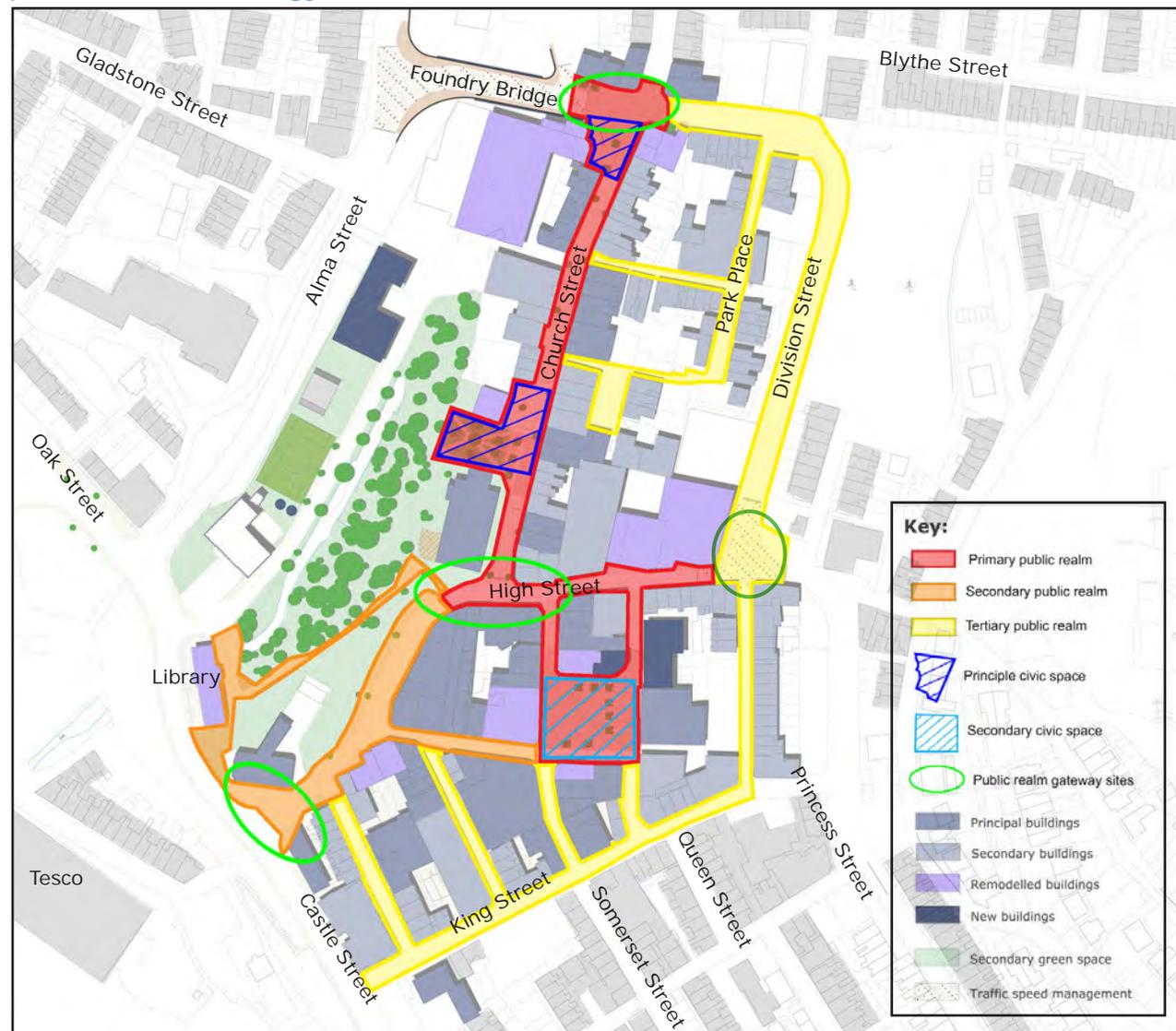
## 6.1.5 Comprehensive Public Realm Strategy

The development of a public realm masterplan for Abertillery is a vital element of its regeneration as it will help to define the extent of the town centre and subtle sub-areas within it whilst raising the quality of the environment.

The public realm is one of the key areas where the public sector alone can signal change and raise confidence. The masterplan should address all relevant issues, which will include:

- Spatial hierarchy
- Pedestrian and vehicular circulation
- Material use
- Public art
- Lighting
- Landscape
- Street furniture and signage
- Development of key civic spaces

public realm strategy



# priority quick win projects

## Philosophy

Abertillery is an historic Welsh town and deserves a public realm befitting its location and heritage. It is also, however on the verge of a new era and it is important that this is also represented.

Above all, the new public realm will need to create an appealing, improved environment in the town centre, central to its regeneration and attraction of new residents, businesses and tourists.

## Approach

In order to achieve a coherent, attractive appearance across the town centre it is important that a comprehensive Public Realm Strategy is developed at the earliest opportunity. This should set out the hierarchy of space, circulatory mechanisms and location and size of key civic spaces. It should also provide design guidelines as to style and quality of space. With this in place a palette of materials, furniture, lighting, signage, artwork and landscape can be co-ordinated for the town's initial and future phases of regeneration, as and when funding is secured. The masterplan and guidelines will

also form prescriptive guidance to be followed by all developments in the town centre for the entire period of regeneration.

## Priorities

The 'public realm strategy plan', above, identifies the recommended hierarchy of public realm space within Abertillery. Also highlighted are the two principal civic spaces at Church Lawns and Foundry Square, the secondary civic space at Metropole Square and the four key Public Realm Gateway Zones at Foundry Bridge, Church Street, Division Street / High Street and Castle Street.

Attractive well designed civic spaces are an important Town Centre need which Abertillery is currently lacking. Fulfilling this need will do much to improve the attractiveness and value of the town centre.

The Public Realm Gateway Areas (see public realm strategy, p.19) represent the main arrival zones within the town. Their regeneration is crucial to creating an attractive and functioning town centre. Each of these locations is not only an arrival point but also a transition space between one or more elements of the site and another.



a public realm strategy will help to provide clarity on how the improvements should be focussed. This photo highlights the positive relationship between on street parking, drainage and pedestrian permeability.



possible palette of materials that could contribute to the public realm strategy

## 6.1.6 Town Centre Movement and Traffic Management Strategy

### Revised Traffic Direction

This project is based on the need to review and where appropriate, revise the one-way traffic circulation system for the Town Centre.

The existing traffic circulation system lacks legibility, and in some cases it is characterized by several changes of direction along one same street. These routes are well known by locals, but can be confusing to visitors to the town.

The main objectives of this project are to:

- increase legibility and ease of vehicular movement in the Town Centre
- improve the efficiency of access to the town's principal car parks
- minimise the need for signage and make necessary signage effective

As a mechanism to increase legibility, one-way streets should preserve the same - and only - direction all the way through - provided this does not result in a plethora of signage. This project suggests changing the vehicular direction of the following streets, subject to further detailed feasibility work.

Street	Existing Direction	Proposed Direction
Somerset Street (northern sector),	Northbound (up to Commercial Street) and southbound (from High Street to Commercial Street)	Northbound only
Commercial Street	Two Way (from Market Street to Somerset Street) and westbound (from Somerset Street to High Street)	Westbound only
Market Street	Two Way	Northbound only
King Street	Two way (from Castle Street to Carmel Street), Westbound (from Somerset Street to Carmel Street), and two way (from Market Street to Bywater Row)	Two way (from Castle Street to Carmel Street), and Westbound (from Carmel Street to Bywater Row)

The requirements for visibility should not present a problem. However, this is subject to detailed analysis. In addition, the project proposes the establishment of build-outs in key locations, to facilitate traffic movement and reduce conflict:

- Build-out required in the corner of Carmel Street and King Street, to facilitate movement of vehicles turning left on Carmel Street and increase legibility of the change in direction at this point.
- Build-out required in the corner of Somerset Street and High Street, to facilitate movement of vehicles turning right on High Street and increase legibility of the change in direction at this point.

It is important to note that bus turning conditions from Somerset Street to Commercial Street remain unchanged.

# priority quick win projects

## Changes in pedestrianised streets

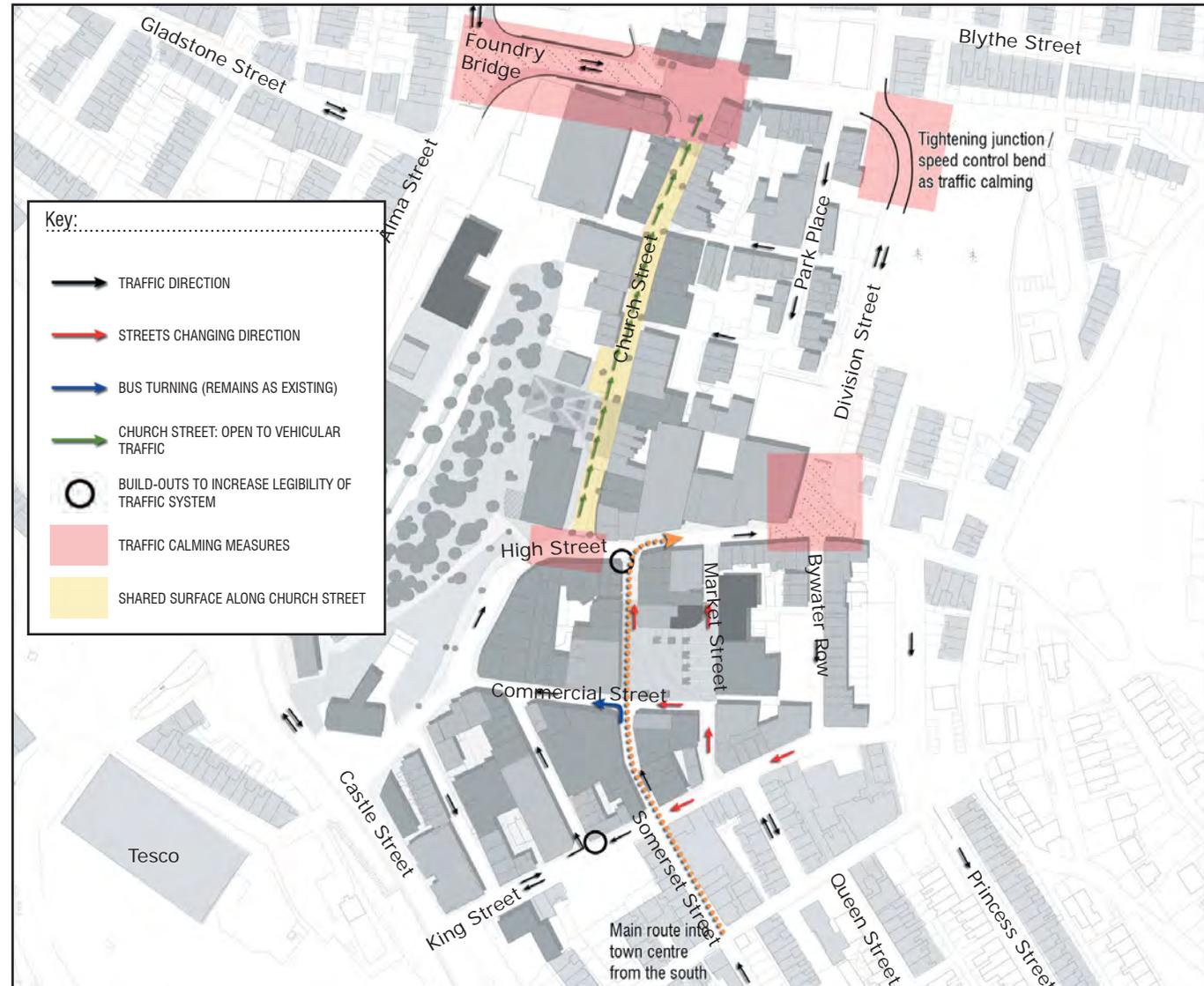
Pedestrianised areas are at the moment difficult to enforce and control due to the number of exceptions. It is possible that they are limiting activity in the town centre by restricting vehicular movement and ease of access. However the pedestrian priority serves a positive purpose in making the town centre more pedestrian friendly. Although the maintenance of pedestrianised streets should be reviewed aiming at the elimination of exclusively pedestrianised areas, the principle of maintaining pedestrian priority should be preserved.

A good example of this is to promote a new pedestrian friendly environment along Church Street while at the same time allowing for vehicle access and rationalising vehicle movement patterns across the Town Centre. Church Street is, at the moment, closed to vehicular traffic by means of a locked gate. However, vehicles enter through the streets located to the east of Church Street (e.g. Park Place), defeating the purpose of an exclusive pedestrianisation and making the pedestrianisation hard to control.

Church Street needs to change to make it more convenient for people to stop and shop whilst improving the pedestrian environment.

Church Street should become a shared surface street with vehicular movement in one direction (south-north). The area would maintain a

## traffic management strategy



traffic management strategy plan

pedestrian priority, and materials could be used to clearly define areas for vehicular movement. Coarse materials in selected points in carriageway (such as the junction with Park Place) would provide traffic calming but maintain access for pedestrians, wheelchairs and buggies. Additional traffic calming measures would be provided by the use of tree/planting and street furniture. Church Street has the potential to provide additional on-street parking. This should be on a short stay basis to allow quick access to the shops. There should be disabled spaces and (disabled priority) loading should be allowed outside of core shopping hours (as it is at the moment).

This project should be understood as part of the required traffic improvements for the Town Centre, and must be carried out in conjunction with a strategy to increase the quality of the public realm along Church Street. The project should be subject to the normal processes of detail design and analysis involving all stakeholders.

### Traffic Calming Measures

Traffic calming measures are required to improve the sense of arrival to Abertillery. In certain areas this will include reducing vehicular speeds, emphasising pedestrian routes and, in general, providing a more pedestrian friendly environment. Measures could include tightening of junctions, vertical deflection, shared surfaces, changes in materials and raised tables. Some of the options are:

- Junction of High Street and Church Street: raised junction serving as a gateway to the shared surface along Church Street, emphasising pedestrian linkages to Church Street.
- Junction of Division Street, Church Street and Tillery Street: raised junction serving as a gateway to the shared surface along Church Street, emphasising pedestrian linkages to Church Street. This raised junction would also calm traffic along the circular loop created by Alma Street, Foundry Bridge, Division Street and Bywater Row.
- Junction of Division Street, High Street and Bywater Row: Changes in junction layout and raised junction aiming at traffic calming along the circular loop created by Alma Street, Foundry Bridge, Division Street and Bywater Row.
- Tightening junctions to create speed control bends in selected locations, such as the corner of Division Street in the north-eastern sector of the Town Centre.



Sensitive highway treatment improves the pedestrian environment



shared surface approach - where pedestrians come first but cars are designed for



Pull in bays within a town centre street

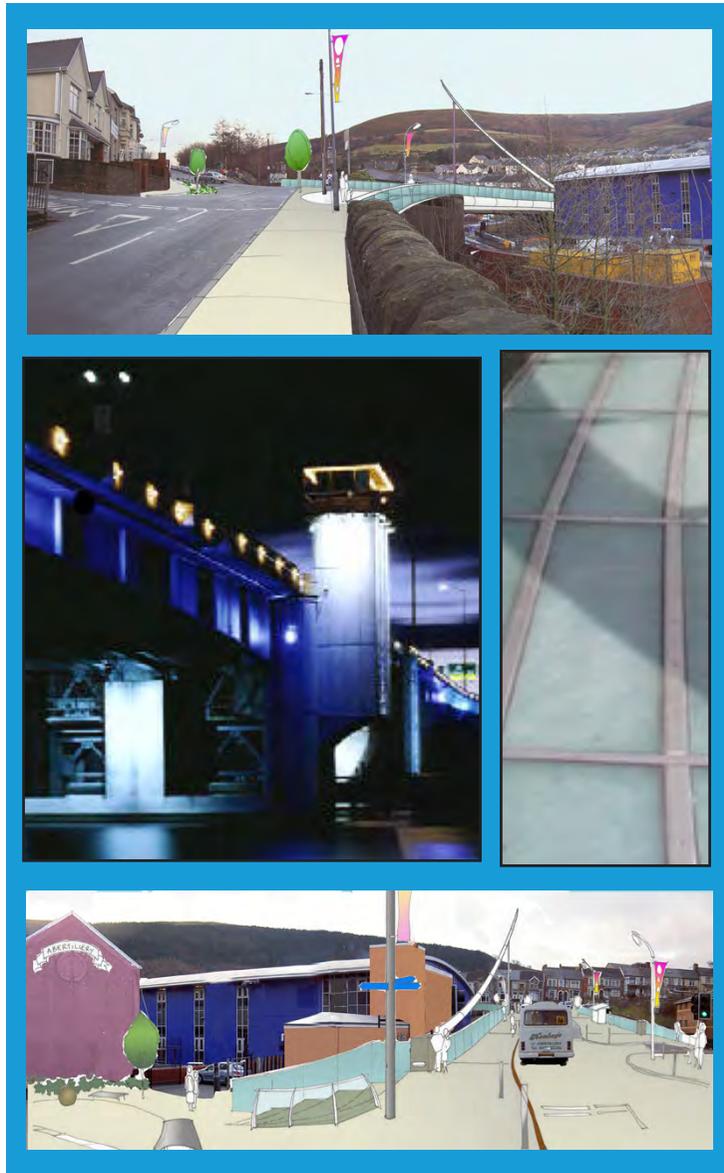
### 6.1.7 Foundry Bridge Renewal

Addressing the need to replace Foundry Bridge presents one of the most significant opportunities for changing perceptions of Abertillery; signalling change and improving the quality of one of the town's key destination spaces.

Importantly, it is all in public sector control and can, and should, be implemented quickly.

Foundry Square will become one of the most important parts of the town centre. It is one of the key movement intersections in Abertillery (to shops, health centre, new car park, schools and Anvil Court) and is going to be the place where traders are moved to from peripheral, outdated parts of the centre. With this in mind the scope of the re-design of the bridge should be extended to look at the public realm around the bridge. Obviously this would need to be guided by the Public Realm Strategy.

Getting the bridge right is therefore one of the single biggest projects in the strategy and additional funding should be sought from the Heads of the Valleys initiative to enable the Council to improve the standard of design. If sufficient additional funding is available BGCBC and WAG may consider the use of an architectural competition to stimulate interest, as free marketing for the regeneration of Abertillery and raise design quality.



### Foundry Bridge Design Guidance

The following suggestions outline elements which should be designed into the structure of the bridge:

- The design should achieve a strong vertical emphasis somewhere near the middle of the bridge to announce the gateway to Abertillery town centre, where it is most visible from the surrounding area. This feature would need to be imaginatively lit using bespoke architectural lighting to ensure the bridge remains iconic at night
- It would be desirable if the south west corner of the bridge incorporated a cantilevered deck. This would allow greater pedestrian freedom and help soften the bridge structure
- Including shared surfaces into the approaches to the bridge would help to blend it into its surroundings
- Interesting materials or lighting on the outward facing deck is required so that the bridge expresses a positive statement
- The design should consider how best to control access to below the bridge and Anvil Court after dark whilst also allowing for easier management of the voids beneath
- The bridge needs to sweep elegantly into Church Street and blend in with the proposed public realm works in this space.
- A variety of materials should be utilised. These examples highlight the use of powder coated steel and heavy duty smoked glass.

# priority quick win projects

## 6.1.8 Building Quality Review

More detailed intelligence is required about the condition and quality of the buildings in the town centre. A brief should be written and a thorough review of the buildings should be carried out. This will aim to provide the justification for establishing a stepped grant funding regime through Town Improvement Grant to ensure that the most needy buildings in the most important areas receive the most financial assistance. Collecting this information can commence immediately and should take into account the following:

- building location and townscape importance
- inherent features and details (and note whether they are present, obscured or likely to have been removed)
- architectural quality
- building condition in respect of maintenance
- a photographic record
- level of use

## 6.1.9 Shopfront Design Guidance

To support the Planning Policy Alterations (see above) detailed Shopfront Design Guidance is required to ensure that regardless of the level of grant assistance, alterations to shopfronts are guided to a certain degree throughout the town centre. The guidance should include information on signage, lighting, entrances and security features and include the details required to guide the smooth transition from retail to residential in the southern part of the centre.



## 6.1.10 Car Park Feasibility Study

A detailed engineering and design review of the existing town centre car park is critical to enhancing one of the most ugly, but important structures in the town.

Engineering opportunities and constraints review is required with a view to remodelling and improvement whilst broadly maintaining customer car parking and incorporating new active uses onto High Street (either community or retail use). Embedded within this will be the scope for improving the appearance and management and community safety aspects of the car park. Urban Design, Architectural and Community Safety advice is therefore also required.



## 6.2 Priority Projects

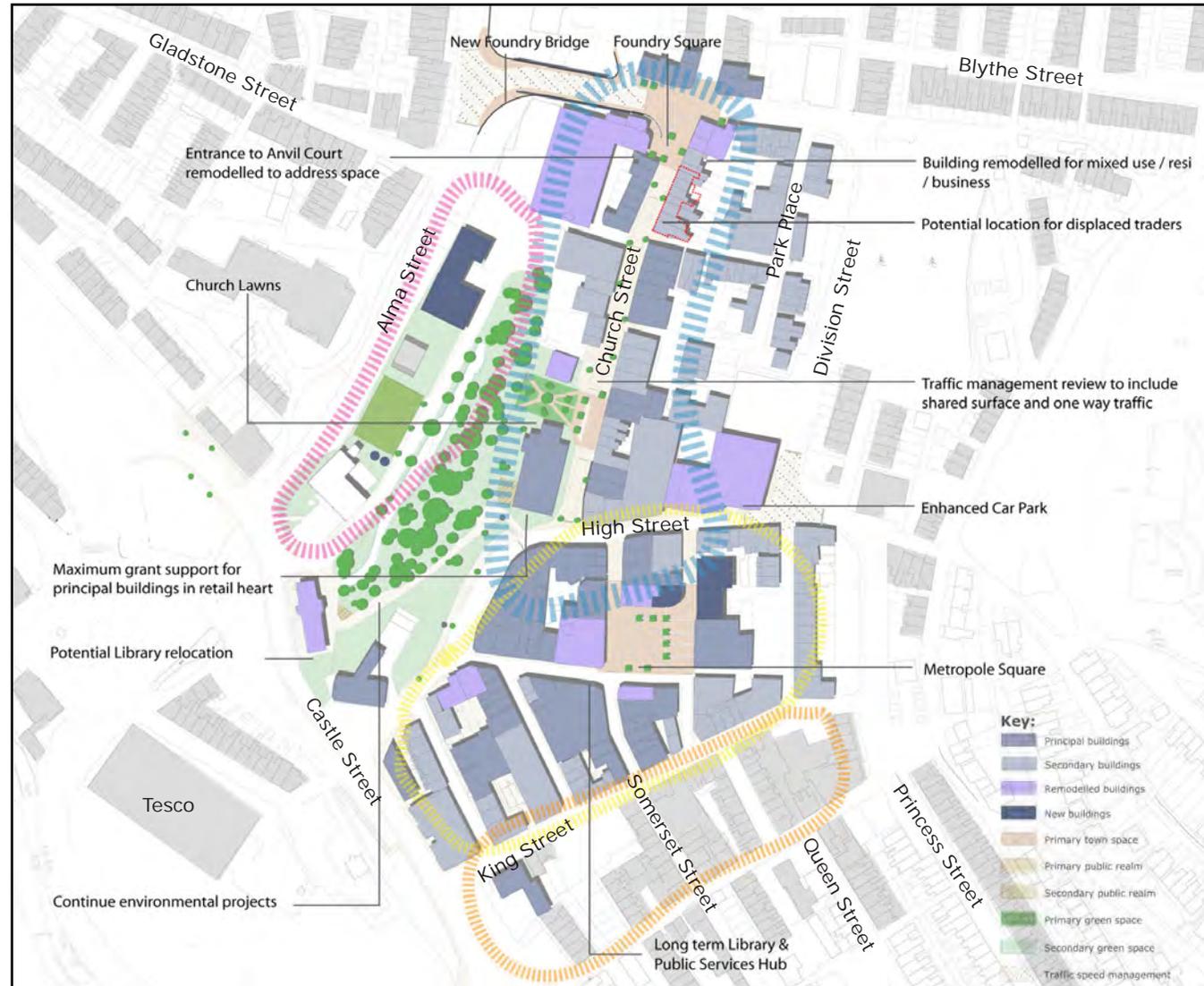
There are a range of projects which will have a significant effect on the function, extent and appearance of Abertillery Town Centre which will have the cumulative impact required to create the correct climate for all of the other projects to succeed.

### 6.2.1 Town Improvement Grant / Building Improvement Programme

The public sector needs to step in and provide a mechanism and support for improving buildings in Abertillery if the strategy is going to succeed. The Town Improvement Grant / Building Improvement Programme should be prioritised based on the sub-areas first; the Retail Heart, Community and Social Quarter, Retail to Residential Conversion Zone and Foundry Valley.

Grants should be targeted to implementing the strategy. The grants should therefore be weighted to ensure that the Retail Heart takes priority. Providing grants to facilitate change of use from retail to residential in the Residential Conversion Zone are also important. The level of grant funding for building improvements should remain as high as possible for the Community and Social Quarter but still not at the same level as the Retail Heart. Building quality should also inform the level of grant assistance. The exact identification of Principal and Secondary Buildings (see opposite) should be clarified from the Building Quality Review.

## priority projects



Town Centre Regeneration Strategy Plan with key projects anoted



The impact of targeted building improvements can be significant, as this example in Birmingham highlights

## 6.2.2 Shopfront Improvement Programme

Working with traders to enhance shopfronts is an important step to improving the image of Abertillery. This can be embedded as part of the Building Improvement Programme and act as a standalone project for those occupiers not eligible for a grant to repair the fabric of the building. The standard and quality of improvements will be established by the Shopfront Design Guidance and embedded into a Supplementary Planning Document. Dedicated technical Officers for Abertillery Town Centre will then be able to provide assistance and fast-track planning applications.

## 6.2.3 Securing the Future of Key Buildings

Successfully rehabilitating several key buildings must be a priority within the overall Regeneration Strategy. These buildings cannot be allowed to continue to decline if the Strategy is to succeed. These buildings are:

- former rugby club
- former Chapel at the corner of Church Street and Division Street

Fundamental improvements designed to keep the buildings dry and structurally sound are a priority. Following this, steps to re-use the buildings are required. Small scale serviced business space with some residential are a priority. This will require more detailed work to determine the demand. If demand is not present further research should identify the trigger points where demand for business or residential uses is likely to become active.

## 6.2.4 Managed Contraction of Abertillery: Working with Traders

This will be one of the most important and difficult elements of the strategy. The projects explained on the previous pages provide the mechanisms for change and the confidence that the public sector is taking the regeneration of the town seriously. However the strategy relies upon some traders moving from one area of the town centre to another. Research from the New Economics Foundation (Ghost Town Britain II, 2005) outlines that the amount of people starting new independent shops is falling. At the same time Abertillery, for the foreseeable future at least, cannot rely on attracting new national multiples to the town. For these reasons it is critical that traders which the town already has are seen as crucial to the future of the Abertillery.

BGCBC and the WAG will need to develop a detailed methodology and financial mechanisms for support; such as compensation, disturbance costs and agreements on future rents and rates. At the same time the public sector will need to identify the buildings traders are to be moved to, either by negotiation with current owners or compulsory purchase and ensure that these host units are brought up to standard using the projects listed above. BGCBC and the WAG will need to identify the right time to engage traders in the most affected areas, but be aware that it should be early in the process. This process will almost certainly be painful, time consuming and have financial implications but is critical to the re-organisation of the town and the retention of existing businesses. Without this intervention traders will eventually cease to trade anyway and with the 'carrot' of improvements to host areas the project is capable of success.

## 6.2.5 Improving Links with Tesco

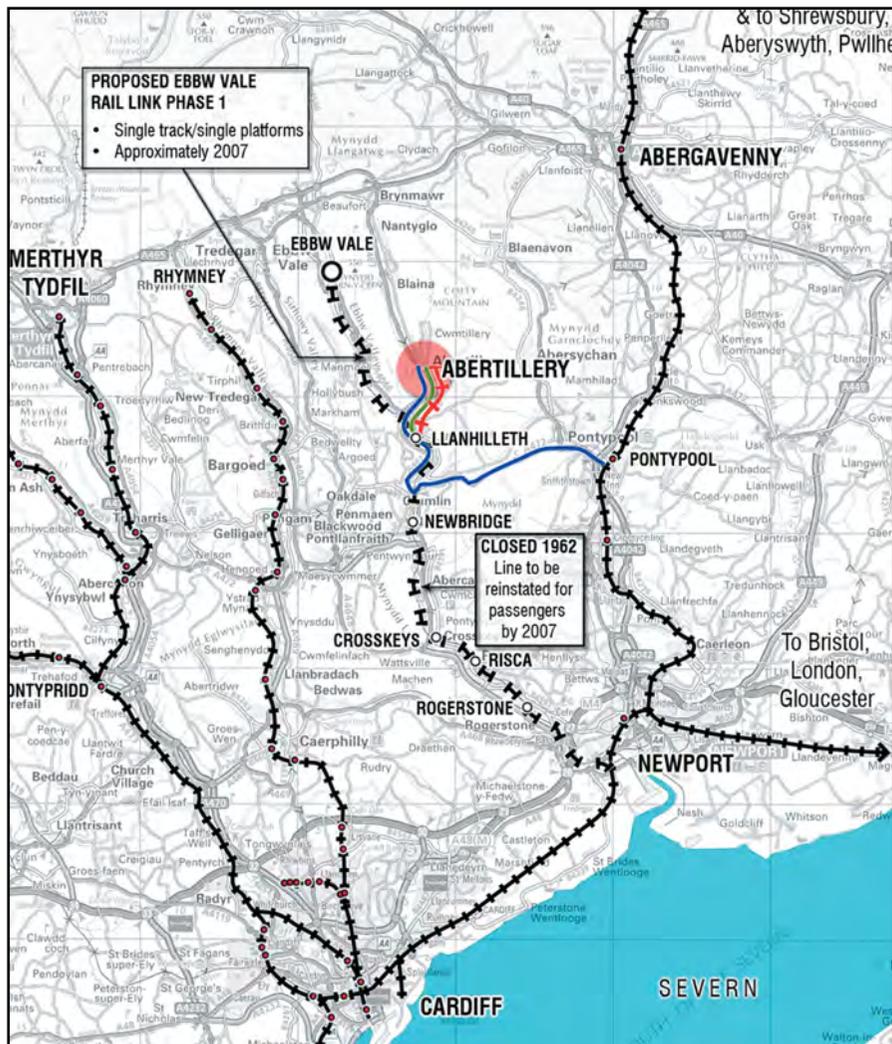
Aside from the physical and public realm improvements that can help Abertillery relate better with Tesco (which will come out of the Public Realm Strategy) there is an opportunity to develop a small shuttle service to run on a regular circuit around the centre, Tesco and the immediate residential streets. This has the potential to link trips that are current severed by steep topography. Wherever possible this vehicle used for this operation should be LPG or electrically fuelled and can alight at either the bus stop or the taxi rank.

# priority projects

## 6.2.6 Dedicated Rail Link: Economic Impact Appraisal & Engineering Issues Report and Costed Options

Allowing the town to operate more efficiently as part of the Newport/Cardiff City Region has already been explained. This Strategy will help to provide a lobbying framework to understand why Abertillery should be reconnected to the City Region by rail. However, further work is required to provide the ammunition for the discussions to come. An Economic Impact Appraisal will outline the value of a direct public transport link whilst the Engineering Issues Report will help to illustrate the value from a movement perspective and also some of the costs or barriers. Obtaining this information will be vital to realising the wider Strategy and role for Abertillery.

Possible strategic transport improvements



6.2.6 Youth Services Review

A thorough review of Youth Service and Youth Provision is required in Abertillery.

Consultation highlighted the concern from all sections of the community that young people did not have enough things to do. This project will seek a way of developing a new base for young people in the town and staff required to supervise it. Positive activities for young people will help to alleviate some of the problems caused by bored youths in the town and help to make Abertillery a more attractive place to visit.

Working directly with young people, perhaps through Communities First and Youthworks will be crucial to the success of this project.

The networks and knowledge base developed through this project can be built upon to explore and deliver future proposals for young businesses focussed in Foundry Valley.

## 6.3 Other Key Projects

A range of other quick win projects are important to create the right conditions and gather the necessary intelligence prior to the implementation of the Priority Projects.

### 6.3.1 Activity Sports Feasibility Study

The public sector and local business stakeholders need to understand the extent of opportunity which Activity Sports represent and the level to which Abertillery as a town centre can tap into this.

Making the most of the surrounding landscape could be the key to unlocking Abertillery's future and will fit neatly with the Heads of the Valleys Strategy of creating a Valleys Park and enriching the tourism experience.

Our investigations to date with a local mountain biker outline the scope for improving trails and facilities. Cwmcam Forest Drive currently draws in 118,000 visitors per annum and we have been informed that the scope for mountain biking around Abertillery is extensive. There will be many places looking to tap into the same market, so Abertillery will need to make early progress if it is to establish itself as a hub town for Activity Sports and Mountain Biking in particular.

Consultation with the local community highlighted that this project was welcomed, but sometimes mis-understood. Further engagement is recommended when projects related to this are being considered.

## other key projects

"In recent years mountain biking as a recreational pastime has become more organised. This serves to both help promote itself and to help illustrate how well organised and developed mountain bike centres can have both a minimal impact on the environment and help rejuvenate, sustain and vastly improve local areas economy.

Mountain bike centres throughout Wales have demonstrated considerable success in recent years. Such centres now exist at Coed-Y-Brenin, Afan Argoed, Betws-Y-Coed, Penmachno, Nant-Y-Arian & Cwmcam. Cwmcam recently revealed visitor figures suggesting a visitor figure increase of 30,000 per year until the millenium, when visitor numbers started to increase from 40,000 to 118,000 in 2005. This is tied directly to the creation of the new mountain bike trail in Cwmcam created in 2000 and the new downhill track created in summer 2005.

Is it feasible that Abertillery could be turned into the next successful Welsh mountain bike centre? Certainly areas such as Coed-Y-Brenin, Afan Argoed & Cwmcam were never even heard of in mountain biker circles until the creation of such mountain bike centres. Now they're considered as mountain bike "Meccas" of the UK if not the world and have even been voted as high as "B+" by the US based, worldwide trail governing body International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) - compared against even long established mountain bike centres in the United States & Canada.

I believe that with my skills and knowledge I can help to develop and run Abertillery as the next great successful mountain bike centre. The actual area of land in and around Abertillery is some eight times that of Cwmcam with extremely similar topography and slightly higher altitude with varying tracts of forest land, open moorland & narrow valleys, coupled with existing communication links. All of which are key ingredients in the creation of a successful mountain bike centre."

Mike Snare - Local Mountain Biker

### 6.3.2 Traders' Competitions

The regeneration strategy should breathe new life and impetus into the Traders' Association. This should lead to many additional benefits

for the town. Among these the traders should be encouraged to participate in a shop window display competition and take up hanging baskets outside their businesses (which could be purchased via a special deal with the local florist). If all traders participate the benefits could be significant.

### 6.3.3 Annual Events Programme

A well organised programme of events will help to bind the traders, TCM and other stakeholders together and provide a degree of certainty to the short term future. The annual events programme should have a small start up budget to facilitate special events in the town. These could include the Blues Festival, Christmas, Summer and Easter Events and over time could adapt to take on events driven by new users of the town centre (e.g. activity sports).

### 6.3.4 Public Services Needs Review

A thorough piece of research is required to determine the future of public services in Abertillery. This needs to take into account and document the services already operating from the town, desirable services which should be located in the town and known needs from public sector users which Abertillery could cater for.

Increasing the amount of office workers in the town centre will help to promote foofall and vitality.

The questions that need to be answered include:

- are the Social Services offices on Portland Road situated in the best location?,
- is there greater need for Youth Services to locate in the town?

Wherever possible public services should be attracted to take up space in the Community and Social Quarter. Existing facilities such as the BGCBC office should be retained in the town.

Increases in staff at Anvil Court and Town Council Offices are examples of this already occurring.



Town centre events, increased office workers and new leisure pursuits can add significant vitality to Abertillery Town Centre

# aspirational projects

## 6.4 Aspirational Projects

These are the schemes that will work to best effect once the above projects have turned the town back from the decline that is currently inhibiting its future. They are not fundamental to the strategy for reshaping the town centre in the short term but have the potential to complete the regeneration process, once the basics have been set right.

### 6.4.1 Foundry Valley

Although this is a key strategy element and important, it is not one which will underpin the managed consolidation of the town and is therefore an aspirational project that will assist the overall regeneration process, but will take longer to deliver.

The valley floor is currently occupied by the Fire Station, a very poor youth centre (which several young people said they don't use) and temporary offices. The valley floor is very well contained by the river, woodland and steep slopes, so is inappropriate for retail uses.

All of these conditions make the area a suitable venue for locating facilities and services which link youth activities with businesses specialising in the creative industries and media. Having a dedicated area where young people feel comfortable and engaged will also help to



remove the slightly worrying trend of young people 'hanging about' on the street whilst providing opportunities to engage with smart businesses attracted to this location by high bandwidth broadband technology.

The youth activity element could find its focus in a new multi purpose youth facility - whether through re-using an existing building, or using a new one. This can provide the focus for a range of youth activities, some of which could benefit from the adjacent woodlands, steep slopes and open space. From this location links can be forged between local youths and entrepreneurs.

### 6.4.2 Library Relocation

Relocating the Library is not necessarily critical to realising the strategy but may have an important longer term effect. The Library should be in a location where it can add value to the Town Centre and in accommodation where it can feed off and support other local services. Best practice shows that combined local services help to provide a more joined up service and contribute more to footfall in town centres where retail is not expanding. Therefore the Library should not be relocated until it is clear which services it will share accommodation with and where best to locate them. (See Metropole Square project below). Another pre-cursor to relocating the Library will be gaining a proper understanding of what uses will replace it (see Public Services Review, above).

From a sustainability point of view, the building (which is not architecturally poor) should be retained and re-used, with guidance coming from the Public Services Needs Review. Opportunities to incorporate Youth Services or Youth related admin should take precedence. Although there may be a market to redevelop the site for housing and there could be interest in this from a regional scale developer / builder. If the site is released and redeveloped Design Guidance should be prepared.

### 6.4.3 Metropole Square

Metropole Square has long been an ambition of the Council and some funding has been attracted for this scheme to progress. The need for the square is being driven by the need to showcase the Metropole building and the perceived need for Abertillery to have a public space.

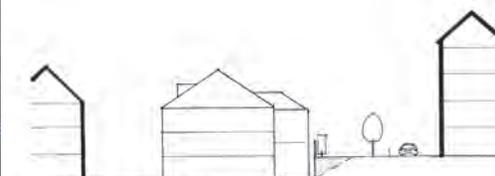
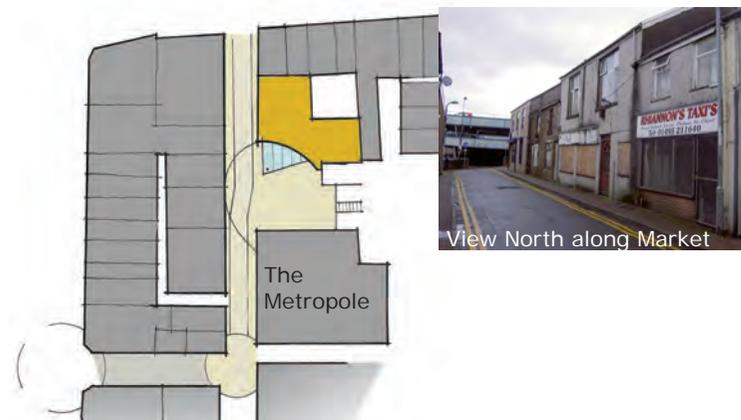
We agree with both of these objectives, but they are not necessarily a priority for the regeneration of the town or that the public space in Abertillery needs to be situated outside the Metropole.

#### Space Critique

The creation of public space in front of the Metropole should be ambitious and should be a long term aim. It is in effect the project that can capitalise upon the regeneration of Abertillery, not start it. The ideas that have been presented for public space in this location to date are too piecemeal and will not result in a good public space. We feel that the preliminary design of the space that has been presented prior to this commission, will not conform to any of the principles of good civic design that have been long established throughout the UK and Europe. These include:

- Quality lateral enclosure
- Active edges
- Vertical enclosure
- Flexible spaces (for markets, performances, demonstrations etc)
- Human touches (benches, seats, public art, water etc)
- Landscaping (introducing trees and softer elements)

The approach currently being considered will not help to showcase the Metropole. This important building and Abertillery both deserve something better.



current proposals: easy to deliver - likely negative townscape impact



a sensitive step change: complicated, will deliver small square but could be attractive

## aspirational projects



Metropole building



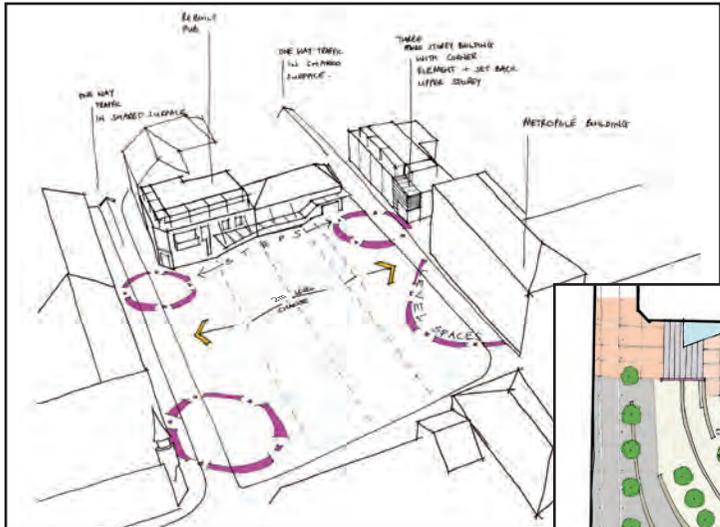
Middle and Right: Interacting with levels in public space. Exchange Square, Manchester



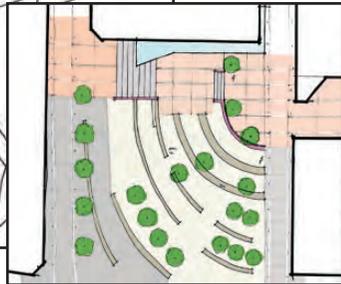
### Spatial Concept

The Metropole is a tall building, as are many of the buildings around it. The massing of the Metropole is emphasised by the sloping site profile and the height (and richness) of the surrounding buildings could easily contain a space between them. There are many active uses (such as the Metropole and local pubs) but other uses could also be encouraged (such as a new multi-agency community hub – including a Library). Any new space between these buildings should then:

- use the changes in levels to create a variety of arenas for activity
- create sweeping curves to smooth out the changes in level and where people can move and sit
- show off the existing buildings around it
- create new or remodel existing buildings to look onto the space
- allow cars to access but prioritise the needs of pedestrians
- enable better linkages through the town
- provide relief from the tight buildings and narrow streets in other parts of the town centre

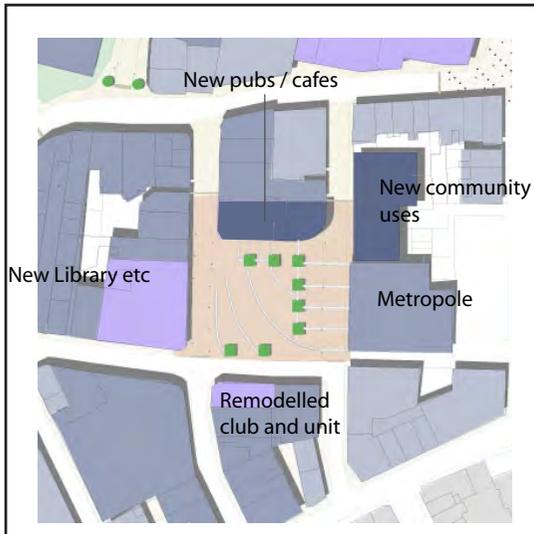


Conceptual approach

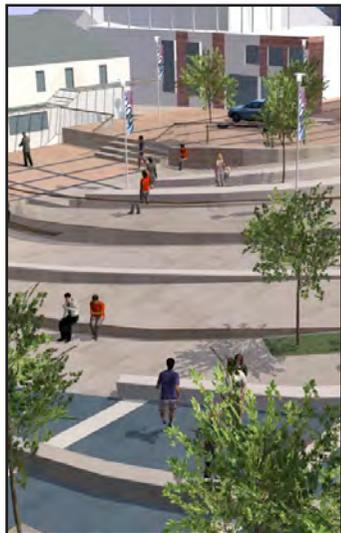


### Phasing

We believe there is scope for a new space near the Metropole, but that the approach to creating this space should be radical and take into account the principles of good civic design, or not happen at all. We therefore recommend that Foundry Square and Church Lawns be developed as the town's civic spaces in the short to medium term and that a more sweeping change to create Metropole Square be designed, tested and implemented towards the end of this strategy.



Drivers of activity around the space



Metropole Square: Adding richness and interest through use of levels

#### 6.4.4 Marketing Strategy

Once the early elements of the Strategy have been implemented, the town can be marketed to the outside world in a coordinated way. The Traders' Association and the Town Centre Management (TCM) together with the Council and the WAG should expand the Annual Events Programme to develop a marketing strategy for the town to help build the elements of this strategy onto the next level. This marketing strategy will highlight what a great place Abertillery is to shop, but also highlight the quality of life here and showcase some of the high quality leisure pursuits that have captured the imagination of people nationwide. By marketing the town to the outside world based upon what has been achieved, the Strategy will become self-sustaining and the need for extensive additional public sector support will be reduced.

# aspirational projects

## 7.0 Making the Projects Happen: Moving to Delivery

### 7.1 Action Plan for 4 Key Projects

This section of the report sets out the projects and are organised, broadly in 4 separate groups.

In terms of evaluating the projects, they have been assessed against their contribution to achieving the 8 strategic objectives which are outlined in Section 4. The strategic objectives have been developed within the context of the current and emerging policy framework, especially the Heads of the Valleys Initiative and the particular issues which need to be addressed in Abertillery. The 4 key projects groups are:

- Refining the Town Centre Boundary and Offer
- Public Realm Enhancements
- Traffic Management Enhancements
- Improving Strategic Transport Links

#### 7.1.1 Refining the Town Centre Boundary and Improving Retail Experience

Abertillery town centre has clearly undergone a significant period of decline, like many other towns in the UK. In order to improve the vitality and viability of the town centre it is felt very important to concentrate the retail offer in the Shopping Heart. Properties vacated by retailers in the areas to the south of the town could then

be brought forward for either residential purposes to support the diversification of the local population or business units to support the economic development of the town. The most appropriate use will be influenced by the location of the vacated units.

#### Project Champion & Approach

In terms of bringing forward the project the Local Authority will need to take the lead. There are a number of mechanisms which need to be put in place to bring this project forward. These are detailed above and summarised below:

- Planning Policy Amendments
- Supplementary Planning Document
- Town Improvement Grant / Building Improvement Programme
- Shop Fronts Improvement Grant Scheme
- Town Centre Manager
- Managed Contraction of Abertillery
- Working with Traders
- Acquiring key properties
- Improvements to Foundry Bridge

#### Phasing and Key Risks

In terms of phasing the above projects, it will be important to ensure all of the mechanisms are implemented in tandem to ensure maximum benefits. Although the appointment of a Town Centre Manager could possibly be held back, an Officer from the Council would need to be charged with the task of ensuring the delivery of the other mechanisms. The project should be progressed immediately.

The key risks associated with this project are two fold. Firstly, if the policy framework is not put in place to manage the effective contraction of the town centre, it will be extremely likely that gaps will emerge in the retail offer leading to a disaggregated and vulnerable town centre. In addition, funding will need to be secured to enable the shop fronts and building improvement grant scheme to be progressed which will be a key enabling scheme. It will also be very important to sell the concept of the strategy and work closely with retailers to ensure local buy in and co-operation.

#### Key Outputs

The key outputs from this project will include the revitalisation and regeneration of the town centre offer of Abertillery. This, in turn, should help to attract more residents to the town and its surroundings. The projects will also help to improve the physical environment of the town centre making it a more definitive and attractive place to live, work and shop. The rationale of this project is clearly in line with the objectives of the Five Counties Regeneration Strategy which identifies the importance of re-establishing the towns as centres of economic

activity and 'Heads – We Win...' – A Strategic Framework for the Heads of the Valleys. The Strategy identifies that the Valleys should be a place where people want to live, work and play – with a sustainable, high quality of life and a thriving population. The strategy also identifies the need to create a **strong, vibrant and well-maintained** town centre with good public transport and the provision of readily available housing.

The project meets strategic objective 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 outlined in section 4.1

## 7.1.2 Public Realm Enhancements

The development of a public realm masterplan for Abertillery is a vital element of its regeneration.

### Project Champion & Approach

In terms of bringing forward the project the Local Authority will need to take the lead.

In order to achieve a coherent, attractive appearance across the town centre it is important that a composite masterplan is developed at the earliest opportunity. The details for how this should be achieved are explained in the previous chapter.

### Phasing and Key Risks

The diagram to the right sets out the key tasks

in developing and subsequently implementing the Public Realm Strategy.

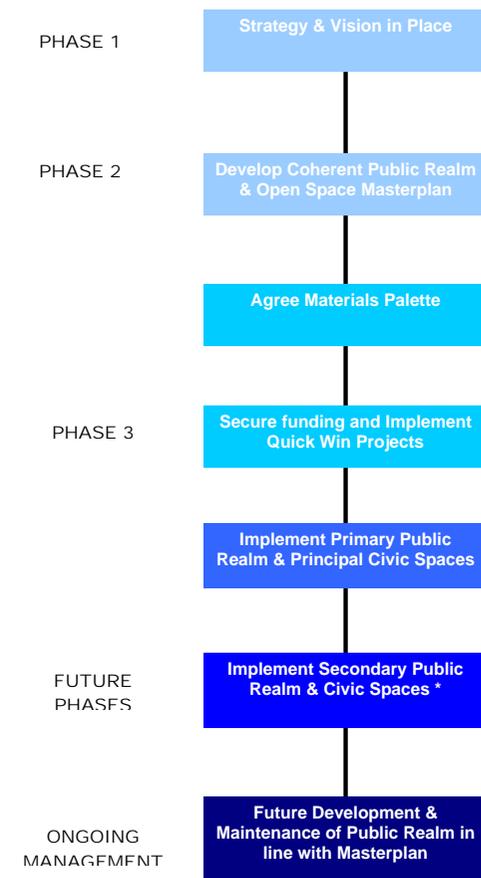
In terms of phasing, it will be important to ensure that a comprehensive Public Realm Strategy is in place before any improvements are implemented on the ground. The strategy will set the framework to ensure all projects are implemented in a co-ordinated and effective manner which will maximise the benefits that they offer to Abertillery. Once the strategy is in place the early wins projects such as the Foundry Bridge Renewal should be brought forward. The public realm strategy should be progressed immediately.

The key risks associated with this project include the risk of racing ahead in implementing improvements in an ad hoc fashion which will actually detract from the benefits which can be realised. In addition, once the improvements are in place, they will need to be maintained, the maintenance of improvements will need to be considered in the public realm strategy.

### Key Outputs

The key outputs from this project will include the improvement of the general quality of the public realm in Abertillery, including the gateways to the town. The rationale of this project is clearly in line with the objectives of the 'Heads – We Win...' – A Strategic Framework for the Heads of the Valleys which **identifies the need to create strong, vibrant and well-maintained** town centres with good public transport and the provision of readily available housing.

The project meets strategic objective 1, 2, 4, 5,6, 7 and 8 outlined in section 4.1.



\* Implementation of Secondary Civic Space dependant on Success of Earlier Development

## 7.1.3 Traffic Management Strategy

### Project Description

The distribution of activity across towns fundamentally influences movement patterns by vehicles and pedestrians. The current road layout in Abertillery is considered not to be working very effectively and changes need to be made to increase the ease of movement and legibility of the town centre.

### Project Champion & Approach

In terms of bringing forward the project the Local Authority will need to take the lead supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and where required, further technical advice.

The Traffic Management Strategy has a number of specific projects which are detailed below:

- Re-considering traffic direction & signage
- Changes in pedestrianised streets
- Opening Church Street to vehicular traffic
- Traffic calming measures
- Accessing new and existing car parks

### Phasing and Key Risks

In terms of developing and implementing the Traffic Management System, the approach is very similar to the approach detailed for the Public Realm Strategy. The five projects detailed above, will need to form the basis of the detailed Traffic Management System for the town.

The first stage will be to develop the detailed Traffic Management Strategy. In developing the strategy the objectives of the Public Realm Strategy will need to be assessed and carefully considered. On completion of the detailed Traffic Management Strategy, the quick win and priority projects should be progressed.

The key risks associated with the Traffic Management Strategy are also similar to the Public Realm Strategy. Changes to traffic management must be sold to the local community who are supportive of the broader strategy but need to be informed of the specific proposals being developed.

It will also be important to ensure that there is a sensible blend between urban design aspirations for the town and the traffic management interventions.

### Key Outputs

The key outputs from this project will increase the legibility and ease of vehicular movement and people around the town centre. Making the town more accessible is crucial in helping it to attract shoppers.

Moving around the town will be made easier as will car parking. The strategy will help to link the existing car park and the proposed one to the north of the town into a system which is easy to understand. The rationale of this project is clearly in line with the objectives of the Strategic Framework for the Heads of the Valleys which **identifies the need to create strong, vibrant and well-maintained town centres with good public transport.**

The project meets strategic objective 1, 2,4,7 & 8 outlined in section 4.1.

## 7.1.4 Improving Strategic Transport Links

### Project Description

A prerequisite for people to move to Abertillery will be the ability to travel to work. Whilst the road infrastructure is adequate, public transport is currently restricted to bus only. Following the opening of the Ebbw Valley Railway in 2007 a bus service will operate from Abertillery to the nearest station at Llanhilleth. We would not consider this to be ideal, as it would be perceived to overcomplicate the journey and be considered a “hassle”. An alternative would be to drive to Llanhilleth and then take the train for the onward journey. Again, once in the car, the temptation must be to continue for the remainder of the journey. This increases congestion at the point of destination, the city, which has a negative impact upon the function and competitiveness of the city region. A prerequisite for the success of Abertillery is a railway station for those seeking the lifestyle offered by the town and its environs.

### Project Champion & Approach

In terms of bringing forward the project the Local Authority will need to take the lead and will need to prove the economic benefits of the railway station to the WAG/WDA. In addition, it will need to be demonstrated that a station can be successfully implemented at Abertillery.

The Local Authority will need to undertake a targeted campaign to prove the economic benefits of the development of a railway station at Abertillery. The campaign we need to be supported by a range of research studies including a study that identifies the economic benefits and a study that examines the practicalities of delivery and the likely cost implications.

### Phasing and Key Risks

In the first instance the Local Authority should make it known that they wish to have a railway station located at Abertillery. A targeted lobbying campaign should then be developed and implemented. As mentioned above the campaign will need to be supported by a range of feasibility studies.

### Key Outputs

The implementation of a railway station will significantly increase the attractiveness of Abertillery as a place to live and work. The strategic transport links of Abertillery will be significantly enhanced. The proposal meets one of the key objectives of the Five Counties Strategy which identifies the need to establish an integrated, well connected sub-region. In addition, it also meets one of the aspirations of the Heads of the Valleys Strategy which hopes to create strong, vibrant and well-maintained town centres with good public transport.

The project meets strategic objective 3, 4, & 6 outlined in section 4.1.

## 7.2 Project Delivery and Phasing

Abertillery Town Centre clearly has significant potential to once again become a flourishing local service centre in keeping with the primary aims of the Five Counties Regeneration Strategy and the 'Heads – We Win...' – A Strategic Framework for the Heads of the Valleys. The strategy recognises the importance of regenerating town centres in the area, a key aspect of which is considered to be improving the physical environment of the town centres and ensuring joined up think with greater co-ordination between schemes. This will inevitably involve substantial change as the demands of the enlarged local population increase.

The completed strategy establishes a bold direction for the future development and role of Abertillery in the Cardiff/Newport city region. Whilst the private sector will play an important role in delivering new development, significant drive and focus of attention will be required from the public sector especially in the early years to ensure the comprehensive delivery of the strategy over time. Key projects identified for Abertillery include:

- Refining the Town Centre Boundary and Offer
- Public Realm Enhancements
- Traffic Management Enhancements
- Improving Strategic Transport Links

These projects are clearly inter-linked and need to be brought forward in a co-ordinated and

integrated manner. The overall development timeframe is expected to run over the next 5 - 15 years to full completion, with the initial 2 – 5 years being the critical period to establish the infrastructure required to facilitate regeneration. The approach must be to deliver the strategy via a variety means as follows:

- **Direct intervention:** To ensure the timely and effective delivery of the strategy land acquisitions will be necessary and possibly development
- **Enabling:** By providing gap funding and or infrastructure - development will come forward.
- **Support:** Providing advice and support including marketing.
- **Empowering:** Other organisations, agencies and member of the local community to deliver key components of strategy.

The early priorities for delivery will include:

- Planning, management and co-ordination of the key projects;
- Land acquisitions including CPOs for infrastructure delivery and to support physical projects;
- Cash flow/financial management and funding.

Management and delivery of the projects identified in the strategy will require the continued focus of attention from the Blaenau Gwent CBC and a multi-disciplinary team approach. The dedicated focus of resources will be essential to making the project appear in an acceptable timeframe.

Whilst many of the skills and statutory powers already exist within Blaenau Gwent CBC, WAG and other public agencies, the challenge will be to ensure that dedicated resourcing and management attention is given to delivery.

### 7.2.1 Project Phasing

The project profiles of the 4 key projects clearly demonstrate the benefits that the implementation of the projects can bring to Abertillery. None of the projects are straight-forward all involving a range of actions to implement them. The table below sets out the indicative phasing of the key projects and the component projects which are required to achieve the objectives of each key project.

Projects / Tasks	Delivery Agency	Short Term (0-5 years)					Medium Term (5-10 years)					Long Term (10 years +)					
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
<b>Refining the Town Centre Boundary and Offer</b>																	
Planning Policy Amendments	BGCBC	■															
Supplementary Planning Documents	BGCBC	■															
Shop Front Improvement Grants	BGCBC DEIN			■													
Town Centre Manager (TCM)	BGCBC	■	■														
<b>Public Realm Enhancements</b>																	
Comprehensive Public Realm Strategy	BGCBC	■															
Building Quality Review	BGCBC	■															
Shop Front Design Guide	BGCBC	■	■														
Public Realm Review	BGCBC	■															
Building Improvement Programme	BGCBC	■	■	■	■												
Foundry Bridge Renewal	BGCBC	■	■	■													
Foundry Square	BGCBC				■	■											
Church Gardens	BGCBC			■													
Metropole Square	BGCBC									■							
Hanging Basket Initiative	TCM		■														
Traders Competitions	TCM			■													
Annual Events Programme	TCM			■													



## 8.0 Conclusions

This report provides a clear agenda for action and a strategy for success. In setting out an ambition and timescale, the strategy provides a clear framework for changes that should be almost complete by 2016. We strongly believe that Abertillery has the key ingredients to make a successful place, and that the time is right for the renewal of this town centre to come to the fore. Significantly, there is funding to support many of the activities which have been advocated above.

Although complex, the interlocking features of this report provide local people, businesses, the Local Authority and the Welsh Assembly Government with the tools they need to work towards success. These tools are interconnected and work at different levels.

The sub-regional strategy carves out a deliverable role for Abertillery that will make it competitive in the Newport / Cardiff City Region and provide it with something special in a regional, or even national context.

This feeds the Town Centre Regeneration Strategy which outlines the way that Abertillery will function, whilst the projects are a bottom-up explanation of how the multi-layered strategies should be implemented.