

Appendix 1
Audit Wales – Regenerating Town Centres in Wales
Self Evaluation Tool

	Intention	
Action Needed	Yes, we are good at this and no further work is required	No, there is more for us to do
We have a long-term vision for all of our town centres.		<p>Town Centre Action Plans (TCAPs) have been produced for some of our principal town centres and consultants have been commissioned to conduct studies for other towns (such as the Powell Dobson study on Blackwood). However, many of these documents were produced several years ago and, more importantly, pre-pandemic. The Strategic Planning team is currently producing a series of masterplans for the County Borough, which will create a long-term vision for the different parts of the County Borough and the town centres that sit within them. The Authority is also embarking upon an ambitious Place Shaping and Place Making agenda that include plans for regeneration of our town centres. Post-pandemic recovery for our town centres will form part of the revised Local Development Plan, which is currently being produced. The Council's Place Shaping agenda and Place Making plans</p>

		will also contribute to a long-term vision for our town centres.
We have committed, highly visible political leaders for town centre regeneration.	The Cabinet and Leaders of all political parties recognise the importance of our town centres and proactively support town centre regeneration initiatives.	
Our approach to town centre regeneration is integrated with other key strategies and plans – e.g., Wellbeing Plan, corporate priorities and other community, Council and regional strategies.	The importance of town centres and their regeneration is recognised by Political and Corporate leaders. Town centre regeneration is integrated within the Council's Regeneration Strategy – “A Foundation for Success” – and forms a key part of all associated strategies and plans. Caerphilly's Well-Being Plan – “The Caerphilly We Want 2018-2023” – and the associated work by the Public Services Board also contribute to town centre regeneration.	
We have set SMART objectives for town centre regeneration.		Not all objectives for our town centres have been set using SMART methodology historically. However, Town Centre Action Plans and the associated wider area regeneration plans are produced using SMART targets and will outline our approach to town centres for the medium and long term.
We are clear on the benefits and risks of town centre regeneration for citizens, the local economy and local communities.	The impact that town centre regeneration has on the businesses within them and the communities they serve is a key consideration when developing plans and strategies. Benefits and risks are assessed and managed in so far as is	

	<p>possible through the setting of SMART targets and the assessment of available data (such as demographics, population projections and economic projections).</p> <p>The Council's Integrated Impact Assessment process is a key component of assessing and mitigating against risks.</p>	
We have a clear accountability framework to govern and scrutinise our decisions in regenerating town centres.	<p>All regeneration strategies and plans are reported through the Council's committee structure and are considered by the Regeneration Board, Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet and Council as required.</p>	
We have agile and effective decision-making processes when approving our work on town centres.		<p>The Council's decision-making process is robust and transparent, but this does not always allow for agile decision-making while ensuring good governance.</p> <p>However, agile decisions can be demonstrated by pandemic recovery initiatives that were delivered quickly and in direct response to the challenges that were being faced by the business community.</p>
We act in a transparent way and everyone is clear on how decisions on town centre regeneration activities are made and by whom.	<p>Town centre regeneration activities are approved through the Council's committee structure with updates delivered in the same way. Responsible Officers and Members are identified within reports. Officers have delegated powers for certain activities, such as grant approvals, but these are done in</p>	

	consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.	
Those who make decisions on town centre regeneration are accountable for their choices and are held to account through clear governance arrangements.	Town centre regeneration initiatives are developed, reported and updated on through the Council's Committee structure with responsible Officers and Members available for questions. Many decisions relating to town centres are taken through the Regeneration Project Board, where lead Officers produce reports and are held to account via questions.	
We have enough staff and resources to undertake town centre regeneration work.		It is recognised that in-house staff capacity is not sufficient and resources may not always be available to develop large-scale regeneration programmes. However, steps are being taken to address this such as the recent Regeneration Project Board approval to employ a multi-disciplinary team of consultants to lead and implement the ambitious Caerphilly Town 2035.
We have staff in the right services and with the required seniority to undertake town centre regeneration work.	It is recognised that town centre regeneration requires input from departments across the whole Council. Such cross-cutting work programmes are well-established within the Authority and have the support of senior management.	
We have a can-do culture and entrepreneurial mindset within the Council for town centre regeneration.	The Council's "Commercial and Improvement Strategy", which forms part of the "Team Caerphilly – Better Together" Transformation Strategy	

	underpins the new operating model of “social head and commercial head” to ensure that a can-do culture and entrepreneurial mindset exists across the Authority.	
We can recruit the right people with the right skills to deliver our town centre regeneration work.	The importance of regeneration is recognised and staff vacancies that arise within departments that implement this work are proactively filled. Posts are advertised via a range of mediums, including appropriate platforms and publications, to ensure that people with the right skillset are appointed to these roles.	The importance of regeneration is recognised and staff vacancies that arise within departments that implement this work are proactively filled. Posts are advertised via a range of mediums, including appropriate platforms and publications. However, there have been difficulties in filling recent vacancies especially technical and regeneration posts. This appears to be largely due to the current labour market and the increasing disparity between public and private sector remuneration packages.
We have embedded regeneration with programmes of long-term transformation and/or recovery from COVID-19.	COVID-19 has had wide-ranging impacts across many areas of the Council’s work, including town centres. The Council has recently agreed our economic recovery framework, which will support and enhance the implementation of the Well-Being Strategy.	
We are able to secure the resources we need to undertake town centre regeneration.	Officers have strong, well-established, and longstanding relationships with colleagues in Welsh Government and work with them to identify regeneration priorities and secure resources required to implement actions. Similarly, the importance of town centres is recognised	

	by senior management and political leaders of the Council and resources are allocated to regeneration activities through the Regeneration Project Board, Cabinet and Council. Links will be established with UK Government going forward through the Levelling Up agenda and associated funding.	
	Involvement	
Action Needed	Yes, we are good at this and no further work is required	No, there is more for us to do
We effectively communicate internally and externally about what the Council and its partners are trying to achieve through our town centre regeneration work.	The Council is proactive in internal and external engagement of its priorities through staff newsletters, press releases and social media posts. Specific long-term promotions around the Place Shaping Agenda and our Choose Local (shop local) campaign are currently underway.	
We draw on the expertise and knowledge of partners, businesses, citizens and stakeholders when identifying and agreeing our priorities for town centre regeneration.		The Council has historically used its Town Centre Management Groups to engage with partners and stakeholders on town centre regeneration. However, it was recognised that partner and stakeholder representation at these meetings was declining. As such, Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet have recently approved a trial of a revised format for these groups to encourage participation and engagement. The new format is

		<p>anticipated to increase and encourage stakeholder participation and input into town centre initiatives, but the new format will be assessed during its trial period (12-months) with a view to a long-term implementation of the new format subject to feedback. Changes may be required to ensure that the proposed new format is fit for purpose. The new format will be utilised to consult and develop our Place Shaping & Place Making agendas along with other regeneration plans and initiatives.</p>
<p>Our priorities for town centre regeneration reflect the feedback we receive from partners, businesses, citizens and stakeholders.</p>	<p>Town centre regeneration initiatives are subject to consultation with feedback incorporated and plans amended as appropriate. As mentioned above, it is anticipated that the new format Town Centre Management Groups will increase the proactive engagement with partners and stakeholders on town centre plans and programmes. The new format will also give the groups a business focus for the first time.</p>	
<p>We enable all of our stakeholders to be fully involved in identifying and agreeing town centre regeneration priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected Members; • Welsh Government; • Local Health Board; • Fire & Rescue Authority; • National Park Authority; 	<p>Stakeholders and partners are actively encouraged to be involved in town centre regeneration initiatives through working groups, engagement events and the Town Centre Management Groups. The revised Management Groups are anticipated to enhance this engagement.</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police; • Police and Crime Commissioner; • Town and Community Councils; • Business Improvement Districts; • Chamber of Commerce; • Social Enterprises; • Local community groups; • Individual citizens. 	<p>There is no National Park Authority, Business Improvement District or Chamber of Commerce in Caerphilly County Borough at this time.</p> <p>Wide reaching collaborative work is also a key aim of the Public Services Board and their work on Resilient Communities focus on our town centres.</p>	
<p>We encourage partners, businesses, citizens and stakeholders to develop solutions that help regenerate our town centres.</p>	<p>Stakeholder and partner engagement forms an integral part of the development of town centre regeneration initiatives and such input is encouraged to ensure that plans are robust and fit for purpose.</p> <p>We work proactively with the private sector over large regeneration schemes and provide financial support through grant funding wherever possible.</p> <p>Successful town centre regeneration initiatives include conversion of the former <i>Store 21</i> in Blackwood into a high-quality mixed-use development.</p>	
<p>We support community-led regeneration and actively encourage our partners, businesses, citizens and stakeholders to lead on town centre regeneration by encouraging and working through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Improvement Districts; • Town and Community Councils; • Place Plans. 	<p>There aren't currently any Business Improvement Districts operating within the County Borough. Officers and Members have active dialogue with Town & Community Councils and they are proactively involved in regeneration initiatives. Workshops on the place making, place shaping and area</p>	

	regeneration plans focus on citizen and stakeholder engagement.	
We draw on and utilise the skills and knowledge of our local partners, businesses and stakeholders to help us deliver our regeneration programme.	The importance of the knowledge and skills of our town centre stakeholders and partners is recognised and incorporated into regeneration initiatives.	
We actively seek feedback from the community on an ongoing basis about our planned, ongoing and future town centre regeneration work.	Feedback from the business community forms an inherent part of the Council's model of town centre management and will be encouraged proactively through the new format Town Centre Management Groups.	
	Informed	
Action Needed	Yes, we are good at this and no further work is required	No, there is more for us to do
We use a wide range of data to understand our town centres and identify the priorities for action.	The Council currently uses data such as footfall, vacancy rates and demographics to understand how our town centres are functioning.	
Our data covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Footfall; • Digital – Wi-Fi usage, social media interactions, travel movements, etc.; • Property – rent, profit margins and empty units; • Catchment demographics; • Interdependency of towns. 		The Council currently has footfall data for all of the principal towns, along with vacancy rates and catchment demographics. Free public Wi-Fi is currently being installed in the principal towns and this system will provide much-enhanced data on footfall, including capturing data across the whole town centre (as opposed to single points under the current system). It is envisaged that the system will also provide information on the number of people employed in our

		<p>town centres (through long-dwell data), traffic movements (through short-dwell data) and the demographics of town centre users (through the profiles of registered users).</p> <p>Property data is currently reserved to vacancy rates through annual surveys, but data from CoStar (a subscription service that the Authority currently utilises to advertise commercial and industrial properties) could be utilised to provide more in-depth data on rental values and profit margins.</p> <p>The Audit Wales report provides information on the interdependency of towns through an online toolkit that Officers can utilise when developing town centre plans.</p>
We make transparent decisions based on good quality information when deciding on town centre regeneration.	Available data is utilised to analyse trends and provide an evidence base for town centre regeneration initiatives whenever appropriate.	
<p>We receive good quality information to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judge whether we should approve a town centre regeneration project; and • Monitor and fully evaluate performance of our delivery of town centre regeneration. 	Town centre footfall and vacancy rates/trends are routinely used to assess the effectiveness of town centre regeneration projects and provide information and justification when formulating ideas.	

We have a confident decision-making culture and Elected Members are not afraid of challenging Officers and holding people to account.	The Council's committee structure and reporting process provides robust decision-making and enables Members to challenge and question Officers and Cabinet Members.	
We regularly review our town centre regeneration work to ensure our actions and decisions are the right ones.	All town centre regeneration work is regularly assessed utilising available data and trends to assess the effectiveness of interventions. Projects are also evaluated to see where lessons have been learnt.	
We amend our town centre regeneration programmes to reflect changing needs and demands.		Town centre regeneration programmes are regularly reviewed to reflect changing needs and demands. However, the pandemic has had an unprecedented and rapid impact on our town centres and work is underway to amend programmes in light of the pandemic and the impact that this will have on our town centres. Plans and initiatives now need to reflect the recovery phase as a priority.
We set targets and measures of success for town centre regeneration to judge improvement over time, and monitor these when they have been agreed.	Utilising the SMART methodology, town centre programmes have targets and measures to assess their effectiveness over time.	
We jointly take corrective action as a result of our ongoing evaluation of town centre regeneration programmes.	Long-term programmes are assessed throughout their implementation with each stage assessed and future actions amended accordingly.	
We share learning and draw on evidence from other Councils in Wales and elsewhere to learn what does/does not	Officers attend regional meetings and working groups (such as the town centre focused Place Management Forum) to share ideas and experiences across the	

work, the challenges we face and the potential rewards.	South East Wales region. Welsh Government representation at this, and other, regional meetings provide input from a national level/perspective.	
We have robust performance management arrangements in place to monitor evaluation of past regeneration programmes.	Town centre performance data (such as footfall) is a measure on the Council's performance management framework.	
We review the effectiveness of our past decisions on town centre regeneration to understand what worked and what did not.	Officers proactively review town centre programmes and projects to assess effectiveness and learn lessons for the future.	
We undertake post-implementation evaluation of individual town centre regeneration schemes to check that the objectives we set were delivered.	Targets and objectives for projects are outlined in the planning stages and these are assessed and measured throughout implementation.	
<p>We can draw on robust information that shows how our regeneration work is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving local people's social and health well-being; • Improving the quality of buildings and homes in our town centres; and • Delivering carbon reduction targets and improving green infrastructure. 		<p>The Authority is currently embarking upon carbon reduction measures, including increasing green infrastructure. The environmental impact of projects will be a key consideration going forward to ensure that local and national targets are met.</p> <p>Work to improve the quality of buildings in our town centres is currently underway in conjunction with colleagues in Welsh Government. This will include bringing underutilised buildings back into beneficial use, including high quality housing units to improve the social and health well-being of town centre</p>

		residents, while also assisting with town centre pandemic recovery.
	Intervention	
Action Needed	Yes, we are good at this and no further work is required	No, there is more for us to do
We have defined and clarified roles, responsibilities, and our legal powers to support our town centre regeneration work.	Officers are aware of their roles and responsibilities and the powers available to them in delivering town centre regeneration projects. Internal working groups are regularly established to deliver large-scale projects with defined terms of reference and clear roles, responsibilities, and objectives.	
We can draw on and utilise the skills and knowledge of our partners, the Welsh Government, and stakeholders to help us take legal action to regenerate town centres.	Welsh Government has recently delivered training for Officers and Members on empty property enforcement as part of their town centre regeneration programme. Through this work, they have appointed a consultant with extensive knowledge and experience in property enforcement. This consultant is available to Local Authorities to advise and support them through individual cases and also advises of other Local Authorities who have dealt with similar cases so that best practice etc. is shared.	
We provide landlords, businesses, partners and stakeholders with good quality advice and guidance including:		The authority is currently working on launching a 'mini empty properties website' to provide comprehensive information on the authorities stand on empty properties including the products

<p>Advice to landlords on options for sale, rent and ownership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of agents to help sell/rent; • Discounted fees through Auctioneer Scheme; • Identify and list potential Investors/Developers; • List of approved Builders/Architects; • Free composite Schedule of Works. 		<p>available to assist in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use. The website will have links to signpost interested parties to relevant services. A 'contact me' function will also be built into the webpage to encourage engagement.</p> <p>Information regarding the rules for Listed Building repair, maintenance, renovation and regeneration are different from those of non-listed depending on the listing Grade. Links to CADW will be included to provide online information to anyone interested in a Listed Building. Often Listed Building Consent is required if change to the building is more than repair and maintenance.</p> <p>In addition, the production of an 'Empty Residential Property Information Pack' with key information on the products available to assist empty homeowners/prospective purchasers including VAT information, loans, grants, renting, Caerphilly Keys and selling advice.</p> <p>The Empty Property team offer technical support and advice on bringing an empty residential property back into use, including producing schedules of works, estimate costings and general technical advice.</p>
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		The Empty Property team has agent and auction discounted fees offers to empty property owners referred by the Local authority.
<p>We support landlords to tackle empty premises by offering a wide range of services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use LA website to promote/advertise land/buildings for owners; • Home Improvement Agency; • Council run Private Sector Leasing scheme; • Social lettings scheme to match applicants to private rented homes; • Public Request Ordering Proposals; • Direct purchase by LA or RSL; • LOTS and HARPS to create homes above shops. 		<p>The authority is currently working on launching a 'mini empty properties website' to provide comprehensive information on the authorities stand on empty properties including the products available to assist in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use. The website will have links to signpost interested parties to relevant services. A 'contact me' function will also be built into the webpage to encourage engagement.</p> <p>The Private Sector Housing offer a full home improvement agency. The agency is instrumental to empty property work including completing works in defaults of legal notices and grant work.</p>
<p>We provide landlords, businesses, partners and stakeholders with financial support to regenerate town centres including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement grants linked to nominations to properties; • Loans for improvement work (interest free or interest bearing); 		<p>Regeneration and Housing provide a variety of financial support initiatives to provide financial assistance to owners of town centre properties who wish to carry out refurbishment works. These are usually grants as loan funding has received very low levels of interest when offered historically.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial lending advice; • Discount VAT and/or Capital Allowance Schemes. 		<p>Advice on VAT discounts for empty properties and exemption letters are provided by Caerphilly Homes.</p>
<p>We proactively take enforcement action to regenerate town centres fully using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – CPO; • S.77-79 of the Building Act 1984 – dangerous structures, ruinous and dilapidated; • Housing Acts 1985 and 200 – improvement notices, EDMOs, demolition, clearance and CPO; • S.79-80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 – statutory nuisance; • S.4 of the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 – treat pests; • S.29 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 – boarding up; • Listed Buildings/Urgent Works notice; • Public Health Acts 1936 and 1961 – filthy and verminous; • Naming and shaming landlords (publicity). 		<p>Welsh Government recently conducted training for Officers and Members on property enforcement options. An action plan of town centre properties has been developed that includes appropriate enforcement action for each site. There is also a similar plan dedicated to Bargoed town centre. Enforcement action on these properties will commence in late 2021/early 2022. However, some of the powers have been rarely used and advice will be sought from WG on best practice. A package of funding support is also being put together to assist the owners of the buildings where they are unable to afford the works or where the Authority has to complete these works in default.</p>
<p>We use our powers to encourage empty buildings to be brought back into use in town centres:</p>		<p>An Enforced Sales Procedure was adopted by the Authority in early 2021 and its implementation is currently being</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax, Statutory Debts or Business Rates debt recovery (Bankruptcy, charging orders or Bailiffs); • County Court or Enforced Sales Procedure; • Empty Homes and Holiday Homes Premium; • Prosecution; • Compulsory Purchase Order; • Empty Management Dwellings Order; • Enforced Sales Procedure; • Direct Purchase. 		<p>considered on some properties that meet the policy's criteria. An enforcement action plan has been developed for long-term vacant town centre properties and Officers across various departments are considering enforcement powers available to them. Some of these powers have been rarely used in the past, so advice and best practice is being sought from Welsh Government and partners where applicable. A financial support package is also being developed to assist the owners of the property where they do not have the available funds to do remedial works, or to minimise risk to the Authority if work has to be done in default.</p>
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