



AFAN VALLEY

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INTRODUCTION



The Afan Valley community area includes the electoral divisions of Pelenna, Cymmer, Glyncorrwg and Gwynfi.

The Afan Valley is very close to many areas of dense urban population, including Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot and Bridgend. Unlike many of the other areas, it has no large centres of population, but instead a string of villages set amongst glorious countryside.

The Afan Valley has evolved into an area for outdoor activity, with world class mountain bike trails, walks and a low level cycle route along the valley floor.

There are two main visitor centres in the Afan Valley, Glyncorrwg Ponds Mountain Bike Centre and Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre. Both provide direct access to numerous walking and mountain bike trails.

The Afan Valley is home to the South Wales Miners Museum, which is situated in Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre. The museum is a registered charity and is managed by volunteers dedicated to promoting the industrial heritage of the Afan Valley. The museum is made up of both indoor and outdoor exhibits.





KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR ENGAGEMENT AND
RESEARCH EXERCISES:

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SOCIAL



Social well-being was described by survey respondents in terms of identity and a sense of belonging to a community; with strong connections to friends, neighbours and family who could be relied on to offer support. It was felt to be important to be able to contribute to society and to be needed by others.

Health issues and access to health care services were raised by a number of respondents, including waiting lists and delayed appointments. Healthy eating was acknowledged to be important, although frequently compromised on the basis of buying cheap food.

Some people achieved social well-being through their work and through leisure activities. In terms of improvements to social well-being, work life balance was a factor; several respondents mentioned time constraints as a factor inhibiting participation in sport. Cost of sports and events was also an issue for some respondents.

The school was an important social centre for those with children, allowing contact with other parents and an opportunity for volunteering.





ECONOMIC



Survey respondents defined economic well-being as having enough money on which to live, and being part of an economically stable society. The most commonly cited factors contributing to economic well-being were having a job and being able to maintain a decent standard of living. Respondents believed that access to local work, lower household bills and an increase in salary would pave the way for improvements in economic well-being.

Other factors affecting a sense of economic well-being included connectivity in terms of mobile and broadband signal. Conversely, some participants felt that economic well-being was compromised by a shortage in local employment opportunities, as well as living in communities not connected to a rail line. Also, childcare was an issue for working parents both in terms of affordability and being able to access sufficient cover in order to allow time to commute.

The latest census information (2011) shows that there was 6.3% unemployment in the Afan Valley area and of those aged 16 and over, 43.3% have no qualifications, which is significantly higher than the all Wales figure of 25.9%.

Of the 2,756 homes in the area, 2,145 (77.8%) were identified as being deprived using one or more of the following 4 dimensions of deprivation; employment, education, health/disability and household overcrowding (Census 2011).





The area is comprised of steep sided valleys, much of it conifer plantation on Welsh Government Woodland Estate. The uplands mark the southern boundary of blanket peat bog, which as well as being an important habitat helps mitigate climate change. The Pen y Cymoedd wind farm, as well as being the largest onshore wind farm in England and Wales, is the site of a large scale peat restoration project.

The Afan Forest includes important habitats, such as coal spoil and heathland that supports significant populations of reptiles, rare invertebrates and plants. The Afan Valley has over 17 local wildlife rich areas and one Site of Special Scientific at the former colliery site at Bryn Tip. These are areas that have been selected for their local biodiversity value.

Water quality in the valley is much improved but more remains to be done particularly in tackling mine waters and in removing manmade obstructions which impede the passage of fish.

The area is renowned for its fantastic mountain bike trails and throughout the engagement, Afan Valley's natural environment and forest was consistently highlighted as one of the biggest assets in the area. The Afan Valley provides plenty of opportunities for walks, compared with other areas nearer to the M4 corridor.

The provision of safe, clean public spaces was important to many of those consulted and proximity to local shops and services played a key role. Generally, it was felt that residents were taking more responsibility for the environment, although fly tipping and littering were still problems. There was also some resistance to wind farms being built nearby.





The Afan Valley has a rich and diverse range of built and cultural heritage assets, which plays a vital role in creating a sense of place and local identity for the area. From the consultation responses there was a strong sense of cultural well-being, based on the closeness of the community and an underpinning set of unspoken values that united those who lived there.

People commented on the friendliness in the community, saying hello and smiling to one another on the street and supporting a sense of community safety through mutual support. The prevalence of extended families in the area was seen as critical to this.

Being active in the community was highlighted as being important to cultural well-being. Sport, especially football and rugby, were seen as vital to the cultural well-being of the area, as they brought people together and encouraged healthy exercise.

The Afan Valley is the birthplace of the actor Richard Burton. A life sized image of Burton himself can be found in the Afan Valley, along the low level cycle trail.

There are a range of leisure facilities in the community area including a community swimming pool and a number of community centres. Blaengwynfi Social Centre includes a snooker room, sports hall, weights room and health suite. Cymer Afan Comprehensive School and the primary schools in the area are community focused schools, which enable the local community to use some of the facilities out of school hours.

There are two community managed libraries in the Afan Valley, one in Blaengwynfi and the other in Cymmer. In total there are currently eight parks/playgrounds in the area. Four of these have fixed play equipment, with one having a Multi-Use Games Area. The Afan Valley also has two green spaces (which can range from informal amenity areas to woodland). The area is also served by rugby and football pitches, bowling greens and tennis courts.

The Afan Valley also has a mining heritage museum located in Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre, the South Wales Miners Museum. The museum is a registered charity and managed by volunteers dedicated to promoting the industrial heritage of the area. There are 31 listed buildings in the Afan Valley, the majority of which are located in Cymmer.

With regards to the Welsh language, only 8.4% (521) of residents in the Afan Valley can speak Welsh, however some people in the Valley did recognise that more should be done to encourage the use of Welsh language in the community.

Similar to other areas in the county borough, the number of people from black and minority ethnic groups in the Port Talbot community area is small, and is reflected in the position in the County Borough as a whole.

Information from the Census shows a decrease in the percentage of people who identified themselves as Christian, from 64% in 2001 to 49% in 2011. During the same period, there was also a noticeable increase in people declaring that they had 'no religion', from 23% to 42%.

In terms of factors that contributed to cultural well-being, arts and culture, access to museums and cinemas were cited. The lack of provision to public transport was highlighted as a significant barrier to cultural well-being.



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