



NEATH

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INTRODUCTION



The Neath community area includes the electoral divisions of Aberdulais, Tonna, Neath North, Neath East, Neath South, Briton Ferry East, Briton Ferry West, Bryncoch South, Bryncoch North, Cadoxton, Dyffryn, Coedffranc West, Coedffranc North, Coedffranc Central and Cimla.

Neath town developed as a market town for the surrounding rural valley areas. The town's landmark, St David's Church clock tower, is in the heart of the town centre.

The classical singer Katherine Jenkins once sang as a choir girl at St David's Church. Opposite the church is Victoria Gardens, which has a 19th century bandstand and a circle of standing stones, which were erected for the National Eisteddfod in 1918.

The town offers a range of shops, cafes, public houses and a Victorian Indoor Market, which is home to a number of specialist stalls offering local produce.

The Gwyn Hall in Neath town centre regularly shows films, shows and musical performances. Neath Town Hall, a listed building is also located in the area. Originally a council chamber, jury room and corn market, the Town Hall is currently the home of the town council.

Neath town centre is currently part of a major regeneration plan to make the County Borough an attractive place to live, visit and do business. The vision for Neath is to create an attractive, vibrant and competitive town that meets the needs of businesses, shoppers and visitors, whilst retaining its market town character.

The ruins of Neath Abbey Monastery are located just outside the town while Neath Castle, a grade II listed building, is located within the town itself. Neath is also home to the oldest rugby club in Wales, Neath RFC. The Gnoll Estate Country Park also located in the immediate area of the town includes four duck ponds, two 18th century cascades, a visitor centre and cafe, play area and adventure playground.





KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR ENGAGEMENT AND
RESEARCH EXERCISES:

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SOCIAL



For survey respondents from Neath, social well-being was strongly related to social networks; friends, family and people who could be relied upon. Healthy living, maintaining good health (both physical and mental) and happiness were frequently mentioned factors here.

In terms of things that could improve the social well-being of the area, survey respondents from the Neath community area were concerned about social degradation of services and facilities, with few activities for young people and increasing problems of anti-social behaviour and drug and alcohol misuse. Local facilities, such as the cinema were said to be too expensive for many people.

There were some concerns about health service provision, with reports of a six month waiting list to see a psychiatrist, difficulties seeing dentists and poor mental health care.

Survey respondents felt that their social well-being could be improved if they had more time to socialise and money to support social activities. Respondents also acknowledged that people needed to be encouraged to reduce or give up smoking and to attend more activities aimed at developing a healthy lifestyle – such as cooking or exercise.





ECONOMIC



For survey respondents, having a job was perceived as the greatest contribution to economic well-being. Additional factors included: the avoidance of debt and being able to meet financial obligations; maintaining a decent standard of accommodation; providing for families and children; being able to afford occasional luxuries and pursue hobbies; and avoiding economic hardship by taking ownership of finances and utility bills.

Survey respondents emphasised the impact of tax, interest rates and tax credits upon individual well-being, pointing out that economic well-being is a function of government spending, as well as individual behavior.

Having a job was seen as the greatest contribution to economic well-being. In terms of things that would improve individuals' economic well-being, many responses focused on increased pay, improved financial literacy and lower household bills.

The latest census information (2011) shows that there was 4.1% unemployment in the Neath region and of those aged 16 and over, 29.3% have no qualifications, which is higher than the all Wales figure of 25.9%.

Of the 22,518 homes in the area, 14,488 (64.3%) 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 Neath community area has a rich and varied landscape with woodland, wetland, dune and floodplain habitats. These include the European designated Special Area of Conservation/National Nature Reserve at Crymlyn Bog and Pant y Sais Fen, four Sites of Special Scientific Interest, two Wildlife Trust Reserves and two local nature reserves and 35 Sites of interest for Nature Conservation. As well as being home to some rare species, such as the fen raft spider, these areas also provide tranquil amenity space.

The Neath and Tennant Canals provide important ecological connectivity through the area and are also used extensively for walking and cycling. Following major restoration works, the Neath canal has been made navigable from Neath town centre to Abergarwed near Resolven. The Tennant canal is also an important source of water for industry, supplying developments at Baglan Bay.

There is good access to the surrounding countryside via a range of rights of way, with leisure facilities, such as the Gnoll Estate and Craig Gwladys Country Parks.

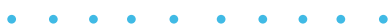
Air pollution from traffic is an issue in many urban areas of the UK. The Victoria Gardens area of the town is such an area and actions to improve the situation are ongoing.

Survey respondents from the Neath area defined environmental well-being in terms of:

- Access to a high quality natural environment; free from pollution, noise or litter, and;
- A home environment that is safe, warm and comfortable.

Other factors mentioned included good recycling facilities, road infrastructure, traffic management and cycle ways.

In terms of things that could improve the environmental well-being of the area, survey respondents from the area placed particular emphasis on being close to green spaces, woodlands and beaches. Air quality was a concern to some residents, along with ensuring maintenance of clean rivers.





For people living in the Neath community area, cultural well-being was defined in terms of the emphasis on cultural activities and events (theatre, film, music, arts, and libraries), learning and a sense of place. Being proud to be Welsh, feeling patriotic about sport (especially rugby) and symbols such as the daffodil were mentioned by people living in the area. Additionally, volunteering was also highlighted as an important factor contributing to cultural well-being.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council manages two libraries; one is located in the town centre and the other in Skewen. Also, there is one community managed library, located in Briton Ferry. In Neath itself there are 167 listed buildings.

There are a number of sports and leisure facilities in the area, including a 25m swimming pool. There are currently 38 playgrounds in the Neath community area; 34 of these have fixed play equipment, 24 parks have green spaces (which range from informal amenity areas to woodland) while three parks are equipped with a Multi-Use Games Area. There are a number of other facilities in the area including golf courses in Neath and Jersey Marine.

Three historic parks and gardens are also located in the areas; Gnoll Estate Country Park, Victoria Gardens in Neath and Jersey Park in Briton Ferry. In terms of entertainment, Neath provides a cultural hub for the area, including the Cinema in the Gwyn Hall and the Neath Little Theatre, which is a venue for local amateur productions.

With regards to the Welsh language, 10.8% (5,449) of residents in Neath can speak Welsh.

Similar to the Port Talbot community area, 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.

Religion is important to some people living in the Neath community area. However, information from the Census shows a decrease in the percentage of people who identified themselves as Christian, from 72% in 2001 to 58% in 2011. During the same period, there was also a noticeable increase in people declaring that they had 'no religion', from 20% to 34%.

In terms of opportunities, a shortage of music venues was highlighted and it was felt the loss of the museum in Neath town centre due to a fire had left a gap in cultural knowledge. Also, people living in the area called for more adult learning, showing a strong desire for learning the Welsh language and more about local culture and heritage.





NEATH PORT TALBOT PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD
WELL-BEING ASSESSMENT

