



# **Blackwood** Placemaking Plan

June 2025

## theurbanists

**Prepared by:** The Urbanists  
**Address:** The Urbanists,  
Westgate House, Womanby Street, Cardiff,  
CF10 1BR  
**Email:** info@theurbanists.net  
**Website:** www.theurbanists.net

**Issue date:** 24.06.2025  
**Drawing status:** FINAL  
**Revision:** B  
**Author:** WP  
**Checked by:** LH



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# 01. Introduction to the Placemaking Plan

## Introduction

With its variety of independent shops, a distinctive local market, and a vibrant night-time economy Blackwood has traditionally been a key retail and leisure destination for the residents of Blackwood and also the wider communities located across the wider mid valleys corridor. However, like other towns across Wales and the UK, Blackwood has faced stern challenges; increased competition from retail parks and a significant rise in online retailing have provided stiff competition to traditional high-street purchasing over the past 15 years. The COVID-19 pandemic closed the high street for large periods, cut off many businesses from their loyal customers, and encouraged the increasing trend for online purchasing. Currently, the ‘cost of living crisis’ and restrictions on public spending are placing further constraints, reducing consumer spending and making it more challenging for existing businesses to reinvest and for the new high street businesses to emerge.

**Despite the challenges faced, Blackwood town centre and its community of businesses and residents have demonstrated incredible resilience, the town continues to remain well-visited. To help the town continue to recover and ultimately thrive, the Blackwood Town Centre Placemaking Plan has been prepared. The plan offers a bespoke place vision for Blackwood based on the shared aspirations of residents, businesses, and the Council. It sets out our ambitions for the town centre in line with the Placemaking Wales Charter and explains the type of bespoke interventions that will be pursued and delivered to ensure Blackwood remains a key destination for current and future generations.**

- Legend:
- Project Location
  - Sub-regional Centre
  - Principal Centre
  - Local Centre
  - City
  - Town
  - Road
  - Railway
  - Train Station
  - Water
  - Park



## Placemaking Policy

**Future Wales: The National Plan 2040** and **Planning Policy Wales** identify placemaking as the means to maximise well-being and create sustainable places. Placemaking is a holistic approach to planning and designing development that considers development opportunities holistically in the context of the local place to ensure they are appropriate to the place and best support the community. In this way placemaking ensures the design and delivery of development that promote people’s prosperity, health, happiness, and well being in the widest sense.

Placemaking is a statutory process in Wales and underpins decision-making to ensure that any new development and investment enhances and builds on the sense of place of our town’s and wider settlements.

In recognition of the important role of placemaking, the **Placemaking Wales Charter** has been introduced in Wales and reflects a commitment by those that practice in development, design and regeneration to support the development of high quality places.

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act** is focussed on improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It requires all public bodies to think more about the long-term, to work better with people and communities and one another, and to work collectively to improve the wellbeing of Wales. The Act identifies seven wellbeing goals to guide action and identifies how public bodies should work.

Sustainable development is central to the Act, and is based on giving equal priority to improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. Each aspect of well-being is as important as the other and it is critical that all four are improved. This approach will ensure that “the needs of the present are met without comprising those of the future”.

Sustainability is also at the core of the Welsh Government’s environment and climate change policies. The **Natural Resources Policy (NRP)** is the second statutory product of the Environment (Wales) Act. The focus of the NRP is the sustainable management of Wales’ natural resources, to maximise their contribution to achieving goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The policy sets out three National Priorities:

- Delivering nature-based solutions
- Increasing renewable energy and resource efficiency
- Taking a place-based approach

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 and Planning Policy Wales requires planning, investment and development to create sustainable places. Sustainable places have the right mix of homes in the right place; include local employment and services; have excellent public transport and active travel infrastructure; and, are green. National policy defines that they also require mixed-use town centres that satisfy local needs.

In recognition of the key role that town centres have in building sustainable places, the Welsh Government has introduced the ‘Town Centre First’ principle. This requires all new major commercial, retail, education, health and public service investment and proposals to be located in town centres. Further, the Welsh Government has established the Transforming Towns funding programme, to enable projects to redevelop and improve town centres and nearby areas.

The Blackwood Placemaking Plan has been developed in accordance with national policy and legislation and advances this agenda, setting out the pathway for investment and ensuring that Blackwood Town Centre is a sustainable place that serves the needs of its wider community.



Bus Station.



Area of High Street at the top of Hall Street steps.



Blackwood Miner’s Institute.



The Market Place.

## Placemaking Plans

Placemaking Plans are an integral tool to ensure that best placemaking practices are used as part of the statutory process in the future development of places, such as Blackwood. They are particularly important to the future success of town centres throughout Wales and the rest of the UK, as they offer an opportunity to develop a ‘plan of action’ and ‘blueprint’ for local centres, which are place-specific and address the needs of local residents and visitors; as well as highlighting unique opportunities that will help the place thrive.

The overall Placemaking Plan ambition described above aligns with Welsh Government’s ‘Town Centre First Principle’ which identifies town centres and High Streets for priority investment. Successful Placemaking Plans are able to set an agreed place vision for a town centre which is supported by stakeholders, with an opportunity for the community to engage and inform the plan, whilst also being used to deliver investment that enhances diversity, resilience and increases vitality.

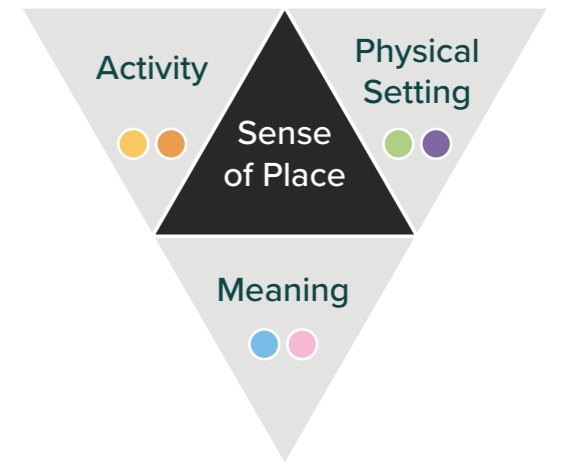
### The Placemaking Wales Charter

In 2020 Welsh Government and the Design Commission for Wales, in collaboration with the Placemaking Wales Partnership, developed the Wales Placemaking Charter.

The Charter provides advice for placemaking practice that can be applied to the preparation of Placemaking Plans; builds on the strengthening focus on Placemaking in policy and practice in Wales and aims to provide an overview of the range of considerations that go into placemaking; it promotes the creation of vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive communities across Wales by focusing on the quality and design of the places where people live, work, and play. The charter outlines six placemaking principles that cover the range of considerations that contribute to establishing and maintaining good places.

To help shape best practice, the Charter promotes the use of six placemaking principles: People and Community; Movement; Public Realm; Location; Mix of Uses; and Identity. The principles are shown below alongside a detailed summary of the aspiration for each.

The Blackwood Placemaking Plan has been prepared in accordance with these principles and has have been used to structure the document; informing the place analysis, vision for the town centre and shaped the intervention areas and key projects that have been identified.



The diagram above shows how the placemaking principles, identified in the *Wales Placemaking Guide (2020)* document, collectively contributes towards the creation of a better sense of place and high-quality environment for all.

## WALES PLACEMAKING GUIDE PRINCIPLES

### PHYSICAL SETTING



#### Movement

Walking, cycling and public transport are prioritised to provide a choice of transport modes and avoid dependence on private vehicles. Well designed and safe active travel routes connect to the wider active travel network and public transport stations and stops are positively integrated.

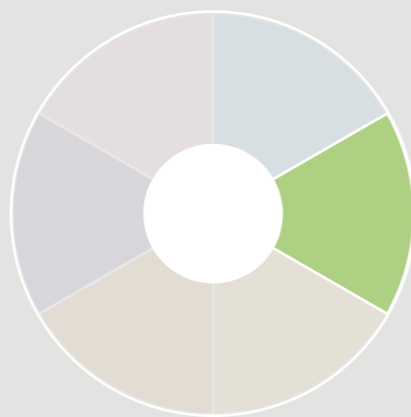
### ACTIVITY



#### Mix of Uses

Places have a range of purposes which provide opportunities for community development, local business growth and access to jobs, services and facilities via walking, cycling or public transport. Development density and a mix of uses and tenures helps to support a diverse community and vibrant public realm.

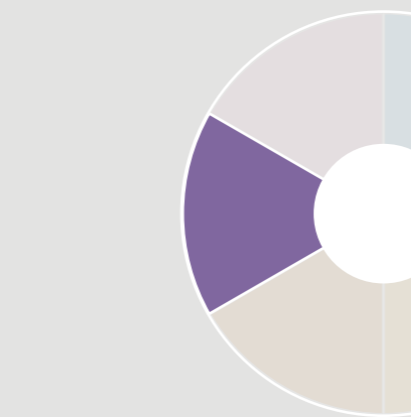
### MEANING



#### Location

Places should grow and develop in a way that uses land efficiently, supports and enhances existing places and is well connected. The location of housing, employment and leisure and other facilities are planned to help reduce the need to travel.

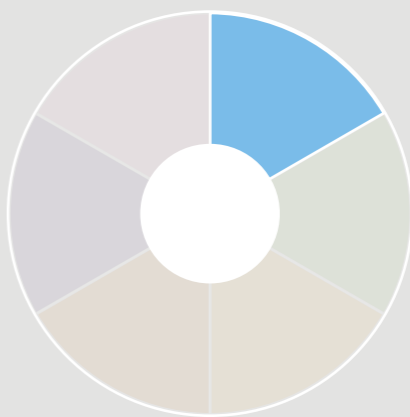
### PHYSICAL SETTING



#### Public Realm

Streets and public spaces are well defined, welcoming, safe and inclusive, with a distinct identity. They are designed to be robust and adaptable, with landscape, green infrastructure and sustainable drainage well integrated. They are well connected to existing places and promote opportunities for social interaction and a range of activities.

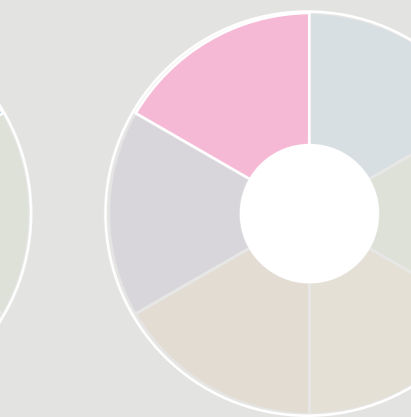
### ACTIVITY



#### People and Community

The local community is involved in the development of proposals. The needs, aspirations, health and well-being of all people are considered at the outset. Proposals are shaped to help to meet these needs as well as creating, integrating, protecting and/or enhancing a sense of community and to promote equality.

### PHYSICAL SETTING



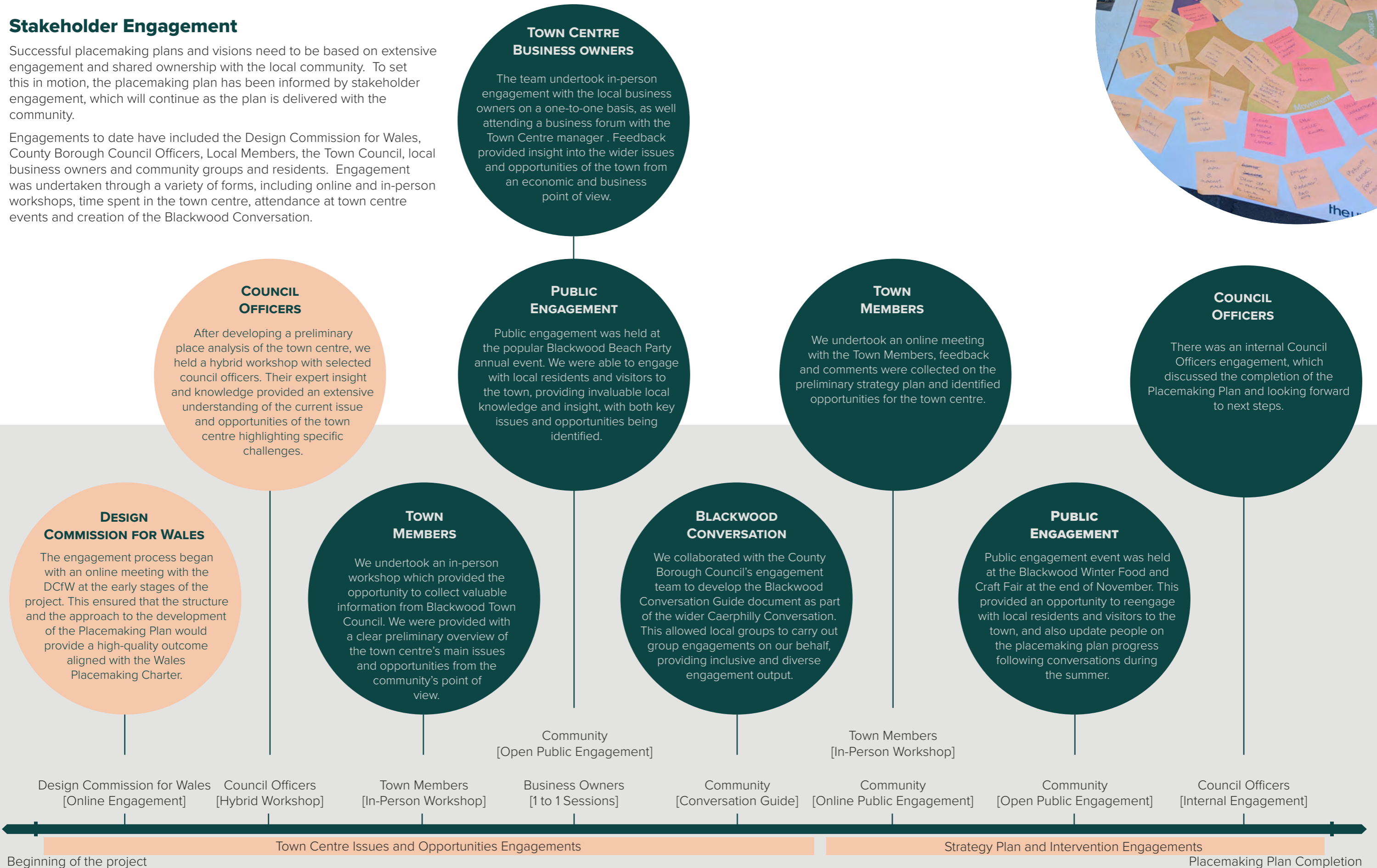
#### Identity

The positive, distinctive qualities of existing places are valued and respected. The unique features and opportunities of a location including heritage, culture, language, built and natural physical attributes are identified and responded to.

## Stakeholder Engagement

Successful placemaking plans and visions need to be based on extensive engagement and shared ownership with the local community. To set this in motion, the placemaking plan has been informed by stakeholder engagement, which will continue as the plan is delivered with the community.

Engagements to date have included the Design Commission for Wales, County Borough Council Officers, Local Members, the Town Council, local business owners and community groups and residents. Engagement was undertaken through a variety of forms, including online and in-person workshops, time spent in the town centre, attendance at town centre events and creation of the Blackwood Conversation.



## 02. Introducing Blackwood



## 02. Strategic and Regional Importance

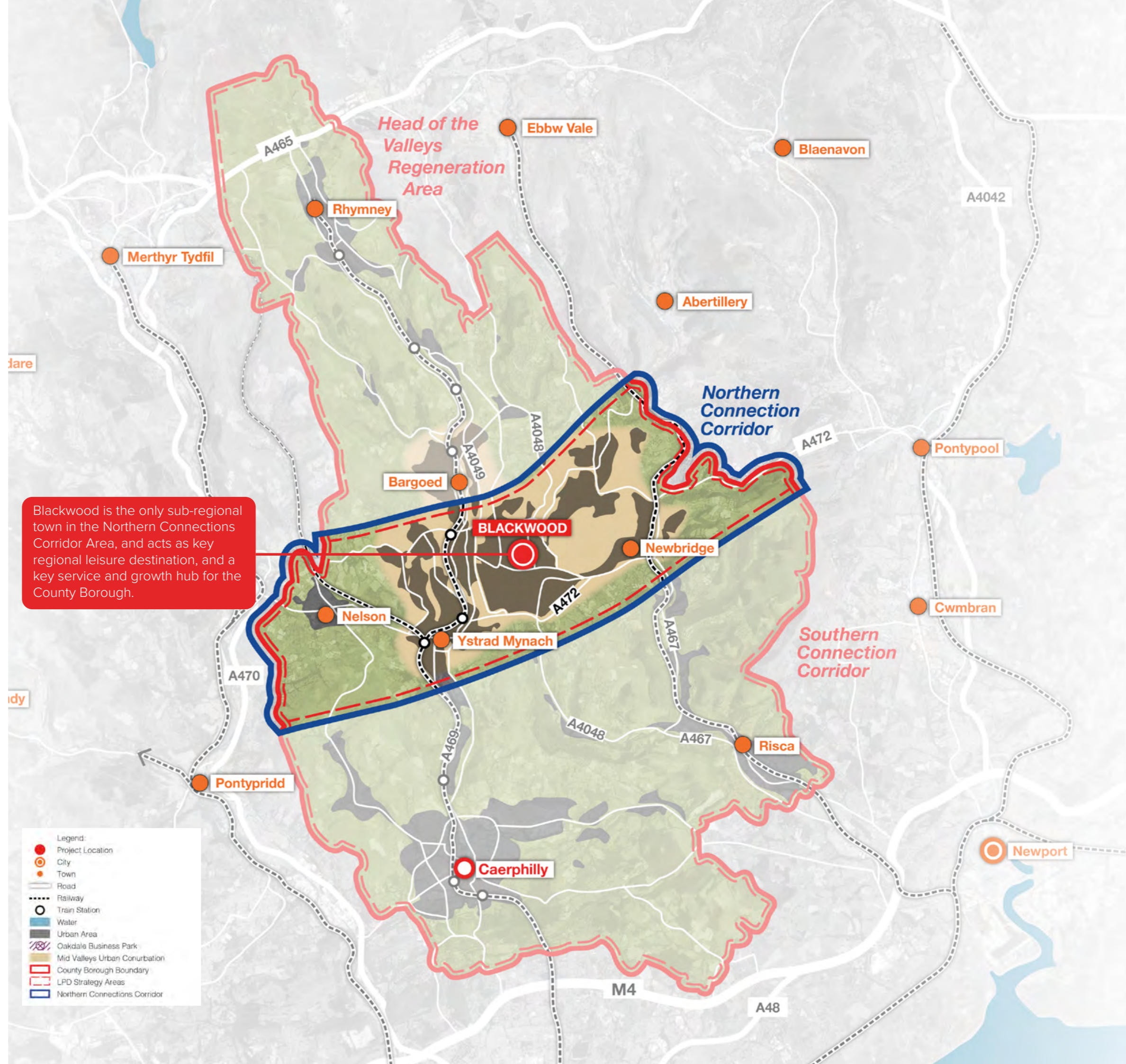
### County Borough Importance

Blackwood is located centrally in the mid-valleys area of Caerphilly County Borough and the town centre is a sub-regional town along with Caerphilly town centre. The status of sub-regional town is based on Blackwood's population number, the wider catchment it serves, and the mix of retail, leisure and service uses located in the centre.

Blackwood is the main town in the Upper Connections Corridor of the Development Plan, but it is located near other principal towns, including Ystrad Mynach to the west and Bargoed, the principal town for the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area, to the north-west. It is also located close to the local centres of Nelson and Newbridge which are located in the west and east of the Upper Connections Corridor respectively.

Blackwood's location in the mid valleys area and the Upper Connections Corridor spatial development area means it is strategically located and performs an important role in connecting the County Borough. The A472 serves the town directly and connects the town, via the A469, A4048, A4049, and A467, to the Rhymney, Sirhowy and Ebbw Valleys to the north, Ystrad Mynach and Caerphilly to the south, and Risca and Newport to the south-east. Blackwood is well connected by bus, historically it has benefitted from a bus service to Newport every 15 minutes that visits key local settlements in the east of the Upper Connections Corridor and Southern Connections Corridor en route. It is also served by a series of wider local services that connect it to the northern settlements in the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area (specifically the Rhymney, Sirhowy and Ebbw valleys) and the well-populated settlements in the west of the Southern Connection Corridor. A new strategic bus station has recently been built in Blackwood in recognition of its important connecting role for the County Borough and wider Capital City Region.

Blackwood does not have a railway station; the nearest is Pengam Railway Station which is located approximately 1.8 miles to the west and Hengoed Railway Station located approximately 3.8 miles to the southwest. The absence of railway stations emphasises the importance of Blackwood as a sub-regional town and the critical role it performs to the local catchment that is also not connected by rail.



## Role of the Towns within the County Borough

In preparing placemaking plans for the County Borough's town centres it is important to recognise the unique attributes of each and the key functions that they have evolved. These create opportunities to shape the future of each town and also ensure that complementary roles are prioritised so that all towns can flourish.

Caerphilly and Blackwood are the largest towns in the County Borough and due to their population, catchment and mix of uses are the key sub regional towns that are strategically important to the County Borough. Each of the town's has unique opportunities and due to their location in the Northern and Southern Connection Corridors respectively have the opportunity to grow in a complementary fashion. Caerphilly has the potential to become a national tourism destination in addition to being a key leisure and service hub for the extensive residential community. Blackwood meanwhile does not have the same heritage offer but it has a significant catchment that is due to grow further, is located in the strategically important northern connections corridor which provides a west/east transport connection through the mid-Capital City Region and is a recognised regional leisure destination.

Although Blackwood is classified as a sub-regional town, sub-regional towns can vary in size and complexity. As a result, Blackwood is largely considered a Principal Settlement with a Principal Retail Centre serving it. Supporting the regional towns are the principal towns of Risca, Ystrad Mynach, and Bargoed. These towns have smaller populations and catchments but provide key retail, leisure, and service functions to their communities and the communities in adjacent residential settlements. Each again as a unique role and function with Ystrad Mynach being the Civic Heart of the County Borough, Risca acting as the key hub for the growing outdoor and activity tourism offer provided by ongoing investment into Cwmcarn Forest Drive and Monmouthshire Brecon Canal. Bargoed meanwhile is the gateway to and traditional service centre for the upper Rhymney Valley and the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area.

The remaining towns are local centres that provide

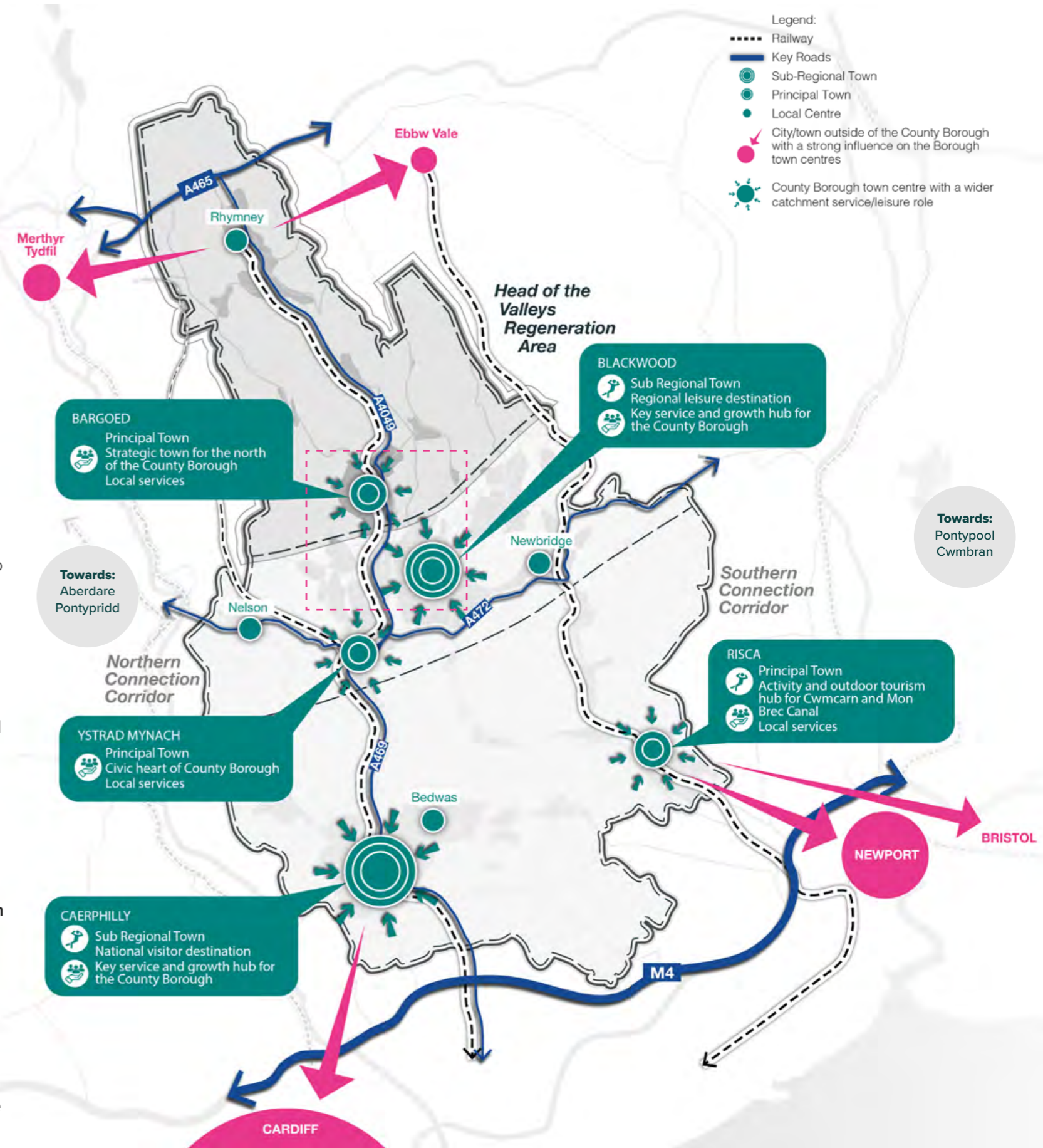
important everyday uses to the local communities. The population and catchments in these centres are much smaller and the extent and depth of the retail, leisure, and service offered reflect that. They perform a supplementary role to the principal and sub-regional towns.

### Proximity, Connectivity and Function

While Blackwood, Bargoed and Ystrad Mynach are located relatively close together, the geography of the valleys, the history of each town, and the significant local populations and catchments they serve means they have traditionally functioned independently. **Blackwood and Bargoed in particular appear geographically close (1.75 miles directly), but their strategic location as the gateways to the upper Sirhowy and Rhymney Valleys means they are not as easy to travel between as they appear.** Highway links between the two either navigate the steep topography of the Sirhowy and Rhymney valleys or detour back towards the strategic highway links of Ystrad Mynach. This means that while it is relatively easy to travel between the two by private vehicle traveling by bus can take over 30 minutes. Rail travel between the two is not possible.

In light of these factors, each town must be able to sustain the local population and wider valley communities and the unique roles of each help to provide a focus point for the type of investment and change that will be pursued.

However, it is also important to recognise that not all towns can be the same and have the same mix of uses and services and that the different socioeconomic profiles of each town need to inform the scale of placemaking interventions that are taken. The focus for principal towns like Blackwood and Ystrad Mynach is for consolidation and strengthening to create a sustainable local offer that supports the health, wellbeing, and vitality of the communities they serve. For the sub-regional towns there are opportunities to deliver a scale of investment that serves the residents of the town and the wider area of the County Borough. This opportunity exists for Blackwood to be the primary retail, leisure and service destination in the Mid Valleys and also the Heads of the Valleys areas.



## Strategic Context: Summary of Objectives and Priorities

The **Economic and Regeneration Strategy (April 2025)** and **Greater Blackwood Masterplan (April 2024)** both outline key development and regeneration opportunities across the Greater Blackwood area. **Their goals are to strengthen the local economy while enhancing the cultural, environmental, and social well-being of both residents and visitors.**

The **new Economic Regeneration Strategy** for Caerphilly County Borough is intended to “Nurture Future Success” and guide local economic growth to 2035. It builds on the previous strategy which provided the Foundation for Success and has directed local economic priorities since 2018.

The Strategy is structured around a clear Vision for the future of Caerphilly County Borough with action driven through three distinct but interlinked Strategic Themes of:

- People
- Place
- Prosperity

The Strategy was adopted in April 2025 and incorporates a longer-term approach to cover the next 10 years, which aligns to the Placemaking Plans for Blackwood. Each theme is guided by the overarching objectives of sustainability and connectivity and compliments the Council’s Corporate Plan.

**The Masterplan covers the Greater Blackwood area**, including the Principal Town Centre as Blackwood and then three neighbourhood centres: Cefn Fforest, Crumlin, and Oakdale. It encompasses the electoral wards of Blackwood, Cefn Fforest & Pengam, Crumlin, Maesycwmmmer, Penmaen, and Pontllanfraith.

While some projects may be delivered in the short term, others are anticipated to take over five years to complete. In addition to setting out general development priorities, the Masterplan identifies specific sites for protection, development, or redevelopment. It supports housing growth in sustainable locations and encourages activity across business, leisure, education, and tourism sectors. **A key ambition is to establish Blackwood as a sub-regional centre that is well-connected both within the Masterplan area and to the wider Caerphilly County Borough.**

**The Masterplan is underpinned by a vision and set of objectives, which are also reflected in the Blackwood Placemaking Plan**, including:

- Transforming Blackwood into a vibrant town centre - An attractive, prosperous destination for living, working, and leisure, with an active day and night-time economy.
- Establishing Blackwood as a commercial hub - Attracting investment by promoting its strengths to businesses and developers.
- Diversifying the local economy - Fostering a robust, varied economic base.
- Improving transport links - Enhancing connectivity within Greater Blackwood and to surrounding areas.

Adopted by Caerphilly County Borough Council in April 2024, the Masterplan will inform the emerging Local Development Plan. It will also guide stakeholder engagement on key themes including site proposals, green infrastructure, transport improvements, and broader policy development in areas such as placemaking and housing delivery.

The following table sets out the Masterplan’s core strategies that are explicitly relevant to the Placemaking Plan, with an overview of their intended outcomes.

Development Strategy	Intended Outcomes
<b>Blackwood Town Centre</b>	Develop Blackwood into a lively, attractive destination for residents and visitors. Support a mix of uses (retail, food & drink, culture, leisure) that create a day-to-night economy. Improve the public realm and encourage community events to increase footfall and engagement.
<b>Economic Growth &amp; Business</b>	Position Blackwood as a key commercial centre by creating conditions that attract businesses and support local enterprise. Encourage flexible workspaces, support start-ups and improve digital infrastructure.
<b>Housing Growth in Sustainable Locations</b>	Deliver a mix of housing types in locations that are well connected and environmentally sustainable. Focus on affordability, housing choice, and tenure diversity. Align new homes with infrastructure provision, especially active travel and public transport.
<b>Connectivity &amp; Transport Improvements</b>	Improve connections within the Greater Blackwood area and to the wider region. Support enhancements to bus networks, walking and cycling routes.
<b>Enhanced Green Infrastructure</b>	Integrate green infrastructure into new developments and public realm upgrades. Ensure access to quality open spaces to support health, well-being, and climate resilience.
<b>Culture &amp; Leisure Development</b>	Expand Blackwood’s offer as a cultural and leisure destination. Invest in community facilities, heritage assets, and events.
<b>Placemaking &amp; Design Quality</b>	Ensure all development contributes positively to the identity and character of Blackwood and its neighbourhoods. Apply placemaking principles that prioritise people, quality design, accessibility, and sustainability. Embed Welsh Government design guidance.

## The History of Blackwood

Blackwood's has a rich industrial heritage associated with the mining industry. That legacy can be seen today in the existing Miner's Institute, an important facility and cultural destination for the town. Blackwood also played a key role in the Chartist movement in South Wales and was a key centre of Chartist organisation in the 1830s. In remembrance of this role, the Chartist Bridge and the impressive 26ft tall Chartist monument that depicts a worker striding towards Newport, provide a distinctive welcome into the north of the town.

In the latter part of the 20th century, the decline of the coal mining industry affected Blackwood. Like wider settlements located across the South Wales coalfield area, coal mining and the associated industries provided a large source of employment for the local population and the decline and subsequently loss of the industry had a significant impact on the local economy and the prosperity of the town. A gradual transition to jobs in the manufacturing, light industrial, and service sectors has since occurred, with state funding helping to secure premises and deliver plant to incentivise companies, and construct the strategic highway network that now serves Blackwood and gives good connectivity to the wider Capital City Region. There are a number of smaller-scale light industrial, manufacturing, and business premises located across the wider Blackwood settlement, and the large Oakdale Business Park and Pen Y Fan Industrial Estate are located 2.5 miles to the east.

The town has traditionally been a popular retail and leisure destination for residents and those of neighbouring towns and villages, playing an important strategic role in the mid valleys area of the County Borough. Over the years High Street has been home to many independent shops and businesses and there has been a popular outdoor market, which is still in operation weekly. The Maxime, Blackwood's independent five-screen cinema, was purpose-built in 1938, and following its use as a bingo hall, is now once again a thriving local attraction, which is popular with the local communities but also draws visitors from across the wider Capital City Region.

Today Blackwood has a population of 8,100 (Census 2021) and the town centre continues to act as an important retail and service destination for that

population and the wider catchment of the mid valleys. In recent years there have been several retail developments delivered in the town, including the Market Place in the middle of the town centre, and a series of large retail units along the eastern edge of the town centre which are accessed off Cliff Road and have large parking areas.

The Miners Institute remains a popular local destination, and the town is synonymous with Manic Street Preachers, being the hometown of the founding band members.



Chartist Bridge and Statue

## Socio-Economic Snapshot

### Demographic



Blackwood has a predominantly older demographic with 26.1% of the local population being under 24 years old.

### Deprivation

54.7% of households were experiencing deprivation, surpassing the Welsh average of 54.1%



### Employment Statistics

53.7% of the local population is economically active.



59.0% travel to work by car

1.2% travel to work by bus

0.8% travel to work by train

0.3% travel to work by bike

The most popular commuting destinations are Cardiff, Newport and Ystrad Mynach.

### Education

22.8% of individuals aged 16 and over lack formal qualifications.



27.1% have attained degree and higher degree qualifications.

## **03. Blackwood Town Centre Today**

### 03. The Town Centre Today

## Blackwood Settlement

Blackwood town centre is located in the eastern edge of the Blackwood settlement boundary. The wider area of Blackwood has significant residential areas to the west, north and south of the town centre.

Within the wider area there are green spaces and sports clubs including: Blackwood Rugby Club, Blackwood Cricket Club, Cefn Fforest Cricket Club and Blackwood Golf Club. There are a number of educational and community facilities providing provision for the town, such as: Blackwood Primary School, Blackwood Comprehensive School and Plas Mawr Community Centre.

The town centre is characterised by its linear formation from north to south with a prominent level change from west to east and the Sirhowy River running alongside the town centre boundary to the east; although this is separated from the town centre by the road network, including Cliff Road and Hall Road, and a large area of woodland which bounds the riverside which has a steep decline.

The local centre is clearly defined, however both the southern and northern gateways to the area are car-dominated and have a poor public realm and

pedestrian experience. The main retail area is within its traditional setting on the High Street, which is characterised by a mixture of older buildings and newer developments; there are examples of both types which are of poor quality and currently vacant.

There is an active cafe culture within the High Street with several businesses utilising pop-up seating areas, on the wide pavement spaces, for outdoor seating. To the north and south of the local centre there are larger retail parks; with the Asda Superstore to the north and the Home Bargains and Aldi Supermarket to the south. There are also a number of centrally located key assets including the Miner's Institute, Blackwood Library and leisure attractors.

The key public transport hub within Blackwood is the new Bus Station development to the west of the High Street. The bus station is bounded by the large open public space to the north which is used for the outdoor market, and is part of the wider Market Place retail development. This area is connected to the High Street by small alleyways providing a pedestrian connection.

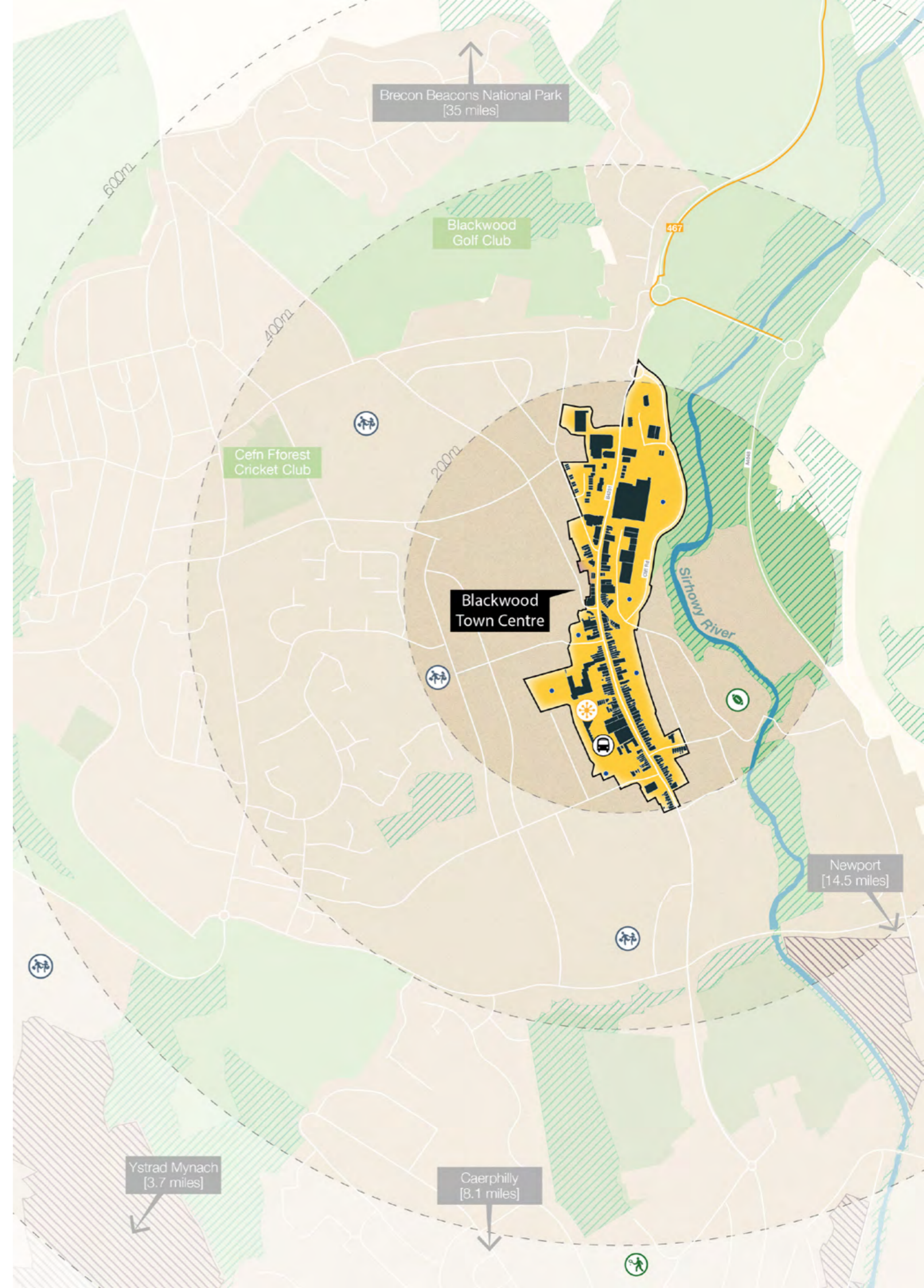


Maxime Cinema



Market Place retail area

<b>Legend:</b>		
Town Centre Boundary	Bus Interchange	Rugby Pitch
Settlement	Town Centre Buildings	Leisure Centre
Roads	Water	Car Park
National Cycle Route	Green Space	Market square, public space
Bus Interchange	Market square, public space	School



## Commercial Property Context

### National Property Market Conditions

Between 2008-2022 the southeast Wales property market improved after a period of low interest rates boosted all asset classes, including property. The market improvement did not, however, result in new speculative or bespoke developments due to persistent viability issues and reliance on public sector funding. There was a significant change in the autumn of 2022 when the financial markets responded with caution to the UK Government's 'mini budget'. There was a loss in confidence which led to reduced demand alongside reduced construction activity. Inflation also rose significantly, rising above 10% for a time and remaining at 6.8% in July 2023. There are continued concerns over the impact of rising interest rates on the wider economy.

### Energy Efficiency and the EPC Crunch

Since 2008, it has been a legal requirement that whenever a property is built, sold, or rented, an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) is required. The Energy Act 2011 introduced the concept of 'Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards' (MEES) to address the energy efficiency of the existing building stock. This Act introduced a timescale of April 2018 for the introduction of restrictions on lettings of those commercial properties with a poor EPC of F or G (which is understood to account for circa 18% of all UK commercial buildings, higher in the Valleys).

On 1 April 2023 this legislation meant it became unlawful to 'continue to let' commercial premises with an F or G rating – this creates challenges for areas such as the South Wales Valleys, with a higher proportion of older properties. The rules and regulations are however not straightforward with a key exemption if improvements are financially unviable, for example, if they do not pay for themselves through energy cost savings within seven years. The direction of travel is that the EPC standard required for a letting to be authorised will be tightened with an EPC rating of C or higher required by 1 April 2027 and B or better by 2030. This will have an impact upon the Rhymney Valley property market as poor-quality buildings become 'unlettable' and lose rental value and capital value.

### Retail and Leisure Uses in Blackwood

The Local Data Company said there was a net loss of approximately 2,000 retail units across Great Britain in the whole of 2022 and 4,000 in the first six months of 2023. This increase has been attributed to the poor economic conditions facing business owners, the 'cost of living' crisis for shoppers and the final unwinding of pandemic support. The Local Data Company also note there is a rising number of retail units which have been unoccupied for over two years. This context will remain valid for the next few years.

The fastest growing retail subcategories of demand are: fast food; beauty salons; barbers; convenience shops; ice cream parlours; nail salons; bakers; and, bars / cafés. The subcategories in decline are: banks / financial services; fashion shops; newsagents; bookmakers; hairdressers; recruitment agencies; chemists / toiletries; hotels (3 star); estate agents; shoe shops; and, vaping shops; charity shops. The sectors in decline reflect where there is growing online competition but also changing trends. Town centre retail dominance is over, not least due to the rise in out-of-town retail, superstores and online. Therefore, a broader social mix of activities is needed within town centres with residential, flexible enterprise space (easy in, easy out) and complementary retail including coffee shops / fast food / bars, personal services (beauty, barbers) and convenience shopping.

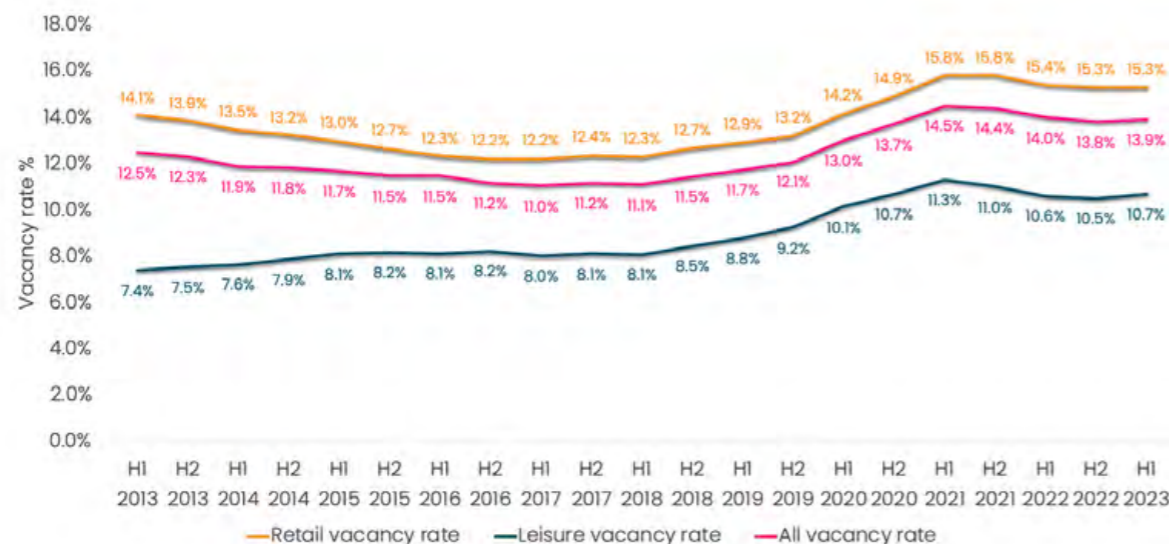
Some local retail has benefitted from increased home working. The value of thinking and acting locally increased during the pandemic period with many people re-assessing their traditional journey to work and reconsidering local accessibility of services, entertainment, leisure, and shopping activities. This in turn perhaps creates more demand for housing within walking distance of town centres.

Local property agents specialising in the local retail market report a subdued property market for high street and suburban retail. **There is, however, limited activity in the following sub-sectors of retail and leisure demand, which could be seen as opportunity areas for retail use in Blackwood:**

- **Convenience retail** – Tesco 'one stop', Co-op etc. A limited number of strong convenience enquiries.
- **Local personal and leisure services** - such as beauty parlour, nail bars, hairdressers, barbers, gyms, tattooists, tanning salons.
- **Café sector** – coffee shops, tea shops, bars, sandwich, and hot food. Likely to be digitally connected and in locations with passing trade.
- **Artisan food retailers** – e.g., speciality bakers, high quality butchers etc.
- **Speciality shops** – there are a small number of high-quality enquiries for non typical sub sections, from angling supplies, florists, and many other uses, which will come through from time to time. These may also be connected to an online presence.

### Employment Uses in Blackwood

Blackwood is not recognised as an office location. There are isolated examples of offices in the upper floors of retail and leisure units and a limited public sector presence through job centres, the Department for Work & Pensions and Council hubs. Across the South Wales Valleys, the business park and out of town office sectors has, in general, had a decade of under-performance with little new floorspace being built. The office market has declined as remote and hybrid work have gained popularity since the pandemic. **Welsh Government 'town centre first' policy, which was adopted in January 2020, provides an opportunity, as it places a focus on town centres to be considered first for the location of significant new commercial facilities, along with retail, education, health, leisure, and public service facilities.**



### Town Centre Retail Uses Analysis

Historically, Blackwood was regarded as one of the strongest retail centres in the Valleys and being a sub-regional town therefore continues to have an important role in providing retail and leisure services to local residents and visitors from neighbouring towns and villages.

However, Blackwood town centre has had major retail park and foodstore developments built in close proximity to the High Street which does attract customers but also brings tough competition to regional and independent traders in the comparison goods sector - currently there are 18 vacant ground floor retail units, equating to a vacancy rate of 10.24%. However other uses which do continue to thrive are those that are not offered in the supermarkets and retail units, including: barbers, nail bars, hot food, cafes, pet shops, bookmakers, and other local services.

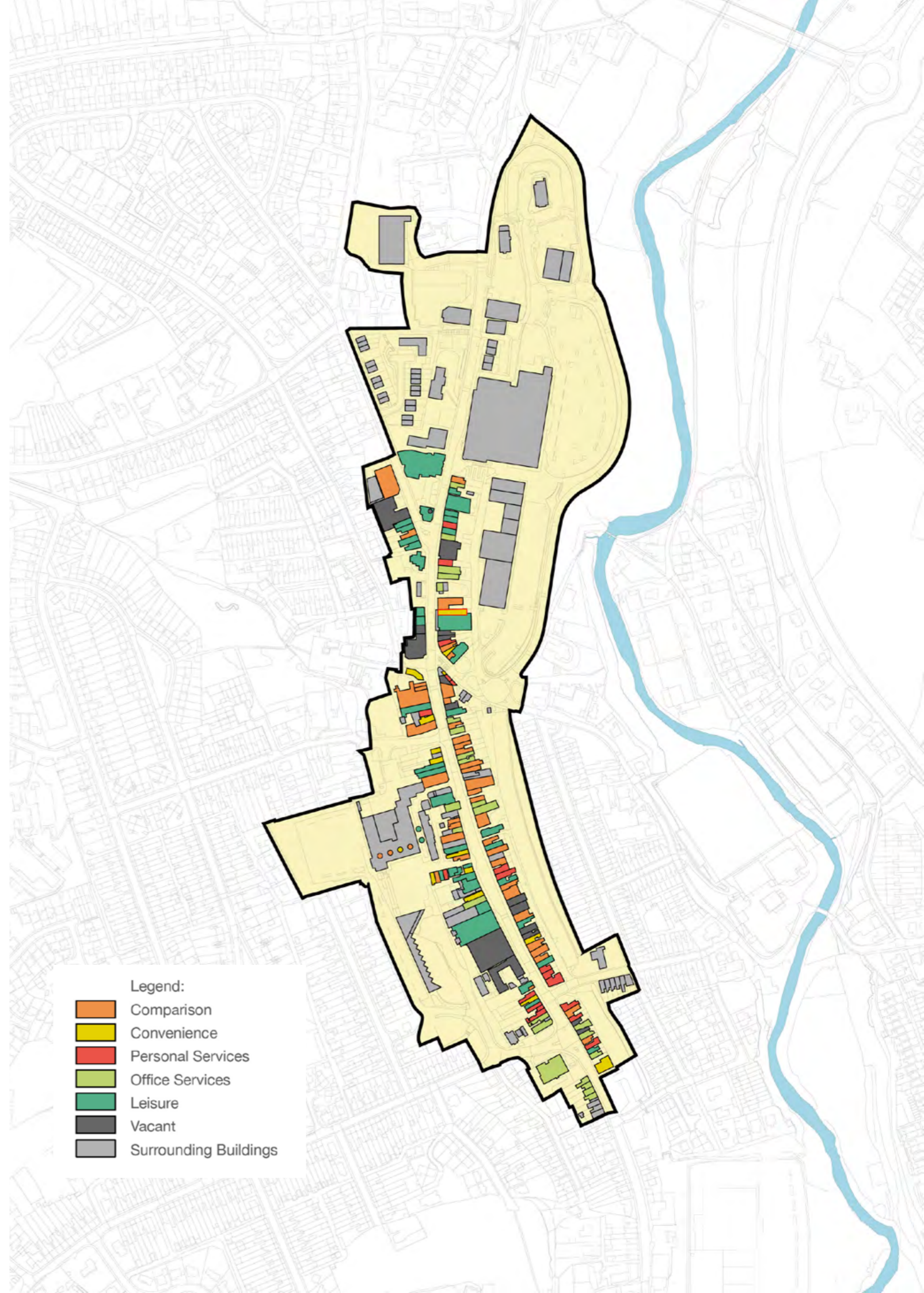
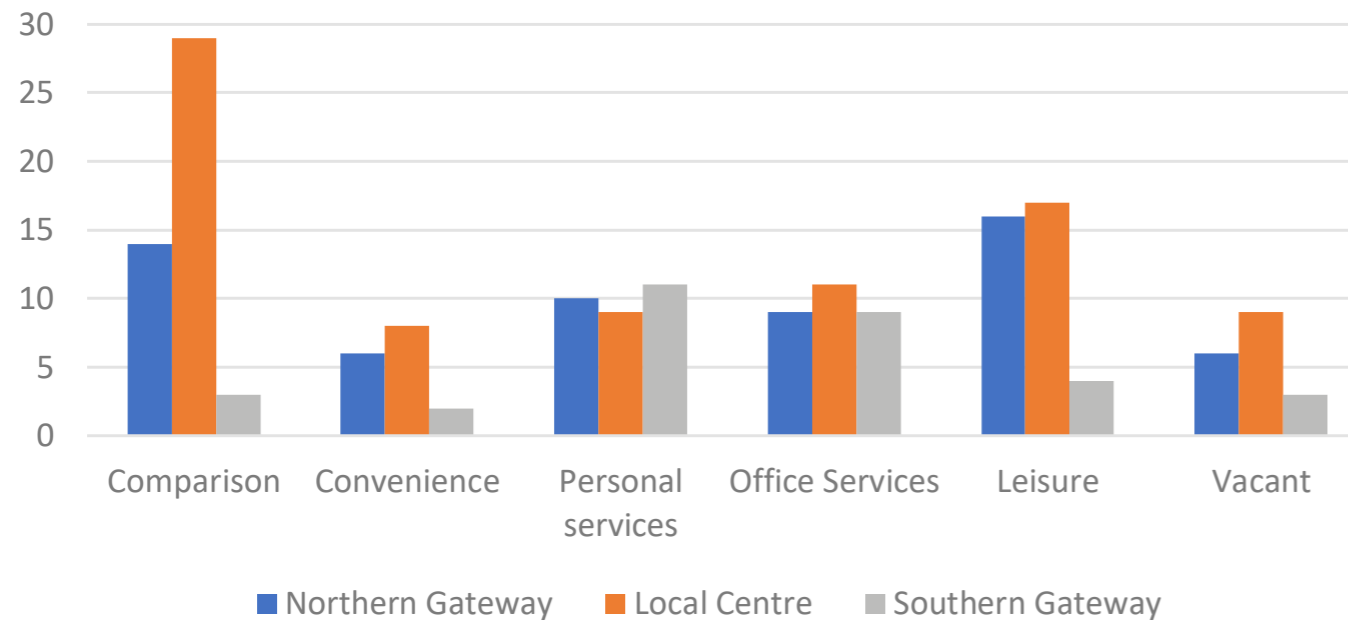
The analysis of retail offer in Blackwood town centre carried out in November 2023\* identified a total of 176 retail units and five main types of retail categories:

- Comparison
- Convenience
- Personal Services
- Office Services
- Leisure

The table and graph below, provides an overview of the type of offer within the town centre. The plan on the side maps provides a visual representations of the data.

Area	Comparison	Convenience	Personal services	Office Services	Leisure	Vacant	Total
Northern Gateway	14	6	10	9	16	6	61
Local Core	29	8	9	11	17	9	83
Southern Gateway	3	2	11	9	4	3	32
	46	16	30	29	37	18	176

\* The table above reflects the businesses in place on Saturday 25 November 2023. The analysis was based on direct observation.





## Town Centre Analysis

### Views of the Community

To help inform an understanding of the town centre today, engagement was undertaken with Local Members and Town Council Members, local businesses and resident and community groups. The method of how engagement was undertaken was described in Section 1. The engagement used each of the Placemaking Charter principles to get the insights of local residents.

#### MOVEMENT

- Enhance visitor navigation with improved **wayfinding** and signage in Blackwood town centre.
- Alleviate **congestion** on the high street, prioritise drop-off zones, and address parking issues.
- Explore payment apps and consider free **parking** during peak times for borough car parks.
- Improve **public transport**, create a walkable local centre, and address bus limitations.
- Enhance **walking routes** for pedestrians, focusing on safety and accessibility.
- Address **accessibility** concerns for older groups, including dangerous crossings.
- Introduce a one-way **vehicular system** in the east car park and pedestrianise High Street at times.
- Improve **cycle safety**, enhance infrastructure, and attract cycling groups.
- Enhance **pedestrian experience** on side streets with safety measures, lighting, and artwork.
- Explore mobility scooter rentals to address **accessibility** and encourage foot traffic toward the library.

#### MIX OF USES

- Develop a thriving **cafe culture**, featuring local roasters on the high street.
- Utilise closed Emily's market for **start-ups**, offering small internal units for businesses.
- Seek a diverse mix of **retail uses**, considering smaller units due to challenges in the online retail landscape.
- Leverage **valuable assets** like the affordable cinema, collaborative efforts with cafes, and cultural contributions from the theatre and Miners Institute.
- Enhance **F&B offerings**, cluster **nightlife establishments** on the high street, and transform Market Place into an evening hub.
- Encourage new **residential developments**, possibly housing for those over 55 or above retail spaces.
- Provide **activities for young people**, such as an indoor skate park, bowling alley, or arcade, and consider additions like Geek Retreat and leisure centres.
- Support the success of the existing **market**, held multiple times a week, especially the popular Friday market, while addressing challenges faced by independent businesses during town events and emphasising the need for better consideration from the council. Additionally, address the need for more doctors' surgeries or a mixed health hub, aligned with increased residential schemes.

#### LOCATION

- Encourage connectivity between **residential developments** and the town centre for economic growth.
- Promote diverse residential development in the town centre for **improved surveillance and inclusivity**.
- Address **limited accessibility** to library services and banking facilities in the local centre.
- Lower business rates to support smaller or **start-up local businesses** in town.
- Utilise online resources for **event promotion** beyond retail offers, such as Facebook groups and an improved local app.
- Consider **geographical factors** and weather for increased footfall, exploring green infrastructure for better shelter.
- Address the perception of Caerphilly receiving more investment despite **consistent footfall**.
- Collaborate with **community groups** like Blackwood Rugby Football Club to organise events and utilise their venue as an affordable alternative to costly options like the Miners Institute.

#### PUBLIC REALM

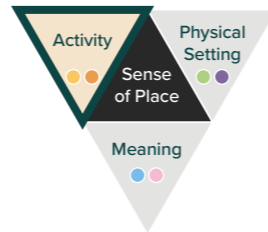
- Integrate **outdoor seating** and repurpose vacant spaces for restaurants on the high street.
- Enhance the **high street** with outdoor seating, greenery, and pedestrian-friendly features.
- Prioritise **pedestrian safety** and library access by transforming **car-dominated** Northern and Southern gateways.
- Make **underutilised public space** between Asda and the high street accessible, especially for older individuals.
- Implement **high street enhancements**, including a one-way road system, seating, and greenery, particularly at gateways.
- Utilise the wide public realm for seating, greenery, and designated spaces to discourage **illegal parking**.
- Introduce **tree planting** for natural shading and overall environmental improvement.
- Address **safety concerns on east-west routes** by widening pavements for pushchairs and wheelchair users.

#### PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

- Library hosts **diverse social groups**, including fortnightly events by Sight Cymru.
- Establish **indoor market** with smaller units for community and business benefits.
- Support **independent shops** for knitters and crafters on the high street.
- Address **anti-social behaviour concerns** among young people at the Northern end of the high street.
- Explore **recreational** options like a bowling alley, arcade, or indoor skate park near the cinema for young children and teenagers.
- Engage with **local schools** to gather input on placemaking plans for **young people**.
- Support **local groups for youth and older individuals**
- Address various challenges, including lack of **public toilet facilities, anti-social behaviour, and safety concerns**, while **promoting community initiatives** like a social club in the Miners' Institute.

#### IDENTITY

- Celebrate key buildings with **architectural significance**, emphasising lighting, as seen in the Miner's Institute.
- Embrace and build on Blackwood's identity as a traditional valley town with **historical** ties to Chartism.
- Recognise the **rich heritage** of the mining community, incorporating public art that resonates with local history.
- Revitalise the **outdoor market** to regain its status as a key part of Blackwood's identity.
- Support **local crafters** with activities and stalls in the indoor market to enhance the town's creative community.
- Encourage the return of **independent shops** for further improvement.



## Town Centre Analysis

### Place Analysis

To further understand the issues and opportunities identified from the stakeholder engagement a physical place analysis was undertaken of the town centre. The analysis was undertaken through each of the Placemaking Wales Charter principles, considering each of the three key aspects of what contributes to Sense of Place; namely Activity, Physical Setting and Meaning.

### Activity

#### Movement

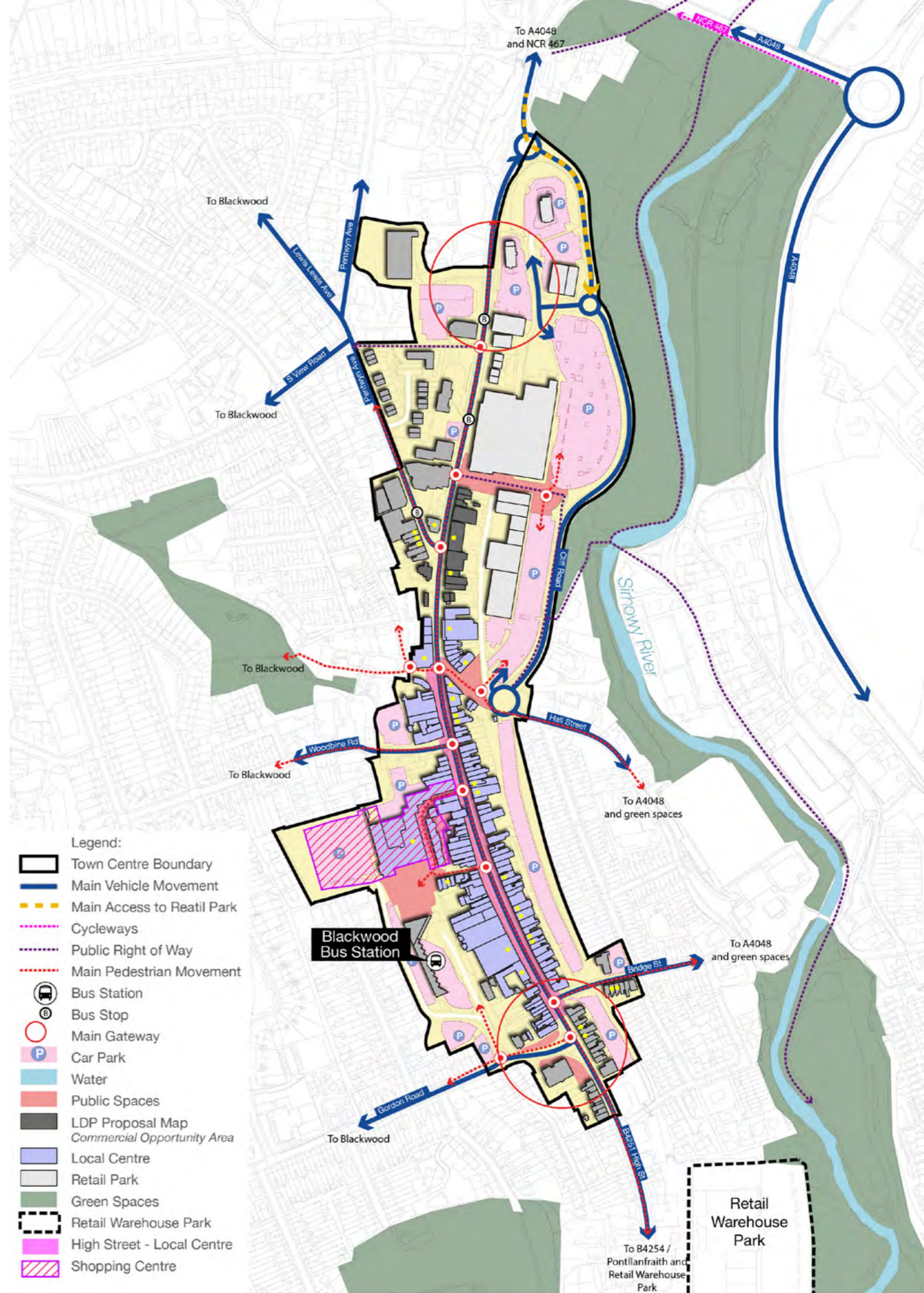
- **Vehicular Movement** - The town can be accessed from the A4048 to the north and from Blackwood to the west. The main vehicular movement runs north to south along the B4254/ High Street with the retail park being accessed from Cliff Road.
- **Parking** - Car parking within the town is dominating the street scene. There are car parks located within the retail park to the north and along and to the rear of the local centre.
- **Public Transport Movement** - The town is well connected by public transport with several bus stops, mainly located to the north, towards the retail park and to the south/west, within the bus station. However, there is no railway station.
- **Pedestrian Movement** - Pedestrian movement throughout the town centre is mainly from the wider residential areas and from parking areas situated at the retail park in the north and car parking areas to the east of the town centre - people parking and walking to the High Street. Pedestrian movement to the southern entrance of the town, where the library is located, is problematic due to the area being characterised by vehicle movement.
- **Active Travel Movement** - There are active travel routes to the east of the town but none within the town centre, with most streets and roads being characterised by vehicle movement and parked cars.
- **Gateways** - There are several pedestrian and vehicular gateways around the town which are mainly dominated by cars and are currently of poor quality.

#### Mix of Uses

- **Retail Park** - The retail park is located to the north east of the site and includes ASDA Superstore, B&M Store, Pets at Home and McDonalds.
- **Commercial Opportunity Area** - As indicated on the LDP Proposal Map areas of Commercial Opportunities have been identified within the intersection between Pentwyn Ave and High Street.
- **Local Centre** - The local centre is located to the south of the High Street and includes several businesses and activities for the community like Cinema, cafes, banking, etc. It also includes the shopping centre to the west of the site, and the library to the southern entrance. The street scene is characterised by vehicle movement, although spacious footpaths to the side of the road are available.
- **Public Spaces** - The town is supported by public spaces, mainly used to access the retail park and the local centre.
- **Vacant Units** - Several vacant units along the High Street and several poor quality buildings are present within the town.
- **Retail Warehouse Park** - Improving the link between the town and the Retail Warehouse Park to the South of the town.

There are 214 businesses across the High Street and 28 confirmed vacancies, with a vacancy rate at around 13.1%.

Blackwood presents an average week footfall of circa 20,660.



### Town Centre Analysis Activity



Mix of uses at Northern Gateway.



Vacant units at Pentwyn Rd junction to High St.



Car dominated roads between Pentwyn Rd and High St.



Pedestrian crossing at High St and shopping centre.



Pedestrian and vehicular movement on High St.



High St parking.



Local market held at entrance to shopping centre.



Vacant units in the Market Place.



Pedestrian path to High St from top of Hall St.



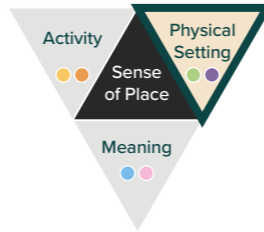
Pedestrian experience at High St and Hall St junction.



Quality of High St scene.

## Town Centre Analysis

### Physical Setting



#### Location

- **Topography** - The town has a significant topographical level change from west to east, with the higher point to the west of the High Street and the lowest point towards the river to the east. The severe and frequent changes of the topography affects the spaces within the town e.g. the steep pedestrian access throughway from Hall Street to the High Street.
- **Facilities** - Several facilities are located within the town, including the Retail Park, the Shopping Centre and the Local Centre.
- **Leisure** - The closest leisure facilities are located to the east and south of the town centre, and are poorly connected to the area.
- **Connectivity** - The connectivity with the surrounding Blackwood settlement is currently mainly car based. Pedestrian and cycle movement are secondary to the car and the quality of those is currently limited. The topography affects the pedestrian and cycle links.
- **Flood Zone** - The town is outside the flood zone areas.
- **Green Infrastructure** - Within the town centre green infrastructure e.g. street planting; is currently limited.

#### Public Realm

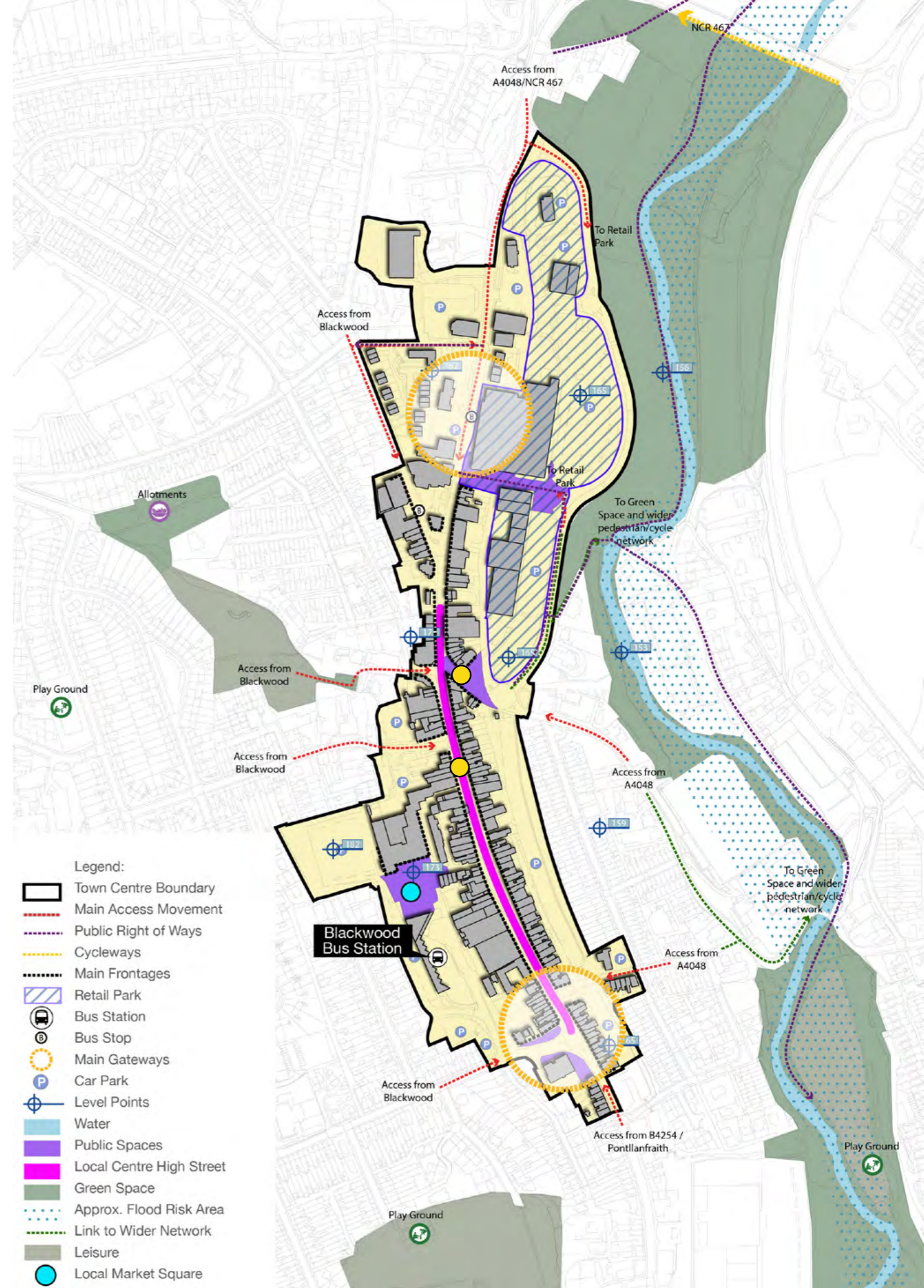
- **Streets** - Streets are currently characterised by vehicle movement, with a lack of spaces for community interaction. There is limited green infrastructure within the streetscape and there are no well defined active travel routes around the town. Connections to existing pedestrian and cycle routes are currently limited. Several poor quality buildings are located within the streetscene along the High Street.
- **Public Spaces** - Public spaces are currently used mainly to access the local centre and the retail park. There are not many spaces for social interaction and the quality of those is currently poor. Landscape is very minimal around those spaces. The local market square holds the Outdoor General Retail Market.
- **Green Spaces** - There are not green spaces within the town. Green spaces are located within the surrounding, mainly located to the east of the site, towards the river. Connections to those are currently poor.
- **Local Centre Gateways** - Gateways into the local centre are not well defined, welcoming, safe and inclusive, they do not have a distinct identity and are mainly characterised by vehicle movement.



Public realm characterised by vehicle movement



Level changes and wide road at Pentwyn Rd junction



## Town Centre Analysis

### Physical Setting



Wide pavements on High St



Market held in public space at entrance to shopping centre



Existing greenspace



Existing seating area.



Pop-up outdoor seating areas on High Street



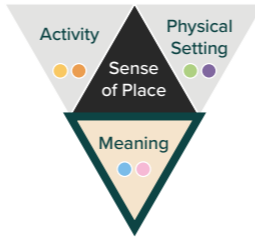
Level change with poor public space and pedestrian route



Pop-up outdoor seating areas and Cafe culture

## Town Centre Analysis

### Meaning



#### People and Community

- **People and Sense of Community** - Despite the lack of green and public spaces and a number of vacant properties, the town centre is an important retail centre for local residents and visitors. Several local services are located within the town and activities such as the outdoor market are an important part of the Blackwood community.
- **Health and Well-Being** - The town is mainly focused on the use of the car, lack of green infrastructure and active travels routes can effect the health and well-being of the residence and the visitors of the town. Link to open spaces are currently poor.
- **Accessibility** - The town is mainly accessible by vehicles and is connected by public transport through bus services and the centrally located Bus Station. Pedestrian and cycle routes are limited and links to the wider network are not well defined. The topography of the town, along with strong presence of vehicular movement, can adversely affect accessibility for various users.

#### Identity

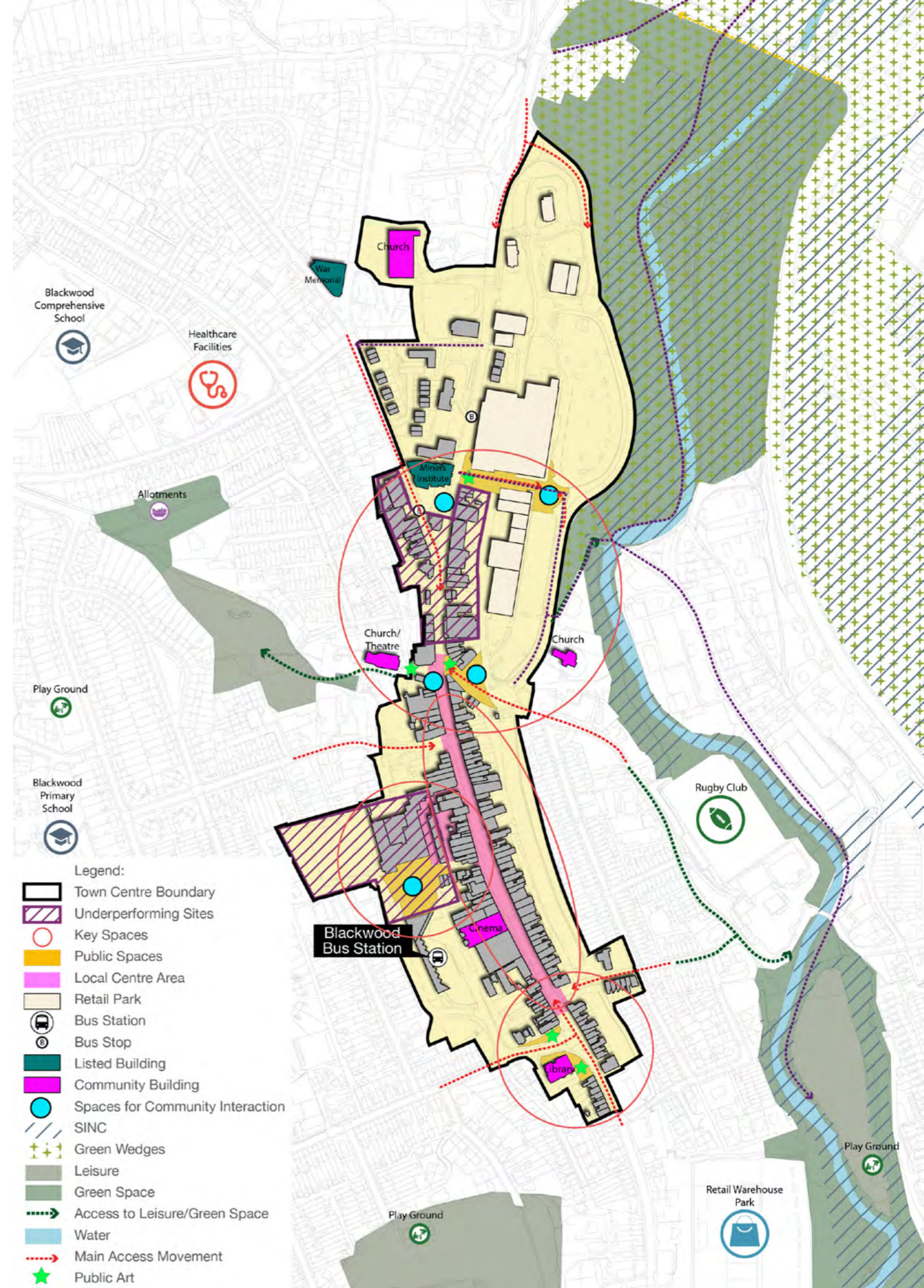
- **Existing Key Places** - Within the site there are several existing key places such as the Market Place and local centre which play an important role within the town. To the east of the site there are green spaces which are classified as SINC and also help to create a distinctive character of the town.
- **Key Community Spaces** - Several community spaces are available within the town like the library, churches, cafes, cinema, theatres and public markets which can be used for social activities. Those spaces are not well connected with the public realm, making them isolated events within the town.
- **Key Buildings** - Several key buildings are located within the town such as the listed Miner's Institute building, located to the north of the town, and the centrally located leisure attractor. These key buildings are not supported by a strong public realm.
- **Public Art** - There are examples of public art within the town, mainly located within key spaces such as the north and south entrances to the town. Public art is important to support the town's identity and heritage e.g. Chartist Statue.



Leisure Attractor



Public Art at southern entrance to town centre



# Town Centre Analysis

## Meaning



Public artwork at northern entrance to town centre



Miners Institute at town centre northern entry point



Theatre



Blackwood Library



Public Art by entrance to Bus Station



Community Public Art



Heritage Plaque



Blackwood Methodist Church



Public Art at the top of Hall St

## **04. Place Vision and Ambitions**



## Placemaking Vision

*To unlock potential and re-establish Blackwood as the sub-regional centre in the heart of the County Borough. Blackwood will be the town that connects north and south and will be the primary destination in the upper County Borough for bespoke retail, high-quality services, and a distinctive leisure offer that is underpinned by the town’s renowned cultural and entertainment attractions and a growing daytime and night-time eating and drinking offer. Blackwood will be a place forged to meet the needs of its loyal customers, while also looking beyond to the needs and wants of the communities in the wider County Borough and Capital City Region. It will provide the platform for its businesses to prosper and be the space that new businesses want to start in.*

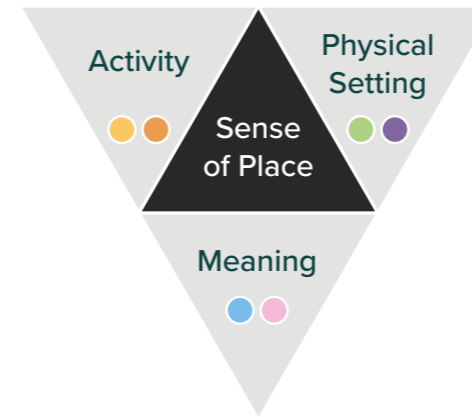


Diagram from the *Wales Placemaking Guide (2020)* document.

The guiding placemaking vision and core ambitions respond directly to the findings of the community engagement and place analysis. The vision sets a long-term destination for Blackwood town centre based on its unique character. The placemaking ambitions identify where change shall be sought in the town centre to deliver the vision.

## Ambitions

PHYSICAL SETTING		ACTIVITY		MEANING	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MOVEMENT</b></p> <p>Create a better quality pedestrian environment that encourages people to stay longer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the physical connections between the bus station, retail park and the high street and local centre area.</li> <li>Provide cycle infrastructure (e.g. secure storage) at key areas within the town centre such as the Bus Station.</li> <li>Improve the connections from town centre to local services e.g. Blackwood Library in the Southern Gateway.</li> <li>Design out and prevent illegal pavement parking within the town centre which adversely affects accessibility for pedestrians.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MIX OF USES</b></p> <p>Build on the commercial strengths of the town, strengthen the retail offer and introduce complementary leisure, service and residential uses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a concentrated food and beverage offer within the local centre.</li> <li>Repurpose and redevelop vacant buildings and sites for new uses e.g. residential development</li> <li>Utilise a key town centre vacant building for a new indoor market for business start-ups, and improve the existing outdoor market.</li> <li>Introduce further community and public service use offer within the town centre, including youth facilities.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LOCATION</b></p> <p>Reinforce the town centre’s status as the heart of Blackwood and the County Borough making it a destination for public service and leisure time and as a place to live.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reuse vacant town centre units to locate highly accessible public and community facilities.</li> <li>Cultivate a stronger leisure offer that has a multi-generational appeal.</li> <li>Deliver high quality sustainable homes in the town centre.</li> <li>Enhance pedestrian connections as much as possible to existing assets and community use ‘hubs’ e.g. Miners Institute and Blackwood Library.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PUBLIC REALM</b></p> <p>Create better entry points to better define the town centre, create a greener public realm also focussed with a safer and pedestrian friendly environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve and expand existing public spaces such as the area between Asda and the Miner’s Institute .</li> <li>Use pedestrian friendly surface treatments and narrow road widths at the new ‘Northern Gateway’ to make a safer, defined and less car-dominated public realm.</li> <li>Consider the viability of street planting to create visual interest, provide shading and shelter within the High Street and improved northern and southern gateways.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY</b></p> <p>Make the town centre a place local people want to be in, and create a stronger multi-generational offer for the community and future generations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide space for the next generation of town centre businesses, including small start-up businesses.</li> <li>Work with the business community and local investors to enhance the town centre’s offer.</li> <li>As part of the proposals to deliver more public and community services in the town centre. Include provisions for youth services.</li> <li>Ensure the existing community and social uses on offer are accessible to visitors and local residents.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>IDENTITY</b></p> <p>Celebrate the Blackwood’s heritage whilst also creating a new identity for the town centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve buildings with architectural merit e.g. new facade lighting design for the Miner’s Institute.</li> <li>Adapt and reuse, or potentially redevelop, existing vacant buildings and sites for new uses which will help improve Blackwood’s reputation as a retail centre.</li> <li>Celebrate and support traditional businesses whilst also enabling new businesses and young people.</li> <li>Build on and celebrate the existing music and arts scene within the town.</li> </ul>

# 05. Placemaking Opportunities

### Town Centre Strategy Plan

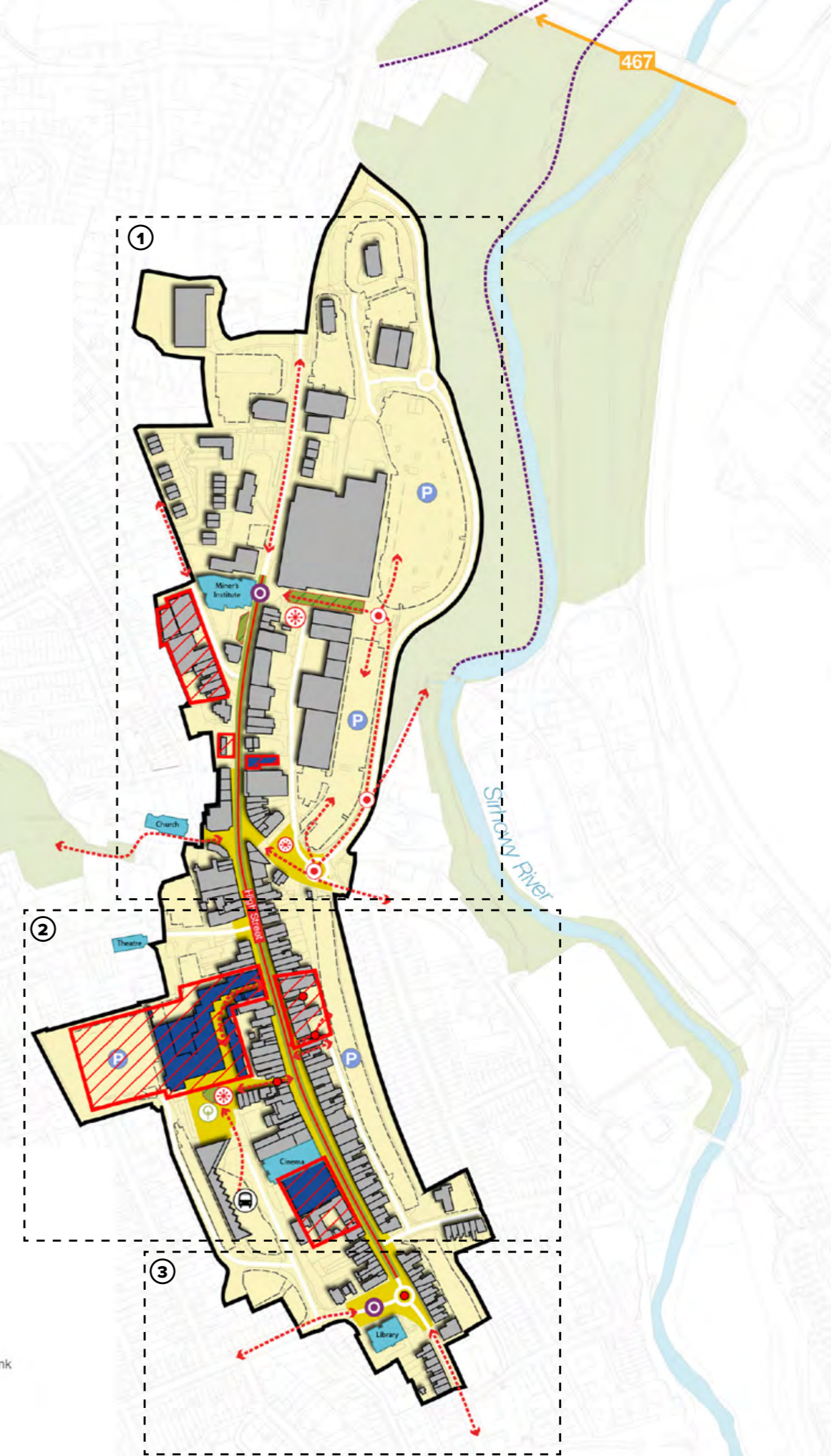
To help deliver the Placemaking vision and ambitions for Blackwood a series of Placemaking opportunities have been identified. Like the vision and ambitions, the opportunities respond directly to the feedback of the community and also the Placemaking analysis and are fully in align with the Placemaking Wales Charter principles. **This section presents the opportunities; they are allocated into three key spatial areas for the town centre: Northern Gateway; Local Centre and Southern Gateway.** A series of town centre wide interventions are also identified below. The tables present the opportunities and identify which of the Charter principles would be met. The associated illustrated plans help to visualise the opportunities. The opportunities shall frame physical projects and investments made into the town centre.

#### Town Centre Wide Interventions

OPPORTUNITIES	FULFILLED AMBITIONS MARKED AGAINST THE WALES PLACEMAKING CHART					
	MOVEMENT	MIX OF USES	LOCATION	PUBLIC REALM	PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY	IDENTITY
Introduce strategically located urban furniture with integrated green and wayfinding elements. To be used to design out illegal parking within the local centre area.	Orange	Light Orange	Light Green	Dark Purple	Light Blue	Light Pink
Refurbishment of a series of vacant and/or underused buildings across the town to introduce new uses and enhance the town character. Proposed new uses to include new residential developments, indoor market/business start-up incubator and leisure uses.	Light Orange	Orange	Light Green	Light Purple	Light Blue	Light Pink
Introduction of shared bike storage across the town. To be strategically placed to connect the areas within the town centre, with main storage area located at the Bus Station.	Orange	Light Orange	Light Green	Light Purple	Light Blue	Light Pink
Improve poor inactive building facades/gable-ends at key gateways and along movement and view corridors creating safe and interesting throughways (e.g. murals, green walls, lighting).	Light Orange	Light Orange	Light Green	Dark Purple	Light Blue	Light Pink
Where applicable widen public realm areas such as pavements and crossing areas to make the town centre an improved pedestrian friendly area overall, and to assist with traffic calming.	Orange	Light Orange	Light Green	Dark Purple	Light Blue	Light Pink

- INTERVENTION AREAS**
1. Northern Gateway.
  2. Local Centre
  3. Southern Gateway

- Legend:**
- Town Centre Boundary
  - Roads
  - Bus Interchange
  - Key Regeneration Area
  - New Key Green Public Space
  - Refurbishment Opportunity
  - Key Building
  - Improved Key Public Space
  - Facade Improvement
  - Improved Existing Pedestrian Link
  - Existing National Cycle Route
  - High Street Greening
  - Walking Routes
  - Greening
  - New Pedestrian Crossing
  - Proposed Public Art/Mural



**05. Placemaking Opportunities**

**Intervention Area 1 - Northern Gateway**

The Northern Gateway area is characterised by a vehicle dominated approach to the town, narrow public realm, underutilised green spaces, retail area which has a number of vacant and poor-quality buildings and the town’s key civic building - the Blackwood Miner’s Institute. There is also a large retail park to the eastern side which is home to an Asda Supermarket and a number of other retail and fast food options.

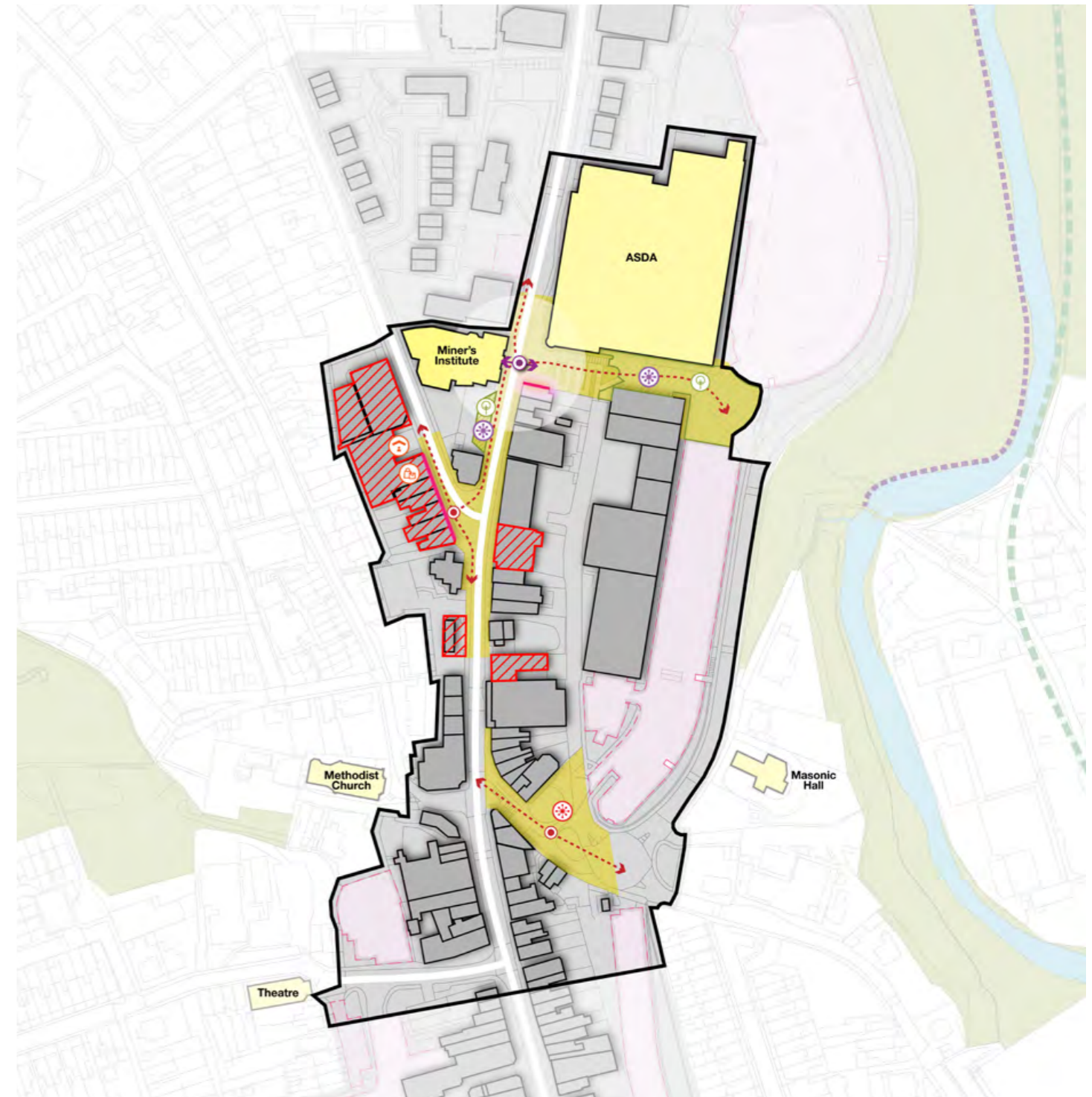
The intervention area plan and the identified interventions listed below aim to transform the northern part of the town into a **welcoming and accessible gateway to the town centre which aims to enhance the use of the Miner’s Institute, create a safer and more enjoyable pedestrian experience, provide new and improved residential and retail units, greener public space and make better use of existing public spaces.**

**Northern Gateway Interventions**

OPPORTUNITIES	FULFILLED AMBITIONS MARKED AGAINST THE WALES PLACEMAKING CHART					
	MOVEMENT	MIX OF USES	LOCATION	PUBLIC REALM	PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY	IDENTITY
Create a key gateway space at northern gateway; creating a sense of arrival, and extend public realm improvements southwards to High Street junctions with Pentwyn Road; as well as enhance the area around the junction of Cefn Road, the High Street and pedestrian connection to Hall Street.	Orange	Orange	Green	Purple	Blue	Pink
Celebrate the Miner’s Institute with new lighting design scheme for the building front facade, and possible building/outdoor area extension southwards, including enhancing green public space to the south.			Green	Purple	Blue	Pink
Create new pedestrian crossing at gateway between Asda Supermarkets public space and Miner’s Institute; use of pedestrian friendly surface treatment materials and traffic calming can be utilised.	Orange			Purple	Blue	
Improve public spaces within Northern Corridor, including: thoroughway between Miner’s Institute and Asda Supermarket public realm improvements; around junction at Pentwyn Road and the High Street; and the public space on Hall Street.	Orange		Green	Purple	Blue	Pink
Opportunity to refurbish a series of vacant and/or underused buildings around the junction of High Street and Pentwyn Road to introduce new uses e.g. residential new build or refurbishment; and improve existing uses e.g. food and beverage businesses.		Orange	Green		Blue	Pink

**Legend:**

- Existing buildings
- Existing Greenspace
- Residential
- Key buildings
- Improved Greenspace
- Greening
- Regeneration Opportunity Area
- Key Public Space
- Gateway
- Improved Public Realm
- Improved/New Key Public Space
- New Pedestrian Crossing
- Proposed Facade Improvement
- Retail
- Extension Boundary
- Pedestrian Movement
- Extend Building



**05. Placemaking Opportunities**

**Intervention Area 2 - Local Centre**

The Blackwood Local Centre intervention area currently consists of the main transport hub for the town, Blackwood Bus Station; as well as the key retail area with high street shopping units, and the large Market Place retail development. Popular amenities include the Cinema, and there is a growing cafe culture within the area which has utilised pop-up outdoor seating areas within the public realm for al fresco seating. However, there are a number of key vacant and low-quality buildings and there continues to be issues with illegal parking.

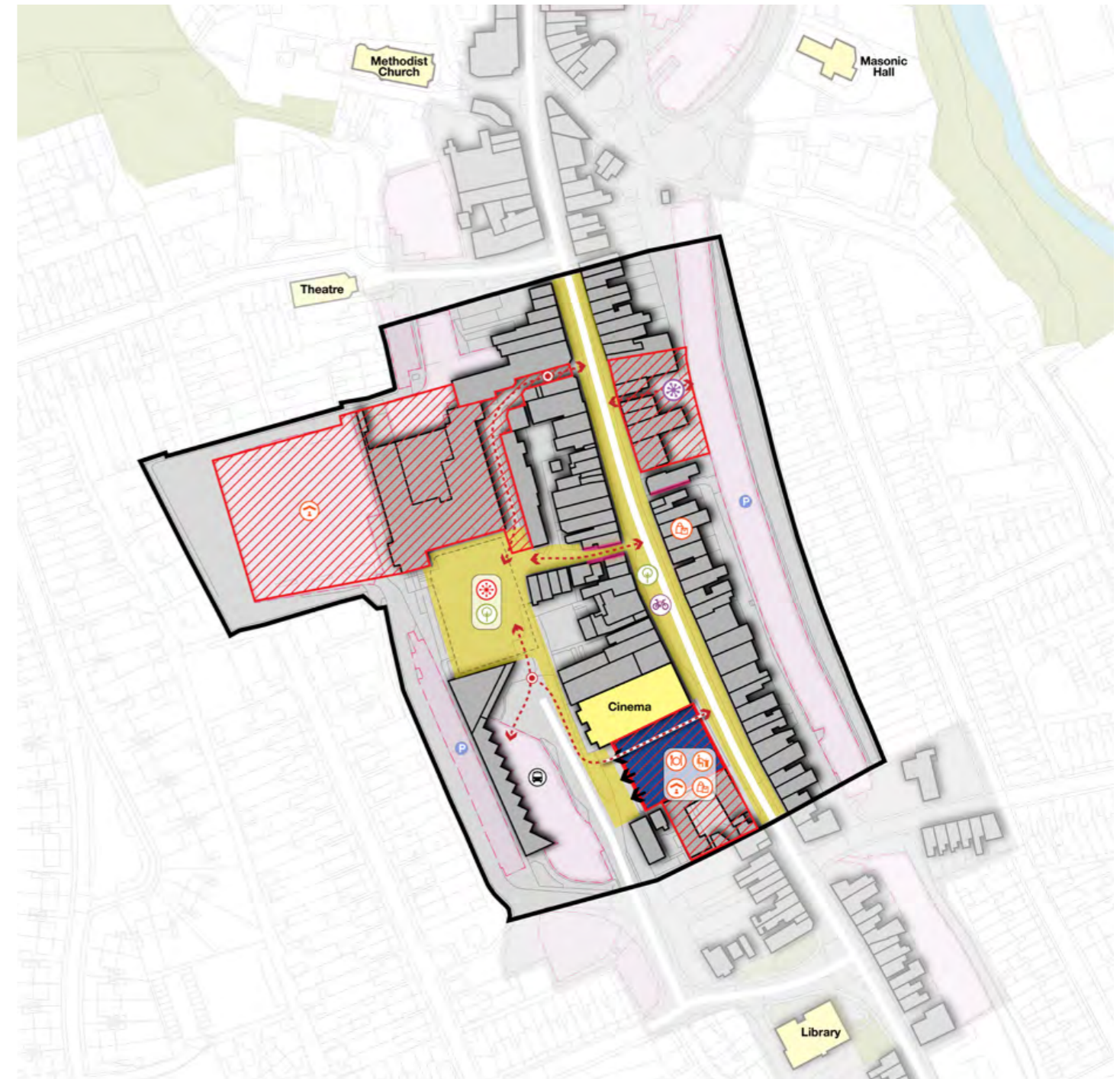
The intervention area plan and the identified interventions listed below aim to improve a key part of the town into and **provide a vibrant and attractive high street with an improved mix of business, residential and community/creative arts uses utilising vacant buildings, as well as providing a better public realm.**

**Local Centre Interventions**

OPPORTUNITIES	FULFILLED AMBITIONS MARKED AGAINST THE WALES PLACEMAKING CHART					
	MOVEMENT	MIX OF USES	LOCATION	PUBLIC REALM	PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY	IDENTITY
Reuse/Redevelop existing vacant building for new uses e.g. small start-up businesses indoor market, arts centre; this would allow smaller local businesses to utilise retail space with lower start-up and running costs.						
Night time economy and offer should be improved with a more concentrated food and beverage offer and varied options.						
Consider use of the Market Place to include change of use, food and beverage offer, leisure and potential residential.						
Enhancements to the public realm around the Bus Station, taxi rank, and the Market Place will create a more pedestrian-friendly environment through landscaping, seating, and improved surfacing. These changes aim to improve movement and encourage footfall within the area and connectivity to the High Street, whilst enhancing the existing outdoor market, providing natural surveillance and aiming to reduce anti-social behaviour.						
Introduce new community activities and uses within the town centre or expand on the popular activities that exist e.g. young people and creative arts groups.						
Series of shopfront improvements along the High Street and within the Market Place with potential to include the refurbishment of upper storeys for residential uses.						

**Legend:**

- Existing buildings
- Existing Greenspace
- Greening
- Key buildings
- Improved Greenspace
- Bike/e-bike Station
- Regeneration Opportunity Area
- Key Public Space
- Improved Key Public Space
- Refurbishment Opportunity
- Retail
- Work space
- Improved Public Realm
- Residential
- Pedestrian Movement
- Proposed Facade Improvement
- Bus station
- Existing parking
- Activate Frontages



**05. Placemaking Opportunities**

**Intervention Area 3 - Southern Gateway**

The Southern Gateway is characterised by a vehicle-dominated environment with wide road network and narrow public realm with unsafe crossing opportunities. The area is home to the key community building - Blackwood Library. This facility provides key public services, community classes and regular banking facilities for the residents of the town, however the library can be difficult to access for elderly and disabled residents and visitors due to limited crossings over busy roads, and the steep access to the building entrance.

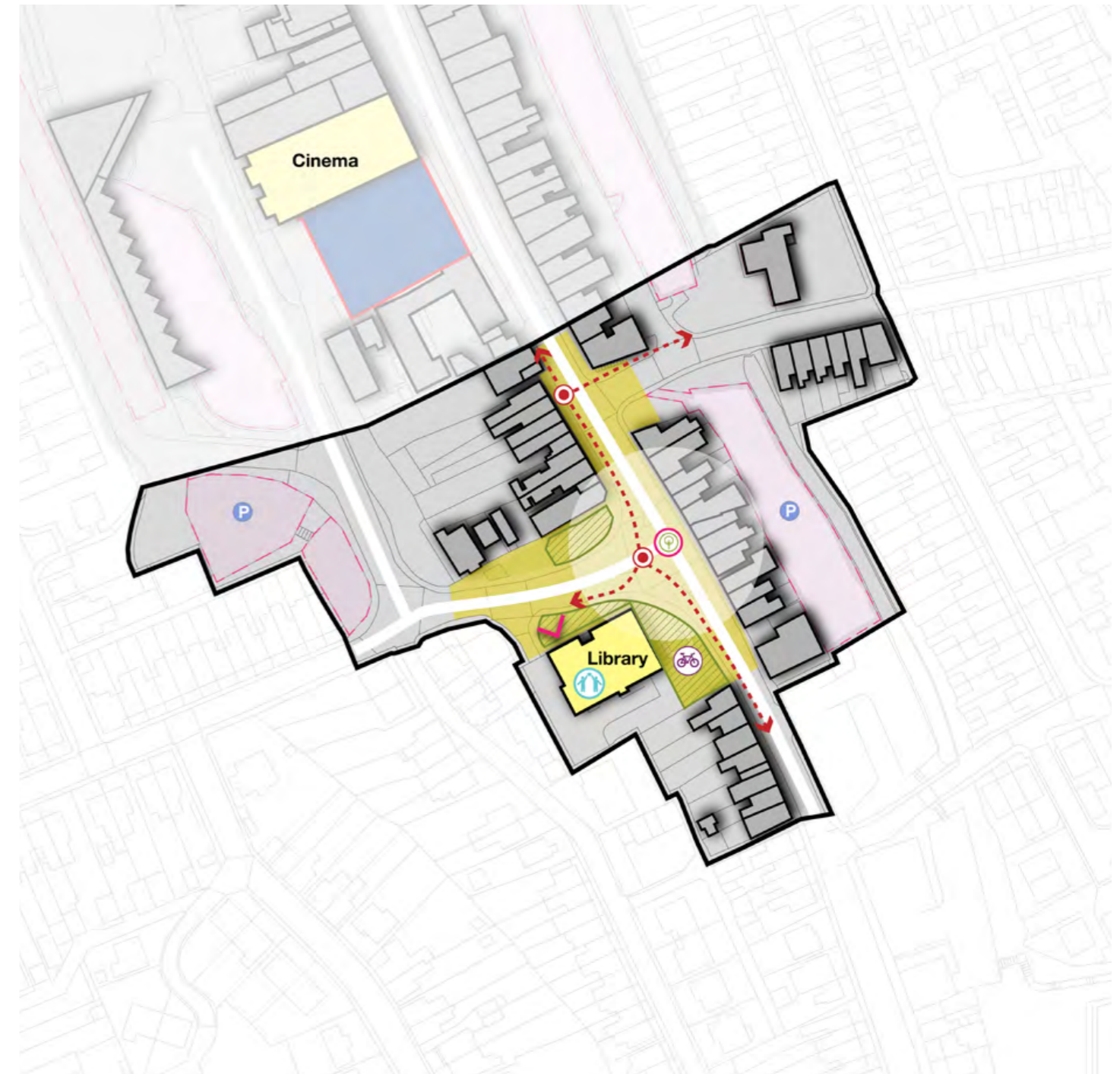
The intervention area plan and the identified interventions listed below aim to create an improved gateway to the town, with a **better-quality and pedestrian friendly public realm and better quality access to the key public services housed within Blackwood Library.**

**Southern Gateway Interventions**

OPPORTUNITIES	FULFILLED AMBITIONS MARKED AGAINST THE WALES PLACEMAKING CHART					
	MOVEMENT	MIX OF USES	LOCATION	PUBLIC REALM	PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY	IDENTITY
Create an improved sense of arrival at the key gateway space to the southern end of the town centre, e.g. public realm and highway improvements and addition of new public artwork opportunities.	Orange	Light Orange	Green	Purple	Blue	Pink
Widen public realm and pavement areas, utilise new surface treatments for car slowing purposes which create a more pedestrian friendly environment at the southern gateway.	Orange	Light Orange	Green	Purple	Blue	Light Pink
Potential to install new crossing to the Library from the High Street, enhancing pedestrian movement between the areas. It also highlights an opportunity to include a new redesigned accessible entrance to the library building.	Orange	Dark Orange	Green	Purple	Blue	Light Pink

**Legend:**

- Existing buildings
- Key buildings
- Pedestrian Movement
- Existing Greenspace
- Improved Greenspace
- Improved Public Realm
- 🚲 Bike/e-bike Station
- 🚌 Bus station
- P Existing parking
- ↑ Community Services
- ⊕ Gateway
- 🌿 Green Infrastructure Artwork
- Improved Entrance



# 06. Conclusion

## Conclusion

Blackwood town centre has faced significant challenges in recent years, navigating difficulties within the retail sector and overcoming setbacks that have impacted local businesses. While challenges remain, there are reasons for optimism as Blackwood continues to evolve and strengthen its town centre. The Placemaking Plan aims to support that evolution, fostering a stronger, more resilient town centre for the future.

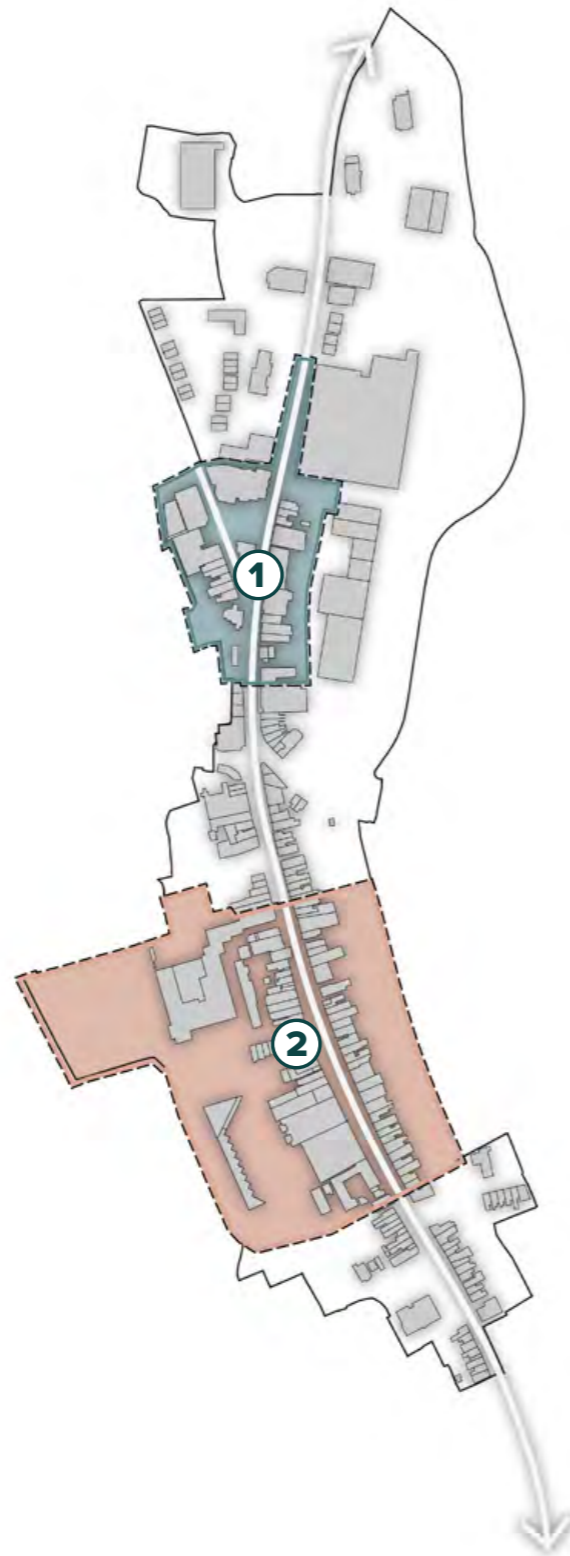
Through the process of this Placemaking Plan, an in-depth analysis of Blackwood's physical and commercial environment was undertaken and a clear vision was established for the town which was shaped by extensive engagement with stakeholders and the community. A set of key place ambitions, grounded in the principles of the DCfW Placemaking Charter, was also developed to support this vision.

The vision for Blackwood aims to unlock Blackwood's potential as the sub-regional centre of the County Borough, linking north and south and improving the public realm while enhancing its retail, service, and leisure offerings. From this vision, the Placemaking Plan presented strategies across the placemaking boundary. Although all areas of the town centre and the immediate area are considered, the plan helped shape key intervention areas which are highlighted to be taken forward: the Northern Gateway and the Town Centre Core.

As next steps, an action plan will be formulated to focus on these 2 intervention areas:

1. **Miners' Institute and the High Street/Pentwyn Road Junction** – Enhancing the public realm, building and roadway improvements.
2. **Blackwood High Street and the Market Place** – Key regeneration projects of vacant buildings and underused sites for mixed use schemes whilst improving links within the town centre.

These interventions will drive Blackwood's regeneration, creating a vibrant and sustainable town centre.





06. Conclusion

## Appendix A

### Stakeholder Engagement Feedback; July-November 2023

A summary of the feedback collected during the engagement process is below by each placemaking principle by stakeholder group. [Key comments raised by one or more stakeholders are summarised at the top of each theme summary.](#)

MOVEMENT		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Congestion</b> issues along the high street in Blackwood and towards the Northern end of the high street are prevalent.</li> <li>• Addressing the need for disabled <b>parking</b>, reevaluating the unpopular car parking charges and combating illegal pavement parking are crucial for the local centre's vitality. Illegal pavement parking in the town centre poses accessibility challenges for wheelchair users and prams.</li> <li>• <b>Public transport</b> needs enhancing, especially to address limitations in bus services post-COVID, and leveraging the potential benefits of a car-centric environment by creating a lively local centre accessible on foot are recommended.</li> <li>• The <b>accessibility</b> to the town centre for older groups varies; while some utilise bus services with satisfactory walking surfaces, others resort to taxis due to accessibility challenges. Concerns include dangerous crossings to the library, insufficient accessibility from the periphery, non-existent disability access to Emily's market, steep roads causing accidents, especially by Bridge Street, and unsafe road corners, particularly by the bus station.</li> <li>• Pedestrianise High Street at certain times of the day to reduce vehicle dominance in the main shopping street.</li> <li>• Improved <b>cycle safety</b> is sought for routes to neighbouring areas and residential zones, addressing residents' discomfort cycling alongside vehicular traffic.</li> <li>• Other general points include enhancing pedestrian experience on side streets, prioritising safety, lighting, and artwork along key east-to-west routes.</li> </ul>		
Town Members	Local Community and Groups	Business Owners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting payment apps for borough car parks is advisable, while exploring options for free parking during peak times, such as Saturdays, could counteract the negative impact of paid parking that deters people from using the High Street.</li> <li>• ASDA's popular 3 hours of free parking sets a precedent for the appeal of such initiatives compared to fee-based alternatives.</li> <li>• Improved <b>wayfinding</b> and signage within Blackwood would be beneficial to assist visitors with navigating the town centre on-foot and also encourage people to visit other areas of the town, whilst highlighting key assets e.g. Blackwood Library, Miner's Institute, Bus Station.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving traffic flow and addressing these congestion points is essential for a better experience for both pedestrians and motorists.</li> <li>• Short-stay free parking on the High St would be beneficial as there is a current issue with illegal parking.</li> <li>• Enhancing walking routes with safe and direct pathways for pedestrians would further promote active travel and improve overall accessibility to the town centre.</li> <li>• Enhancing the local centre's infrastructure by incorporating secure storage facilities can accommodate and attract cycling groups currently passing through the town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing designated <b>drop-off zones</b> on the local centre's periphery to alleviate congestion on the High Street e.g. for events like school children visiting the cinema.</li> <li>• Introduce a one-way vehicular system in the car park east of the High Street, extending northward to retail area car parks, as a potential solution to alleviate traffic congestion in the town centre's <b>road network</b>.</li> <li>• Explore mobility scooter rentals to enhance movement, address accessibility concerns, and incentivise foot traffic towards the library by offering something for exploration in that part of town.</li> </ul>

MIX OF USES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The local centre boasts a thriving <b>cafe culture</b> to bring local roasters to the high street to keep business local.</li> <li>• There's a desire for a diverse mix of shops, including a DIY hardware store, butchers, men's clothing, pottery, and haberdashery, the challenge lies in the online retail landscape, suggesting that smaller units may be more viable for success.</li> <li>• The <b>town centre</b> boasts valuable assets, notably the beloved cinema housed in an art-deco building, offering affordable tickets at £3.50 and frequently attended by residents and visitors alike.</li> <li>• The local town centre seeks a diverse mix of <b>retail</b> uses, lamenting the closure of independent shops like butchers and proposing a community rental DIY store. Despite acknowledging changes in retail, there's a strong public desire for a lively town centre with shops, F&amp;B, and residential spaces.</li> <li>• While Blackwood features some <b>nightlife and food and beverage aspects</b>, including pubs, bars, and a thriving cafe culture, there's a sentiment that the town could enhance its F&amp;B offerings. Suggestions include clustering nightlife establishments together on the high street for a livelier night-time atmosphere.</li> <li>• Encouraging new <b>residential</b> developments in the town centre.</li> <li>• There is a strong desire for more activities for <b>young people</b>.</li> <li>• The <b>existing market</b>, held three times a week, is used frequently, with the Friday market playing a significant role in attracting more people to the high street.</li> <li>• Successful <b>town events</b> like those during Summer and Christmas are popular with the community.</li> </ul>		
Town Members	Local Community and Groups	Business Owners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The closed Emily's market presents an opportunity for <b>start-ups</b>, particularly in creating small internal units for businesses like Matt's ceramics.</li> <li>• There's potential to transform the Market Place into a vibrant evening food and beverage hub, possibly relocating retail shops to the high street.</li> <li>• The theatre and Miners Institute contribute significantly to the town's cultural landscape, with both being popular among residents and hosting a variety of events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing for those over 55 or residences situated above retail spaces would encourage more passive surveillance to discourage anti-social behaviour.</li> <li>• The establishment of an indoor skate park, bowling alley, or arcade, which could complement the cinema. Geek Retreat and leisure centres were recurrently highlighted as potential additions for young people.</li> <li>• A need for more doctors surgeries or a mixed health hub with more residential schemes happening.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upcoming additions like a brewery/taproom at Shoezone, further enhance the town's dynamic offerings.</li> <li>• Collaborative efforts between the cinema and McKenzie's cafe, providing themed meals for certain movies, enhance the overall experience. Retail centre competition, absence of bookshops and independent butchers/delis.</li> <li>• Prevalence of charity shops and barbers.</li> <li>• Market benefits local businesses as brings people to the High Street.</li> <li>• Some independent businesses faced challenges during local events as the council did not consider their needs, leading to isolation during the Beach Party event and restricting customer access for some.</li> </ul>

LOCATION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouraging connectivity between extensive <b>residential developments</b> on the outskirts of town and the town centre is essential to boost usage and enhance the local economy.</li> <li><b>Local centre services</b>, now housed within the library, face issues of limited accessibility due to constrained opening times.</li> <li>Business rates are too high to accommodate smaller or start up <b>local businesses</b> in town.</li> <li><b>Online resources</b> like a Facebook group have been established for Blackwood to promote events and local businesses.</li> <li>The <b>geographical factors</b> including the weather significantly influence the town's footfall. Despite Blackwood consistently experiencing higher weekly footfall within the town, there is a prevailing belief that Caerphilly receives more investment and attention.</li> <li>Various <b>community groups</b>, including the Blackwood Rugby Football Club, organise events such as the Cider Festival, presenting opportunities for promotion and collaboration to enhance the local centre and town—for instance, pairing the Cider Festival with a town centre food festival.</li> </ul>		
Town Members	Local Community and Groups	Business Owners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoting residential development within the town centre, catering to various demographics such as Pobl and those over 55 may enhance the local economy but will also improve passive surveillance for antisocial behaviour.</li> <li>While the current local app for Blackwood is beneficial, there is room for improvement, such as enhancing its features to spotlight events and local groups and activities, rather than solely focusing on retail offers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The relocation of services to the library also hampers access to banking facilities.</li> <li>There is potential for increased green infrastructure to offer better shelter.</li> <li>Better connections to the town centre would improve the accessibility issues to do with the topography and surface treatments, especially from the Bus Station to the High Street.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dropping the price of vacant shops will help start-up businesses.</li> <li>The rugby club serves as an affordable venue for other groups to host events, providing an alternative to the potentially costly Miner's Institute, as seen with the air cadets group.</li> </ul>

PUBLIC REALM		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The integration of <b>pop-up outdoor eating areas</b> have been a positive addition to the high street and should be encouraged after proving to be successful. However, some are left empty from shops closing down which could be taken over by some of the restaurants and cafés, such as McKenzie's Cafe.</li> <li>The Northern and Southern <b>gateways</b> in the town are currently car-dominated, lacking safe pedestrian crossings and restricting access to important services, particularly the library. A pedestrian-priority public realm is suggested to slow traffic and enhance safety.</li> <li>The Blackwood <b>high street</b> serves as a well-defined focal point and should be enhanced as a key area for residents, especially at gateways.</li> <li><b>Surface treatments</b> to some of the east-west routes can be uneven, posing hazards for older and disabled individuals. Enhancing the paving on roads, especially Bridge Street, is crucial due to frequent accidents involving pedestrians and cars.</li> <li>Improve <b>community facilities</b> such as benches and dog waste bins as well as maintenance of litter.</li> </ul>		
Town Members	Local Community and Groups	Business Owners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leveraging the wide public realm, improvements like additional seating, greenery, and designated spaces can enhance the local centre, acting as a buffer to prevent illegal parking.</li> <li>The bus station facilities could be better with the toilets being locked majority of the time due to no frequent maintenance.</li> <li>Enhancements, such as implementing a one-way road system (northwards) to improve congestion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhancing the high street with additional outdoor seating and increased greenery will significantly elevate the overall pedestrian experience.</li> <li>A pedestrian-priority public realm is suggested to slow traffic and enhance safety. The public space between Asda and the northern end of the high street, while underutilised, serves as a key area for older people due to its accessible ramps facilitating movement between Asda and the high street.</li> <li>Introducing seating, would particularly benefit older individuals by providing resting spots in the town centre.</li> <li>Furthermore, the introduction of tree planting would offer natural shading during summer and shelter from rain, contributing to an overall improved environment.</li> <li>Widening the pavements on the High Street would also help with pushchairs being walked up the street and wheelchair users.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving the community facilities on the High Street, as well as widening the pavements and improving the surface treatments, will enhance the overall pedestrian environment. This will encourage more people to use the High Street.</li> </ul>

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>library</b> is a great asset for a diverse range of social groups.</li> <li>There is a need for a space for local start-up businesses. The market is occasionally used for local school art shows. Despite a significant community of knitters and crafters, there's a lack of nearby stores for their supplies. The community expresses a desire to support independent shops and is willing to spend disposable income, particularly if these businesses relocate to the high street.</li> <li>Catering for <b>different age-groups</b> is deemed important. At the Northern end of the high street, young people often gather near pubs and takeaways, leading to concerns about anti-social behaviour. There is a lack of recreational options for young children and teenagers, aside from the cinema, suggesting a need for more facilities for young people on High Street. Engaging with local schools is proposed to understand what young people would find beneficial for the Placemaking Plan. Unfortunately, local groups for youth and older individuals, such as dance classes, have been adversely affected by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. On a positive note, churches are well-attended and provide social activities for older people.</li> <li>The town centre lacks <b>public toilet facilities</b> as the only publicly accessible ones are located in the bus station which are always closed.</li> <li><b>Antisocial behaviour</b> challenges are seen in the town centre with prevalent littering and public urination.</li> <li>Introduction of a <b>community/social club</b>, potentially held in the Miners' Institute for different age demographics to help with antisocial behaviour and loneliness.</li> </ul>		
Town Members	Local Community and Groups	Business Owners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>library</b> provides diverse social groups and activities for residents, including weekly events held by Sight Cymru.</li> <li>The introduction of public toilets in key locations within the town centre is recommended.</li> <li>Social clubs held in the Miners' Institute or introduction of a community hub for local people to go.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More facilities for young people to reduce the anti-social behaviour on the High Street, potential for a bowling alley, arcade, or indoor skate park near the cinema.</li> <li>To address this, creating well-lit and lively spaces in side streets can discourage such behaviour and promote a safer environment for pedestrians. Young people express a desire for enhanced safety in the local centre and side streets, encouraging comfortable walking and cycling, even after school hours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing an indoor market with smaller units could be a valuable opportunity for <b>business and the community</b>, catering to smaller businesses that may struggle with larger spaces.</li> </ul>

IDENTITY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key buildings with <b>architectural significance</b> should be celebrated and consider incorporating lighting, exemplified by the Miner's Institute. This architectural gem not only stands out but also serves as a venue for local events.</li> <li>Celebrate Blackwood's <b>heritage</b>, notably its historical ties to Chartism, whilst embracing and building on the town's identity as a traditional valley town. Recognise the rich heritage of the mining community that contributes to the town's history.</li> <li>The outdoor <b>market</b>, currently on Fridays and Saturdays, has a limited offering and should be revitalised to regain its status as a key part of Blackwood's identity. While independent shops like the poster store are making a comeback, there's room for further improvement.</li> <li>Blackwood, once a destination town with <b>independent shops</b>, like a butchers, no longer holds the case and distracts the quality of the local centre.</li> </ul>		
Town Members	Local Community and Groups	Business Owners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Giving key building, like the Miners' Institute, more prominence on the High Street through improved lighting.</li> <li>Introducing more public art that resonates with local heritage and history, for example The Chartists Movement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognising and supporting <b>local crafters</b> with activities and craft stalls in the indoor market could enhance the town's creative community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing more independent shops, like a butchers, bookshop and deli to link back to the heritage of the High Street but also give people an alternative to shopping in larger supermarkets.</li> </ul>

# theurbanists

## **Cardiff**

Westgate House,  
Womanby Street,  
Cardiff, CF10 1BR

## **Email**

[info@theurbanists.net](mailto:info@theurbanists.net)

[www.theurbanists.net](http://www.theurbanists.net)

## **Bristol**

Studio 410, Generator Building  
Finzels Reach  
Bristol, BS1 6BX

## **Phone**

029 2023 6133