

Merthyr Tydfil

Town Centre Health Check

Appendix MP7 to R0002v2

- 1.1 To provide a baseline against which the health of the town centre can be assessed, a health check was undertaken on 24th January 2020 to consider its viability against the key indicators in TAN4.

General

- 1.2 Merthyr Tydfil town centre is situated to the east of the River Taff and the A4054 Avenue de Clichy, and to the south of the A4102 Bethesda Street, extending east to Tramroadside North and south to Swan Street.
- 1.3 The centre as defined in the Local Development Plan is very extensive and includes areas dominated by non retail uses.
- 1.4 The retail core comprises the partly covered Tydfil Shopping Centre and extends along the pedestrianised Graham Way eastwards to connect to the pedestrianised High Street. Beacons Place is a modern covered shopping mall extending eastwards from the High Street to a Tesco Extra store and the adjoining railway station.
- 1.5 To the north and west are areas dominated by offices and civic uses including the Police, Council and court buildings.

Diversity of uses

- 1.6 The retail composition of the town centre as at January 2020 is shown in the table below. To allow for comparison against national indices, the centre boundary

adopted is as defined by Experian GOAD. This covers a total of 287 units in a range of uses, as summarised below:

Use class	Number	Percentage	
A1 convenience	21	7.3%	15.2%
A1 comparison	73	25.4%	34.6^
A1 other	41	14.3%	6.9%
A2	26	9.1%	7.6%
A3	45	15.7%	NA
Other	31	10.8%	NA
Vacant	50	17.4%	9.9%
Total	287	100%	

- 1.7 The table illustrates that the town centre has a below average level of convenience stores in terms of numbers. However, it is noted that these units include a 4,488 sq m net Tesco store.
- 1.8 Iceland operates a 364 sq m store at Tydfil Square, and Farmfoods operates a store at the southern end of the town. There is a limited range of other convenience outlets and these are dominated by bakery uses including three independents and two Greggs outlets. There is one independent butcher (J W Millward) and one green grocery store (Fresh and Fruity) on Victoria Street. Other stores include an ethnic supermarket and a number of small 'corner shop' type stores on the periphery of the centre.
- 1.9 Merthyr Tydfil has a comparison offer that is below the national average. This is reflected in a limited representation by national comparison goods multiples and the recent closure of Wilko and Poundworld. Wilko opened a store at Cyfarthfa Retail Park in 2016 and in 2019 closed its store in the St Tydfil Centre. Brands still represented in the centre include New Look, Shoe Zone, Bonmarche, Trespass and Poundland.
- 1.10 There is a strong independent retail offer across a range of sectors including pets, clothing, jewellery, camping, textiles and hardware.

- 1.11 The centre is served by a high number of service outlets, including some 20 hairdressing outlets and 6 beauty related outlets.

Vacancy Rates

- 1.12 The town centre has a relatively high vacancy rate, at 17.4% although this is likely in part to be due to the extent of the centre area and the consolidation of retail activities towards the retail core. Within the core itself there are relatively few vacancies, although the vacant Wilko unit in the Tydfil Centre and Poundworld unit on the High Street are of concern and reflect a national consolidation of such brands in smaller towns such as this.

Environmental quality

- 1.13 The town centre is of a mixed environmental quality. Significant new investment has taken place in Castle Yard, around Penderyn Square, to restore buildings and create a pleasant public realm. The pedestrianised section of the High Street is of a reasonable quality, with buildings in generally good condition and new surfacing of the public spaces. The Tydfil Centre is dated but in good condition generally. The Bus Station is in a poor condition and there are plans to redevelop this to provide a more contemporary facility.
- 1.14 The town centre has formed a BID to promote the town centre entitled “The Big Heart of Merthyr”. This has undertaken initiatives including frontage improvements, provision of 116 hanging baskets and 7 planters in the centre and funding towards Christmas lights.

Safety and crime

- 1.15 The latest crime statistics for December 2019 indicate 51 offences were committed in the central area, comprising predominantly anti-social behaviour in peripheral areas and shoplifting within the central area. This is a reduction on data for the same period in 2018 and does not signify any particular problem.

- 1.16 The centre feels generally safe and there is limited evidence of graffiti.

Accessibility

- 1.17 Merthyr Tydfil is strategically located at the junction of the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road and the A470 extending northwards from Cardiff. It is therefore extremely accessible by car.
- 1.18 The Bus Station provides strategic and local connecting services and appears well used.
- 1.19 The railway station sits at the terminus of the valleys line from Cardiff and is served by regular services down the valley, with connections to the wider network beyond.
- 1.20 The town centre is pedestrianised, providing easy access for pedestrians wheelchair users through the retail core. Vehicular routings through the centre are complex and parking is some distance from retail areas.

Conclusions

- 1.21 Our survey concluded that the centre, when assessed against these standard indicators, is not particularly strong. This is a reflection of the national climate, particularly as several retail operators continue to struggle. However, the centre is not dependent on the convenience sector or on independent convenience providers, and is more reliant on service sectors.