

# ***Together* towards a healthier upper Rhymney Valley**



**Rhymney, Pontlottyn, Abertysswg, and Fochriw**

# **CWTSH**

## **Integrated Wellbeing Network Draft Outline Plan**




**November 2023**

## Hearing the Bells of Rhymney<sup>1</sup>

*In “The Bells of Rhymney”, the bells of each town toll a different color, and some peal different emotions: Merthyr’s bells are brown, and Rhymney’s are sad. Some ask questions: “Who killed the miners?”*

*This song of the mining disasters of Wales is stuck in my mind because of the bells. What if we really did have bells that could articulate communal feelings, or even initiate them?*



*It’s the black bells of grief we’ve all been hearing, the red bells of alarm. But what if the bells sensed, or could help bring about, a change, voicing a new scene? Could they lift us from our grey habit of sadness if they suddenly began to ring out green?*

**Carolyn L. Tipton**  
**Poet, translator, and professor**  
**Berkeley, California**

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<sup>1</sup> Lampton LM. Poetry in Medicine: Hearing the Bells of Rhymney. *JMSMA*. 2023;64(2).

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The upper Rhymney valley along with the Darran Valley has some of the biggest health and wellbeing challenges in Wales and indeed the UK. These include heart and lung disease, obesity, and Type 2 diabetes, along with mental health and wellbeing issues.

These health inequalities severely impact the quality of life in our communities with people living healthy lives for far fewer years than those in more affluent areas. In addition, it places extra demands on already stretched health and social care services which exacerbates the situation. This needs to and must change.

No single organisation alone can successfully address these challenges and deliver the changes needed. Moreover, it requires working together with people, so they participate and are empowered. Within our communities, we have assets vital to achieving the change needed – people, places, and provision of services.

The **Integrated Wellbeing Networks (IWN) Outline Plan** based on IWN work done in the area to date highlights what people have said they want to see, including:

- Community life is thriving with vibrant, connected venues and local groups and organisations providing well-supported activities
- Town and village centres support and promote wellbeing and health
- People get good quality, accessible local health and wellbeing information
- Local green spaces and countryside contribute to better health and wellbeing
- Increased knowledge and pride in the area's heritage supports wellbeing
- People of all ages are included and valued and enjoy healthy ageing
- Community health and wellbeing are enhanced through volunteering
- People are empowered to manage their own health and wellbeing better

This outline plan is aimed at contributing to achieving these outcomes. It is not a standalone plan and must complement other projects and initiatives. It is not intended to be prescriptive or definitive, but an outline plan that crucially requires wider community involvement and greater collective action with three main aims:

- To catalyse more and wider conversations and encourage greater involvement in enhancing wellbeing and health in our communities
- To stimulate further action *working together* based on what's good and strong in the area to improve wellbeing and health, building on progress to date
- To initiate new actions on the ground led by the community together with services to make real differences to the area's wellbeing and health supported in part by participatory budgeting

We warmly welcome everyone living and working in the area to be part of the change.

## OUTLINE PLAN REPORT STRUCTURE

The first section sets out the aims of this outline plan, its background, and the underlying rationale. It is followed by a brief review of the health and wellbeing challenges in the area before describing the development work undertaken to produce the plan.

The main section provides more detail on the desired outcomes drawn from the development work, indicating what people felt was good, what could be developed or improved, and some indicative actions to achieve those outcomes.

Finally, there are some concluding comments with proposed next steps and actions indicating how the outline plan fits within the IWN principles work moving forward.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACT DETAILS

We thank all the people who have contributed to the work to date as part of the collaborative and outside that.

Any omissions or errors are totally my responsibility.

We warmly welcome feedback on this outline plan and encourage wider involvement in taking it forward.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read it – Diolch yn fawr iawn.

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## 1. AIMS AND BACKGROUND

### Aims of the outline plan

The **Integrated Wellbeing Networks (IWN) Community Wellbeing Outline Plan** is based on what people, primarily in the local IWN wellbeing collaborative, have said they would like to happen to improve wellbeing and health in the upper Rhymney valley.

It is neither a prescriptive nor definitive final plan. It is an outline plan which indicates what members of the community and some services to date feel might be done. Circumstances will potentially change, and it will and should evolve as more people have their say, get involved and provide more input and ideas. We need to include as many people as possible in our communities to continue the conversations, get more involved, and work together to make the changes happen.

As such, it has three main aims:

1. To catalyse more and wider conversations and encourage greater involvement in enhancing wellbeing and health in our communities.
2. To stimulate further action *working together* based on what's good and strong in the area to improve wellbeing and health, building on progress to date.
3. To initiate new actions on the ground led by the community to make real differences to the area's health and wellbeing.

The outline plan will support and be supported by the new **participatory budgeting** process in the area to help deliver some of its aims. Importantly, too, we fully recognise the impacts of the other wider determinants on health and wellbeing that must be and are being addressed. As such, it is not a standalone plan and should complement other projects and initiatives in the area.

We hope you will find this outline plan informative and use it as intended - to have or start conversations about making change happen, to remain or get involved going forward, and to shape and to help deliver collectively the health and wellbeing changes we want and need in our communities.

### Background and rationale for the outline plan

Like other former heavy industrial areas in the valleys of south Wales, the upper Rhymney valley<sup>2</sup> has health and wellbeing challenges that are some of the worst in Wales and the UK.

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<sup>2</sup> Fochriw in the adjacent Darran Valley is included for the IWN work in the area and this plan



Most importantly, unfortunately, these challenges impact dramatically on people’s quality of life in our communities. The major aim of the Integrated Wellbeing Networks programme is that people enjoy a healthy life for as long as possible, increasing their ‘health span’.<sup>3</sup>

Healthy Life Expectancy (at birth) is the average number of years a person would expect to live in good health in a particular area. In Caerphilly County Borough as a whole, Healthy Life Expectancy for males is 56.7 years and 57 years for females. The respective figures for Monmouthshire, which are 68.7 years and 69.3 years, which indicates the challenges.

Moreover, the disparities in this health span between areas, such as the upper Rhymney valley and the more affluent areas of Monmouthshire for example are even bigger, as shown in the recent **Building a Fairer Gwent** report, which demonstrates the crucial impacts and influences of the wider determinants of health, such as poverty, employment, and housing.<sup>4</sup>

As well as the unacceptable personal impacts on people, their families, and friends, and indeed the wider community, these inequities produce additional stresses and strains on already stretched health and social care services, exacerbating the situation in our communities. This must change and this IWN outline plan is aimed at contributing to that change.



The socioeconomic gap in healthy life expectancy has remained largely unchanged at 13 years for men, but has widened to 20 years for women over the period 2011-13 to 2018-20. This means that on average, a man living in the most deprived communities in Gwent today lives just 53 years of life in good health and a woman lives just 48 years of life in good health

The aim of the **Integrated Wellbeing Networks** (IWN) programme is to enhance wellbeing and health in our communities by working *with* people and the services that serve them.

Despite the challenges, there are many positive assets in our communities all of which have important roles in addressing those challenges – people, places, and provision of services. The IWN programme uses a ‘*what’s strong, not wrong*’ assets-based approach focusing upon connecting, strengthening, and developing those assets to address the issues that impact upon community health and wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> It is a preventative approach, working

<sup>3</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/healthspan>

<sup>4</sup> <https://abuhb.nhs.wales/healthcare-services/staying-well-and-healthy/building-a-fairer-gwent/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://researchoutreach.org/articles/whats-wrong-whats-strong-guide-community-driven-development/>

together *with* people helping to enable them to live healthy, fulfilled lives and addressing the health inequalities faced by our communities. This is the major objective of the Building a Fairer Gwent initiative, and why Gwent is now a so-called Marmot region.<sup>6</sup>

A key part of the IWN approach is to bring people and services together in a locality and empower communities to find and lead solutions. In the areas of Caerphilly County Borough where the IWN programmes is focused upon localities, we call these our **Cwtsh Collaboratives**. These are open to *everyone* whether a service provider, a community group, or a resident in the area. Our community health and wellbeing are everybody's business, and everyone needs to be engaged and involved.

The Cwtsh Collaboratives work to understand the positive changes in health and wellbeing local people want to see and make happen in our communities, explore how we can best do this together, and help to deliver those changes collectively.

The basis of this plan has come primarily through the work with the local collaborative, but also importantly from work outside that. The work started just prior to the Covid pandemic which, unsurprisingly, severely interrupted its development. Moreover, the pandemic as well as the subsequent and continuing Cost of Living crisis has undoubtedly exacerbated the health and wellbeing challenges faced, but these and the inequalities existed before and must be addressed.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/building-a-fairer-gwent-improving-health-equity-and-the-social-determinants>



## 2. HEALTH AND WELLBEING CHALLENGES IN THE AREA

Wellbeing is not just the absence of disease or illness. It's a complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional, and social health factors. Wellbeing is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction and could be described as how you feel about yourself and your life<sup>7</sup>. Feelings of wellbeing are fundamental to people's overall health whilst conversely your health can impact upon your wellbeing.

The aim and approach of the IWN programme is to actively help and encourage people and our communities to take control of their wellbeing, taking advantage of activities and support available, and becoming more confident and able to lead healthier and happier lives.

Evidence from a variety of sources indicates the continued health challenges faced by people in communities in the upper Rhymney valley.

Major health challenges include:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Coronary heart disease
- Obesity
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Worsening mental health, depression, and anxiety

Dementia is also increasingly an issue within our communities.

These health data are backed up anecdotally in conversations in our collaboratives, from discussions at other meetings and events, and from general everyday chats with people in our communities.

Many are struggling with these conditions and with data showing an increasing ageing population, the challenges will intensify. We must address those factors that impact adversely upon our health and wellbeing through preventive approaches working with communities.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wpa.org.uk/health-wellbeing/articles/importance-of-wellbeing>

### 3. WORK UNDERTAKEN FOR THIS OUTLINE PLAN

#### Integrated Wellbeing Networks (IWN) programme

Integrated Wellbeing Networks (IWNs) seek to improve and strengthen wellbeing by connecting and enhancing community assets for people to build relationships and find the things that matter to them.

They are not about creating more services or 'sticking plasters' that attempt to solve people's problems. Rather, the aim is to build on what is already available locally and bring in the unique strengths and assets that are within individuals and communities. These assets exist within all communities and contribute to good health and wellbeing.

There are four elements to the IWN programme:

1. Encouraging place-based collaboration and community-led action
2. Connecting and enhancing community-based hubs and activities
3. Supporting and connecting services and support in an area
4. Enabling easier, inclusive access to wellbeing information in communities

More details on the IWN programme and the underlying principles can be found at:

<https://abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/staying-well-and-healthy/integrated-well-being-networks-in-gwent/>

Whilst the team supporting the delivery of the IWN programme is hosted by Aneurin Bevan Health Board, we realise fully that no single organisation or body can deliver the actions and changes needed. They require effective networking between relevant partners ranging from local authorities, health boards, other statutory bodies, voluntary organisations and most importantly groups and people in our communities.

#### Initial IWN work, area collaboratives, and scoping exercises

The upper Rhymney valley, from Bargoed northwards, along with the Darran Valley, was selected as the initial focus area for the IWN work in Caerphilly County Borough.

Whilst the health and other statistics were undeniably factors in deciding the focus area, crucially and equally importantly, we recognised the area's assets and opportunities, including the strong sense of community, people and organisations already doing excellent work, services operating on the ground, and an environment and landscape that should support community wellbeing and health.

We decided to breakdown the area into three distinct working areas in greater recognition of the geography and how communities largely relate to each other. Along with the

community areas in Bargoed and New Tredegar, we focused on what we termed the 'Rhymney area' comprising Rhymney, Abertysswg, Pontllytyn, and Fochriw, including the latter due to its links and proximity.

Initial work began in mid-2019, soon after the IWN programme started, holding discussions with services, organisations, and groups to get a greater understanding of the wellbeing challenges as well as the assets in the area and how well they connected and complemented each other. From this, we produced two initial wellbeing assets maps for the area as shown in Annex 1, which also shows two follow up maps indicating how these have changed since the pandemic.

After an inaugural general IWN meeting at St David's Community Centre, Rhymney in autumn 2019, we organised well attended further area-specific meetings; the first in January 2020 at Rhymney Integrated Health and Social Care Centre followed in early March 2020 at Fochriw Community Centre.

At the first of these, we undertook a wellbeing-focused *Postcards from the Future* exercise.<sup>8,9</sup> This approach seeks to get participants to imagine positive changes that have happened in a community in the foreseeable future – we picked 5 years on since we felt this would give a meaningful timescale. This provided a basis for creating a collective plan to achieve those outcomes. The outcomes were explored further at the second meeting to gather collective ideas on how to achieve them. Annex 2 shows the outcomes of those meetings and exercises.

Further discussion sessions were planned and ideas to explore the developing material in more detail, but unfortunately the pandemic intervened which prevented them happening.

### **'Post-COVID' IWN collaborative conversations and events**

In late 2020 and throughout 2021, we conducted a series of in-depth online discussions in our collaboratives, including the upper Rhymney valley area. The contributions across all the IWN areas highlighted some key common issues exacerbated by the pandemic and the measures taken. These included:

- Worsened mental health and resilience
- Social isolation affecting people's health and wellbeing
- Seeming increases in obesity and Type 2 diabetes through inactivity
- Impacts of Covid, exacerbating existing respiratory and other conditions and causing new ones including Long Covid

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<sup>8</sup> <https://createthefuture.earth/postcards-from-the-future-for-communities/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.reimaginary.com/methods/postcards-from-the-future>

This work also highlighted challenges people felt there were in accessing services, including health services, and the impacts of digital exclusion, especially at a time when people were increasingly dependent on online activities and information.

It was also clear that wellbeing assets in our localities had been adversely impacted; community centres and venues were struggling to recover because volunteers needed to help run them were not well enough or decided not to continue in their roles.

In addition to these meetings, we organised a small number of events with partners to support health and wellbeing where we also gathered additional community information and input, such the Cwtsh Festival at Ael-y-Bryn Community Centre, Rhymney in spring 2023. The *Love the Park* event at Rhymney War Memorial Park in June 2021 included a brief *planning for real-type exercise*<sup>10</sup>, conducted with GAVO, asking people how they felt the park could be developed to support wellbeing and health.

The main headlines from that from that are shown in Annex 3. In response to that, we worked to stage some community events at the park, ran a pilot weekly Woods Café with the bowls association, supported a men's den and helped established some Geocaches to try to get greater usage of the park.

### **Continued community intelligence and input since 2022**

In early 2022, IWN collaborative meetings resumed, initially as hybrid meetings where people could attend in person or online via Zoom. These together with other 'post-COVID' discussions with communities and services e.g., at Cwtsh Cafes and community projects, and direct conversations with people in the area, have added more information and input. We have also conducted recent Community surveys on specific issues such as women's and men's health, again vitally adding context and evidence to this outline plan.

In the middle of 2022, we initiated our IWN Cwtsh Connections funding initiative through GAVO to support community projects and activities that would help reconnect people and address some of the post-Covid challenges identified.

These again gave valuable insight into the issues as perceived by community groups and organisations. Over two funding rounds, 32 projects were supported in total across the IWN focus areas. Six of these were in the upper Rhymney Valley area including support for a new men's den, an additional Cwtsh Café-type activity, a bowling for wellbeing initiative, and support for young people's activities at two community centres. We also provided support for new Wi-fi provision at Fochriw Community Centre via an additional dedicated fund to address digital exclusion in the area.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.planningforreal.org.uk](http://www.planningforreal.org.uk)

We held two upper Rhymney valley IWN collaborative meetings in January and June 2023 where we returned to the Postcards from the Future outcomes in our earlier work and additional information we had gathered following those. In the first, we revisited those findings in the context of the further information gathered afterwards to get further refinement and input. The second event used a World Café-style approach to gain feedback on proposed objectives that emerged.<sup>11,12</sup>

The information from all these events and activities, along with reference to relevant data, has informed and shaped this outline plan. It provides a basis for moving forward to contribute to achieving the outcomes indicated.

We have produced outline plans for the other IWN areas through similar work. These plans in different areas share quite a lot in common in terms of the desired outcomes, which is unsurprising because they have some comparable health and wellbeing challenges, which was a major basis for their selection in the first instance.

Nevertheless, there are important differences between the plans. This is intended to be a place-based plan for the area comprising Rhymney, Abertysswg, Pontlottyn and Fochriw which have different assets and opportunities to the others as well as importantly differences within themselves. The next section details the outcomes and ideas to achieve those that have emerged from this work to date.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method](http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method)

<sup>12</sup> [www.involve.org.uk/resource/world-cafe](http://www.involve.org.uk/resource/world-cafe)

## 4. MOVING FORWARD: DESIRED HEALTH & WELLBEING OUTCOMES

Social inequalities such as poverty, employment, housing, and other important factors influence and affect our health and wellbeing. The current cost of living crisis has impacted upon people's mental health. For example, a recent UK-wide survey by the Mental Health Foundation showed many people are feeling anxious and stressed because of their current financial situation.<sup>13</sup>

The work undertaken by local authorities, other public bodies such as the health board, and organisations in the voluntary sector is vital in addressing these and are key elements of the Building a Fairer Gwent initiative for example. The IWN programme seeks to involve all these and support them and their work.

To complement and augment that, the work here specifically set out to understand what communities and some of the services in them feel are amongst the major health and wellbeing challenges, what they understand to be the area's assets, and what outcomes they want to see.

With the need to include and involve more people, the outcomes are not all encompassing and there will be challenges and opportunities not yet articulated or covered. Indeed, other opportunities clearly exist and need to be encouraged. Nevertheless we believe this is a strong starting point for moving forward collectively.

In the Rhymney, Pontlottyn, Abertyswg and Fochriw areas, we have drawn out the following interrelated outcomes based on the work to date. They are not listed in any order of priority and have obvious overlaps and links between them. A major task now is to continue and encourage more community conversations whilst moving from planning to delivering more actions to make change happen. The outcomes are:

- People are well-informed and involved in local wellbeing activities and support
- Community life is thriving with vibrant, connected community venues and local groups and organisations providing well-supported activities
- Town and village centres are safe, welcoming, and support and promote community wellbeing
- Increased pride in the local environment with outdoor activities contributing to better health and wellbeing
- Improved community cohesion and sense of belonging through increased knowledge and pride in the area's heritage
- People of all ages are included and valued in community life; people are ageing well, and young people enjoy better mental and physical wellbeing
- Health and wellbeing and community vitality are enhanced by volunteering

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/about-us/news/stress-anxiety-and-hopelessness-over-personal-finances-widespread-across-uk-new-mental-health-survey>

- People are empowered to manage their health better with improved support for long-term conditions and mental wellbeing.

Importantly, we provided the chance for people to propose other opportunities in the World-café session. We have sought to incorporate these in the outcomes above for now as appropriate.

We set out the outcomes in the following section set out as follows:

- **Background and context**  
This includes some evidence from wider work that underpin the outcome.
- **What people said - what's good, what could be improved or developed**  
This emanates from the World Café-type sessions where we encouraged people to say what is good now and what could be improved or provide additional opportunities.
- **What could be done together going forward?**  
Again primarily emerging from the World Café-type sessions, these are some future actions put forward by people to achieve those outcomes. Together with existing and continued actions, and others yet identified, these provide a basis for more detailed delivery plans.



## **OUTCOME – People are well-informed and involved in wellbeing activities and support**

### **Background and context**

For people to get involved in activities and take advantage of support locally and more widely to support their wellbeing and health, it is important that information about what is available is accessible to all.

There are several useful digital sources such as Dewis<sup>14</sup> and Gwelcol<sup>15</sup> that can be searched by people to find out what is on and available in an area. In all our Cwtsh Collaboratives, a clear message since early 2022 was that people wanted and needed regular up-to-date local information to complement Dewis.

To do this, the IWN team has worked with Dewis, GAVO and the Wellbeing (Community) Connectors to produce local Cwtsh guides each week. The Rhymney, Abertyswg, Pontlottyn and Fochriw area was the first to have a dedicated Cwtsh guide produced in February 2022, the development of which has continued since. The Cwtsh guide and the fully searchable Cwtsh website section dedicated to the activities in the area are updated each week - [www.cwtsh.wales/en/events/rhymney](http://www.cwtsh.wales/en/events/rhymney).

Recently, the Cwtsh website has been expanded to include more information on support available for health conditions, access to health services, and information on issues that impact adversely on wellbeing and health.

Cwtsh guides are sent to some key partners as pdfs each Friday for the following week. A poster image link to the website with QR code and text links is posted on all local Facebook sites each week.

We have also developed the growing Caerphilly Cwtsh Community Facebook site which promotes wellbeing activities across the county borough.<sup>16</sup>

The area is active with several excellent local community Facebook sites that promote local activities and events.

### **What people said - what's good, what could be improved or developed**

Local Cwtsh guides and website are working well with good up-to-date information. However, there is a need to ensure this information reaches all people, especially those not on social media, with a need for more printed resources.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.dewis.wales](http://www.dewis.wales)

<sup>15</sup> [www.gwelcol.co.uk](http://www.gwelcol.co.uk)

<sup>16</sup> [www.facebook.com/IWNcaerphillywellbeingfriends/](https://www.facebook.com/IWNcaerphillywellbeingfriends/)

Promotion and information need to be more available and visible across the community for example at:

- Rhymney Integrated Health and Social Care Centre
- Local businesses
- Schools
- Community Centres and other community venues

We have sought to support greater digital inclusion through support for the installation of fast fibre Wi-Fi at Fochriw Community Centre.

### **What could be done together going forward?**

The following were amongst the ideas and suggestions:

- The community needs to be more involved in disseminating information to others, especially to those not on social media. Local people could become Cwtsh Wellbeing Friends that do this each week in their area.
- Possibility of outreach person working at Integrated Health and Social Care Centre - this could be the existing or new wellbeing connector. This opportunity could also be extended to the library hub when it re-opens in the autumn.
- Community venues especially community centres should be wellbeing hubs with information readily available in various formats so it is accessible and can be used by all.
- Community venue staff and volunteers are supported with their own wellbeing as well as being more able to inform community members of wellbeing information through Connect 5 training sessions.

## **OUTCOME – Community life is thriving with vibrant, connected community venues and local groups and organisations providing well-supported activities**

### **Background and context**

A growing body of evidence shows that feeling and being part of a community is good for wellbeing and health. Community participation can empower people to be positive and more involved with greater influence in the places they live, provide important communal networks that support mental and physical wellbeing, help combat social isolation across all ages, and help 'buffer against disease and influence health-related behaviour and management of long-term conditions.<sup>17</sup>

Community venues and organisations provide important opportunities for people to come together. They also provide activities that improve wellbeing and health and offer opportunities to obtain support, advice, and even care in the community. In short, they are vital to community wellbeing.

The two community centres, along with the day centre in Rhymney are important assets and the newly refurbished library which will act as a hub. There are also important venues like Furniture Revival and Hafod Deg. Fochriw and Abertysswg have valuable community centres, whilst in Pontlottyn, venues such as the Boys and Girls Club and Elim Church offer important opportunities. There is a good range of sports organisations and activities in the area, such as rugby football and bowls, whilst activities in churches, schools, clubs, and pubs also contribute significantly to the area's social life.

It is also important to recognise the role that open and green spaces can play in bringing people together and adding to an area's vibrancy – these are considered in more detail in a specific section below.

### **What people said - what's good, what could be improved or developed**

Undoubtedly the pandemic impact had a detrimental impact on community venues and organisations and their activities with some disappearing and others struggling since.

Despite this, assessment of the area's Cwtsh Guide over the last indicates an increase in activities at community venues over the past year. Centres are providing activities such as exercise sessions, Kettlebell classes and arts and crafts groups for example.

New activities launched over the past 20 months include the Cwtsh Café in Rhymney, Rhymney Social Strollers including geocaching at Rhymney Park, The Parent Network sewing group, a new Men's Den at War Memorial Park, Kettlebell and fitness sessions at St

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<sup>17</sup> <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2018/02/28/health-matters-community-centred-approaches-for-health-and-wellbeing/>

David's Community Centre, Café Corner at St David's Church, Boxercise at Pontllytyn Boys and Girls Club, and yoga and young people's activities at Abertysswg Community Centre

The existing gym at Rhymney provides opportunities to exercise regularly indoors throughout the week.

There are excellent local sporting organisations which could perhaps play even wider roles with additional support.

A community Repair Café started at Furniture Revival though it was not as well utilised as hoped for, but the opportunity is there to further develop it.

### **What could be done together going forward?**

The following were amongst the ideas and suggestions:

- Support and promote activities at centres so more people get involved - this will help sustainability of those activities and the venues and support community wellbeing.
- Develop more activities that people want to take part in at venues.
- Greater number of activities available in the evening and on the weekend to cater those who currently cannot avail themselves of activities and support.
- A regular (daily?) community café in Rhymney as a meeting place for people – based at one of the centres (St David's Community Centre) or High Street location.
- Volunteering to be supported and encouraged so activities and venues can be sustained and thrive.
- Local sporting organisations are supported and encouraged to be more involved in enhancing community wellbeing
- Communities need more opportunities to come together.
- Centres and venues work together to avoid activities from clashing - different times scheduled to provide wider opportunities for people to take part or attend.
- More networking between community centres and with the community.
- Opportunities include local Film Club; equipment/licences could be shared between different venues across the area - Rhymney, Fochriw, Pontllytyn, and Abertysswg.
- Could be a Saturday morning session for children - and older people too to bring people of different generations together.
- Life skills done enjoyably such as cooking sessions that support people and increase knowledge.
- Dial a car scheme to aid people with mobility issues to get to more events.
- More networking between community centres and with the community
- Community responsive transport that connects community centres and for people who live on the edges of the communities
- Community venues open in the evenings – many activities are not convenient for people who work in the day

- Need more volunteers to get involved at our venues – what will encourage more volunteering; how might volunteers get rewarded apart from the intrinsic wellbeing and satisfaction value to volunteers.
- A local community (Cwtsh?) card that gives discounts on activities at centres

DRAFT

## **OUTCOME – Town and village centres are safe, welcoming and support and promote community wellbeing**

### **Background and context**

There is increasing recognition that town and village centres can and must contribute positively to health and wellbeing - supporting and providing a better quality of life for communities. The Placemaking Charter Wales<sup>18</sup> sets out six principles, all of which emphasise the need for safe, well-connected spaces. Good communal places and spaces can encourage social interaction and connection whilst poor neighbourhood environments have been linked to self-reported depression and anxiety.<sup>19</sup>

NHS and local government leaders along with community businesses and invited experts in England produced a report highlighting how putting health at the heart of places can attract more people into local high streets supporting economic and social recovery, address health inequalities, provide opportunities for health service delivery, and encourage healthier lifestyles.<sup>20</sup> Local amenities such as shops, schools, healthcare, and social spaces such as libraries, parks, pubs, and restaurants can create opportunities for people to meet, and walk, cycle or use public transport to do so.

### **What people said - what's good, what could be improved or developed**

Much of the discussion has focused on Rhymney itself to date. In the early IWN Collaborative meetings, people expressed the desire for it to be a safe “social town” with a thriving, well-visited High Street. where people and groups come together.

Interestingly, the High Street in Rhymney is at the heart of the Rhymney Town Conservation Area, first designated in September 1975 and redesignated in October 2001, which recognises it is an area of special architectural or historic interest.

Undoubtedly, there are assets on or close to the High Street that contribute to community wellbeing and health, such as the library and the Rhymney Integrated Health and Social Care Centre, as well as St David's Community Centre, Furniture Revival and Hafod Deg Resource Centre whilst Rhymney War Memorial Park is close by.

People felt are few opportunities in the centre of Rhymney for people to meet, talk and socialise. There have been developments with public Wi-Fi now available, the library has been redeveloped as a community hub, whilst there are plans for a community-based café. The proposed redevelopment of the Buchan Buildings and Whitbread Centre and seeming loss of the gym there has been at the heart of much local discussion recently.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://dcfw.org/placemaking/placemaking-charter/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2167702619830640>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nhsconfed.org/publications/health-high-street>

Safer spaces for all – improve outdoor areas to make it safer for public use. People attending the Cwtsh Cafe in Rhymney said they did not feel they felt safe going out after dark, which contributes to isolation. Some people felt that a better lit High Street and more generally, e.g. car parks, would contribute to increased perceptions of safety.

### **What could be done together going forward?**

The following were amongst the ideas and suggestions:

- Support for existing local businesses to help make the High Street in Rhymney attractive and welcoming to all.
- More opportunities for local people to develop business ideas, maybe through community interest companies, to bring more to the High Street in Rhymney and help make it vibrant.
- Link green areas together better and to the centres
- Improve connectivity to and from the railway station - be more attractive as a setting?
- Create a Heritage Trail within Rhymney to attract people
- Make centres more accessible through bike hire - this could be e-bike in light of the local terrain?
- Create community banking hub, e.g., a new one is being created in Abertillery <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/23577559.high-street-banking-return-abertillery-high-street/>



## **OUTCOME – Increased pride in the local environment with outdoor activities contributing to better health and wellbeing.**

### **Background and context**

There is considerable evidence to show connecting with nature and being active outdoors can improve people's health and wellbeing. The benefits include better weight management, helping to prevent chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and hypertension, and improving mental wellbeing and health by reducing stress and anxiety.

Communal outdoor activities also promote and create social connections with others, again supporting and enhancing wellbeing. Such activities can include walking, outdoor exercise activities, birdwatching, mindfulness in nature sessions, and gardening for example.

Community growing can also provide a good source of environmentally sound, healthy, locally-sourced food for people. Moreover, there are studies showing that good quality green spaces can lower levels of stress, reduce depression and anxiety, and improve general wellbeing. They can also improve air quality which is important especially with the incidence of respiratory conditions in our communities.

We are fortunate in the valleys to be surrounded by wonderful natural landscapes. There are also fantastic urban parks such as Rhymney War Memorial Park. We need to take advantage of these to benefit individual and communal health and wellbeing.

### **What people said - what's good, what could be improved or developed**

A landscape masterplan for the area was produced in 1989 which indicated the potential in the area. People recognise the natural beauty surrounding Rhymney, Abertyswg, Pontlottyn and Fochriw and the opportunities for walking and outdoor activities, However, it was felt many do not take advantage of these and needs to be better promotion of the beauty and historical points of interest.

Recent developments such as the Rhymney Social Strollers and Rhymney Heritage Group weekly walks have provided opportunities for people to get more active outdoors. There is a Nature Prescribing programme now operating - [www.naturewellbeing.wales](http://www.naturewellbeing.wales).

Accessibility can be an issue with better indication of footpaths and improved footpath management needed- clearing growth, replacing stiles, ensuring gates on tarmac paths are wheelchair appropriate, improving wheelchair accessibility on other paths, and better signage.

Much of the input focused on Rhymney itself - probably reflecting the focus to date. However, the potential in other areas is recognised. The proximity of Gelligaer and Merthyr

Common to Fochriw was given as an example for people to get involved<sup>22</sup> and the recently-established weekly URV Wanderers walks take advantage of the wonderful surroundings of nearby Parc Cwm Darran. The Rhymney Social Strollers have scheduled walks from Abertysswg down towards New Tredegar – this walk has fantastic views across the valley.

In Rhymney, the War Memorial Park should be a major focus for increased community usage to support health and wellbeing and boosting community pride and cohesion. The park, which will celebrate its centenary in 2025, is well maintained by CCBC parks department and is a real jewel in the crown in Rhymney. Its proximity to the High Street should be seen as a distinct opportunity to better connect the two for mutual benefit.

Several small-scale community events were held at Rhymney Park in 2021 and 2022 including a nature treasure hunt and an Easter Egg Hunt which attracted good numbers of families and children. An *Art in the Park* in 2021 event also included a short Planning for Real-type exercise asking people what they would like to see at The Park - see Annex 3.

From this, the idea of a Friends of Rhymney Park emerged - there is a Facebook Group to date, but more community involvement would be needed to take it forward. The bowl clubs and the rugby club offer real opportunities for increasing community usage of the park and more activities. Joint working between the Bowls Association and a new men's mental health group - initially held at the rugby club - has established a men's den next to the bowls pavilion at the park with weekly activities. The Bowls Association has held *Bowls for Wellbeing* sessions involving local schools. The pavilion also provided a setting for a weekly Friday morning café in the winter where a new local community group has also been involved in creating geocaches<sup>23</sup> and staging weekly walks as well as occasional litter picks. The group has also been supporting a new community garden space recently created at Emmanuel Baptist Chapel.

The rear of Hafod Deg Centre continues to be used effectively by Growing Space and there was discussion about a potential community orchard at the Furniture Revival site.

St. David's Church is a real jewel in the crown in Rhymney and has been working well in improving the churchyard with plans to create a local nature reserve and enhancing the setting for the graves themselves.<sup>24</sup> There is a great opportunity to link up green spaces better in Rhymney, creating a walking trail between seating areas, e.g. churches, parks.

### **What could be done together going forward?**

The following were amongst the ideas and suggestions:

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<sup>22</sup> <https://gmcommon.org/get-involved/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/geocaching/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://caerphilly.observer/news/1013492/theres-a-history-here-that-you-dont-necessarily-know/>

- Create a community green spaces plan providing a much-needed update to the previous Landscape Plan including linking the Park in Rhymney with St David's Churchyard, the High Street and Railway Station and the riverside.
- Get young people involved in improving skate park and help create it as a meeting place
- Promote area in schools with walks and activities - walk schoolchildren around the area
- Develop the former tennis courts area in the War Memorial Park as an outside activity space which is wheelchair accessible.
- Support existing and developing volunteer groups that are already working to improve local environment
- Inclusive approach to working with young people to reduce anti-social behaviour, e.g. burning cars on the hills
- Get schools more involved in the local environment engaging and working with young people and parents.
- Green spaces include parks – support for local sporting organisations
- Appropriate tree planting and guerrilla gardening to improve pockets of underused land
- Link to food growing – edible footpaths. Community areas as growing spaces.
- Potential community orchard in Furniture Revival.
- Develop a Good Gym<sup>25</sup> in the area.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.goodgym.org>

## **OUTCOME – Improved community cohesion and sense of belonging through increased knowledge and pride in the area’s heritage**

### **Background and context**

*“Heritage is not just old stuff. It connects us, provides a sense of rootedness and place, and is vital to understanding who we are and what we would like to become.”<sup>26</sup>*

It is increasingly recognised that connection to place is a vital element in people’s wellbeing. Heritage is intimately linked to mental health and wellbeing largely generating positive emotions and a sense of connection, although it can also have negative impacts.<sup>27</sup>

Many of the stories and images in Marion Evans’ books, for example *A Portrait of Rhymney with cameos of Pontlottyn, Tafarnaubach, Princetown, Abertysswg and Fochriw*, portray the area’s rich tradition and heritage. However, this rich heritage is not as well-known as it should be, both locally and elsewhere.

Rhymney has a very proud and unique heritage, not only connected to iron and coal industries. Although most traces of these industries have now disappeared, Butetown is an fine example of model workers housing of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The town also has a rich tradition in the arts, business, civic culture, and health and wellbeing, e.g., Idris Davies, Andrew Buchan, TH Jones, and the Rhymney Bonesetters - ‘Bonesetter’ Reese and the Rocyn-Jones family - who hugely impacted and influenced the world of medicine through their practices and legacies.

Pontlottyn has a rich heritage with its links to David Morgan and as the birthplace of George ‘Honey-Boy’ Evans, who became one of America’s greatest entertainers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Abertysswg-born Jack Howells directed the only Welsh film to have won an Oscar and professional cyclist Colin Lewis, British National Road Race Champion, was also born in the village. The whole area, especially around Fochriw, has strong connections to the ancient Silures tribe renowned for their battles against the invading Roman legions.

### **What people said - what’s good, what could be improved or developed**

People felt local heritage and more recent history needs to be better understood and promoted.

The recently-formed Rhymney Heritage Group has started regular walks attracting local people and visitors, which could promote the area better and boost economic activity, as

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<sup>26</sup> [https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Heritage-Alliance-AnnualReport\\_2020\\_Online.pdf](https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Heritage-Alliance-AnnualReport_2020_Online.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <https://unesco.org.uk/heritage-mental-health-and-wellbeing-brief-report/>

well getting people more active. They have just started a stories project and have been discussing opportunities to create a new heritage trail around the area.

There are existing and developing walking trails from the railway station in Rhymney and from Butetown up into the Bannau Brychieniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park along the old tramroads routes.

The newly refurbished library will provide an opportunity to act as a community hub.

### **What could be done together going forward?**

- Increased awareness in community and outside the area
- Promote what's available better
- Youth clubs and information in schools
- Local history days involving schools - Could be held in the library every 3 months for example?
- Hold annual heritage evening – make local people more aware of the history, work towards the present and ideas for the future
- Produce interactive maps of each heritage walk detailing the information
- Interact with all activity groups and share best practice
- Develop more Geocaches during the walks and quizzes to instil fun and curiosity
- Open a heritage café where people can share photos and friendly chats over coffee

## **OUTCOME – People of all ages are included and valued in community life; people are ageing well, and young people enjoy better mental and physical wellbeing**

### **Background and context**

Generally, nowadays, people can now expect to live far longer than before, although the rate of premature deaths (under-75) in the upper Rhymney valley is considerably higher than the average in Wales and the highest in the Caerphilly County Borough area.

However, we need to ensure extra years are spent in good health by addressing conditions that reduce people's independence and impact on their quality of life. These means supporting older sections of our community, but importantly it means ensuring that people of all ages can thrive and age well. People of ages contribute hugely to the economic and social wealth of our communities.

The health and wellbeing impacts of the pandemic upon people of all ages have been apparent. The disruptive effects on schooling were detrimental for example and young people of school age and beyond suffered with poorer mental health.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, it is sometimes overlooked that young people can experience high levels of loneliness and social isolation, which affects their health. This is also true for older members of our communities, whose confidence too was severely impacted by the pandemic.<sup>29</sup>

### **What people said - what's good, what could be improved or developed**

It was felt by most that people's mental health was significantly worsened by the pandemic.

Activities such as the Cwtsh Café in Rhymney show how people can be brought together to improved community connections.

Community (wellbeing) connectors can and do play a critical role in helping older people connect with their communities good

People need to know what is available. Cwtsh guides help but need to get to people who are not online – digital exclusion is an issue amongst older people in the communities.

### **What could be done together going forward?**

- Support the development of more community activities for people of different ages.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9883078/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/age-friendly-wales-our-strategy-ageing-society-html>

- Need to engage more with young people through schools and youth clubs (use staff and networks that exist), but also outside those, to listen and understand better what they want and need - work together to enable greater provision accordingly.
- More activities for younger children (up to 10 -12) in school holidays, outdoors and at venues
- Encourage and develop more intergenerational activities in community settings
- Develop dementia-friendly community activities

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## OUTCOME – Health and wellbeing and community vitality are enhanced by volunteering

### Background and context

Volunteering can be key in helping to hold communities together and make them more vibrant - people connect to their communities and make them better places for families, friends, and neighbours. Moreover, research shows volunteering is rewarding and provides significant health benefits, physically and mentally, helping to offset the impacts of stress, isolation, and anxiety.<sup>30</sup>

Volunteering supports the **5 ways to wellbeing**.<sup>31</sup> It can involve physical activities getting people to **be active**. Volunteers can help people to develop and upskill (**learning**), which can in turn be used to help others (**connecting** and **giving**). Volunteering can help promote understanding and friendship between different groups within the community such as young people and older people. It can also help people get into employment developing their skills and confidence. Volunteering can lead to greater appreciation of the world around (**take notice**).

It is important we recognise that volunteering should not result in displacement or replacement of paid roles – indeed it can provide opportunities for people to gain confidence, training, and experience to move into employment.

### What people said - what's good, what could be improved or developed

There are excellent opportunities locally for people to volunteer and the communities benefit hugely from those involved. For example, at Community Centres and their activities e.g., Cwtsh Café and Parent Network, in sporting organisations in the area and at community venues like Furniture Revival. New activities have sprung up in the last year so such as walking groups which also provide opportunities.

GAVO has a dedicated community volunteer officer to support people who want to volunteer whilst the local authority, building on its excellent buddy initiative during the pandemic, has developed a volunteer scheme. The health board has its *Ffrind i Mi* project and a volunteering for health scheme that can help people get employment in health settings.

### What could be done together going forward?

- Develop volunteering as a key wellbeing initiative in the area

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/3-health-benefits-of-volunteering>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>

- Other incentives could be developed to encourage volunteering
- Employment to support volunteering opportunities
- Publicise opportunities on Cwtsh and social media
- Develop opportunities that fit with gaps in provision locally
- A 'Good Gym' to support health and wellbeing through volunteering

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## **OUTCOME - People are empowered to manage their health better with improved support for long-term conditions and mental wellbeing**

### **Background and context**

According to the World Health Organisation, community health is “the maintenance and improvement of health of all the people through collective or social actions” or “most simply the role of communities in keeping us healthy.”<sup>32</sup>

In line with ‘Building a Fairer Gwent’, we must ensure parents can give their children the best start in life, ensure the best quality education and training, help people as appropriate into work, and provide good quality housing. All these things contribute significantly to our health and wellbeing and there is much excellent work seeking in these areas.

We must also support people to age well by keeping them healthy and connected to their communities. We should enable people to make wiser choices and manage their own health and wellbeing better, to improve quality of life and reduce health inequalities in our communities. In other words, empowering people to live well.

We have challenges and opportunities to connect people better with each other and services to improve mental wellbeing, to encourage and enable us all to be more active to reduce the risks and incidence of chronic conditions and diseases such as obesity, hypertension, and Type-2 diabetes, all of which cause premature deaths and reduce health span in our communities.

We have many of the assets in our communities to be able to do this: people, places, and provision of services and support. The aim is to make sure those are functioning the best they can, are connected and are available to all.

### **What people said - what’s good, what could be improved or developed**

Services and staff at Rhymney Integrated Health and Social Care Centre are major assets, but could connect better to the community activities?

There are opportunities for more signposting and outreach of other services.

Organisations in the area such as Helping Hands and activities like the monthly Fibromyalgia group provide valuable and needed support. The recently-formed community menopause support group at Abertysswg is excellent.

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<sup>32</sup> [www.communityhealth.uk](http://www.communityhealth.uk)

Local information sites detailing support are good - Cwtsh guides and website are good - guides help community and services. Melo is well appreciated and Gwelcol site provides good specific help.

Better transport is needed to help people to get to groups

Long term support for conditions through EPP and other activities.

### **What could be done together going forward?**

- Support better connections between the Rhymney Integrated Health and Social Care Centre and local community activities and support
- Improve transport to facilitate people getting to support groups – “Wellness cabs to take people to support groups”
- More non-weight bearing activities available for people to support more physical activity such as e-cycles, cycle hire
- Drop-in ‘wellness’ sessions to give advice and support in health and other spheres
- Enhanced working between sectors with statutory services, GPs, dentists, pharmacies and third sector organisations having better mutual understanding and appreciation
- Help businesses in supporting their employees’ wellbeing
- Provide wellbeing support training (Connect 5) for community centres and groups

## 5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND SOME NEXT STEPS

This outline plan is based on community input to date; from individuals, groups, and some of the services that work in those communities. It is not all encompassing or perfect. Indeed, we fully recognise the need to engage more people to provide their views and input and to involve and enable for people to take action, whether personally or at community level.

We expect some will disagree with some or perhaps even much in this plan. That is warmly welcomed because continued constructive challenge and dialogue is needed to make progress in addressing our wellbeing and health issues together.

No one organisation can address or solve the challenges in our communities – it must be a collective approach and effort. The scope of this outline plan does not *directly* address some major factors that impact health and wellbeing. There is ongoing work being undertaken across sectors to address those wider determinants like housing, education, and employment.

This outline plan must be viewed in that context and complement that work. Effective community voices and informed, empowered communities are absolute necessities. The participatory budgeting process about to commence will provide a chance for local people to get more involved and devise and decide upon ideas and initiatives to address some of the challenges and opportunities.

### Next steps and actions

We propose the next steps to take this forward

- Disseminate the outline plan through our channels and through those of the Cwtsh Collaborative to **get wider community and service input and involvement**.
- Use the outline plan as a basis to support and deliver **participatory budgeting** in the area to enable and empower community-led action.
- Create **action areas with measurable delivery plans** based on the indicative outcomes. We propose **locally-led** action groups for each area (these could be combined considering the overlaps). We will encourage and invite people and organisations to be part of these. This will ensure delivery and demonstrable progress in each area and monitor the impact in making a difference.

Alongside this, we will continue seek to improve what happens in the IWN programme through its four work areas.

**1. Encouraging place-based collaboration and community-led action**

IWN meetings will continue - we will ensure these are more regular on a quarterly basis, but we will support the action area groups outside these.

**2. Connecting and enhancing community-based hubs and activities**

We will continue to support the development of activities at hubs and encourage enhanced collaborative working between them.

**3. Supporting and connecting services and support in an area**

We will continue to work within and outside meetings to help connect services and groups. We will work to support local primary care services to link better with the communities and support initiatives such as Nature Prescribing. We will work with colleagues in Public Health on prevention, protection and promotion measures and initiatives to improve people's health in our communities.

**4. Enabling easier, inclusive access to wellbeing information in communities**

We will continue to provide and develop the Cwtsh website and guides as well as working to provide better offline information, support information portals including Dewis and disseminate local information through the Caerphilly Cwtsh Community Facebook site and other social media channels. We will continue with partners to support initiatives such as men's and women's health and wellbeing events.

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# **ANNEXES**

**To be added**