

Aberdare set to become a thriving hub for economic and community development

A new pilot project aims to make the Cynon Valley town an epicentre of prosperity with ambitious regeneration plans putting collaborative working at the heart of a bright and sustainable future.

The CORE Project will take an innovative social approach to town centre economic regeneration through co-operative working and community engagement in Aberdare, aimed at creating a ripple effect permeating throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf.

At the heart of the town – one of eight prioritised for regeneration in the county – the CORE Business Solutions Centre around which the project will be based is set to make Aberdare the go-to for new business support and collaborative local economic development in the Cynon Valley and beyond.

The project is funded by the UK Government through the UK Community Renewal Fund, supported by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

Leading the co-ordination of the project with an established base in the town centre, Our Aberdare BID is a five-year business-led and funded partnership which started in May 2020, facilitating local businesses to invest in improvements within the town and surrounding area.

Jim Bradley, Our Aberdare BID chairman, said:

“We are proud to be leading the coordination of this project for this will put Aberdare front and centre in the fight back to regenerate the town and the Cynon Valley.”

“We will create an environment which will promote the Cynon Valley as an excellent place to do business and in which to live and work. A visitor information centre will also be set up here to provide literature on all that the valley has to offer.”

“We look forward to support from all agencies but, in particular, from those who already live and work in the valley.”

The nucleus of the plan is a co-working space which will function as a business incubator, allowing innovation and enterprise to flourish. The physical space will enable businesses, community groups and partner organisations to come together to develop regeneration ideas which will benefit local people for generations to come.

The project will have collaborative approaches at its core from the outset with partners alongside Our Aberdare BID including; the Wales Co-operative Centre, microfinance provider Purple Shoots, employment specialists BPI Consultancy and community-integrated mental health support providers, Signposted Cymru.



Wales Co-operative Centre CEO, Derek Walker, said:

"We are delighted to be leading this project, which will actively encourage a collaborative approach to community regeneration in Aberdare and the Cynon Valley. Working with a number of partner organisations, we will create a space and provide support for new local businesses to set up and to flourish. The project will improve lives and livelihoods throughout the area."

Specialist support will be offered through a variety of activities, events and innovative workshops, including community enterprise days specifically focusing on social enterprise and purpose-led business development.

From its earliest stages, the pilot proposal proved popular with the backing of more than 270 local businesses within the Aberdare Business Improvement District. It has also received parliamentary support for its capacity to positively affect the community for generations to come. Speaking about the project gaining the green light, Beth Winter, Labour MP for Cynon Valley, said:

"The world of work is changing and so are our town centres. A shared working space will bring people into Aberdare Town Centre and promote entrepreneurship and innovation in our communities."

"If people who would otherwise be commuting out of the valley were enabled to spend their time and money in the town centre, the knock on effect could be really important for the local economy."

"This is incredibly exciting news and I'd like to put on record my thanks to Our Aberdare BID and the Wales Co-operative Centre for the hard work that went into securing this funding."

The multi-purpose space will support local networking and collaboration between local people while encouraging visitor footfall from those further afield – all with the key aim of growing an inclusive local circular economy by uplifting all commerce in the area.

The new hub will also act as an access point to a variety of ongoing business advice services from Social Business Wales and Big Ideas Wales among others – facilitated by Our Aberdare BID in their role as co-ordinators of the hub's overall operation. Our Aberdare BID Manager, Dawn Penny, said:

"The overall aim of our project is to improve the prosperity of our town, aiding its regeneration and sustainability. Strengthening the voice of our levy members, business and local community on matters that affect us."

"By creating a hub in Aberdare to include an information and solutions centre for businesses and visitors and co-working space, we will bring our community together to create the indelible developments they want to see."



With funding from the Community Renewal Fund to kick-start the project and ambitious plans to develop opportunities for investment in skills and employment, the aim is to attract further investment into Aberdare town centre.

As a longstanding supporter of Our Aberdare BID and providing endorsement for the pilot project from its earliest stages, Vikki Howells, Member of the Senedd for Cynon Valley, said:

"It was a pleasure to support Aberdare BID with their application for funding from the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund. I'm delighted that this application has been a success and that funding has been awarded for the BID to develop a town centre hub from which they can support local businesses. Local independent businesses are the backbone of our town centre, and I've no doubt that with the support of the BID we will see more businesses grow and thrive."

A dedicated project team will have the collective responsibility for identifying and raising awareness of community development-based investment opportunities as well as allocating seed capital to get new and expanding businesses on the road to sustainable success.

Grants of up to £10,000 will be available for new or existing businesses and supported constituted groups to develop solutions that have a positive impact on the climate, environment and community. Overseeing this element of the project is Purple Shoots, a registered charity based in Rhondda Cynon Taf. CEO, Karen Davies, said:

"This project is a great chance for us to focus our efforts in the Cynon Valley. At Purple Shoots, we've spent the last eight years helping brilliant businesspeople who have struggled to find support elsewhere to get their new ventures started."

"We've also worked with groups of people to develop friendships, support and enterprising ideas in our Self Reliant Groups."

"Climate change and supporting the environment are huge issues for everyone and we can't wait to see what great ideas the people of the Cynon Valley have and help them through the process of getting up and running and also positively impacting the community."

People power will be the focal point of development plans, empowering and uniting individuals with a shared vision, particularly those currently unemployed or at risk of redundancy.

Vocational courses and learning programmes will be available across subjects from leadership and management to marketing, income diversification and lean manufacturing. Mark Adams, Director of training providers, BPI Consultancy, said:

"Empowerment through personal and professional development is key to our work and will fit into the objectives of the CORE Project perfectly. The CMI-recognised Empowering Employees to Peak Potential (E²2P²) courses in particular will put self-starters looking at establishing a



new business on the road to success, complementing the additional business support available through the project.”

Alongside empowerment, an edict to improve well-being is woven into the plan as a cornerstone of the project, ensuring longevity is embedded within ongoing regeneration work.

One-to-one well-being sessions will also be available in order to ensure a person-centred approach to business resilience. Darren Thomas of Signposted Cymru, said:

“We’re really pleased to be a part of this project to help local people manage their well-being. Work life balance is essential for good mental and physical health.”

“Our involvement will not only encourage and support balanced workplace well-being but will also compliment other professional support available through our immediate interventions for people who may need support with their mental health.”

Discussing the reach and ambition of the multi-faceted collaboration initiative into the future, project manager, Tom Addiscott, said:

“This project is a really exciting opportunity for local people and businesses in Aberdare and the Cynon Valley, with a place-based business incubator that will encourage learning, collaboration and facilitate local solutions to current local and global challenges.”

“The long-term aim is to facilitate a new bottom-up approach to town centre regeneration through enabling the development of businesses, jobs, community ownership of buildings and a strengthened local circular economy which directly benefits all those with a stake in it.”

“I’m really pleased that the Wales Co-operative Centre and our amazing partners can now mobilise our collective strengths to bring this pilot project to life – a project that will be co-delivered, co-owned and make a real difference to local people throughout Aberdare and beyond.”

Find out more and book free onto our business development workshops. Search Wales Co-operative Centre on Eventbrite or go directly to: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/wales-co-operative-centre-1591791082>

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Notes to editors:

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This project is funded by the UK Government through the UK Community Renewal Fund.

Our Aberdare BID

The Our Aberdare BID programme pledges to deliver services above and beyond those currently provided by the borough council. This 'additionality' is fundamental to the way in which the BID works and is ensured by a baseline agreement between Our Aberdare and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. <https://www.ouraberdare.com>

The Wales Co-operative Centre

The Wales Co-operative Centre is the UK's largest co-operative development agency. They deliver a range of services (both commercial and publicly funded) and undertake policy and public affairs work, all with the aim of achieving our corporate objectives. The Centre champions a fairer and greener society, for co-operative working and for the use of technology for social good – we're leading the public debate, shaping policy and campaigning for positive change. <https://wales.coop>

Purple Shoots

Purple Shoots (Purple Shoots Business Lending) is a not-for-profit micro finance organisation and a registered charity. Purple Shoots provides small business loans at fair rates, helping people who need a hand up, not just more hand outs and have made a real difference to many people's lives. <https://purpleshoots.org>

BPI Consultancy

Since 1990, BPI has specialised in helping businesses across Wales and the South West improve the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of their organisation by investing in their most valuable and precious asset – their workforce. Today, BPI is one of Wales' longest established training organisations. Over the past two decades, they have trained more than 25,000 students and delivered more than 3,000 training courses. <https://bpigroup.co.uk/>

Signposted Cymru

The Signposted Cymru offers initial and immediate intervention for individuals struggling and needing support with mental health and well-being challenges. They offer responsive, tailored support for people and communities to help build brighter futures. The core ethos behind Signposted Cymru is to Acknowledge, Strive and Succeed.

<https://signpostedcymru.com>

