

Valleys Viewpoints

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Introduction

For too long the south Wales valleys have been associated with economic decline. There are without doubt economic challenges as a result of massive job losses in the 1980s and 1990s. Even worse, some of the solutions, such as inward investment and a reliance on commuting to Wales' cities, have not helped the area to recover.

So what is the future for the valleys?

We invited people from across the valleys to tell us what they love about their area and what would make it better. We used local newspapers and newsletters along with social media for them to elicit their thoughts, either as quotes, images or any other format they chose. We were delighted at the number and range of responses.

People told us that the valleys have unique strengths. Their responses show how strongly people feel about the places they live in and how much they want a better future. Crucially, they want a future that builds on the valleys' assets, valuing their history, community and environment while at the same time offering good public services such as decent transport and good schools.

A selection of responses – both quotes and images – are brought together in this booklet. Together they demonstrate that there is much to like – or love – about the valleys, and that there is also more to do.

Bevan Foundation, June 2021

The Valleys: My Home

The valleys are home to around 700,000 people, many of them valleys born and bred. Home is much more than bricks and mortar – it is a sense of community and affinity with the landscape. The valleys exert a strong pull – many of those who leave want to come back.

Wendy, Merthyr

I love living in the valleys, it is where all my family and friends are and there is a real sense of community. I worry that house prices are becoming more and more unaffordable.

Wayne, Tylorstown

What I love are the tight-knit communities who provide support for one another and are rich in laughter and joy.

Lee, Blaen-y-Cwm

After decades of living under the shadow of 'Rhondda Grey' we are now emerging as an area of outstanding natural beauty with a huge diversity of both landscapes, nature and people. The Rhondda is once again a place we can be proud to call home.



By Wayne Carter,
Duffryn Street, Ferndale, Rhondda



By Lee Williams,
Houses in Blaenycwm, Rhondda



By Lee Williams, Chapel Street
Blaenycwm, Rhondda

Anna, Abertillery

What I love about living in the valleys is how friendly and approachable people are, when you need something you know that people will help you somewhere. I love the community spirit and the community parks. Everybody helps each other to get things that they want and need (where they are not provided).

Beth, Pontypridd

I am a valley's kid at heart. Despite that I'm now in my twenties, I'm a valley's kid born and raised. I ran from the hills at 19 to study. I love the nightlife, the societies, and the friends I have made but there comes a time when I miss my home.

A stunning environment

The valleys are unique. The combination of steep-sided mountains and narrow winding valley bottoms have created natural environments like no other. Some natural habitats host rare species of flora and fauna so are protected. Others have been created from the valleys' industrial legacy. But all are beautiful, and on everyone's doorstep.

Denise, Treherbert

Our beautiful valley. Who wouldn't want to live here? The old Treherbert Hospital was a brilliant hospital. I was sad to see it close but the beauty is still there. It just shows how beautiful our valley is.

Wayne, Tylorstown

Natural beauty surrounds us as depicted in the photo of Darran Park lake in Ferndale, Rhondda. Local people use it as a social activity to support their health and well-being and meet family and friends.

Beth, Pontypridd

The city is busy, never silent. There are parties, sirens, shoppers and shouting. At home there are birds, sheep and if you listen closely, you can hear the river in the background. It's not silent but the quiet noises are different. I'm home and the valleys are peaceful.

v Windust, Senghenydd Valley

Although I live in a poor area, half way up a mountain, I have a wonderful view over the Senghenydd valley and can watch the changing seasons and walk my dog on the cycle path. Many elderly people and children use this green space for fresh air and exercise but we need a few benches scattered there to rest - one is not enough. Motorbike boy racers are destroying the land and threaten the safety of vulnerable people who are becoming afraid to walk there.

Mitchell, Llanhilleth

Living in the Gwent valleys is special due to the sheer amount of greenery around. The trees and birds are beautiful. However, a downside is that many people don't seem to appreciate the natural beauty and fly tip a lot and the littering is unacceptable. I would like to see the police station restored to my village.

Julie, Glynfach

I love the close-knit community. People will chat and say hello. I wish our areas had better litter picking, road cleaning and grass cutting and that people are educated to keep their area clean. Pavements are unkept with litter and weeds. Our area is not as well looked after as more affluent areas such as Cowbridge.

Cerys, Treherbert

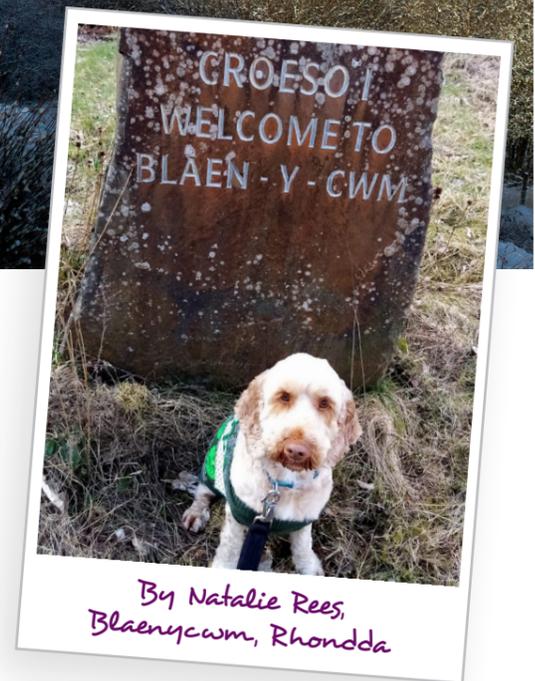
Looking towards Blaenrhondda from Fernhill with Pen-Pych mountain in the background. We have a fantastic community; great mountain walks, fabulous scenery and views to see and explore. Why live anywhere else!



By Cerys Warren, Treherbert, Rhondda



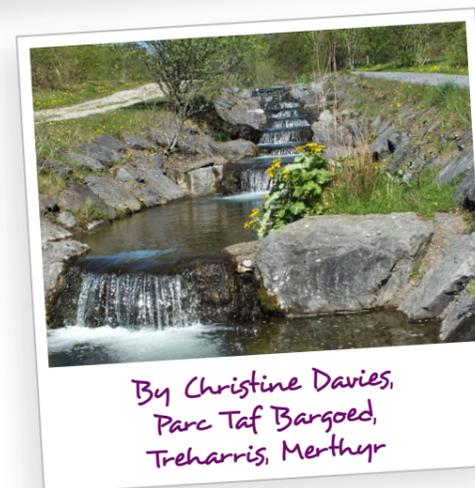
By Mia Evans, Pen Pych, Treherbert, Rhondda



By Natalie Rees, Blaenycwm, Rhondda



By Denise John, Treherbert



By Christine Davies, Parc Taf Bargoed, Treharris, Merthyr



By Denise John, Old Treherbert Hospital

Getting about

The geography of the valleys makes it difficult to get about without a car. More and more people have to travel to Cardiff, Newport and Swansea or along the M4 as well as across valleys. Better public transport would improve the lives of many people.

Helen, Caerphilly

Connections and relationships between valley towns like Caerphilly need to be stronger to break the reliance on the cities for work and leisure purposes. Valleys towns serve as a focal point for their surrounding areas and provide a sense of community.

Adrian, Henllys

History defines many residents of the valleys – heavy industries are long gone. Commutes to the M4 corridor are tortuous. Public transport needs to be vastly improved and free to anyone under 18. Car ownership should be discouraged.

Gillian, Llantrisant

Improve roads into the valleys to encourage businesses to move here.

Kate, Brecon

To improve the valleys there needs to be better and more frequent bus routes. Bring back the railways too.



By Natalie Rees, Tynwydd in winter, Rhondda



By Linda Jones, Taff Trail, Quakers Yard, Merthyr



By Linda Jones, Quakers Yard, Train to Merthyr

Prosperity for all

Communities across the valleys have had to adapt to many years of economic change. New industries have emerged and the valleys are still the base for many leading businesses. But there have not been enough jobs to replace those lost, and like many other places there are signs of decline.

Helen, Caerphilly

I live in Caerphilly town. Being the southernmost town in the county and bordering Cardiff I often feel that I'm not really a valleys resident. Make the most of what we already have, encourage businesses to locate here and draw people in with good leisure facilities.

Maureen, Cwm Parc

To improve the valleys I would like to see the dilapidated shops and houses renovated and put to good use. There are so many empty and derelict buildings making the valleys look neglected.

Glenda, Rhondda

Better infrastructure. Roads in the Rhondda Fach are awful. There is just one road into the Maerdy to link up with Aberdare which doesn't give much enticement for bringing factories into the valley.

Adrian, Henllys

The magnitude of public sector employers inevitably makes them key players. They need to be given the flexibility and resources to offer apprenticeships which lead to permanent jobs.

Sally, Pontypridd

Most valleys' schools are excellent and this is a beautiful place to live. An educated, skilled workforce combined with the advantages of the glorious environment of the valleys will attract businesses and industries, well paid jobs and prosperity. The opportunities are huge.



By Linda Jones, Overlooking Treharris, Merthyr



By Lee Dare, Treharris RFC on the old site of Deep Navi Pit



By Lea Hudson, Rhondda Valley

The past and the future

The valleys of today are built on the coal and metal industries of previous centuries. People are proud of their past and would like greater acknowledgement of the valleys' contribution to the world. With their many strengths, the valleys could be the powerhouse of a greener, fairer and more sustainable future.

Laura, Swansea Valley

Use the industrial history of the valleys to boost tourism and job opportunities. Adapting post-industrial sites will make them safer for local people but also tell the story of an important part of valleys' history. Link the sites together with walks or cycle ways for local people to explore, enjoy and improve wellbeing. Turn the history and culture of the valleys from 'what was lost' to part of a better future for all.

Angela, Tynnewydd

In my opinion the Rhondda is unique and should have UNESCO status to maintain its heritage. The people of the valleys are friendly, caring and love to welcome strangers and talk about their beautiful valleys and their history. It's time now though to look to the future. Let's open Blaencwm tunnel, create cycle paths and mountain climbing routes for tourists. We need hotels and less land given over to forestry. Support people to build small businesses, just like Treorchy 'High Street of the Year 2019'.

John, Trelewis

The valleys is an inspirational place for nature. I would like to see more people visit places like Taf Bargoed to see more of its beauty. More bed and breakfasts in the area would attract more visitors.

Angela, Tynnewydd

We have the talent and the 'hwyl' now we need investment. Not massive factories nor supermarkets – they kill the uniqueness of our homeland. Support creativity, there is plenty within our young people. Invest in health centres and GPs who want to stay. Invest in community services, bring back libraries (which are also teaching centres) and invest in our youth.

Olivia, Pontypool

Young people love their local parks and spend lots of time socialising in their spare time. They said having more spaces to spend time with their friends and do fun things would make their community better.

Jordain, Pontypool

One of my favourite places in Torfaen is Ashley House Youth Club. They have lots of different provisions for young people in the local community to come and make friends, receive support and have fun.



By Jordain Hamilton, Pontypool, Ashley House Youth Club, Cwmbran



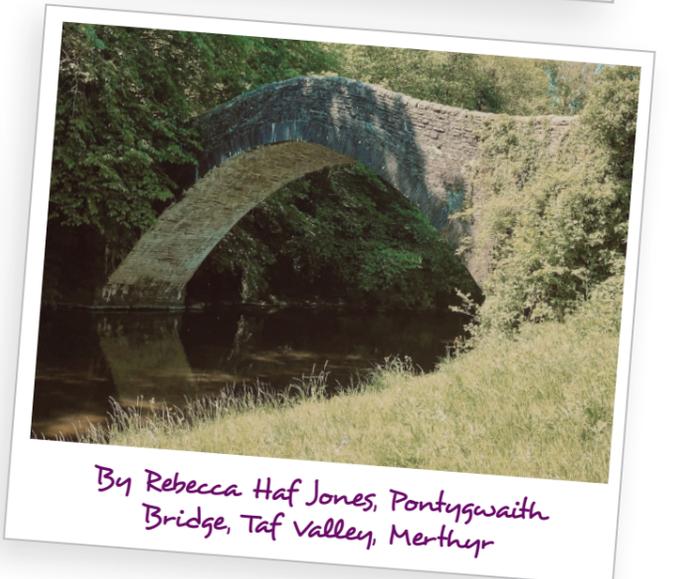
By Wayne Carter, Darran Park, Ferndale, Rhondda



By Lloyd Jones, Parc Taf Bargoed, Treharris, Merthyr



By Hayley Amos, Treharris Park, Treharris, Merthyr



By Rebecca Haf Jones, Pontygwaith Bridge, Taf Valley, Merthyr

About the Bevan Foundation

The Bevan Foundation is Wales' most innovative and influential think tank. We develop lasting solutions to poverty and inequality. Our vision is for Wales to be a nation where everyone has a decent standard of living, a healthy and fulfilled life, and a voice in the decisions that affect them. As an independent, registered charity, the Bevan Foundation relies on the generosity of individuals and organisations for its work, as well as charitable trusts and foundations.

You can find out more about how you can support us and get involved here: www.bevanfoundation.org/support-us

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is part of a wider project on building economic resilience in the south Wales valleys. It is funded by the Friends Provident Foundation, along with local partners including Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Merthyr Valley Homes, Tai Calon, United Welsh Housing Association, Cynon Taf Housing, UnLtd.

This paper includes the views of the authors alone and may not reflect the views of our funders, supporters or subscribers.

Cover photo:

Chapel Street Blaenycwm, Rhondda By Lee Williams



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