WELL-BEING ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

• • • • •

This summary chapter synthesises and draws insight from the findings reported in the four Neath Port Talbot (NPT) Well-being pillar chapters:

ECONOMIC   **ENVIRONMENTAL**   **CULTURAL**   **SOCIAL**

This chapter considers the key issues and progress achieved since the previous Well-being Assessment, and feedback provided in the "Let's Talk" campaign through a retrospective and prospective lens. The information is presented in the context of the Seven Well-being Goals, and should be read alongside the four Well-being pillar chapters.

Since the first Well-being Assessment in 2017, positive progress has been made to improve NPT well-being outcomes. This improvement has been achieved in spite of budget cuts and austerity actions, the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued challenges posed by environmental threats. The importance of protecting the natural environment is a high priority, with the Welsh Government officially declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019 and a Nature Emergency in 2021. This two-fold emergency highlights the significance of the interrelated challenges and the urgency needed in tackling them. It is essential that the social and natural environment are viewed together to achieve sustainable development.

SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEATH PORT TALBOT

• • • • •

A PROSPEROUS WALES

- **GREEN ECONOMY:** NPT remains one of the most important manufacturing locations in the UK with largest steel production complex at Port Talbot. Decarbonising important economic assets such as this to achieve the Welsh Government's Net Zero target are a significant challenge. While carbon emissions have reduced in NPT over the last decade, it is below the national average. However, there are promising opportunities for future growth linked to decarbonisation such as through Associated British Port's vision for Port Talbot Docks as a globally significant offshore wind turbine production hub.

- **SKILLED WORKFORCE:** Occupations remain lower skilled compared to the UK average. We need to work together to upskill our workforce to meet the long-term demand for jobs in the area.

- **PANDEMIC RECOVERY:** Employment is recovering following the pandemic, but support is needed around recruitment for growing sectors. The pandemic has given us an opportunity to rethink the way we do things and build back better in a green and just way that addresses both the climate and nature emergencies.

- **CHILDCARE:** Costs can be a barrier to employment. We need to increase uptake of entitlements and support the development of this sector.

A RESILIENT WALES

- **NATURAL RESOURCE LIMITS:** We are using stocks of our natural resources at a rate which is unsustainable and that our ecosystems are under increasing pressure and threat from the impacts of climate change, land use change, invasive non-native species (INNS), pollution and over-use.

- **ECOSYSTEMS:** Many of our ecosystems are not resilient to unexpected or unforeseen change. This jeopardises the ability of our natural environment to provide a number of vital well-being benefits now and in the future.

- **NATURE-BASED RECOVERY:** A changing climate will likely impact on the condition and distribution of habitats and species, and degraded habitats contribute to climate change. However, by putting nature into recovery we can also tackle climate change.

- **NATURAL ASSETS:** Residents appreciate and value the natural assets in NPT, but more is required to improve and recover them over the long-term.

- **FLOODING AND COASTAL CHANGE:** Flooding and coastal change risks to homes, communities, businesses, infrastructure, and ecosystems are one of the top concerns of climate change in NPT.

A HEALTHIER WALES

- **CHANGING POPULATION:** There is an ongoing increase in the older population, also in single person households, which is likely to be a factor in increased loneliness and isolation. The gap in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy also indicates increased pressure on health and social services.

- **HEALTHY PLACES:** In comparison to Wales, NPT has one of the least healthy diets and lowest levels of physical activity. Work is needed to reverse the growing trend of obesity and more can be done to make sure the places we live help us to be active and eat well.

- **MENTAL WELL-BEING:** Residents of NPT reported comparatively positive mental well-being in the National Survey for Wales. However, we need to be prepared for an increase in low mental well-being and mental health conditions as the true impacts of the pandemic surface.

- **HOUSING:** We need more affordable housing in NPT, with 1,037 new homes required by 2033. Encouragingly, 434 new units were built between 2018 and 2021.

- **AIR QUALITY:** While there has been improvement in air quality across NPT in the last decade, it still remains an area of concern and is a key priority in order to improve the health of current and future generations.

A MORE EQUAL WALES

- **DEPRIVATION AND POVERTY:** High concentrations of deprivation and poverty remain in areas of NPT. These areas will be most impacted by the current increases in living costs.

- **HOUSEHOLD INCOME:** Household income has fallen across Wales during the pandemic with people on low to mid incomes more likely to be affected.

- **COVID-19 IMPACT:** Covid-19 has increased inequality in general in NPT and the worst affected groups include Black and Ethnic Minorities, women and young people.

- **EDUCATION:** The pandemic appears to have increased inequalities in educational attainment and the full extent of this impact may not yet be evident.

- **ENVIRONMENTAL RISK:** Those most vulnerable in society are at higher risk environmental risk such as poor air quality and flooding. Climate change is expected to exacerbate these inequalities and there is a risk that responses to climate change can place disproportionate burdens on vulnerable people and communities.

A WALES OF COHESIVE COMMUNITIES

- **COMMUNITY SPIRIT:** Communities have pulled together during the pandemic and residents have noted the increase in community spirit and support. Communities should be supported to shape their own futures.
- **SAFE COMMUNITIES:** NPT is generally considered to be a safe place to live. There has been a reduction in anti-social behaviour and violence against women, although we have seen an upward trend in cyber-crime. NPT residents are concerned about drugs in the communities.
- **CONNECTED COMMUNITIES:** Whilst the towns of Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe are well connected to each other and the rest of Wales, transport links in the valley areas are poor and contribute to the social and economic isolation of people living there.
- **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:** Residents of NPT feel it is important for children and young people to have more places to go and things to do.

A WALES OF VIBRANT CULTURE AND THRIVING WELSH LANGUAGE

- **PROUD HERITAGE:** People in NPT are proud of their heritage and traditional Welsh communities. We need to preserve and protect our culture, history and rich natural heritage, whilst keeping inclusivity in mind as our culture becomes more diverse and working to remove historical stigma associated with the area by promoting the area.
- **WELSH LANGUAGE:** Whilst the number of Welsh speakers has declined, learning and Welsh educational opportunities are increasing. We need to provide more opportunity to use the Welsh language in NPT to increase residents' confidence.
- **ARTS AND CULTURE:** Underfunding of the arts and culture has had a negative impact on the offer over the years, which the pandemic has further impacted. We know access to these things are an important factor to improving well-being.
- **VOLUNTEERING:** With the increasing number of community assets (e.g. community centres, libraries and heritage sites) being run by volunteers relying on grant funding, we need to provide support to make this sustainable so that such assets are not lost.

A GLOBALLY RESPONSIBLE WALES

- **RESOURCE USE AND DECARBONISATION:** NPT uses 2.5 times per person more resources than the planet can sustain. Further, NPT is a major carbon contributor in Wales and faces a challenge to balance Net Zero goals against the economic benefits brought by its high energy/emission employers.

- **CLIMATE AND NATURE EMERGENCY:** NPT is a leader in renewable energy with some of the highest installed renewable energy capacity in Wales. Current projects to restore adjacent habitats such as carbon-sequestering peatlands demonstrates ways in which multiple benefits can be derived to tackle both the Climate and Nature emergencies together.

- **FAMOUS PERSONALITIES:** NPT has produced world famous actors, artists and sports personalities giving us a global identity, this can be further harnessed to promote the region.

A PROSPEROUS WALES

· · · · ·

An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

Encouraging improvements in NPT's carbon emissions, waste and air quality have been made since the last assessment, yet further improvement remains a priority. In 2020-2021, residents of NPT produced just under 1% less waste per person than the national average (466kg vs 470kg). While air quality has significantly improved in NPT over the past 10 years, further progress is being made using new technology which will help to reduce death and other negative impacts attributed to poor air quality. In 2021, NPT council reported that the area was the first in Wales to implement the innovative approach of placing sensors on lampposts to obtain air quality intelligence.

Reducing the environmental impact of production and consumption, and the carbon footprint from Wales and beyond, is central to achieving the goal of being a prosperous and globally responsible country. The target is for Wales to use no more than its fair share of global resources for the economy, to operate within the regenerative capacity of the Earth's ecosystems and make a positive contribution to global well-being. Housing the largest UK-based steel production complex in its locale, NPT is one of the most important manufacturing locations in the UK. The steel industry sustains significant economic benefit to the area and while it provides an embedded cultural identity, its impact on climate change is irrefutable. NPT has the highest carbon intensity of any local authority in the UK and emits 53% of the industrial carbon in Wales. Subsequently residents in NPT produce over seven times as much carbon per capita compared to the national average even though emissions from transport and households are similar to other local authorities in Wales. While carbon emissions diminished by 9% between 2005 and 2019, it is below the UK average of 36%.

In 2018, NPT's economy was estimated to be worth £2.6 billion, supporting around 56,000 jobs. Workforce qualifications (up to NVQ3 and NVQ4) remain below the national average but have showed an upward trajectory. Prior to the pandemic, employment rates increased 10% between 2014 and 2019. Unfortunately, at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment rates increased by 59% in spite of an effective furlough scheme. The increase in unemployment was 27% lower than the national average (86%) because of the lower exposure to service sectors such as hospitality. Since the reduction of COVID-19 restrictions, employment rates are recovering, with an 18% decrease in unemployment between March and August 2021. There is continued concern that continued rationalisation of jobs at Tata Steel would have a negative impact on employment levels and subsequently individual well-being across the local authority and further afield. Further, COVID-19 has created widening inequalities in education with poorer examination results across the local authority compared to less deprived areas. Further school closures, home schooling and reduced access and progression in further and higher education will also impact the workforce for some time to come.

The COVID-19 pandemic has now given us an opportunity to rethink the way we do things and build back better in a green and just way that addresses both the climate and nature crises, along with other challenges facing our current and future generations NPT has a vibrant economic recovery plan to help "build back stronger" with greater resilience. The recovery plan aims to focus its efforts on the hardest hit places, communities and business sectors by targeting new opportunities, including a set of measures to achieve a greener economy.

A RESILIENT WALES

A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).

We are using our stocks of natural resources at a rate which is unsustainable and that our ecosystems are under increasing pressure and threat from the impacts of climate change, land use change, invasive non-native species (INNS), pollution and over-use. Many of our ecosystems are not resilient to unexpected or unforeseen change because one or more of their aspects are insufficient. This jeopardises the ability of our natural environment to provide a number of vital well-being benefits now and in the future.

The state of nature in Neath Port Talbot is a mixed picture, while the majority of habitats and their associated wildlife are under threat and have shown declines over many years, there are still some significant assets. With habitat loss, damage and poor management continuing to contribute to the nature emergency it has never been more important to take opportunities to deliver positive action, to reverse the trend and to improve and recover the nature of Neath Port Talbot.

More frequent extreme weather as a result of climate change causes significant uncertainty for residents of NPT during stormy periods. Over 15,000 properties in NPT are at risk of flooding with increased individual health and economic impact. In January 2021, Skewen experienced severe flooding as a result of Storm Christoph. Ensuring provisions are in place to reduce the impact of flooding is vital for a large number of NPT communities.

Climate change predictions suggest increases in sea level of between 0.2 and 1 metre along South Wales's coastline. Coastal erosion is a natural process, and while seafront developments are protected by coastal defences, we need also to consider how communities can adapt to coastal changes.

Freshwater ecosystems are rich in biodiversity, and also provide important ecosystem services, including the provision of water resources and flood control. In 2021, only 31% (of 29) of water bodies (wholly or partly) in NPT were graded as at Good Ecological Status, as compared to 36% in 2018. Additionally, the bathing water at Aberafan's classification status downgraded from 'good' in 2015 to 'sufficient' now.

Soil biota and organic matter has been decreasing in Wales, which has led to reduce quality and function. NPT has significant quantity of peat habitats and is a key consideration in NPT as it is important for carbon-sequestering and supports the mitigation of climate change.. As part of a 25-year plan, extensive work will be undertaken to restore these habitats.

A changing climate will likely impact on the condition and distribution of habitats and species, and degraded habitats contribute to climate change. However, by putting nature into recovery we can also tackle climate change. Thriving habitats can safely lock up vast amounts of carbon, while providing other vital benefits that help us adapt to our future climate, such as flood prevention, clean water and improved health and wellbeing.

A HEALTHIER WALES

• • • • •

A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.

The overall population in NPT is set to increase by 2.8% by 2028 taking resident numbers to 146,840 with a disproportionate increase in those aged 65+ (increase of circa 7,000). The resident population aged 75+ is projected to increase by 50% from 13,500 to 20,100 between 2018 and 2033. The largest increase in the older adult population is projected to be in the Neath and Port Talbot areas, and to a lesser extent in the Pontardawe area.

The increase in life expectancy and morbidity is set to place increased pressure on public services which is likely to be offset by increases in employment across the sector. Increasing life expectancy and positive mental and physical health are crucial for living well with a high quality of life. Positively, residents of NPT were ranked in the top five local authorities in Wales for their mental well-being. On the other hand, loneliness is on the increase due to an increasing number of single person households expounded by social isolation measures implemented during the COVD-19 pandemic. In NPT 14.2% of residents experience loneliness compared to a national average of 15.5%. Given the increase in the aging population and the number of single person households, social isolation remains a major concern for public health. With the emphasis placed on community cohesion in the Let's Talk responses, it is likely that supportive communities have helped to offset the impact of loneliness in NPT. Conversely, inadequate physical connectivity within and between communities can exacerbate loneliness.

Two thirds of adults in NPT (66%) are overweight or obese; 6% higher than the national average. Efforts to decrease obesity levels are not being supported by the obesogenic environment (an environment that helps increase obesity levels). For example, NPT has above the national average of fast-food outlets per 100,000 people (104.86 vs 100.65, respectively). One behaviour to offset excess calorie intake is physical activity. There are some of the lowest physical activity levels within Wales in this area, with NPT being in the bottom five local authorities for the percentage of adults meeting the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines. The message from the guidelines of "any activity is better than none, and more is better still" is important to communicate, particularly as there is a vast amount of evidence showing the positive mental and physical health benefits of participating in physical activity. It is important that the infrastructure is in place to enable physical activity, promote mental well-being, community cohesion, social climate and connectivity.

Of relevance here is that NPT has a sizeable proportion of natural assets: 40% of the area is covered in woodland. During the pandemic, the value of greenspace should not be underestimated, with well placed, quality facilities and services (e.g. public toilets, shops, cafés) augmenting well-being, footfall and economic activity. Further "active transport" (walking and cycling) increased during the pandemic, not only reducing car travel and carbon emissions but also improving the public perception of safety outside. The importance of Greenspaces and Green Infrastructure is gaining wider recognition outside of the environment sector, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and work is underway to promote greater provision of such in NPT.

Air Quality is the leading cause of the environmental burden of disease and has been described by Public Health Wales as an urgent public health crisis, second only to smoking. Long term exposure to air pollution can lead to serious symptoms and conditions affecting human health. It is estimated that air pollution contributes to 2,000 deaths a year in Wales (6% of total deaths) and 30,000-40,000 across the UK (6-7%). While there has been significant improvement in air quality across NPT, it still remains an area of concern. The Welsh Government's the Clean Air Plan for Wales sets out a plan for improving air quality and reducing its impacts on human health. Tackling air quality in NPT is a key priority in order to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations.

Other health related behaviours such as smoking, substance misuse, alcohol, and diet have also shown some encouraging trends. Smoking prevalence of 17% is nationally representative but NPT has seen one of the largest decreases in smoking behaviour, reducing from 26 to 17% between 2016 and 2021, with similar reductions in excess alcohol consumption which has decreased from 21 to 16% over the same time period. On the other hand, hospitalisations as a result of alcohol are slightly higher than the national average. Eight out of 10 residents who were seeking help for substance misuse were aged between 31 and 65 with twice as many men than women accessing support services. Thirteen percent of "Let's Talk" respondents reported that they wanted extra support for drug and alcohol services. Finaly, only 1 in 6 adults in NPT consumes 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, indicating some of the least healthy diets in Wales.

There is a need to increase affordable housing in the NPT locality with 1,037 new homes required by 2033 in all areas except the Afan Valley. Encouragingly, 434 new units were built between 2018 and 2021. At the opposite end, the aging population is also having an effect on household size that will have decreased from 2.5 to 2.2 persons between 1991 and 2033.

A MORE EQUAL WALES

● ● ● ● ●

> *A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).*

Deprivation is a deep-rooted issue in NPT. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019 highlighted that over two thirds of areas (69.2%) in NPT had higher than average deprivation whereas a third of areas were in the most deprived quintile (20%). The WIMD suggests that while NPT has a wide range of deprived residents, there are concentrated areas in the most deprived category. In 2021, around 4.5% (4,000 adults) of NPT residents claimed Universal Credit. The impact of deprivation is likely to worsen over the coming years as levels of poverty increase (e.g. food and fuel), affecting the lowest income families.

While life expectancy has seen a small increase in NPT, with males living to an average age of 77.1 years, still the second lowest in Wales. Life expectancy for women in NPT was four years longer than males at 81.3 years. Significantly, women's life expectancy in NPT was closer to the national average and ranked more favourably against other local authorities compared to men. However, there is a need to consider this increased longevity in the context of quality of life; the Older People's Commissioner for Wales' State of the Nation report (2021) identifies that for men and women, respectively, there is a gap of approximately 17 and 20 years between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy. These 17-20 years of chronic morbidity is set to increase in an aging population and place increasing pressure on public and third sector services. This underscores the need to promote well-being in NPT through all of public sector activity and particularly in families and the early years.

The impact of living in deprived conditions as a child has implications for children's health and now and in subsequent generations. In Wales, Welsh Government adopted the flagship policy "Article 32" United Nations Children's Rights of the Child and consequently provided a commitment to children and their rights and their access to play. There has been an increase in the percentage of children living in poverty between 2018 and 2020 which provides significant cause of concern (2018-2019: 27.8%; 2019/2020: 30.5%). A "good start in life" is essential, thus action is needed to revert the trend in NPT.

Environmental inequalities intersect socio-economic and spatial inequalities, and this burden is borne primarily by socially and/or spatially disadvantaged and/or vulnerable populations. Those most vulnerable in society, or in vulnerable situations, such as the elderly, those living in poverty, the unemployed, those at risk of flood, areas of poor air quality, or high levels of environmental noise are at higher risk of increasing health burdens and lower levels of health life expectancy due to known and avoidable environmental risk. Increasing climate risks will affect all of Wales, but some people and areas are especially vulnerable to change with a risk of exacerbating inequalities. Climate change and extreme weather can exacerbate health and wellbeing inequalities. There is also a risk that responses to climate change can place disproportionate burdens on people and communities who are already vulnerable.

A WALES OF COHESIVE COMMUNITIES

• • • • •

Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.

A number of respondents from the "Let's Talk" survey and focus groups emphasised the limitations of public transport, particularly noting the lack of an inter-valley rail link. In the digital space, nearly all properties (98%) have access to superfast broadband with increasing connectivity and use by older age groups particularly those 75 years and above. Nevertheless, there is further work to be done on digital infrastructure to support the regeneration of towns and to minimise digital poverty.

Community and neighbourhood safety is key to the development and sustainability of thriving communities. Encouragingly, NPT has had a 44% reduction in road traffic accidents between 2019 and 2020, continuing a positive annual trend in improved road safety since 2015. The substantial reduction between 2019 and 2020 will have been a little skewed by the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, there has been a worrying increase in road accidents that involves cyclists suggesting that attention should be paid to this aspect of transport, particularly with the emergence of e-bikes. Moreover 22% of all road traffic accidents involve active travellers, either on foot (12%) or bike (10%). With increases in fuel prices and a move to an active travel infrastructure this issue requires careful consideration.

As stated, access to greenspace remains an issue in NPT despite significant assets. In particular, urban areas have limited access to nature and increased exposure to air and noise pollution, alongside increasing anxiety and stress levels and lowering levels of social cohesion. Increasing access to green and blue spaces and providing community facilities to bring people together is highlighted as a 'best buy' to prevent mental ill health and improve mental well-being by Public Health Wales. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the public's awareness of their surroundings, with the local natural environment highlighted as a key community asset. The Let's Talk results emphasised the need to safeguard the local area and its current natural environmental assets.

In the "Let's Talk" data, NPT residents felt that NPT was a good place to live and has much to offer in terms of infrastructure and culture. However, hate crimes, particularly against minority and vulnerable sections of the population and cyber-crimes have shown a worrying increase, with violence the most prevalent behaviour. On a positive note, antisocial behaviour and crimes against women have decreased over the past 5 years.

A WALES OF VIBRANT CULTURE AND THRIVING WELSH COMMUNITIES

● ● ● ● ●

A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.

Through the "Let's Talk" campaign, it was clear that the local environment, the Welsh language and heritage and local culture mattered to NPT residents. Specifically, they requested that cultural activity should focus on 5 main areas:

- Keep the past alive, promoting and celebrating heritage to strengthen identity and sense of belonging;
- Help to protect, preserve and maintain historic and heritage sites for present and future generations;
- Promote the Welsh language, traditions and culture;
- Help all generations to connect with the natural environment, heritage and culture; and
- Assist community and voluntary groups to sustain and further develop their important work.

Over 20,000 residents of NPT speak Welsh: 15.3% of the county's population. Five of eight of the community areas in NPT exceed this value, with the dominant use of the language in Upper Swansea and Amman Valleys. It is unclear if the same methods were used to derive this statistic, however, the national average of Welsh speakers was nearly double at 28.5%. Exploring the individual components of Welsh use, in NPT (compared to Wales), 18% aged 3 or older could read Welsh (25.9%), 15.7% could write in Welsh (23.8%) and 26.0% could understand spoken Welsh (33.7%). There is a need to consider how environments are developed in an inclusive way that promotes the Welsh language.

Natural and cultural heritage are inextricably woven. The landscape and environment around NPT shape and form cultural identity and ownership. There is a significant industrial heritage including many historic buildings and sites of significant scientific and historic interest. NPT has produced many world-famous actors, actresses, musicians and artists. In 2019, two thirds of people living in NPT reported participating in arts, culture or heritage activities at least three times a year; this is just below the Wales average of 71%. Moreover, there is significant voluntary activity that helps sustain arts and culture in NPT. But most habitats are under threat, including SSSIs (or sites of special scientific interest) that are in an unfavourable condition. The key pressures are from lack of, or poor, management and fragmentation or loss of connectivity between habitats. The situation we face is not something that can be resolved from within the environmental sector. Transformative changes in our economic and social systems are needed, recognising the interconnectivity and feedback loops between these systems.

Sport forms a large part of the culture and heritage in NPT. The rugby and football clubs continue to thrive and as well as being centres of sport they are also important community assets, providing venues for celebrations, entertainment and meeting places. The benefits of sport and physical activity on physical and mental health were reported in the "Let's Talk" survey and focus groups. About half of children in NPT are hooked on sport and the number of residents wishing to volunteer in sport tripled over the pandemic. Shortly, the local authority will take over the running of the four leisure centres in NPT with an aim of increasing activity and facility use. NPT hosts additional inclusive sport and leisure facilities. These include world class mountain bike trails in the Afan Valley, the adventure golf, skate park, aqua splash play pool and the adventure playground on Aberavon seafront, horse riding opportunities in the Amman Valley and a range of walking trails through woodlands, parks and alongside canals. The sea front in Aberafan also hosts a range of aquatic activities, including surfing and open water swimming. There are many facilities, green and blue spaces and play spaces in NPT, providing an infrastructure supportive of well-being and healthy behaviours. From a cultural perspective, NPT provides residence for around 5% of its population who are from black and minority ethnic groups. These groups add depth and cultural diversity to the area where 59 languages are spoken.

The Welsh language, arts, the natural environment, sport and heritage are all important elements of identity reported by respondents to the "Let's Talk" campaign. Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the lens on these assets and activities providing the foundation stones for bringing communities to come together in a sporting and cultural revival.

A GLOBALLY RESPONSIBLE WALES

● ● ● ● ●

A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

People living in Wales use 2.5 planets worth of resources the target being 1. NPT is a major carbon contributor in Wales due to its high level of industry but also generates a high level of renewable energy. NPT has a gha (global hectares) of 3.2 per capita, compared to Wales' average of 3.28. With a world-average biocapacity of 1.63 gha per person NPT far exceeds what the planet can sustain. NPT is making significant efforts to reduce its carbon impact on planetary health which is highly important for its residents and its global impact.

According to the Global Risks Report, the health of the planet dominates concerns, with environmental risks perceived to be the five most critical long-term threats to the world as well as the most potentially damaging to residents of NPT. The top three ranked most severe risks are "climate action failure", "extreme weather", and "biodiversity loss" and are of significant concern to NPT residents.

While NPT faces a key risk in achieving net zero by 2050, with the highest carbon intensity of any local authority area in the UK, it is also leader in renewable energy generation with the some of the highest installed renewable energy capacity in Wales. Plans to restore peatlands using resource generated from windfarm mitigation and to further enhance and develop its woodlands, while also protecting and increasing its biodiversity stock through the recovery of nature demonstrates ways in which the climate and nature emergency can be targeted together. Moreover, efforts made to protect the planet and promote a sustainable economy are central to the NPT economic recovery plan.

From a positive perspective, NPT is the proud home of the Afan Valley cycling centre containing world-class off-road cycling facilities and the area has also spawned a number of famous artists, musicians and actors who have developed a global identity for the people of NPT and in parallel promoted their self-esteem.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE – "LET'S TALK" RESPONSE

• • • • •

The internationally administered Global Risks Perception Survey asked the public globally to reflect on perceived societal risks, in the short- (2 years) to medium-term (5 years). The survey helped to identify societal and environmental concerns such as, "social cohesion erosion", "livelihood crises" and "mental health deterioration." From a longer-term perspective (10-years), perceived environmental risks such as "climate action failure", "extreme weather", and "biodiversity loss" were ranked most important. "Let's Talk" data also helps place context to the "Foresight and Futures" exercises outlined in the Future Trends report from Welsh Government (December 2021).

NPT residents concurred with findings from the international survey reflecting the global concern and constant media attention given to climate change. This is important to recognise, and to consider how influence can be exerted locally whilst also acting as globally responsible citizens. In the "Let's Talk" campaign and survey, NPT residents were substantially influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. A synopsis of "Let's Talk" responses from both the questionnaire and focus groups is presented below.

"LET'S TALK" THEMES

Increased community ownership was a major theme, with residents taking on volunteering responsibilities to help those who were more vulnerable. Whilst this increased community cohesion and spirit, there was also a sense that communities had, by necessity, become self-sufficient and were sustained by volunteers, rather than local services. The introduction of the Street Champions scheme was felt to have had a particularly positive impact.

"I had a neighbour knocking my door seeing if I wanted prescriptions, I had people asking if I needed bread or milk. I sat in my garden and everybody that passed stopped and spoke. It did bring back the fact that I was glad I was back in Glyncorrwg" (Afan Valley)

In contrast to the increased involvement of community residents, a second major theme was the withdrawal or inadequacy of external support, including day services for older adults, social provision for adults with learning difficulties, and youth centres. These changes contributed to the increased social isolation and loneliness that was a consistent theme not just affecting the vulnerable within the community, but also children who were unable to attend school during enforced school closures. Importantly, some respondents noted that social isolation and loneliness were high within the community before the COVID-19 pandemic, with the pandemic exacerbating the issue.

"I used to run a youth club in Briton Ferry, which is quite a deprived area. You've got a Gypsy community there, a Travelling community, etc. and they used to come to that a lot to that youth club and obviously that came to an end. It hasn't started back... so it would've had a negative impact on children" (Dulais Valley)

"There isn't somewhere like 'Mind' in the Valleys, so you have to go to the doctors to get antidepressants" (Afan Valley)

"It's divided the haves and have nots. It's divided the people who were isolated and those who were able to get support" (Amman Valley)

Mental health issues were exacerbated by a combination of these factors. Residents discussed the detrimental impact of their lack of access to specialist support services they needed, and the anxiety experienced by children about contracting COVID-19 at school and infecting their family members. In addition to increased anxiety and isolation experienced by school-aged children, questionnaire responses identified only a negative impact of the pandemic on young people, as reported by this age group.

"I think a lot of the health services, and especially the mental health services, have sort of stood back a little bit because of the COVID... and there's lots of people suffering as a result of that. I think that has to stop now. It has to be improved and people have to be helped" (Dulais Valley)

"I know with my one, I had to take ten weeks off work because she was feeling so anxious because her routine, her friends, everything was just changed" (Neath Valley)

Potentially related to this, with schools and youth centres closed, and mental health issues exacerbated in young people, a notable increase in antisocial behaviour such as drug taking and drinking in recreation areas was discussed consistently in responses.

"Children and young adults, there's been a great increase in gatherings of people smoking, taking drugs in the area, also drinking. And you're talking 12/13-year-olds with both drink and drugs in the area. I think it's an issue of they haven't been able to spend the money elsewhere like they used to, so they see it as 'we've got money, let's go do the alternative'" (Dulais Valley)

The economic and financial impact at both a community and an individual level, was the final negative theme that was evident. The local economy was struggling as shops and businesses had been forced to close during lockdowns, and some individuals had either lost their job, were financially worse off, or anxious about their finance and employment in the future.

In contrast to this, residents appreciated the blended approach to work that many were experiencing, valuing more time with their family and the improved work-life balance and time to reflect and make decisions that this allowed.

"I think it's given us a bit more flexibility in regards to work/life. Meeting on Zoom, a lot of people working from home. I found that easier with regards to the children... It doesn't work for everybody, and there should be an option for people to go into a physical building if they want to, but I know a lot of mums who've found that aspect easier going forward, especially with school runs..." (Dulais Valley)

Figure 1 illustrates the key aspects that contributed positively (green) and negatively (blue) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
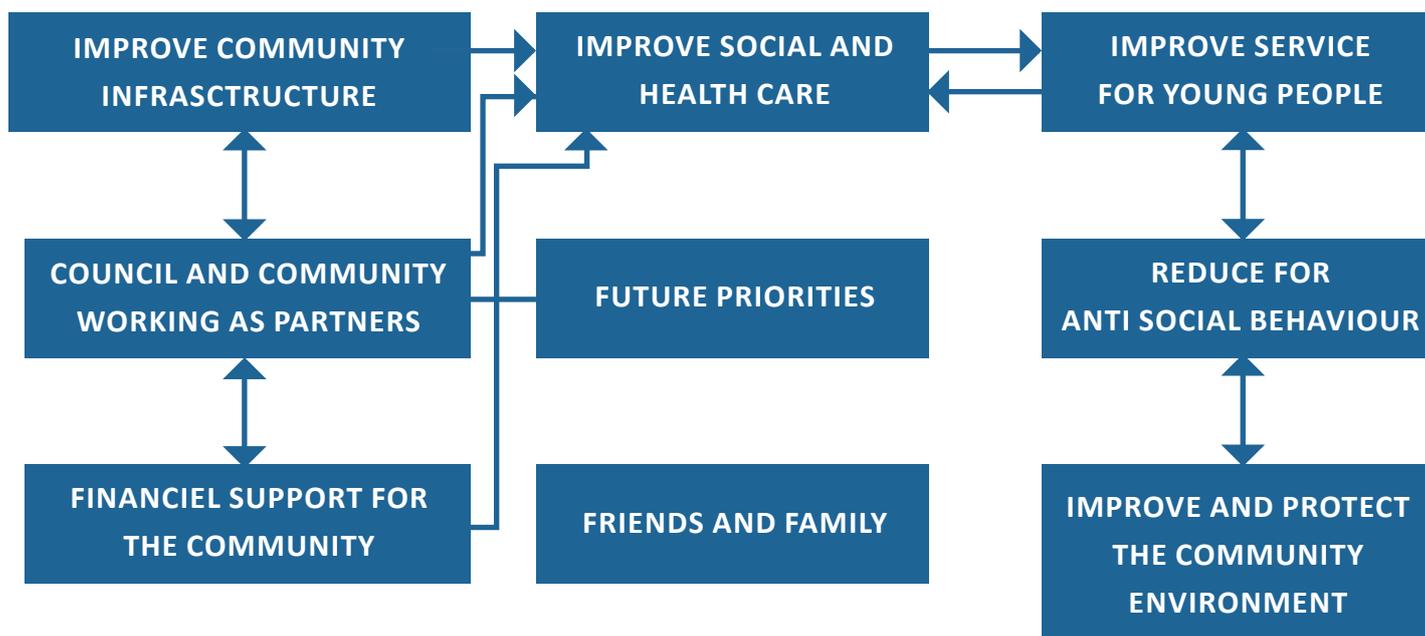
CHANGES EXPERIENCED

• • • • •
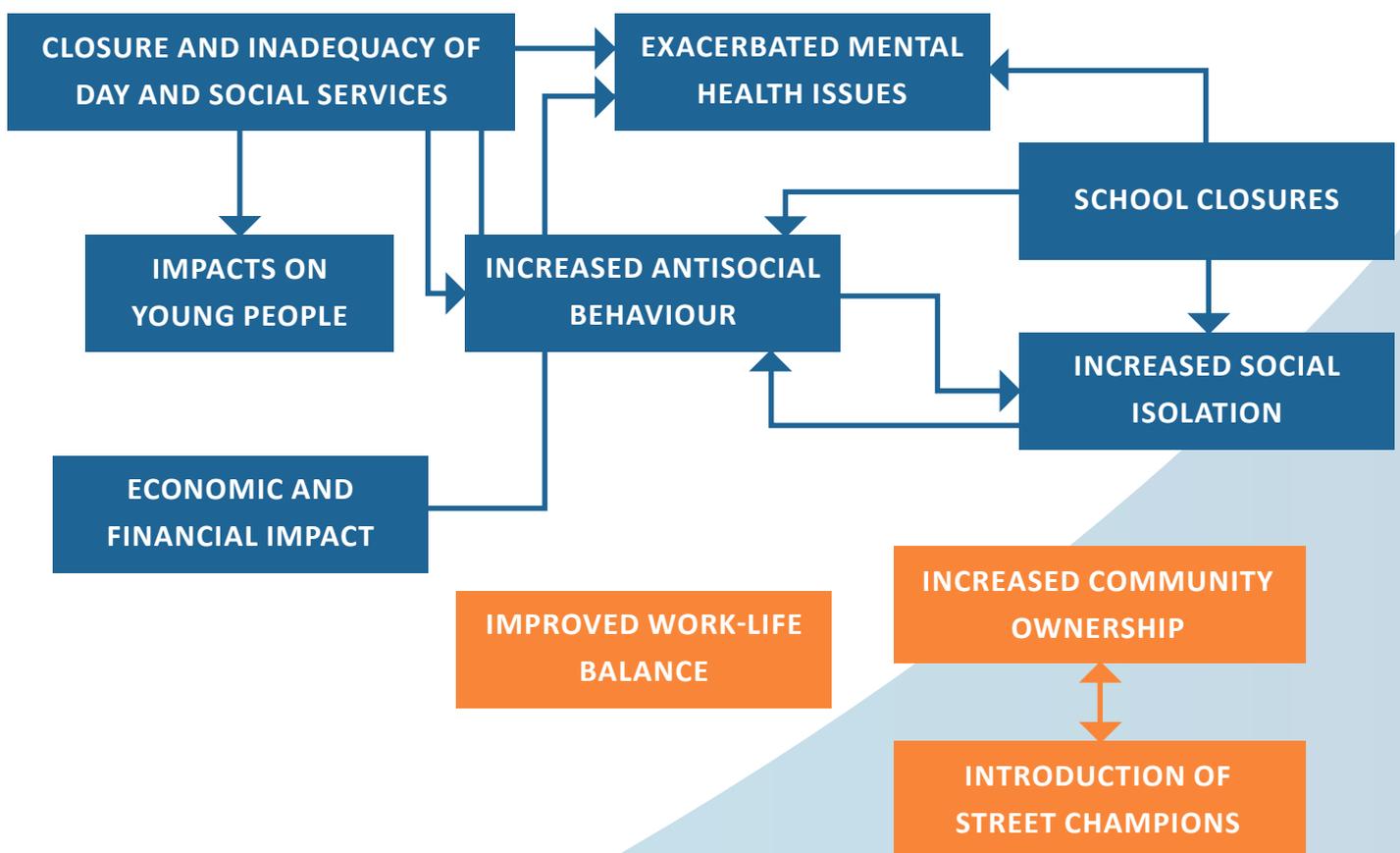
PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD - "LET'S TALK" RESPONSE

• • • • •

The tone, volume and emphasis placed on the main future priorities that residents discussed, suggest that these are hugely important to them, as they appear to have consequences for overall quality of life for all groups of residents by impacting on work opportunities, health, community ownership, social integration, and community sustainability. Figure 2 is intended to illustrate where potential and discussed interactions and interrelations are evident between the themes.

Figure 2 Community residents' future priorities and interrelationships between them

IMPROVE COMMUNITY INFRASCTRUCTURE	IMPROVE SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE	IMPROVE SERVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY WORKING AS PARTNERS	FUTURE PRIORITIES	REDUCE FOR ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR
FINANCIEL SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY	FRIENDS AND FAMILY	IMPROVE AND PROTECT THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Many comments focused on the need for an improved community infrastructure, first and foremost, better transport links that are reliable, adequate to meet travel needs, and affordable. The importance of this theme cannot be underestimated, as it impinges on other key themes below; for instance, poor transport links prevent children from participating in extracurricular activities and prevent adults from following work opportunities that are not local, unless they have access to a car. There was a strong view that funding for local amenities should be continued, such as pools, libraries, and all-day facilities for all age groups, particularly the vulnerable and older adults. Importantly, people felt that funding should be allocated to maintain and continue existing facilities, instead of building new ones.

"I want transport for our children to do extracurricular activities. If they're down the comprehensive in Port Talbot, I want to make sure they can do after school clubs, sports teams and training after school hours. I want them to have exactly the same start as the children all the way down from Cwmafan" (Afan Valley)

"They say they want you to go out to work, well where do you work for three hours a day? By the time you get your bus …you can work three hours and then you've got to get the last bus home. You're never going to sustain that" (Neath Valley)

"By opening the community centre up. Give it back to the community but give us the funding to keep the building maintained and have the money to pay for professional help to come here" (Afan Valley)

"Ask people what they want. Don't just build a new park or hall and assume we wanted or needed it" (Neath Valley)

A dominant theme was the need to improve social and healthcare for people in these communities, which was exacerbated in the light of increased isolation and loneliness and the increased prevalence of mental health difficulties, which was partially attributed to inadequacies in health and social care. Residents did not have access to health and social care services they needed, and this impacted greatly on the vulnerable and older adults, and those who are denied services because of bureaucratic reasons associated with their geographical location.

"I think there are people hidden away in our communities here who are suffering from social exclusion, social isolation, that the communities don't know about, neighbour perhaps don't know about, and it's a ticking time bomb" (Amman Valley)

Connected with this theme, a third major priority for the future was improvement in services for young people, particularly for those who are disadvantaged. Residents identified a need for greater investment, including cheaper outdoor facilities for younger people, and a need for continued funding into schools.

"They need to invest in the infrastructure of these small communities. They need to come down here, they need to talk to us, they need to look at what we've got, and they need to invest in us. Especially our young people... there's kids out there, I can see kids out my window now with nowhere to go. They've not got the infrastructure" (Neath Valley)

Particularly in the questionnaire responses, there was an expressed need to increase community funding to improve and protect the aesthetic and natural assets of the community, thereby improving people's experiences of living there. Cleaner and well-maintained streets, more litter picking schemes, cleaner and patrolled parks, are needed, and, strongly voiced in both sets of data, a reduction in the public anti-social behaviour by young people that residents perceived to have increased. Related to this, comments from a minority of questionnaire respondents reflected a need to safeguard the local environment by preventing overdevelopment, protecting local heritage and prevent flooding.

"It's not having the park, it's just the general outlay and the way that it's operated. We've had dog faeces rubbed all over the equipment" (Dulais Valley)

People expressed a need for financial support for the community to help reduce deprivation and unemployment, and homelessness. This ranged from not raising already high council tax bills any higher to supporting affordable social events to help prevent isolation and mental ill-health.

"Our council tax is the third highest in Wales... and I think we also, up here, have an extra on top called the community council precept, which is just a talking shop... I don't think it's value for money. What do we get for it?" (Amman Valley)

A key theme that underpins the frustrations and priorities of residents identified above is the urgent need for improved partnership working between the Council and residents. Many people felt that decisions were made without their input, and therefore their real health, care and social needs were not considered. They recommended a more collaborative approach, where residents are involved in decision making, with a voice for all communities, including those smaller, neglected areas and transparency over, and input into, financial decisions. There is a need to build a better relationship between the Council and residents, starting with clearer definitions of LAC and Council Officer roles, to ensure that these are working optimally and equally in different areas.

"Just, support would be nice. To actually listen to the needs of the community and the people that live in the communities and to act upon them. Not a guess of what people need or do what they call a 'best interest'. Actually listen to the needs of the people and the communities. Each community is completely different" (Neath Valley)

Finally, questionnaire responses enabled people to identify what matters most to them and their immediate and future priorities. Friends and family were overwhelmingly cited as most important, highlighting the importance of placing people at the centre of future decisions. Returning to normal, remaining safe, maintaining health and education were key immediate priorities and education, economy and environmental issues were identified as key future priorities. Not surprisingly, priorities differed between different groups of people: younger people prioritised leisure activities and facilities; people aged 50+ prioritised physical and mental health/well-being; council workers prioritised work-life balance, and business owners prioritised the economy, improving the locality and local environment issues (e.g. recycling).

NEATH PORT TALBOT PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD

WELL-BEING ASSESSMENT

• • • • •