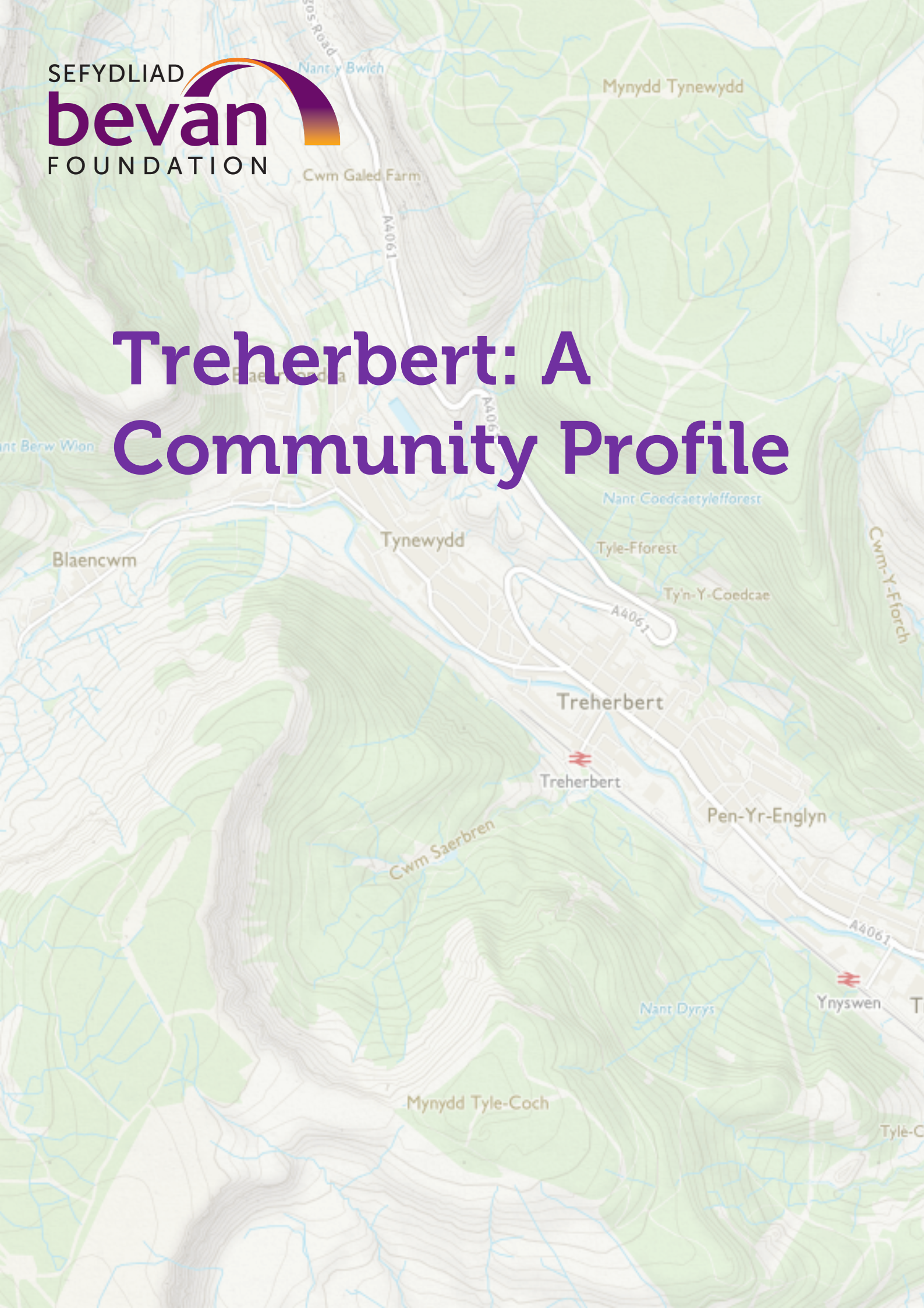


Treherbert: A Community Profile



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Summary

Treherbert is the quintessential ex-industrial Valleys community. Completely rural and very remote at the top of the Rhondda Fawr, there was an explosion of industrial activity from the mid-nineteenth century through to the late twentieth when de-industrialisation brought problems of social deprivation and increased ill health.

The community suffers from higher levels of economic inactivity and benefit claims and significantly lower levels of people without academic qualifications. Despite the loss of industry it still has higher than average levels of workers in manufacture. However the loss of good quality jobs and the cuts resulting from the 2008 economic downturn has seen a lot of its community facilities (such as its swimming pool) close or its youth services limited.

There are a number of businesses present, most being located in Treherbert itself however there is a feeling it loses a lot of custom to major supermarkets as well as Treorchy (which was recently crowned the best high street in Britain). Also, whilst community spirit remains strong there are some who say it is being eroded by inward migration. Many feel the community is forgotten about.

Treherbert is rich in natural assets with the surrounding countryside offering excellent opportunities for economic progress and community wellbeing. However the area struggles with poor transport links yet many do commute out for work.

It has few post-war housing developments and the tenure is in line with the Welsh average.

Overview

This paper has been produced as part of a Bevan Foundation project exploring the potential to grow the everyday economy (also known as the foundational economy) in Treherbert.

To grow the everyday economy, place matters. The kinds of businesses, people, community assets, services and facilities are the things that allow us to live our daily lives with a degree of comfort and safety. They are important factors in opening up both opportunities and barriers to harnessing the power of the everyday economy.

To understand them well requires an in depth understanding of a place itself. What Treherbert looks like, what makes the local economy tick, its relationship with the places around it is critical for understanding the latent potential. As is what currently exists, what has been lost and what is changing. By identifying what is there, we can better understand what needs to be supported or nurtured or what problems may need to be addressed if the potential benefits of the everyday economy are to be realised.

This profile was compiled through desk research and on the ground engagement in Treherbert. It provides a brief overview of its history, business profile, local services, community activity and assets.

If you would like more information on what the core principals of the everyday economy are then please read our factsheet which can be found on our website or by contacting us.

1. A brief snapshot

Treherbert is located at the top of the Rhondda Fawr valley within the county borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf. The administrative ward of Treherbert consists of the communities of Penyreglyn, Treherbert, Tynewydd, Blaencwm and Blaenrhondda. As of 2011 the population is 5,440. All five communities within the ward are interconnected in an almost continuous flow along the main road running through the valley, with the exception of Blaencwm which is slightly – half a mile - to the west of the main road. The majority of commercial premises and amenities are located on or around the high street through Tynewydd and Treherbert.

Speaking to many people in the community it is perhaps unsurprising that the talk of the area being deprived comes up a lot. People are proud of their community and heritage but realistic about the problems it faces. The geography of the area seems to be a factor as many speak of feeling cut off and isolated from the rest of the valley and at times feel forgotten about by the council. The recent success of Treorchy being named high street of the year has met mixed reception. Some are happy and hope it will have a knock on and help regenerate Treherbert others see it as a magnet sucking jobs and trade away from an already depressed area.

Many see Treherbert as having a tight knit community, but there is a recent development that has put strain on this. RCT has re-located some people from other areas with substance abuse issues that is causing a lot of problems around integration and anti-social behaviour. The police have been called many times and some of the community are fearful they no longer recognise their neighbours or feel safe in their community. There has also been an influx of people from outside the Valleys – perhaps attracted by the low house prices – that has further diluted the sense of community spirit. But it is important to note that some of those who have arrived have mentioned they struggle to integrate despite their best efforts in a community that seems hesitant around newcomers.

2. A Brief History

Until the mid-19th century the area consisted of scattered farms and isolated houses with no more than a few hundred people residing over the whole area. Everything changed with the sinking of the first test pit in Treherbert in 1851 (hence the name of the area – the village or hamlet of Herbert (the ancestral name for the Bute family who owned the land)) that became operational in 1855 as the Bute Merthyr Colliery. This was quickly followed by a number of other collieries such Lady Margaret in 1853, Ynysfeio in Pen-yr-Englyn in 1859, Fernhill in Blaenrhondda in 1869 and Hendrewen (Glen Rhondda) in Blaencwm in 1899. So by 1900 every village had a pit that was each employing hundreds sometimes thousands of men. As the population grew so did the civic amenities – rows of terraced houses, railway stations, post offices, pubs, churches and libraries – even trams came to Treherbert in 1908. The wealth generated from mining 'black gold' meant each village became a thriving community.

But as the mines closed, the last being Fernhill in 1979, this wealth dried up. Well paid employment became scarce, the community became more reliant on public sector

funding and levels of deprivation rose. Whilst there are still more people employed in manufacturing than the Welsh average (17.8 compared to 10.5) it can never hope to match the past (only Everest Windows and Thomas Lloyd furniture makers remain as the large scale manufacturers). As such the area suffers from deprivation common to ex-industrial areas. Treherbert has higher levels of economic inactivity (42.5% compared to 34.2%), significantly higher levels of people claiming employment benefits (19% compared to 2.5%) and higher levels of people with bad or very bad health (13% compared to 7.6%).

3. Economic profile

Treherbert has 17 shops and 475 in employment. It has a much larger percentage of the workforce engaged in manufacturing (the two biggest in the area are Everest Windows and John Lloyd a furniture maker) at 17.8% compared to the Welsh average of 10.5%. It also has a larger section of the workforce engaged in construction (14.1% compared to 8.2%). It has a lower percentage of people engaged in wholesale or retail (12.6% compared to 15.6%). There is a significantly lower number of managerial and professionals (7.8% compared to 17.9 and a much higher number of people in semi-skilled or unskilled work (43.8% compared to 29.7%).

6% of the population work from home with 57% commuting between 5-30km. Most people commute to (in order) Cardiff, Pontypridd, Llantrisant, Tonypany, Merthyr and Aberdare. Earnings are below the Welsh average.¹

There are a number of businesses spread over the communities with most being situated in Treherbert and Tynewydd. While many comment that the area is not as deprived as it once was there was much frustration of business being lost to Treorchy (with it recently being crowned as the best high street in Britain). Also the topography and location of the community leaves it feeling forgotten about in terms of funding (the local Citizen Advice Bureau closed and relocated to Treorchy for example) and the poor transport links out of the valley hinders its economic potential.

The community was a Communities First area from 2003 – 2018 and while two of its sectors saw improvement in its deprivation on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, Tynewydd and rural Treherbert actually saw its deprivation increase. The stats are shown on the table below with 1 being the most deprived:

	2005	2019
Treherbert	231	487
Tynewydd	165	114
Blaenrhondda	130	248
Rural Treherbert	406	286

Source – Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation>

¹ <http://www.understandingwelshplaces.wales/en/compare/W38000056/>

4. Business profile

Many locals spoke of the difficult times the community faces as a result of de-industrialisation and austerity. The awarding of the title of Treorchy as best high street in Britain has received mixed reaction. While most are happy for the town they are sceptical the knock on effect will reach Treherbert and many state it is actually draining money and custom away from the community. As an example, a new recycling centre 'The Shed at Treherbert' has opened that refurbishes household items – it reduces waste and gives unemployed and isolated people a chance to socialise and gain work experience. However some locals are critical that the organisation distributes profits made RCT wide and not focused locally and it is taking business away from a busy established recycling centre in Tynwydd. The potential to create a Rhondda wide Chamber of Trade has also met some criticism with the thought that Treherbert should re-create its own.

The closest supermarkets are Lidl and Co-op in Treorchy (approx. 2 miles away), an Asda in Tonypany (approx. 6 miles away) and a Tesco in Aberdare (approx. 12 miles away). There are no shops in either Blaencwm or Blaenrhondda although some residents believe there should be. However there is still a post office in Blaenrhondda and Blaencwm has a rally car maintenance and repair shop (Old School Engineering) and the Hendrewen Hotel (open 3 days a week. Penyreglyn has one general store.

Tynwydd has a general store (which includes a post office counter) a bits and bobs store than offers fresh fruit and vegetables a butcher ([C Deans](#)), sweet shop, hairdresser ([Deb 'n' Hair](#)) and charity shop – The [Community Recycling Centre](#) (the shop that some locals are frustrated that its business is being taken by The Shed), a bakery (Kelly's), a takeaway shop (Chickoland), builders merchant and a funeral director.

Treherbert has a post office, 5 takeaways in a 1 mile radius, a general store, 2 gift shops, a charity shop, 6 franchise stores in a 1 mile radius, a green grocer ([Paul's Bakery](#)), the Old Library (where [Welcome to Our Woods](#) are based), 7 hairdressers in a 1 mile radius, a tattoo shop and the [Croeso Café](#). There is a health food shop ([lechyd Da](#)) opposite the library managed by a local councillor that many locals use as a hub to socialise and swap health and wellbeing advice.

5. Banking

There are no banks in the community however it is fortunate to still have two post offices where people can withdraw cash from their accounts. There are also free cashpoints at many of the local franchise stores (such as Spar stores which offers free withdrawals) however some do charge. The nearest bank is Barclays in Treorchy (approx. 2 miles away).

6. Transport

The geography of the Rhondda can make transportation difficult. Many people cite it as a major problem for improving the local economy, tourism as well as for local people to

get around (such as getting to Treorchy for the dentist). The quality of public transport is crucial as 37% of households do not have access to a car² (compared to the Rhondda average of 27%) and 43.4% of pensioner households have no access to a car.³

Both the main roads in and out of the town are single carriageways (north out of the town is the A4061 Rhigos road which is notorious for closing in bad weather). One local councillor expressed sadness that a potential relief road south that would significantly improve congestion was not built. Access to the main roadways can also be slow and difficult:

- A465 approximately 8 miles away
- M4 approximately 20 miles away

Another surprising fact is the community does not have a single cycle path – whether as a cycle lane on the road (which means cycling on the main narrow road is dangerous) or as a tourist trail such as the Taf Trail in Treharris. However this may soon be rectified with the opening of the Rhondda Tunnel (see tourism section).

Public buses run through the community from Blaencwm and Blaenrhondda every 15 minutes from around 6am but the frequency decreases past 7pm through to 11pm.

Treherbert railway station is the last station stop and has a twice hourly service to Cardiff and the plans for the South Wales metro may possibly extend that to 3 or 4. The line used to run on through Tynewydd to Blaencwm then through the Rhondda Tunnel to Blaengwynfi in the Aber valley but this was a casualty of the Beaching cuts. There is an effort to get the Welsh Government to extend the railway back to Tynewydd (the track bed is still in place unlike Blaencwm which has been built on) but it is not currently in the plans. Despite the cuts there is a sense that the Fawr valley is lucky to have the rail connection it does as the Fach lost its line to Cardiff completely as part of the Beaching cuts.

7. Environment and tourism

Like many communities, Treherbert hopes that an increase in tourism could bring much needed money and job opportunities to the area. However unlike Treharris or Cwmafan perhaps does not have as extensive potential assets. A point of contention raised was that there was no signage into the community from the A465 Heads of the Valleys and A4061 Rhigos roads. It was felt that better signage could increase tourist numbers

The biggest asset the community has is the countryside around it such as the woodland on and around Pen Pych mountain. This is a popular area with locals for walking and for tourists with a waterfall and Iron Age hut. It does not have a visitor centre and the nearest

²<http://www.infobasecymru.net/IAS/themes/2011census/travel/tabular?viewId=971&geoid=78&subsetId=>

³https://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/car%20ownership%20rates%20by%20local%20authority%20-%20december%202012.pdf

accommodation would be The Hendrewen Hotel. At the top of Blaenrhondda near the old Fernhill pit is where WTOW run most of their community engagement projects (this was once the site of 'Cowboy Town' a short lived wild west themed attraction).

Parks and open spaces – Blaencwm has a small play area and skate park. Blaenrhondda has a park where the bowls and football club play. Treberherth has a park with some play equipment and there is a football pitch in Penyreglyn. However many local people state that there are not enough green spaces or play facilities in the area for the young people to use.

Another potential growth area is the re-opening of the Rhondda Tunnel. The tunnel was opened in the late 19th century to connect the pits of the Fawr with the docks in Swansea and was closed as part of the Beaching cuts in the 1960s. The Rhondda Tunnel Society and local activists have campaigned for a number of years for it to re-open as a cycle path. This would become the second longest cycling tunnel in the world and hopefully become a major tourist attraction. It would also re-connect the Fawr and Afan valleys for local people.

8. Community Assets

Each village has their own community assets that act as hubs for local people to socialise and engage in a wide range of activities. These hubs are especially important when you consider the high levels of health problems amongst the population. Many of the community centres rely on volunteers which could help give those out of employment some valuable experience but many are struggling as council and government funds are scarce and are looking at ways of diversifying to increase their income and become self-sufficient.

Some of the key community assets are:

Blaencwm Community Centre

Blaencwm is the most remote of the villages in the community and the centre is only open once every six weeks for people to meet and play bingo – it also acts as the polling centre for the village on election days.

Blaenrhondda Social Club

The club is known as 'top' to the locals, as well as being a traditional social club where people meet and can hold parties etc it acts as a base for the village's old age pensioners' (OAP) group. It runs many events and activities including bingo, indoor bowls and regularly hosts events with special guests – recently they held a night with ex-professional footballer Dean Saunders.

Treherbert Boys and Girls Club

The club is run by trustees with coaches and a welfare officer. It is looking to apply for charitable status so they can apply for grants to better secure their future as they currently exist on a 'hand to mouth status'. The history of the club has been firmly focused on its football teams but they have recently lost a lot of players to the new Cambrian Football

Academy in Tonypany. This has not only meant they have lost their best players but a lot of revenue also. Numbers have dwindled (they are struggling to field full teams) as many see no point in coming now their friends have gone. These issues along with the ongoing financial strains have emphasised the need to diversify the types of activities they offer to attract more visitors (the building remains empty and unused for large parts of the week). However the club does run:

- Junior teams between 10/18 as well as senior teams
- Bowls and table tennis classes
- Craft and woodwork classes
- Run a gym and fitness group linked with Welcome to Our Woods (see below) that is open to anyone in the community

Welcome To Our Woods

Based in the Old Library on Treherbert high street, Welcome to Our Woods (WTOW) are a community partnership organisation that use community engagement to bring people back in touch with the natural world and use the woodland resources around Treherbert to create well-paid long term jobs for local people. Some of their activities include:

- A micro-hydro scheme that harnesses the power of the river that flows behind Treherbert railway station to generate power for the national grid then use the profits for the community
- Hold regular nature walks/events in the local environment and woodwork and craft skill classes in the Old Library
- They use their skills for the good of the community such as maintaining flowerbeds, cutting grass and offering their services wherever needed (such as tree surgery and litter picking)

Perhaps the most ambitious project – in partnership with The Green Valleys Community Interest Company – is Project Skyline. They hope to acquire around 100 hectares of land around Treherbert with funding from The Climate Action Fund which would be owned and run by the community for the community. They will build 100% carbon neutral social housing using materials on site, manage timber production where the profits are recycled back in the community and generate clean sustainable energy through carbon capture and biomass.

Valleys Kids – Penyreglyn Project

Valleys Kids is a youth and community organisation based in Tonypany and the Treherbert section is based In Penyreglyn for the last 20 years. They work with parents to provide play activities for children such as after school and pre-school clubs and with young adults offering youth clubs and after school clubs as a way of keeping them safe and out of trouble – another way to try and keep them off the streets is to offer food and drink clubs. They can get as many as 1,000 through their door a week with groups as large as 60/70 at a time. Their visitor numbers have increased as other youth clubs have closed due to budget cuts yet unfortunately they too have had to reduce their opening from 7 days a week to 5 and are very dependent on volunteers after their funding through Communities First comes to an end.

Treherbert OAP Hall

Located on Dunraven Street. The hall is now owned by the trustees but the outside is showing signs of disrepair. When it was owned by RCT there was some anger that they let the building fall into 'rack and ruin'. However the trustees recently secured grant funding to improve the heating and kitchen facilities and used local builders. There is a sense that people want to use local builders where possible. The hall runs Slimming World classes and armchair aerobics classes, tai chi classes and regularly run trips for the elderly, run bingo and fetes also.

9. Health and wellbeing

Treherbert is part of the Cwm Taf Healthboard whose wellbeing assessment highlighted that like many ex-industrial areas, its population suffer from a number of health and employment problems.⁴ Those classed as economically inactive is higher than the national average (42.5% compared to 34.2%). Those classed as having bad or very bad health is significantly higher (13% compared to 7.6%), longer term health problems are higher (32% compared to 22.7%) as is those classed as in receipt of employment benefits (19% compared to 2.5%). Therefore access to good quality health facilities and the ability for everyone to cheaply engage in activities whether physical or social can only be a good thing to improve the wellbeing of the community.

There are only 3 GPs and dentists for the population with one for every 1920 people therefore the health facilities in the community are vital for the long-term wellbeing of the population.

TyNewydd Surgery – Located on William Street in Tynewydd and has 2 GPs with opening hours from 8am – 6:30pm Monday to Friday. However most of the community go to Forest View Surgery in Ynyswen around 1 mile south built in 2007 and offers more clinics such as well baby, asthma and diabetes.

There is no hospital in Treherbert with the closest being either Royal Glamorgan (the A&E is under threat of downgrade with many people worried how that will affect them. The nearest then would be Prince Charles in Merthyr and the recent floods and poor transport links highlight the problem this downgrade might bring) in Llantrisant (15 miles away) or Llwynypia Hospital for minor injuries and by appointment only (6 miles away).

The nearest dentists (2) are in Treorchy (approx. 2 miles down the road). One of the chemists in Treherbert lchydd Da apparently acts as a bit of a social hub for many members of the community where people chat and the staff offer advice and listen to people's problems.

There is one care home in the community – **Ty Ross** and located on Ninian Street. It is privately owned by Forest Gate Healthcare Ltd with with 28 single rooms and 5 shared. **Treherbert Community Home** is run by RCT and has 4 rooms available for vulnerable young adults. Recently the council used the facility to move young adults with mental health problems into the area from another community and while the service is vital it has

⁴ <http://www.ourcwmtaf.wales/cwm-taf-wellbeing-assessment>

caused a lot of anti-social problems and many in the community feel Treherbert is a 'dumping ground' for people that creates tension and anxiety among the local population.

10. Faith, cultural and sporting life

Treherbert has a much smaller ethnic make-up than the Welsh average with 43.4% identifying as Christian, 47.6% as having no religion and 10% identifying as Muslim or Sikh. However the community has many faith groups that play a vital role in maintaining community cohesion especially with the elderly and those on low incomes.

Blaencwm Chapel in Tynewydd runs a mother and toddler group and coffee mornings. It hosts the Spectacle Theatre which runs youth drama and performance projects and runs a pay as you feel café every Tuesday and Thursday that uses food provided by the local supermarkets that would otherwise be thrown out. It is also the food bank for the community. It provides a community garden and 'quiet time' space for people to relax and feel safe. WTOW tend some allotments in the garden which provides food for the café but also run classes teaching people how to grow food and maintain flowers. The social landlord Trivalis also hold training sessions for people.

Treherbert Methodist Church have Women's Institute meetings on the 3rd Monday of every month, craft classes every 1st, 2nd and 3rd week of the month, bible classes, and the local Brownies group hold regular meetings and classes in the church. WTOW runs palates classes which are open for anyone in the community to join.

Although many of the clubs and pubs have closed as much of the wealth has left the area, those that remain are a vital part of community life. They act not only as simple pubs but meeting places with the ability to hold large scale activities and events. Some of the main pubs include:

- The Hendrewen Hotel – Located in Blaencwm the hotel is over 100 years old and uses its remote location to attract walkers and bikers who might use the local countryside. Aside from a pub that offers traditional means the hotel has accommodation facilities with 4 en-suite rooms. They have a ladies darts team
- Blaenrhondda Social (Top) Club – See Community Assets section
- The Dunraven Hotel
- The Baglan Hotel
- The Ninian Stewart Conservative Club

The community still has an active social and sporting life. **Treherbert Band** is a popular brass band in the community with a senior and a youth section. They no longer compete professionally but regularly perform in concerts and events throughout RCT. They practise every Thursday and are supported by Penycymoedd Wind Farm. Other than the Boys and Girls Club and Bowls Club Treherbert is home to a variety of clubs including **Blaenrhondda FC**, the club has only a senior team and does not have a club house but plays its football on a pitch in Blaenrhondda Park. **Blaenrhondda Bowls Club** has been described by one community activist as a 'jewel in the crown'. The club has seen its membership increase recently and is very community minded. It engages young people

by holding tournaments. Such is the success of its community spirit that one member who attends regularly and suffers from dementia can go on holiday with his wife again and she has found the club has been a massive help to her. **Treherbert RFC** dates back to 1879 when founded by local colliers and has a senior and junior (from under 8s to 17s) teams. The clubhouse is open 4 days a week and holds its own social events and entertainment nights.

11. Housing

Approximately 74% of the housing stock in Treherbert is terraced (far higher than the Welsh average of 27%), 13% is semi-detached and 4% is detached.⁵ Therefore there are few post-war developments. The biggest is located in Penyrenghlyn which used to be known as 'The Ranch'. There are a higher number of single people (35.6% compared to 30.8%) and a lower number of those married with no children (10% compared to 12.6%) The community has a similar average home ownership as the Welsh average (67.5% compared to 67.8%) and similar rental levels too (with social rentals being 14.8% compared to 16.5% and private rentals being 14.8% compared to 15.8%).⁶

The two biggest social landlords in the area are Rhondda housing and Trivalis. Both are involved in the community with outreach programmes. Rhondda Housing works closely with WTOW and the Skyline project to create eco-friendly social housing and creating sustainable jobs. Trivalis run community programmes from Blaencwm Chapel teaching gardening and food production.

⁵<http://www.infobasecymru.net/IAS/themes/people.communitiesandequalities/housing/profile?profileid=399>

⁶<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/Housing/RelatedDocuments/LocalHousingMarketAssessmentSummaryReport.pdf>