



Taking the lead in Tonypandy

RHA Wales Group has embarked on a substantial town centre regeneration programme in the heart of Rhondda Cynon Taf. Rhianydd Jenkins explains the plans

Over the past few years we have been preparing and planning, really questioning ourselves as to how we can help lead on regenerating the town of Tonypandy. Previously described as 'Britains Worst High Street' we have always had a presence in the town, with our office space located just off the main shopping street, we felt really connected within the community and knew we had to play our part as an anchor organisation in Tonypandy to shape its future, and work with the local community to build back to what was once a thriving market town.

Despite the previous negative press, there is positivity to be seen, with

new businesses opening and footfall increasing following the pedestrianisation on the High Street, we definitely feel that things are on the up.

We have opted for a 360 approach to ensure our regeneration plans tackle social, economic, and environmental challenges that are evident in the town today. Our plans will see the largest investment in the town for decades, with aspiration that our work and partnerships will be a catalyst to unlock the potential of Tonypandy and create a place that our future generations will be proud of.

We have opted to take a holistic approach in Tonypandy, considering our impact on the town, and really looked to understand how we can support and

sustain regeneration in the long term. We believe that taking a single project or building approach will not be enough, we are in this for the long haul to ensure the work we do now provides the platform for our future generations to build from and create a thriving town once again.

SO, WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE UP TO IN TONYPANDY?

Knowing our responsibility as an anchor organization within the town, it has been important that we have adapted and been open to change, particularly since the pandemic. Our office block has been transformed from what was originally a 9-5 traditional office environment, to a bright modern multifunctional building.

The Big Shed will provide 52 new homes in the town centre as well as new commercial spaces not currently available in Tonypandy



With support from Welsh Government, the ground floor space has been repurposed to create Workshed. This is a creative, modern, shared workspace for local business and entrepreneurs, as well as offering access to events and networking opportunities, with the aim of bringing people together to network and develop business and enterprise ideas, supporting our long-term commitment to ensuring we build sustainable communities and help improve the lives of those around us.

Elsewhere within the building, we have diversified our income stream by letting office space to commercial tenants, which has supported a revamp of its own staff space known as the RHA HUB. A creative and flexible space that staff can come together and work in a more informal and collaborative way.

In addition to providing workspace, we have repurposed another of our existing commercial assets to create a space called The Little Shed, which will be home to our Grub Hub (food parcel project), a community fridge, and our Be Active health and wellbeing project as well a Repair Café, digital skills classes and an inclusive and welcoming space for the community to use.

To complement the breadth of social and community projects being delivered, we are also embarking on two large scale capital works projects. Both have been specifically designed to complement the existing town, rather than to compete with existing businesses and offerings within the locality. Their project known as 'The Big Shed' will see us invest circa £13 million and, with support from Welsh Government, will construct 52 new homes within the town centre, as well as providing new commercial spaces that are presently not available within the town.

We can't do this on our own and recognize that partnerships at all levels are critical. We worked closely with the local authority

to purchase a derelict and fire damaged building within the town and the site has now been cleared to make way for a small residential development and some external spaces. With a total investment of circa £3 million the project will have significant impact on the town centre, and dramatically improve the street scene and access to the main shopping street.

SUPPORT LOCAL HIGH STREET

Our commitment to working in partnership is also reflected in work with the Tonypany Chamber of Trade, we are active members of the chamber, our head of communities and enterprise is the current chairperson, leading and facilitating meetings and we take part in and support local high street events and initiatives.

Simone Devinett, head of communities and enterprise at RHA, says: *'We have always valued and been committed to working in partnership and our membership of the Chamber Of Trade is an example of this. Membership has allowed us to gain a real understanding of the issues local businesses face and we've been able to work together to address them. For example in December, together with the local authority's town centre team we organised a Christmas Treasure Hunt on the high street, shop owners reported an increase in footfall and new customers to their stores.'*

In January we are planning a promotional event to increase chamber membership and build on current positive momentum. For us, this partnership and the relationships we build are vital in understanding the needs of our local communities, they enable us to invest resources where most needed.'

Darren Notley, Rhondda Cynon Taf project team leader, town centres, explains that: *'The council's corporate plan aims to create the opportunity for people and business to be innovative, be entrepreneurial and fulfil their potential and prosper. It places town centres at the heart of this by committing to invest in them, bring jobs and homes into them to create vibrant, thriving places people wish to live, work and socialise.'*

'RHA clearly shares this vision and in doing so have engaged positively in the opportunity to play a key role in supporting the council in achieving this, within their role as both a social and commercial landlord. The council looks forward to continuing their partnership with RHA to realise their ambitious plans for the redevelopment of a number of key sites within Tonypany town centre, which will contribute to the future regeneration of the town centre and boost the local economy.'

Rhianydd Jenkins is director of development and regeneration at RHA Wales Group

12 new homes will be built on Dunraven Street

