

# Town centres central to Valleys vision

Alun Davies is Chair of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, which was established to deliver lasting change for people living and working in the valleys.

On the visit yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary met with members of the community to discuss the work of the Taskforce and the role it can play in ensuring our high streets continue to thrive.

The Cabinet Secretary said,

“Town centres and high streets play a central role in creating a sense of community and providing us with a place to shop, do business, socialise and live. Our high streets should be the heart of our towns, offering a vibrant local economy and bustling community and we all have a role to play in ensuring they remain sustainable.

“Since I set up the Taskforce, many people have pointed out one of the main challenges facing Valleys communities is the decline of the traditional high street. This is not just as a threat to independent retailers, but changing shopping habits, in particular increasing online and out-of-town purchases, combined with falling disposable incomes, can cause difficulties too.

“People tell me they want to shop on their high street, and support local business, but when it’s cheaper, and more convenient to do so online, or even out-of-town, it’s a difficult choice to make.

“While we know that our town centres are resilient and are used to adapting to market forces, the Valleys Taskforce has been working with our community partners to find solutions to some of these issues so that our high streets are not only able to survive, but to thrive.

“Recently, the Welsh Government announced an extra £5 million to extend our High Street Rates Relief scheme for one further year into 2018-19. The scheme is unique to Wales and will support around 13,000 small and medium-sized businesses across the country this year.

“We’ve also been looking at more innovative public transport solutions and have worked with local authorities to explore the impact of piloting more free town centre parking initiatives.”