



## Caerphilly County Borough Council

# Consultation Report on the proposal to withdraw the subsidy and mothball Blackwood Miners’ Institute and to Mothball Llancaiach Fawr Manor from end of December 2024

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## **Background**

Caerphilly County Borough Council, like many other local authorities across Wales, is facing a huge financial challenge over the next few years and difficult decisions will need to be made to balance the budget.

The council must deliver savings in the region of £45million over the next two financial years and this is on top of the £20million of permanent savings that have already been identified.

The council is unable to continue to run services in the same way and need to explore all options and consider ways of doing things differently.

### **Llancaiach Fawr Manor**

The council currently provides a subsidy of **£485,000** a year to run the venue.

The venue currently employs 20 members of staff (including one vacant post) equal to 13.5 FTEs, plus 14 casual officers. Should any proposal be agreed following consideration of the public consultation feedback, colleagues employed at the venue would be supported through existing council HR policies.

The council is proposing to 'mothball' Llancaiach Fawr at the end of December 2024 and will explore options for the facility to be run in a different way in the future. If agreed, this proposal would allow the council to make full in-year savings for 2025/26 while continuing to try and establish alternative providers for the facility.

### **Blackwood Miners Institute**

The council currently provides a subsidy of **£347,000** per year to run Blackwood Miners Institute.

The venue currently employs 9 members of staff, plus 16 casual officers. Should any proposal be agreed following consideration of the public consultation feedback, colleagues employed at the venue would be supported through existing council HR policies.

The council is proposing to withdraw its subsidy, which could see the venue mothballed at the end of December 2024. The authority would then explore options for the facility to be run in a different way in the future. If supported, this proposal would allow the council to make full in-year savings for 2025/26.

## **Purpose**

This consultation has been conducted to seek the views of residents and stakeholders in relation to two proposals:

- to 'mothball' Llancaiach Fawr at the end of December 2024 and explore options for the facility to be run in a different way in the future.
- to withdraw its subsidy, which could see the venue mothballed at the end of December 2024. The authority would then explore options for the facility to be run in a different way in the future.

An initial Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) was drafted for both venue proposals and can be found at <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/blackwood-miners-institute-and-llancaiach-fawr>

The IIA will be updated following completion of the consultation.

## **Methodology (What we did)**

The consultation ran for a 6 week period from Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> July to Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2024. The consultation was widely promoted to enable all those who wished to give their views an opportunity to take part:

- A dedicated web page linked directly from the home page of the Council's website <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/blackwood-miners-institute-and-llancaiach-fawr>
- Posters displayed in Blackwood Miners Institute, Llancaiach Fawr, libraries and other public facing Council venues. The posters promoted the drop-in engagement sessions and a link to the online

platform where additional supporting information and the survey could be found (in both online and printable format).

- Media and social media releases at the launch of the consultation and throughout the consultation period, including via NewsOnline (the council's e-mail newsletter) There were 9 Facebook posts on the council's Facebook page during the consultation period eliciting 168 comments. This was shared widely by Blackwood Miner's Institute and local community groups including Friends of Llancaiach Fawr and others
- Targeted e-mails to stakeholder groups across the borough (please see Annex on the website for more details) <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/blackwood-miners-institute-and-llancaiach-fawr>

The primary consultation tool was a questionnaire however, participants were encouraged to respond in a number of ways.

## Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was made available bilingually online (as outlined above) and in paper format available for printing from the council website, from libraries and on request via e-mail or over the phone.

A copy of the survey can be found here: <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/blackwood-miners-institute-and-llancaiach-fawr>

## Face to face engagement

Four face to face drop in sessions took place at venues close to both Blackwood Miners Institute and Llancaiach Fawr:

### Drop in sessions

Venue	Date and time	Number of attendees
Blackwood Library	Tuesday 13th August 2024 (4-6pm)	70+
Nelson Library	Wednesday 21st August 2024 (4-6pm)	54
Gelligaer Community Centre	Thursday 5th September 2024 (5:30 - 7:30pm)	18
Blackwood Library	Saturday 7th September (11:30am - 1:30pm)	25

Two online drop-in sessions were also arranged:

Date	Number of attendees
Thursday 15th August 2024 (4:30 - 6:30pm)	6
Tuesday 20th August 2024 (2:30 - 2:30pm)	5

### Two petitions have been received:

- Petition no 271 received 9 September 2024 from the "Friends of Llancaiach Fawr" with 9198 to save Llancaiach Fawr Manor (including 3168 signatures and 6030 to the online petition)
- Petition no 272 received 10 September 2024 to save Blackwood Miner's Institute from Cllr Kevin Etheridge and George Etheridge with over 6000 responses including online.

Responses received via letter/e-mail are contained within the Annexes of this report.

The key themes expressed via other engagement mechanisms reflect closely those of the survey and are incorporated into the summary of Key Findings.

## Results/Key Findings

*Note: The statistical data (percentages) presented within this report relates to survey responses only. The number of responses received for individual questions may be lower than the total number of completed questionnaires returned. Percentages are therefore based on the number of responses to individual questions (n=number of responses) and not necessarily the number of completed surveys received.*

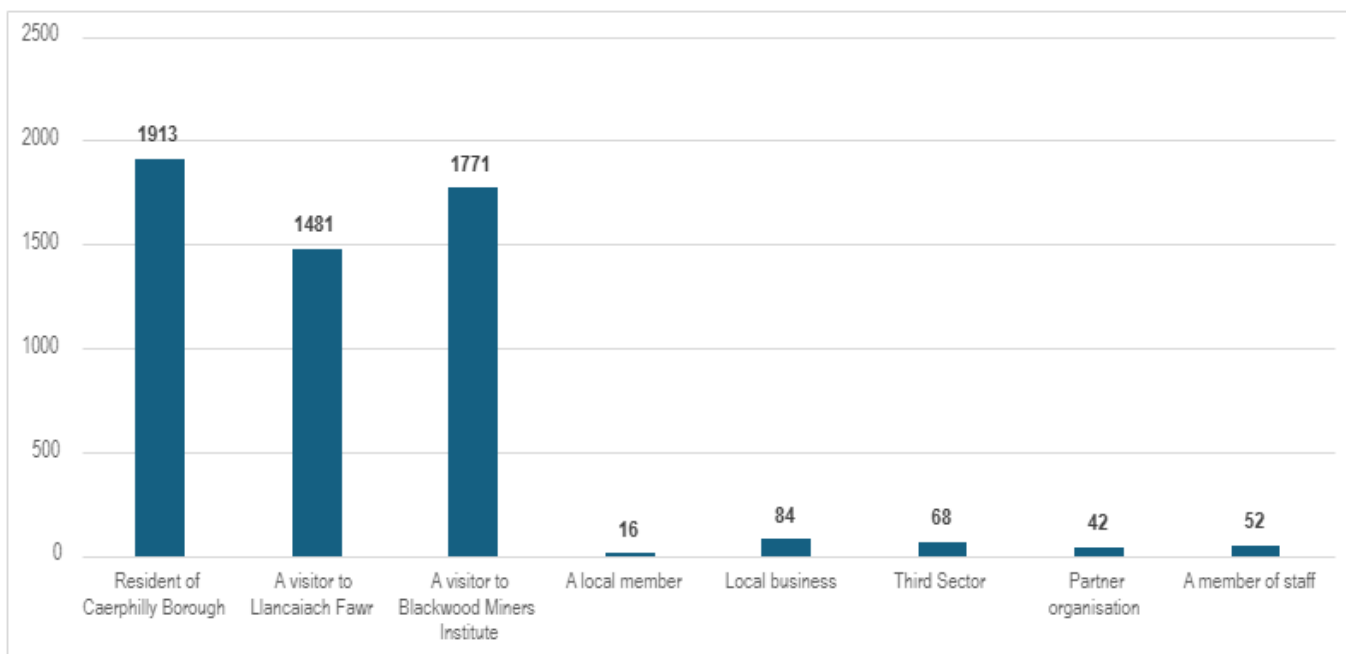
*Qualitative analysis incorporates both the open-ended responses to the survey **as well as** the qualitative feedback from conversations, e-mails, letters and other written comments. **Participation in the consultation was self-selecting. The data should be considered within this context.***

A small number of surveys (6) received after the closing date have not been included in the analysis below but all disagreed with both proposals.

### Respondent profile

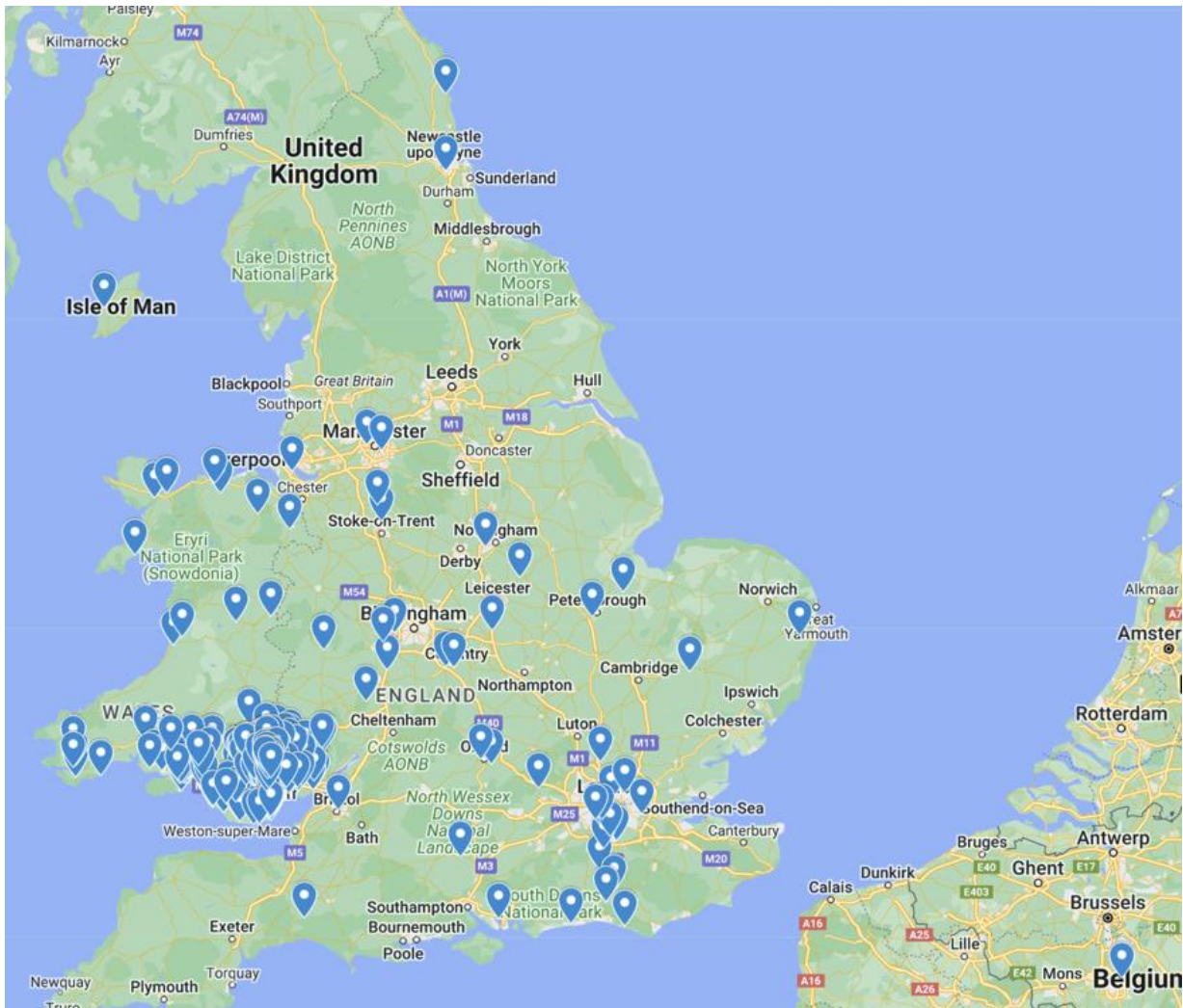
**2726** completed surveys were received by the closing date. As shown in **Graph 1**, the largest proportion of respondents were residents of Caerphilly county borough and those who visit the venues. Note: respondents were able to select more than one response to this question.

**Graph 1: Interest in the consultation (multiple answers possible)**



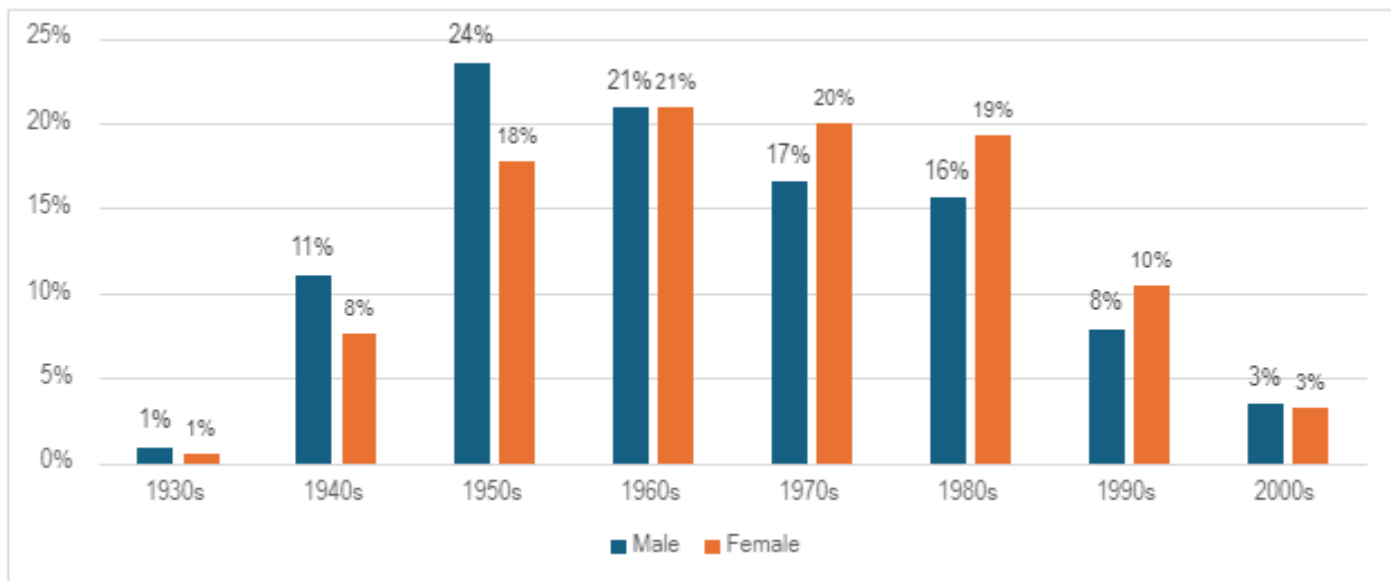
Map 1 highlights that while the largest proportion of respondents were residents of the borough and south Wales more widely, the consultation reached and was responded to by visitors and interested stakeholders from further afield.

Map 1: Geographical distribution of respondents



**Graph 2** provides a breakdown of the age and gender profile of survey respondents. More than two thirds of those who responded to the survey were female. A higher proportion of respondents born before 1950 were men whilst a higher proportion of respondents born after 1970 were female.

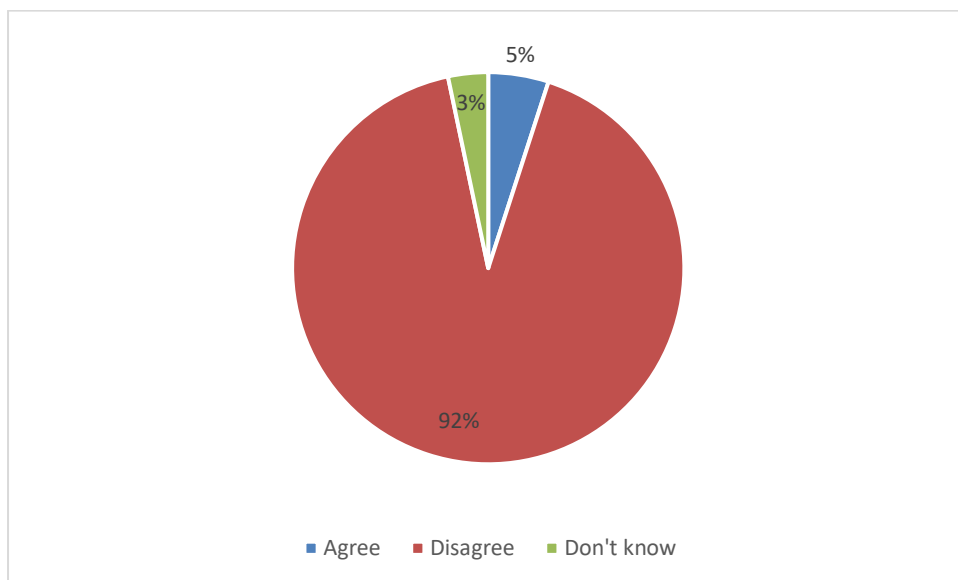
**Graph 2: Age and gender profile of respondents (n male = 750; n female = 1633)**



## Llancaiach Fawr

Of those who responded to the question, **92% disagreed with the proposal** to remove the subsidy for Llancaiach Fawr and mothball the venue from December 2024 (see **Graph 3**).

**Graph 3 Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to remove the subsidy for Llancaiach Fawr from December 2024? (n=1848)**



The main reasons given for **disagreeing** with the proposal can be themed:

- Its unique nature and importance as a historical/heritage venue
  - Attracting tourists/visitors
  - Contributing to education with a focus on young people
- As a facility for local community
- Economic benefits of visitors on the local economy
- CCBC can make savings in other ways
  - Some things are more important than money

- The proposal will not make a significant impact on savings targets
- If it is "mothballed" it won't reopen – the subsidy should be retained until an alternative is found
- What alternative options have been considered?
  - The site could be promoted and marketed more effectively to increase income
  - It could be used for something else
- Don't want staff to lose their jobs
- Depends on what alternative use of site might be
- Understand savings need to be made but...
  - A disproportionate amount of money going to Caerphilly town
  - Need to keep facilities in the north of the borough

A number of people felt that more information was needed to help them understand the proposal and comment. They felt that more information on alternative models and detail on income and costs were needed before they could fully give their views.

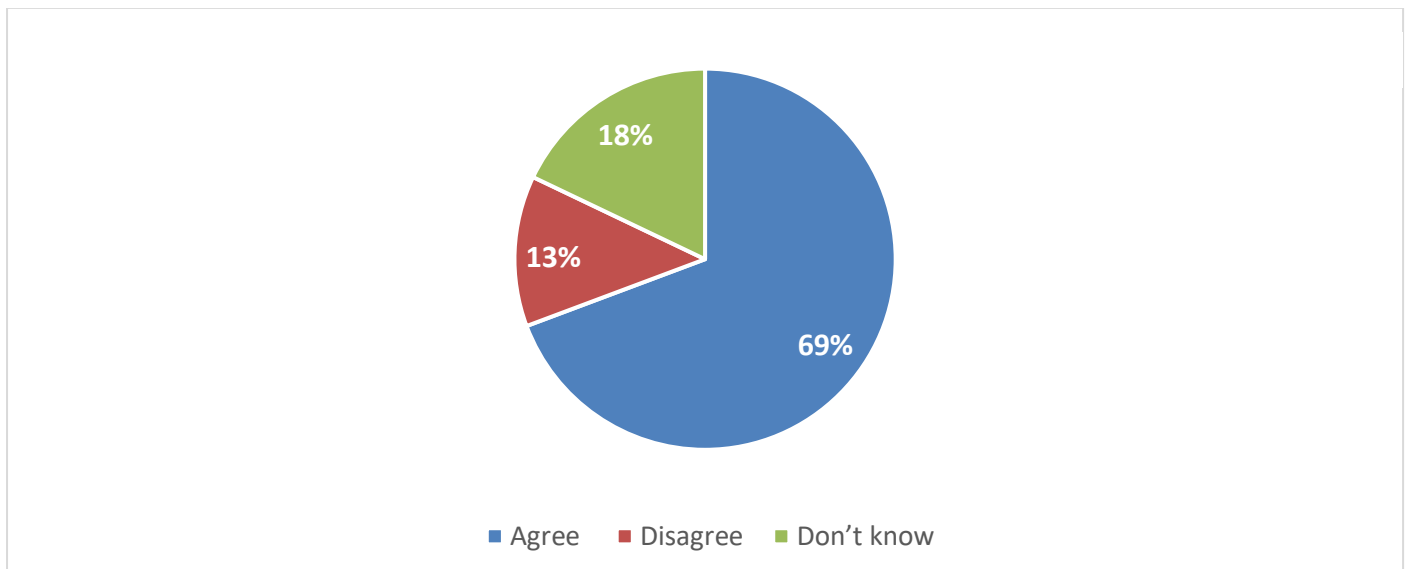
Main reasons given for **agreeing** with the proposal

- Non-essential service - prioritise essential services
- Level of subsidy is too high
  - Do not subsidise/subsidy is too much/should be self-sustaining
- Would agree if an alternative can be found

### Level of subsidy

Respondent were asked whether they agree or disagree with the level of subsidy for Lancaiach Fawr (£485,000 per annum). As highlighted in **Graph 4**, 69% agreed with the subsidy level while 13% disagreed and 18% "don't know".

**Graph 4: Level of subsidy. Percentage of respondents who agreed/disagreed with the level of subsidy (n=1837)**



The main reasons given for supporting the subsidy were:

- That the subsidy is (relatively) small
- It is important to recognise wider benefits to the community and local area as outlined in response to the question above.

The main reasons given for disagreeing with this level of subsidy were:

- The council should prioritise essential services
- The venue should be run more efficiently – there is an income – this should be sufficient if run effectively

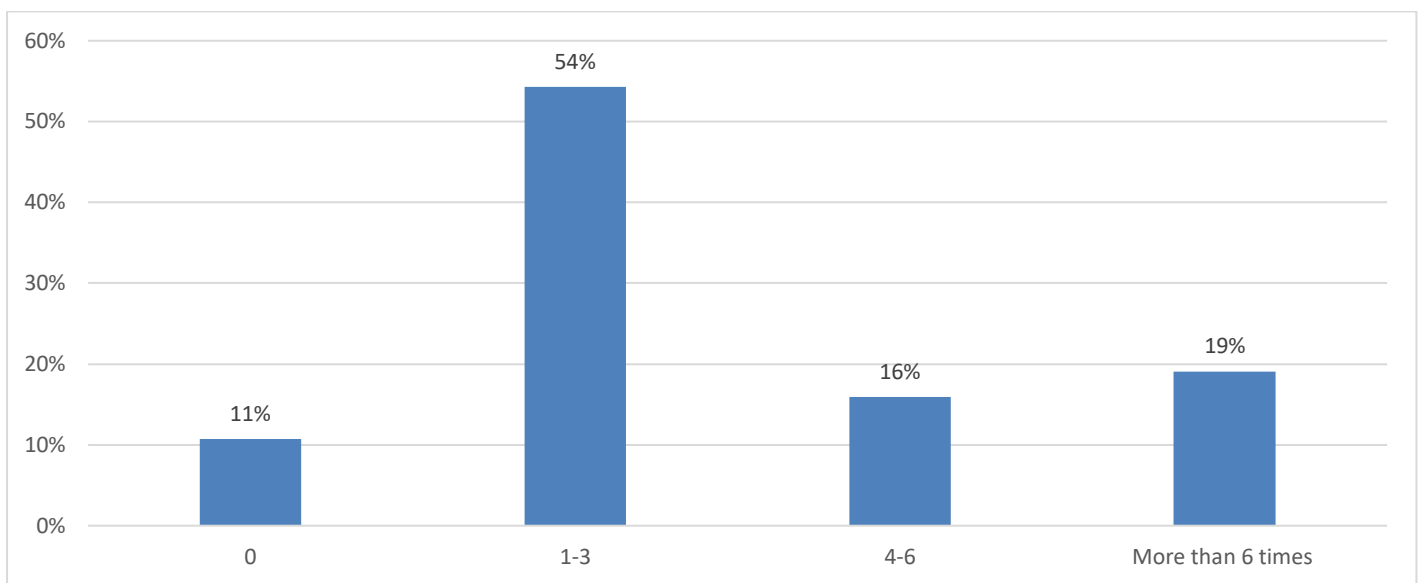


- The subsidy is too high if usage is low
- Money could be saved by making more use of volunteers
- The venue could be run by the private sector/a charity or trust or with partners (voluntary and other organisations)

For those who indicated that they “don’t know”, a key factor was the lack of detail in relation to income/expenditure relating to the venue and a breakdown of costs that would allow them to understand more about why the subsidy is needed etc

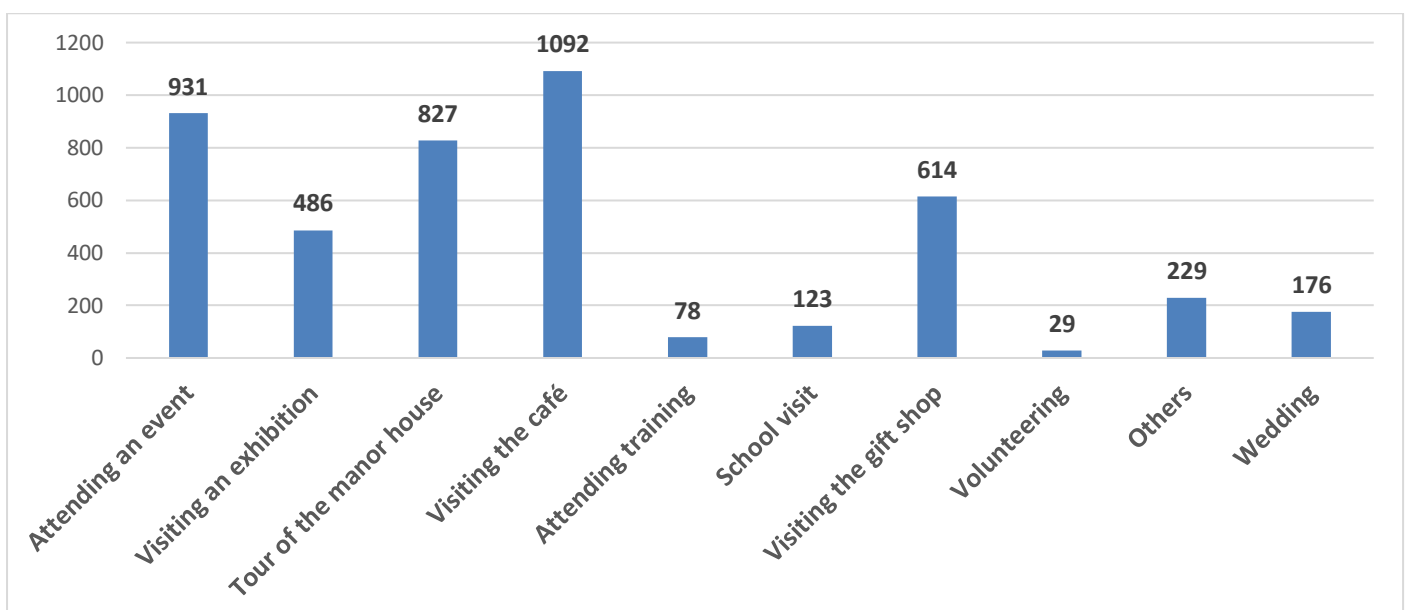
To help understand the potential impact of the proposal to mothball Llancaiach Fawr from December 2024, survey respondents were asked to share how often they have visited the venue in the last 12 months. The majority (89%) of those who responded to the survey had visited Llancaiach Fawr in the last 12 months (see **Graph 5**).

**Graph 5: How many times have you visited Llancaiach Fawr in the last 12 months (n=1834)?**



By far, the most frequent reasons for visiting Llancaiach Fawr were the café and attending events (see **Graph 6**). A tour of the Manor House was the third most popular reason for visiting. Visiting an exhibition and the gift shop were also popular reasons to visit.

**Graph 6: Reasons for visit to Llancaiach Fawr (multiple responses were possible)**



## Impact of the proposal on you and your family

Key themes emerging with respect to the negative impact of this proposal include:

- Impact on access to history and local heritage
- Impact on local economy through a reduction in visitors to the area who, in turn, spend money locally
- Some who visit infrequently indicated that the impact would be relatively small but those who live more locally and visit regularly felt the impact would be great
  - Several groups noted that they would need to find alternative venues for meetings and exhibitions.
  - There would be a particular impact on Welsh speaking groups who use the venue for a range of regular activities, and Arts groups who also use the venue for exhibitions.
  - A number of people who had attended weddings at the venue felt that this proposal would be a great loss
- Impact on education (for children and young people in particular)
- Loss of a suitable venue for events

Some respondents perceived a greater impact on them due to their protected characteristics, in particular:

- Disability – Llancaich Fawr is an accessible venue
- Welsh Language – Welsh language groups use the venue for a wide range of events/meetings
- Age – older people enjoy the accessible venue
- Impact on mental health e.g. visitors using the garden
- Armed Forces Veterans
- Religion
- Gender
- Marital status – unable to get married at the venue

**20%** felt that the proposal will treat the Welsh language less favourably than the English language. The remainder either said “no” or left the question blank.

As noted above, there is a potential socio-economic impact

- Staff (job losses)
- Loss of income from the local economy and
- The need for people to travel further

## Mitigation

Reflecting previous comments, the following themes were identified in relation to how the proposal could be mitigated. By far the preferred suggestion was to keep the venue open. Others felt strongly that more time should be given to allow for alternatives to be put in place. Others felt that the subsidy could be reduced but not removed and a number of suggestions were made regarding running the venue more efficiently and increasing income:

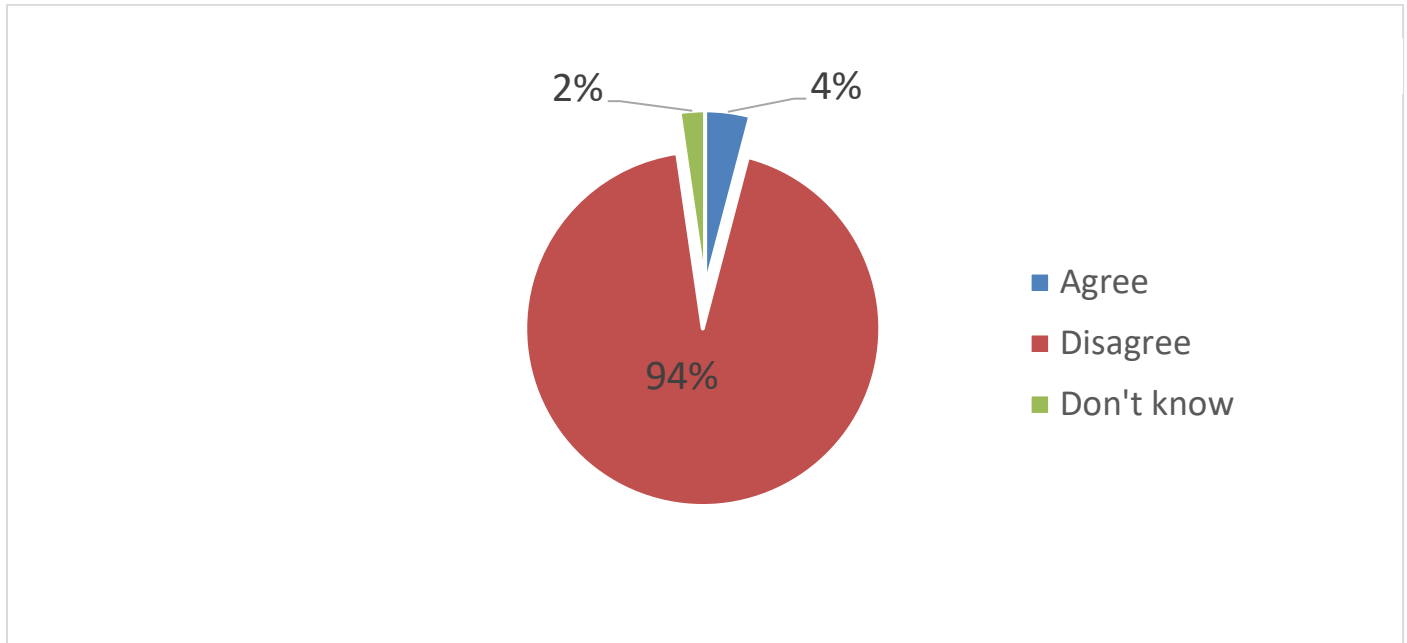
- Make more use of volunteers/work with voluntary sector
- Increase income
  - small increase in charge
  - widen the offer
  - improve marketing and promotion
- Reduce/limit opening hours
- Private investment
- Identify additional income sources (external)
- Find savings elsewhere in the council
- Learn from other venues
- Focus on one flagship venue

# Blackwood Miner's Institute

## Respondent views and emerging themes

Of those who responded (n=2171), **94% disagreed** whilst 4% agreed with the proposal to remove the subsidy for Blackwood Miners Institute in December 2024 (See **Graph 7**).

**Graph 7: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to withdraw the subsidy from Blackwood Miner's Institute at the end of December 2024 (n=2171)**



The main reasons given for disagreeing with the proposal are themed:

- Arts and culture is so important
  - It is the only professional arts venue in the borough
  - It is unique
- As a facility for local community.
  - It was funded by the miners and is part of the heritage of the area/belongs to the community
  - Some things are more important than money
  -
- Impact on local economy through a reduction in visitors to the area who, in turn, spend money locally
  - Attracts tourists/visitors
  - Greater Blackwood Master Plan
  - Night time economy
- If it is "mothballed" it won't reopen – the subsidy should be retained to support the venue until an alternative is found/venue becomes self-sustaining
  - Better marketing and promotion
  - Increase income
- Don't want staff to lose their jobs
- Understand savings need to be made but....
  - The council can save money in other ways
  - Proposal will not make a significant impact on savings targets
  - A disproportionate amount of money going to Caerphilly town
  - Need to keep facilities in the north of the borough

As with Llancaiach Fawr, a number of people felt that more information was needed to help them understand the proposal and comment. They felt that more information on alternative models and detail on income and costs were needed before they could fully give their views.

A small number said that they would agree with the proposal if an alternative can be found.

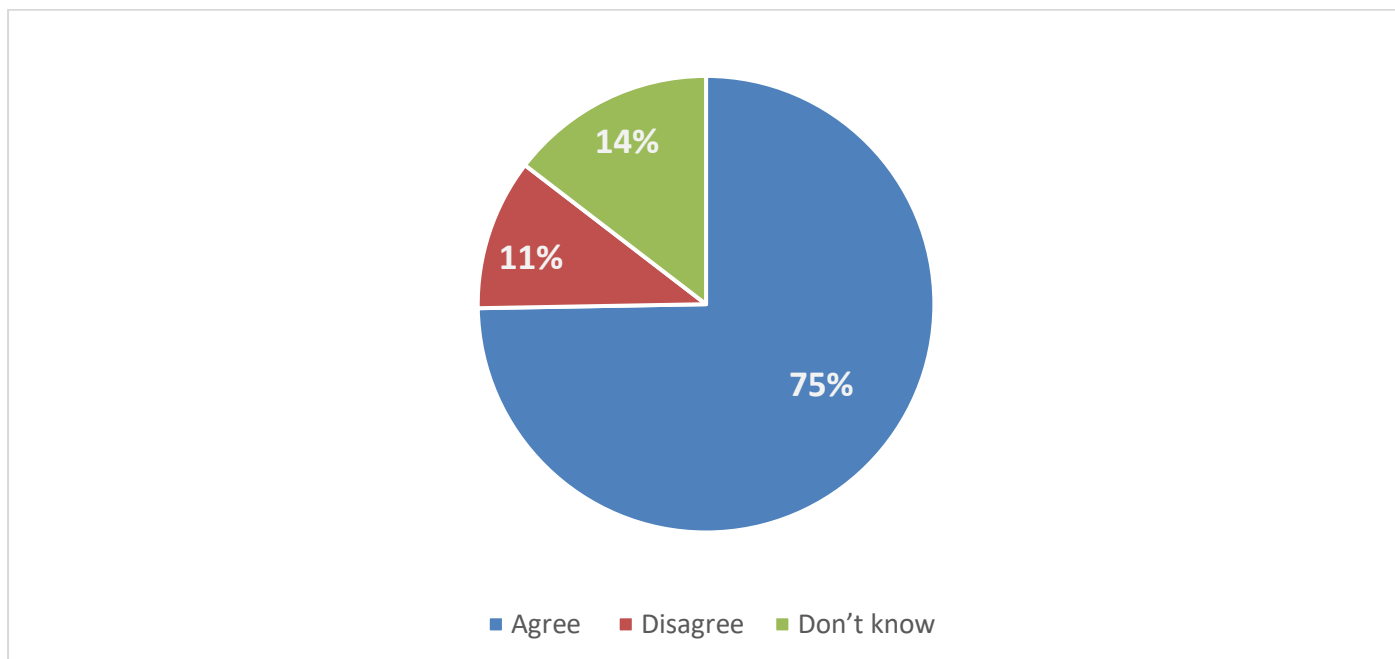
Others felt that as a non-essential service, the venue needs to be self-sustaining and the council should focus on other areas.

### Do you agree or disagree with the annual subsidy of £347,000 provided to Blackwood Miner's Institute?

75% agree that with the subsidy, 14% indicated that they "don't know" and a further 11% disagreed.

A number respondents felt that they were unable to give a view in relation to the level of subsidy as they had not been provided with enough detail in relation to income and costs of running the venue.

### Graph 8: Do you agree or disagree with the annual subsidy of £347,000 provided to Blackwood Miner's Institute? (n=2140)



The main reasons for **agreeing** that the subsidy should remain were:

- The subsidy is (relatively) small
- Recognise wider benefits to the community as highlighted in previous comments

The main reasons for **disagreeing** that the subsidy should remain were

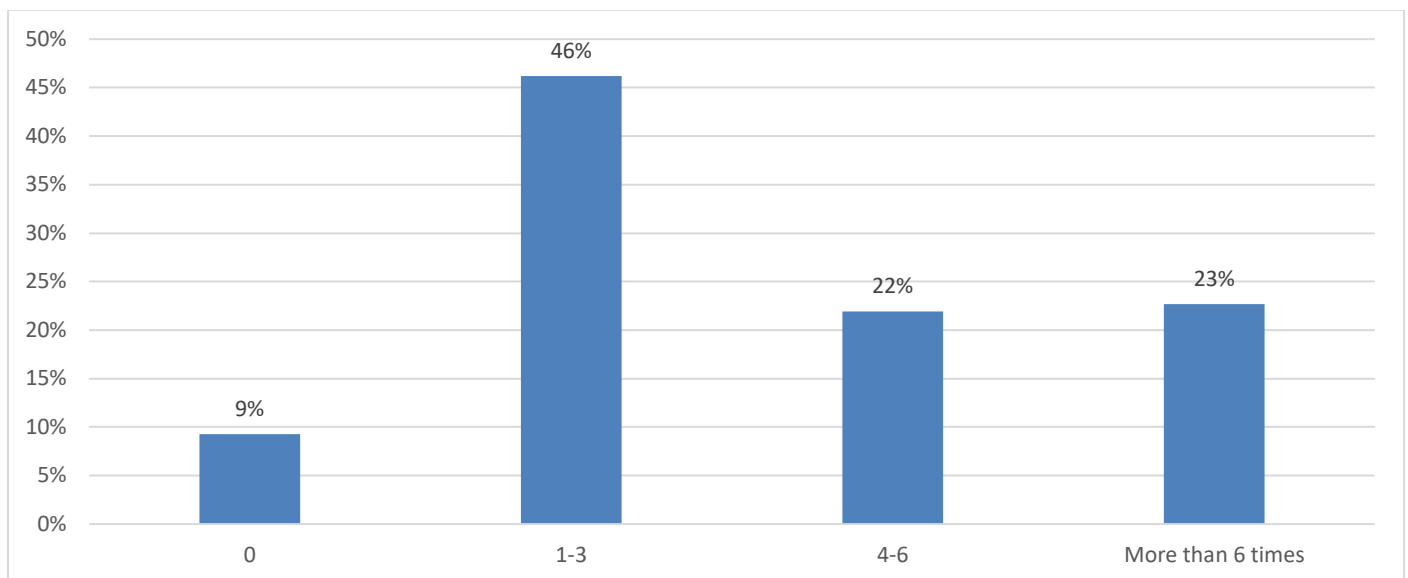
- The Council should prioritise essential services
- The venue should be run more efficiently
- Could be run by the private sector
- The council should work with partners
- The subsidy too high if usage is low
- More use of volunteers would reduce costs

For context in understanding the potential impact of the proposal to mothball Blackwood Miners Institute from December 2024, survey respondents were asked to share how often they have visited the venue in the last 12 months. The majority (91%) of those who responded to the survey had visited Blackwood Miner's Institute in the last 12 months (see **Graph 9**).

### Support for local community groups (n=2079)

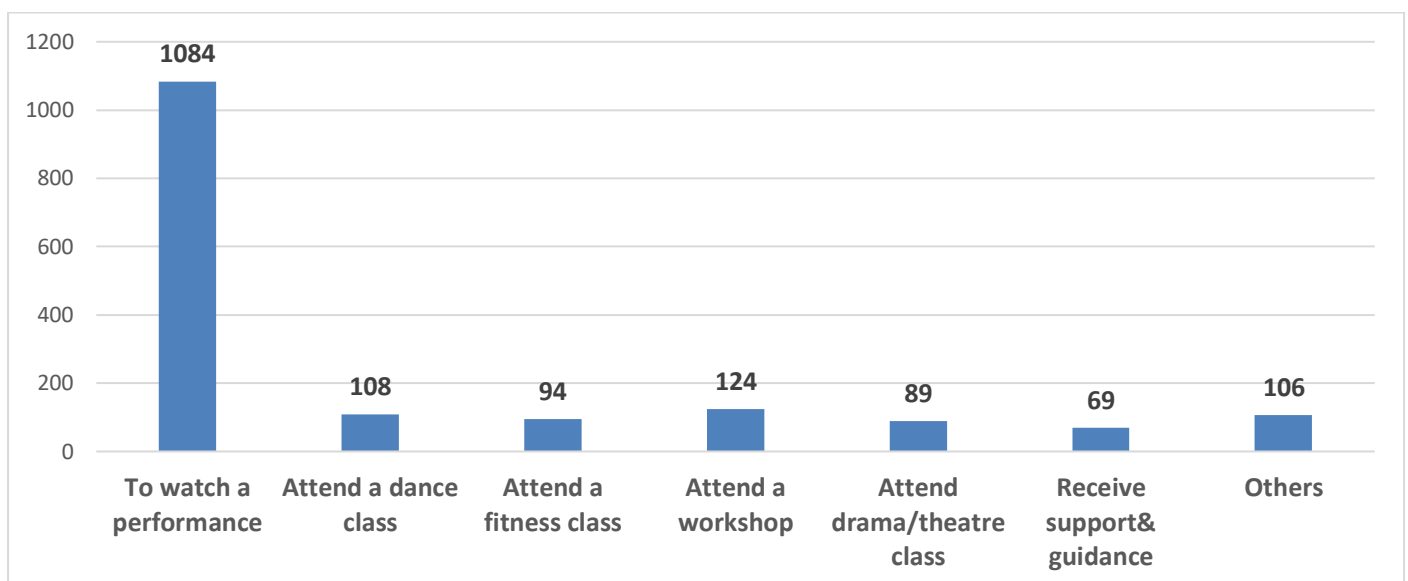
64% of respondents to this question agree that the council should support community groups who'd be interested in taking over the venue. 11% disagree and 26% don't know.

**Graph 9: Visits in the last 12 months (n=2151)**



As shown in **Graph 10** the main reasons for visiting Blackwood Miner’s Institute amongst respondents was (by far) attending a performance. As expected, the frequency of visits is higher for those attending regular classes compared to watching a performance.

**Graph 10: Reasons for visiting Blackwood Miner’s Institute (more than one response possible)**



### **Impact on you and your family**

Key themes emerging with respect to the negative impact of this proposal include:

- Impact on access to arts and culture as the venue is the only one of its kind in the local area “unique” (other venues do not offer like for like)
- Impact on local economy through a reduction in visitors to the area who, in turn, spend money locally
  - Impact on the night time economy
  - Links to the Greater Blackwood Master Plan
- Locally, the venue is used by a number of groups who noted that they would need to find alternative venues for classes and workshops.

- There is a greater cost associated with visiting larger venues further afield
  - Lack of public transport and the cost of public transport would make alternatives out of reach
- Impact on Welsh language – **18%** felt that the proposal would treat the Welsh language less favourably. The remainder either left the question unanswered or said “no”.
  - There would be a particular impact on Welsh speaking groups who use the venue for a range of regular activities, and Arts groups who also use the venue for exhibitions.
  - A number of people who had attended weddings at the venue felt that this proposal would be a great loss
- Loss of a suitable venue for events

Some respondents perceived a greater impact on them due to their protected characteristics, in particular:

- Disability
- Welsh Language – loss of Welsh language performances
- Age – dance classes and other classes for both young and older people
- Impact on mental health if unable to visit, social interaction by attending classes also linked to adverse childhood experiences
- Gender – the dance class is attended mostly by girls
- Race – ability to see diverse performances that reflect cultural heritage
- Sexual orientation – Diverse performances including LGBT friendly performances

As noted above, there is a potential socio-economic impact

- Staff (job losses)
- Loss of income from the local economy and
- The need for people to travel further

## Mitigation

Reflecting previous comments, the following themes were identified in relation to how the proposal could be mitigated. By far the preferred suggestion was to keep the venue open. Others felt strongly that more time should be given to allow for alternatives to be put in place. Others felt that the subsidy could be reduced but not removed and a number of suggestions were made regarding running the venue more efficiently and increasing income:

- Make more use of volunteers/work with voluntary sector
- Increase income
  - small increase in charge
  - widen the offer
  - improve marketing and promotion
- Reduce/limit opening hours/days
- Identify additional income sources (external funding as a charity)
- Find savings elsewhere in the council
- Learn from other venues

‘it’s important to support the arts.’

‘gives opportunities for young and old people to showcase their talents and for the local community to come together to support them.’

‘It’s a fantastic venue, offering such a variety of performances . These shows being in so much money to the local economy.’

‘This building has historical importance which should be preserved’.

‘A phased reduction in subsidy and working with the theatre to find alternative funding so the community isn't cut off straight away’, ‘

A full digest of the responses received can be found in **Annex 2**.

## **Next steps**

The outcomes of the consultation will be considered through the Mobilising Team Caerphilly governance structure.

The full list of comments received can be found at <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/blackwood-miners-institute-and-llancaiach-fawr>

## **List of annexes**

Annex 1: Feedback from interested parties

Annex 2: Digest of comments received through survey

Annex 3: Feedback from drop-in sessions

Annex 4: Social media feedback