



# *Turning heads...*

A STRATEGY FOR THE HEADS OF THE VALLEYS

# 2020



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



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# Introduction

In 'Heads – We Win...' A Strategic Framework for the Heads of the Valleys', we set out our vision for the Heads of the Valleys within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan. By the year 2020, the area will be:

- a culturally rich, dynamic network of vibrant and safe communities
- a place where people want to live, work and play with a sustainable, high quality of life and a thriving population
- helping to drive the success of South East Wales as an internationally recognised Capital Region.

The consultation around 'Heads – We Win...' has revealed widespread support for a Heads of the Valleys Programme. Since its publication, we have established a Programme Board to agree the shared vision and provide strategic leadership, and appointed a Programme Director to take a lead on delivering the vision with partners. We have also committed £140m of special funding over the lifetime of the Programme to stimulate investment (including at least £360million from the private sector) and to encourage partnership working through better use of the £1billion per year already invested in the area.

Building on our public consultation and research, 'The Way Ahead...' Towards a Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys' (February 2006) put forward the five key themes around which the Programme might be built:

- An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment
- A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities
- A well-educated, skilled and healthier population
- An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience
- Public confidence in a shared bright future

Crucially, 'The Way Ahead...' also identified the need to win the 'hearts and minds' of the people living in the Heads of the Valleys, as they are the ones who have the capacity to bring about change for themselves and future generations. We must also facilitate new ways of working and encourage the pooling of resources and expertise.

'Turning Heads... A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020', builds on what we have achieved to date. It has been informed by the available evidence, and is being robustly assessed according to environmental and sustainability criteria.

This Strategy and the accompanying draft Sustainability Appraisal will be the subject of further consultation before being finalised later this year. We look forward to hearing your views so that together we can better shape our sustainable future.



*Andrew Davies*

**Andrew Davies AM**

**Minister for Enterprise,  
Innovation and Networks**

# Executive Summary

'Turning Heads... A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020' breathes life into a vibrant and new regeneration partnership between the public, private and voluntary/community sectors. Set firmly within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan, it sets out a shared vision for what the area will look and feel like by the year 2020 and the ways in which we will turn our vision into reality.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

The Heads of the Valleys benefit from some important opportunities, including:

- the upgrading of the A465 Heads of the Valleys road and rail links to Newport/Cardiff
- positive developments in the South East Wales labour market
- continued major public investment
- planned large scale renewal of public sector/social housing
- vast areas of accessible countryside within a rich historic and built environment
- strong communities
- a robust national and local policy context.

## **ISSUES**

The area does, however, also face some significant challenges, including:

- declining population
- high levels of economic inactivity
- low educational attainment and skills levels
- low quality of jobs and opportunities
- a high incidence of long term health problems
- an unfavourable image
- deprivation, a lack of quality housing and poorly equipped town centres
- limited transport and telecommunications links in some areas
- poor maintenance and management of key natural and historic assets.



## OPTIONS FOR DELIVERY

Without a 'designed-for-purpose' strategy, it is likely that the Heads of the Valleys would continue to lose ground in an increasingly prosperous and competitive Wales.

A number of options for bringing about change have therefore been carefully considered and analysed. Our preferred option (Option A) focuses on the creation of 'balanced communities' within the Heads of the Valleys to provide a mix of housing, retail, tourism and leisure facilities as well as high quality public services and opportunities for people to work within the area and outside it.

## STRATEGIC GOALS AND PROGRAMMES

Through stakeholder consultation and analysis of the available research and evidence, the Strategy has been developed around five priority themes, each underpinned by a number of key Strategic Programmes (SPs):

### ■ An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment

SP1: A sub-regional approach to the regeneration of settlements

SP2: A perception-changing landscape

SP3: Well-used and easily accessed amenities

### ■ A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities

SP4: Directly linking people with work

SP5: Joined-up solutions for business

SP6: Linked opportunities for businesses and individuals

### ■ A well-educated, skilled and healthier population

SP7: Improving health through prevention

SP8: Integrated lifelong learning

### ■ An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience

SP9: Linked local and regional attractions and facilities

SP10: An integrated 'offer'

### ■ Public confidence in a shared bright future

SP11: Visualising the Strategy

SP12: Pro-active communications and engagement

## **DELIVERY AND RESULTS**

The Strategy will be delivered through close partnership working with key stakeholders within the public, private and voluntary sectors, making use where possible of established structures, networks and relationships.

Equality of opportunity and the use of the latest Information and Communications Technology (ICT) will be at the heart of our approach. We will also embed the principles of sustainable development in everything we do, and seek to make better and more effective connections between the public services and other sectors.

Overall strategic direction will be provided by the Heads of the Valleys Programme Board, chaired by the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks. Delivery will be achieved through a dedicated 'Heads of the Valleys Programme Team', and Strategic Programme Managers will oversee delivery against the priority themes. The approach will be inclusive, involving all sectors and interested parties wherever possible.

The aim of the Strategy is to provide a better focus for the estimated £1 billion public sector annual spend in the Heads of the Valleys. The Welsh Assembly Government has committed an additional £140 million of special funding over 15 years to help achieve this, and to lever in further investment from the private sector, EU Structural Funds and other sources.

Progress will be tracked against a number of key indicators, linked to the priority themes.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Strategy is subject to a Sustainability Appraisal incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment, including health and race/equalities impact assessments. These processes involve a 12 week consultation period.

Once finalised, the Strategy will then be reviewed at least once every three years.

## **POLICY INTEGRATION TOOL**

This assesses how well the Strategy fits with other Welsh Assembly Government policies.

## **ACTION PLAN 2006/09**

This illustrates how we are starting to use the special funding (£30m in total over the next three years) to maximise the value of the estimated £1bn public sector annual spend in the Heads of the Valleys.

The Strategy will address key issues such as raising skills levels and helping people into work throughout the lifetime of the Programme. Investment in the first three years will also focus upon:

- 2006/07: Major environmental ('landscape-scale') projects
- 2007/08: Renewal of key town centres
- 2008/09: Development of the tourism and leisure offer

# Opportunities

The Heads of the Valleys Programme offers a once-in-a-generation chance to change the area for the better by capitalising on its unique potential and links to the wider region. In developing this Strategy, we have focused on the many opportunities that the area presents. These include:

- **The upgrading of the A465 Heads of the Valleys road**, along with other transport improvements such as the Ebbw Vale rail link and the proposed Bargoed by-pass. A number of key settlements are now in prime locations with excellent road links both East/West and to Cardiff, Newport and the M4 corridor.
- **Positive developments in the South East Wales labour market.** There are 100,000 more jobs in Wales now than there were in 1999 and rates of economic inactivity in Wales have also started to fall. At the same time, average earnings in Wales have risen by more than 10% in real terms since 1999, making work more attractive than ever.
- **Continued major public investment in the area**, including the regeneration of the former Ebbw Vale Steelworks site. Furthermore, the EU budget agreement in December 2005 means that West Wales and the Valleys will continue to benefit from high levels of funding through the 2007-13 EU Convergence Programme.
- **Housing renewal.** There is strong interest from private sector house builders in developing new homes within the Valleys, and the five Valleys local authorities will invest £0.6 billion in the social housing stock between now and 2012.
- **The accessible countryside and rich historic and built environment.** The landscape is stunning in its own right, and contains unique assets such as the World Heritage Site at Blaenavon and a wide range of housing and other facilities from different periods. The area also has the advantage of being situated at the gateway to the Brecon Beacons.





- **The communities of the Heads of the Valleys.** There are powerful social networks and a strong sense of culture and identity, and communities have been further empowered by initiatives such as Communities First. This Programme has captured the imagination and enthusiasm of large numbers of stakeholders and presents an opportunity to work holistically, tackling issues in a more integrated way.
- **The robust national and local policy context.** The Strategy sits firmly within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan, which sets out a broad framework for change in the Heads of the Valleys. A clear policy direction is set out in key documents such as 'Wales: A Vibrant Economy' (on the economy), 'Designed for Life' (on health), 'Starting to Live Differently' (on sustainable development)

and the recently published 'The Learning Country 2: Delivering the Promise' (on education). We have also drawn upon the Community Plans and Strategies of local partnerships, early discussions with the South East Wales Spatial Planning Group, the useful analysis contained within South East Wales Economic Forum's 'Enter the Dragon Economy'.

*Making the most of these opportunities, and bringing together the expertise and resources of people and organisations active in the area, will allow us to tackle the issues facing the Heads of the Valleys, as set out in the next section.*



# Issues

In developing the Strategy, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of the baseline information assembled by stakeholder organisations including, in particular, the Welsh Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate, the local authorities and the Countryside Council for Wales. The evidence shows that the key challenges facing the Heads of the Valleys are:

## ECONOMIC INACTIVITY

- Only 64% of the working age population in the Heads of the Valleys is in employment compared with 69% in the Lower Valleys and 71% across Wales as a whole.
- A large number of individuals are neither working nor actively seeking work because they are sick or disabled, are looking after the family home or are students. However, almost a third of these inactive individuals say they would like to work - a higher proportion than elsewhere in Wales.

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS

- Nearly one quarter of the population have no qualifications (compared with 17% for Wales as a whole) and there are only half as many graduates living in the area as in the rest of South East Wales.
- Only 41% of 15 year olds are achieving 5 GCSEs at A\*-C grades, compared with a Welsh average of 52%.

## THE QUALITY OF JOBS

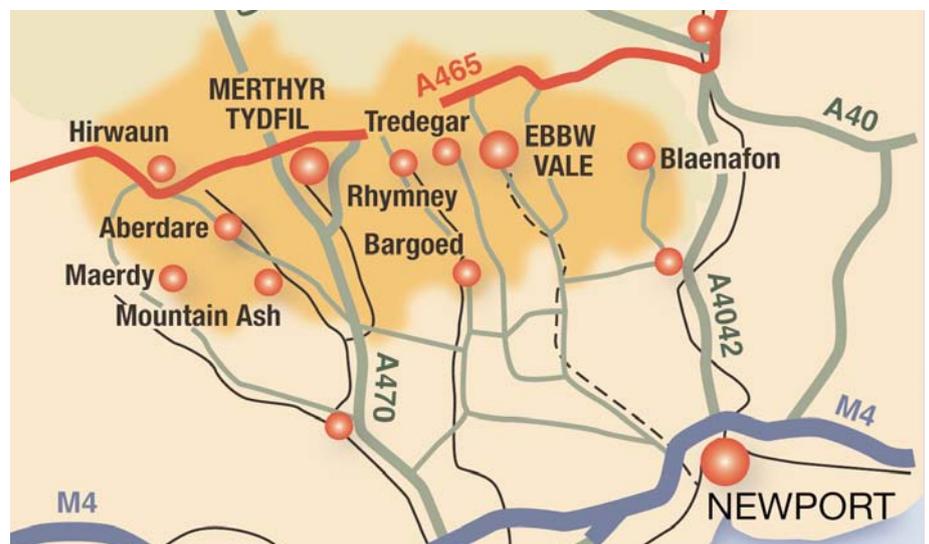
- Heads of the Valleys residents who are in work are less likely to be in skilled or professional jobs (only 50% compared with 62% for Wales as a whole)
- There is a shortage of office space and smaller business units in much of the area and existing premises are often too large for SMEs, sometimes remaining empty for considerable periods of time.
- Many of the more skilled jobs within the area are currently filled by individuals who live outside the Heads of the Valleys, while many residents commute to low skilled and low paid jobs outside the area: for example, on average, people who live and work in Merthyr Tydfil will earn 35% less than those who work within the area but live outside.
- Taken as a whole, average earnings for residents in Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent are 20% below those in the rest of South East Wales.

## HEALTH

- Life expectancy in Merthyr and Blaenau Gwent is the lowest in Wales, with, for example, men in Merthyr living on average five years less than men in Ceredigion.
- More people in the Heads of the Valleys report that they have a limiting long-term illness (33% compared with 28% for Wales as a whole), with particularly high numbers saying they suffer from mental illness, back pain, arthritis and high blood pressure.
- 19% of the working age population in the Heads of the Valleys is economically inactive and suffering from a long-term health problem, compared with a Welsh average of 13%.
- Heads of the Valleys residents generally have less healthy lifestyles than elsewhere in Wales, with higher levels of cigarette and alcohol consumption.

## IMAGE

- Despite the natural assets of the area, the image of the Heads of the Valleys is still overshadowed by its industrial legacy.
- Demand for housing is low in some locations. More than a quarter of houses were worth less than £45,000 in almost half of the local authority wards in 2004.
- The dominant form of tourism is day-visits, followed by visitors staying with friends and relatives in the area, with low levels of longer-stay visitors.
- Research into perceptions of South East Wales as a tourist destination has found low awareness even of Blaenavon as a visitor attraction and less interest in the Heads of the Valleys than in rural destinations in the region.





## SETTLEMENTS

- In a recent report, only two towns within the Heads of the Valleys (Merthyr and Aberdare) were included in the list of the 700 most significant retail centres in the UK, while many people travel to Cardiff for everything except food shopping. Towns in the area need significant investment, as they are often run-down and offer little in the way of entertainment, cultural or leisure opportunities.
- Although the housing stock is not of significantly worse quality than elsewhere in Wales, there is a lack of variety in terms of private dwellings, and a high reliance on council housing, which is in need of renewal to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012.
- Almost a third of the 155 Local Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the Heads of the Valleys are amongst the most deprived areas of Wales according to the latest Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

## CONNECTIVITY

- The geography and topography of the Heads of the Valleys pose challenges for transport and communications, and links between communities in the area are often limited.
- While the road network in the Heads of the Valleys has improved considerably in recent years, challenges remain, and there is a recognised need to develop a better integrated public transport system.
- More could be made of telecommunications and broadband networks, and greater use made of new technologies.
- Despite planned improvements including the Newport to Ebbw Vale rail link, rail services to the upper Valleys are limited. The frequency and connections between bus services also need to be improved.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

- The area contains a range of designated and non-designated sites such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen.
- The protection and enhancement of such sites, as well as the historic landscape and its components, are significant issues, as is the general quality of the natural and semi-natural environment.

## POPULATION

- In the 21 years to 2002, the Heads of the Valleys population fell by more than 9% to 235,000. Half of that decline was accounted for by people of working age moving out of the area - in many cases probably to the Lower Valleys or other parts of the region.

## THE NEED FOR INTERVENTION

It is difficult to predict what the Heads of the Valleys might look like in 2020 without the Strategy because of the complex array of global, national and local factors that are likely to influence change in the area. It is possible that the recent improvements in the employment rate in the Heads of the Valleys (which rose from 63% in 2003 to 64.3% in 2004) and the economic inactivity rate (reduced from 32.5% in 2003 to 30.7% in 2004) may continue,

but it is much too early to say whether this is a trend. It is reasonable to assume, however, that without the Heads of the Valleys Strategy, the prospects for the revitalisation of the area would be significantly reduced. In particular, it is likely that:

- the population would continue to decline
- the natural, semi-natural and historic built environment would continue to deteriorate
- only limited opportunities would exist to co-ordinate and facilitate the development and enhancement of green infrastructure
- at least £500m less public and private funding would be invested in the area
- less emphasis would be placed on joined up strategic development, with a reduced focus on obtaining best value from the estimated £1bn annual public expenditure in the Heads of the Valleys area.

These challenges show that inaction is not an option for us.

There are a range of approaches that we could adopt to deliver our vision for the Heads of the Valleys. In developing the Strategy we have carefully assessed these within the context of the evidence available, and a review of good practice elsewhere.

# Options for Delivery

The approach that we are suggesting to the regeneration of the Heads of the Valleys centres upon the establishment of sustainable and balanced communities throughout the area. This 'preferred option' (Option A) forms the basis of the Strategy.

## **OPTION A – 'DEVELOPING BALANCED COMMUNITIES' (PREFERRED OPTION)**

To be successful in the future, the Heads of the Valleys need a mix of strong employment opportunities and distinctive communities that are attractive, accessible, and offer an excellent quality of life in an improved natural environment. Identified centres of economic growth and employment must be complemented by a network of connected communities providing a mix of housing, retail and leisure/tourism facilities and supporting a broad range of high quality public services.

We must make the most of the internal and external employment opportunities available, including along the M4 corridor and along the arterial roads leading into the Valleys. Skills and education must develop in line with employment needs, so that people can gradually access higher skilled and better paid jobs.

For the reasons previously outlined, we have discounted the 'do nothing' option. We have, however, taken into account two other possible variations of emphasis against the preferred option.



### **OPTION B – 'A CORRIDOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH'**

This approach would place an earlier and much stronger emphasis on unlocking the potential of the A465(T) Heads of the Valleys road as a corridor for economic growth, securing well paid, quality jobs to attract and retain highly skilled workers. The main focus of investment would be on transport and employment infrastructure, including developing and upgrading business parks, attracting inward investment and actively promoting the area to high value-added businesses.

However, the available evidence suggests that even in areas with a relatively buoyant labour market, the lack of unskilled jobs means that economic inactivity often remains high. Businesses tend to be attracted to locations that have a strong image and skills base. The preferred option therefore recognises the need for improvements in educational attainment and skills levels, and the quality of the natural environment, as well as investment in business infrastructure.



### **OPTION C – 'GREATER RELIANCE ON THE WIDER SUB-REGION FOR EMPLOYMENT'**

This approach would rely heavily on locations outside the Heads of the Valleys, in particular the urban centres of Cardiff and Newport, as the principal sources of high quality, well paid employment for Heads of the Valleys residents. In this case, significant investment would need to be targeted at improving transport infrastructure and services to those centres.

The evidence suggests, however, that the majority of people living in the Heads of the Valleys who are in work do not currently commute outside the area, and car ownership is relatively low. Furthermore, from a business effectiveness perspective, productivity benefits are greater where travel times are kept within the 30-40 minutes range. Lack of provision of jobs within the area could also encourage further population decline. The preferred option therefore recognises the need for local employment opportunities as well as facilitating access to jobs in the wider region.

Through extensive and ongoing stakeholder consultation, we have concluded that only a balanced approach will deliver a sustainable future for the Heads of the Valleys. This provides a platform for us to build on the strengths of the area whilst taking a holistic view of the factors that will be essential in bringing about real change. Our preferred option, 'Developing Balanced Communities', forms the basis of the Strategy, which is set out in the next section.



# Strategic Goals and Programmes

Delivery of our preferred option will address the main issues faced by the Heads of the Valleys, whilst capitalising upon the opportunities. We have developed the Strategy around five priority themes:

- An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment
- A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities
- A well-educated, skilled and healthier population
- An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience
- Public confidence in a shared bright future

For each of the five priority themes, we have painted a picture of where we want to be by 2020 (Our Strategic Goals), and how we will get there (Our Strategic Programmes).

Following discussions with stakeholders, we believe that success will lie in our ability to:

- agree a shared vision with partners
- add value to existing provision and delivery in the area
- provide a framework for greater and more effective co-operation between local authorities and other key stakeholders
- remove unnecessary competition and duplication of effort
- identify examples of good practice and apply them across the area.

# An Attractive and Well-Used Natural, Historic and Built Environment

## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

In 2020, people will live in vibrant towns and villages, set in an attractive and well managed natural and historic environment. The area will strive to be a model of good practice in sustainability, with particular emphasis on developing capabilities in recycling, use of renewables, microgeneration, addressing the EU Landfill Directive, and resource and energy efficiency. Residents, and ever greater numbers of visitors, will be actively using and enjoying the area, for example through cycling, walking and other outdoor pursuits - giving rise to a wide range of economic, social and health benefits. People will have fundamentally changed their attitudes towards the Heads of the Valleys, regarding it in equal terms to other environmentally attractive locations. Businesses across all sectors will have the confidence to invest here, and homebuyers will be attracted by the unique opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of modern urban living, set within a high quality rural environment.

## OUR STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES

### ■ SP1: A Sub-Regional Approach to the Regeneration of Settlements

To preserve and make the most of historic patterns of settlement, we will identify roles for towns and villages in the Heads of the Valleys that enable them to complement each other and that serve the diverse needs of those who live in, work in and visit the area. Our focus will be on retailing and service centres, tourist towns, and employment hubs. We will work with housebuilders to provide executive and other high quality and affordable housing to attract



professionals and key workers, especially younger families and first time buyers. We will also seek to assist local authorities with planned and potential major upgrades of housing estates, and with the renewal of council housing to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. We will actively promote environmental standards such as BREEAM and Eco-Homes, incorporating the principles contained within the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Creating Sustainable Places' guidance.

## ■ SP2: A Perception Changing Landscape

With stakeholders, we will develop and implement a number of key strategic landscape-scale environmental enhancements, concentrating on key corridors and gateways such as the A465(T) Heads of the Valleys Road, and approaches to the former Ebbw Vale Steelworks and Hirwaun. We will focus on areas that are visually unattractive or derelict, acquiring sites if necessary to ensure the early removal of eyesores. We will seek to protect, enhance and manage the natural and semi-natural environment, its resources and its biodiversity. We will develop a comprehensive design code to encourage consistent standards of urban and landscape design.

## ■ SP3: Well-Used and Easily Accessed Amenities

We will target investment towards improving the quality and maintenance of public spaces and amenities, including recycling facilities. This will include creating cleaner river corridors and ensuring that areas are not blighted by graffiti, littering and fly tipping. We will ensure that paths and cycle routes are accessible and pleasant, and find new uses for the vast network of underused tramways, canal paths and old railway lines, with clear advertising and signposting to encourage use.

## WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE...

- Regenerated and well connected town centres
- Quality, cared-for environment
- Wide use of outdoors
- Changed attitudes
- Business confidence



## EARLY ACTIONS – CLEANER VALLEYS TASK FORCE

We have already begun to develop the concept of a Cleaner Valleys Task Force which will tackle the persistent challenges of littering, graffiti and fly tipping that currently discourage visitors and deter potential investors. Making creative use of an Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) model, the Task Force will soon be equipped to provide an essential service throughout the Heads of the Valleys, helping to clean up areas where local authorities and local communities lack the resources to do so by themselves.

# A Vibrant Economic Landscape Offering New Opportunities

## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

In 2020, the Heads of the Valleys will be viewed as a nationally competitive business and investment location, where the majority of residents are in work and making a positive contribution to the Welsh economy. There will be an accessible and better integrated transport system, with strong North-South and cross-Valleys connections. Individuals will be



able to achieve their full potential - moving up the ladder of opportunity regardless of the point at which they enter. They will have access to a more diverse range of business and employment opportunities, with social enterprises and the voluntary sector playing an important role. There will be much higher levels of innovation and entrepreneurship than at present, and essential support services such as affordable and convenient childcare will be more readily available.

## OUR STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES

### ■ SP4: Directly Linking People with Work

Working with JobCentre Plus and other key service providers, we will ensure that there is a better co-ordinated approach to reducing levels of economic inactivity. A tailored programme of support and advice, such as that offered through JobMatch, addressing individuals' needs, and enveloping mainstream support such as Pathways to Work, will be rolled out across the area. We will facilitate sector-specific support to help employers with their skills needs. Innovative engagement tools, such as community role models, appropriate work experience and volunteering opportunities, and sport, will be used to attract workless people.

## ■ SP5: Joined-Up Solutions for Business

Informed by market demand, we will actively encourage developers to improve and expand the range of business premises in the area, including within town centres, to help the Heads of the Valleys become a realistic investment option alongside centres such as Newport and Cardiff. This will be supported by good community and public transport links connecting people with jobs and services - integrated into the wider South East Wales Transport Plan. We will encourage the provision of ICT to promote stronger links between Universities and the public and private sectors and exploit the knowledge economy. We will also help service sector, environmental technologies and manufacturing businesses to be successful in the area by ensuring that business development and support programmes are delivered consistently and coherently across the area.

## ■ SP6: Linked Opportunities for Businesses and Individuals

We will ensure that active programmes of business birth and incubation, supplier-chain and enterprise development, knowledge transfer and clustering are in place across the Heads of the Valleys. These will be linked to the major investment activities in housing renewal, roads and infrastructure, construction, environmental technologies/energy efficiency, and leisure and tourism. This will create opportunities to grow and develop indigenous businesses, and attract new ones to the area. We will recognise the key role of the public sector, particularly the NHS, as an employer, and will encourage the wider use of social clauses in investment programmes and support for human resource development and training. This will help local people take advantage of business growth, and will ensure that education and training provision is in line with labour market needs.

## WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE...

- Most people in work
- Better road and rail links and public transport
- More and diverse employment opportunities
- More social enterprises
- Greater levels of innovation and entrepreneurship



## EARLY ACTIONS – PROMOTING BUSINESS INCUBATION

By supporting pre-incubation facilities at the Valleys Information Technology and Communications Centre (VITCC) at Tredgar, we are helping to ensure that local entrepreneurs are supported and encouraged as they aim to establish and grow the thriving high tech businesses of the future.

# A Well-Educated, Skilled and Healthier Population

## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

In 2020, all children and young people within the Heads of the Valleys will have a flying start in life, whatever their background. People will generally have the knowledge, skills and



opportunities to maintain their best possible levels of physical and mental health. There will be easier access to a comprehensive range of academic and vocational education and learning opportunities, including personal and social skills and the opportunity to go to University in the area. Community-focused schools will actively promote health, nutrition and fitness; they will offer out of hours learning, and will collaborate across the area.

## OUR STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES

### ■ SP7: Improving Health Through Prevention

Working alongside 'Designed for Life' and 'Health Challenge Wales', we will add value to both healthy lifestyle initiatives and primary healthcare services within communities. Through sharing expertise, information and ideas, we will identify and extend best practice across the region to promote the prevention of ill health. Health Impact Assessments of major initiatives will identify opportunities for maximising health benefits. We will encourage local NHS organisations to exemplify best employment practice, good corporate citizenship and healthy, sustainable workplaces. We will also develop links with business support, work access and training initiatives to promote good health in the workplace and maintain or engage people with health problems in work and training. Capitalising on investment in leisure facilities and access to the countryside, we will encourage people to participate in more physical activity.

## ■ SP8: Integrated Lifelong Learning

We will support the agenda set out in 'The Learning Country 2', focusing particularly on early intervention. By securing the effective roll out of the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Flying Start' and Childcare strategies and implementation of 'Pathfinder', and supporting mature students and continuing professional development, we will ensure that basic and key skills are at the heart of learning opportunities, and that they are explicitly linked to employability.

Working to support 14 to 19 Learning Pathways, we will encourage a fuller range of vocational and academic opportunities for young people, from the roll out of the Welsh Baccalaureate to developing, in partnership with Sector Skills Councils and other organisations, innovative and engaging ways to better link businesses with education. We will also ensure that appropriate guidance is given on workforce skills development, including the implementation of social clauses.



## WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE...

- Higher aspirations
- Easier access to good quality pre and post 16 education and health services
- Higher levels of attainment, including at University
- Healthier lifestyles
- Better career opportunities

## EARLY ACTIONS - CONSTRUCTION SKILLS CHARTER

With the support of local stakeholders and organisations such as the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), we have already had early success in encouraging the use of 'social



clauses' within the construction sector, linking enterprise with education. Through the Heads of the Valleys Construction Charter/Training Consortium, we are identifying all public sector capital projects over £1 million in the area with the aim of securing additional benefits such as local training opportunities for local people.

# An Appealing and Coherent Tourism and Leisure Experience

## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

In 2020, the Heads of the Valleys will be characterised as an attractive place to live and stay, offering local people and visitors high quality facilities and attractions, including cultural events such as live music and theatre. The tourism and leisure sector will be playing a more significant role in the economic prosperity of the area, with activities complementing the offer elsewhere, such as Cardiff, Newport, the Gower and Brecon. More people will be spending increasingly longer periods of time in the area, enjoying a memorable 'Heads of the Valleys experience'.

## OUR STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES

### ■ SP9: Linked Local and Regional Attractions and Facilities

Aiming initially to establish the area as a successful day visitor destination, we will then encourage its development into a short break location. We will make the most of the existing offer, including sites within the HERIAN (Heritage in Action) initiative and attractions such as



Big Pit, and we will expand the range by adding more quality, family-oriented facilities. Some large regional-scale projects, such as a Valleys Regional Park, will be promoted. In parallel, we will encourage the development of an integrated support network of cultural, heritage, leisure, retail and tourist facilities, within (or linked to) town centres, including places to eat and stay, and provision for business tourism.

## ■ SP10: An Integrated 'Offer'



Within the context of wider initiatives aimed at promoting the South Wales Valleys as a visitor destination, we will work with partners to ensure that there is an increased focus on tourism in the Heads of the Valleys. A unified and coherent, well-branded proposition, which clearly illustrates what the area has to offer, will be

developed. We will organise events to help change perceptions and raise the profile and image of the area. We will use the marketing skills of stakeholders, as well as literature, public art and well placed and creatively designed signage, to tell the 'Heads of the Valleys story', recognising and valuing the cultural and historical character of the area, including the Welsh language. Through all forms of media, we will reinforce the advantages of the Heads of the Valleys as a base for exploring the Brecon Beacons National Park, South Wales and the wider region, and for events such as the Ryder Cup 2010.

## WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE...

- Better range of facilities
- More visitors, staying for longer
- Changed perceptions
- Increased use of local facilities
- More local employment opportunities



## EARLY ACTIONS – 'TOURISM WINNERS'

We are working with Capital Regional Tourism, the local authorities and other key stakeholders to comprehensively assess the full potential of tourism in the Heads of the Valleys. We will help to devise ways of developing and promoting a more integrated product across the area, as part of a wider South Wales Valleys tourism package.

# Public Confidence in a Shared Bright Future

## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

In 2020, the residents of the Heads of the Valleys will be not only proud of their past and present but also looking forward to an exciting future - with a renewed prosperity and a higher quality of life, feeling safe and secure in their neighbourhoods. The area will be regarded as an exemplar of active citizenship where communities, partnerships, the private sector and others work together towards a shared vision - one where promised plans and programmes are delivered. Investment will be better focused and people will be able to see for themselves how value and impact are being maximised. The Heads of the Valleys will be known as an area with a positive image that reflects the impact of the transformational and sustainable changes that have occurred.

## OUR STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES

### ■ SP11: Visualising the Strategy

Within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan and the emerging Local Development Plans of the local authorities, we will prepare a 'Heads of the Valleys Spatial Framework' – a visual representation of the strategic changes that will happen in the area, and what they will look like on the ground. The Framework will provide for the establishment of sustainable communities, helping the public, private and voluntary/community sectors to make joined up investment decisions. It will also help us to identify where strategic development (such as employment, transport, health, housing and the environment) is needed in order to serve the best interests of the area as a whole. This will ensure that those living in, working in and visiting the area – as well as investors – are well informed about the changes taking place, and will therefore help us to achieve buy-in, secure long-term engagement and foster community pride.



## ■ SP12: Pro-Active Communications and Engagement

We will change the image of the area by communicating effectively to raise awareness and confidence among people and organisations that have an interest in the future of the Heads of the Valleys. Wherever possible, we will promote opportunities for investment and for active participation in the Programme. By communicating regularly and effectively with the public, private and voluntary/community sectors, we will ensure that their investment plans and activities are closely aligned.

### WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE...

- Positive image - locally and nationally
- More active, better informed, communities
- Greater public and business confidence
- Plans achieved, promises delivered

### EARLY ACTIONS – 'TIDY COMMUNITIES'

We have already been working with community groups, including Keep Wales Tidy, to ensure that prominent stretches of river and other key urban and rural areas are litter free, well



maintained and available for wider use and access by the public. During a very successful 'Heads of the Valleys Spring Clean', which took place in April 2006, over 150 co-ordinated local events took place - a demonstration of the commitment of local communities to protecting and improving their own environment.

# Delivery and Results

The success of this Strategy will be judged by whether it delivers long lasting, tangible change for the Heads of the Valleys. By working together and building upon existing networks, we will aim to ensure that our agreed vision becomes a reality by 2020.

## **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

The active participation and engagement of stakeholders is central to the partnership approach of the Heads of the Valleys Strategy. We will encourage broad social and economic inclusion and active participation from all groups, using existing structures and relationships wherever possible - especially the established Communities First partnerships, as well as Valleys business clubs, community strategy partnerships, young people's partnerships and older people's groups.

### **Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector...**

There are over 3,000 organisations making up the voluntary sector in the Heads of the Valleys. This is not only a major resource for delivery, but also a means by which we can encourage people living in the area to take responsibility for devising local solutions to the key issues.



### **Working with the Private Sector...**

There are over 3,500 businesses active within the Heads of the Valleys. The private sector has a major role to play in delivering the Strategy and we will establish mechanisms by which we can ensure businesses are fully involved in its development and delivery.

### **Working with the Public Sector...**

At least £1 billion is invested each year by public sector organisations within the Heads of the Valleys. We will draw upon established networks, including local community planning partnerships and the Heads of the Valleys Programme Board, to ensure that the closest possible working relationships are established at all levels with our key partners.

## OUR CORE PRINCIPLES

The following core principles will underpin all aspects of our work:

- **Equal opportunities** – we will deal proactively with barriers to participation and success and we will not discriminate against any individual or group. We will consider in particular the needs of vulnerable, marginalised/under-represented and disadvantaged groups, such as aged/single parents and ethnic minority groups. We will also ensure that activities and programmes treat the Welsh and English languages on a basis of equality.
- **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** – we will exploit the latest technologies to bring to the area the benefits of being an information and knowledge-based society.
- **Sustainable development** – we will take a joined-up approach to economic, environmental and social improvement, taking into account the potential future impacts of climate change, and embedding the principles contained within the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Creating Sustainable Places'.



- **'Making the connections'** – the success of the Strategy will depend on our ability to make strong links between different issues, particularly across each of our five priority themes. We will only make a difference by understanding the whole picture, then developing joined up solutions, with our partners, to the challenges and opportunities we face.

## KEY PROGRAMME LINKAGES

### **An attractive and well used natural, historic and built environment will:**

- attract investment and encourage growth of related businesses eg environmental technologies, waste recycling
- lead to health benefits, for example through exercise and active lifestyles
- create jobs and volunteering, work experience and training opportunities
- increase the demand for a mix of local services, in turn generating jobs locally
- reduce the effect of dereliction on health and wellbeing.

### **A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities will:**

- provide an impetus for the enhancement and maintenance of natural and built assets
- create a buoyant labour market that drives education, careers advice and training provision
- contribute to better health and higher educational attainment
- lead to community and business confidence.

### **A well educated, skilled and healthier population will:**

- be able to overcome the key barriers to employment - skills and health
- equip the workforce to respond to labour market needs
- raise aspirations and give people confidence in their abilities and their future.

### **An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience will:**

- contribute to the enhancement of urban and rural spaces
- provide jobs and opportunities to develop sector skills
- lead to health benefits through active lifestyles.

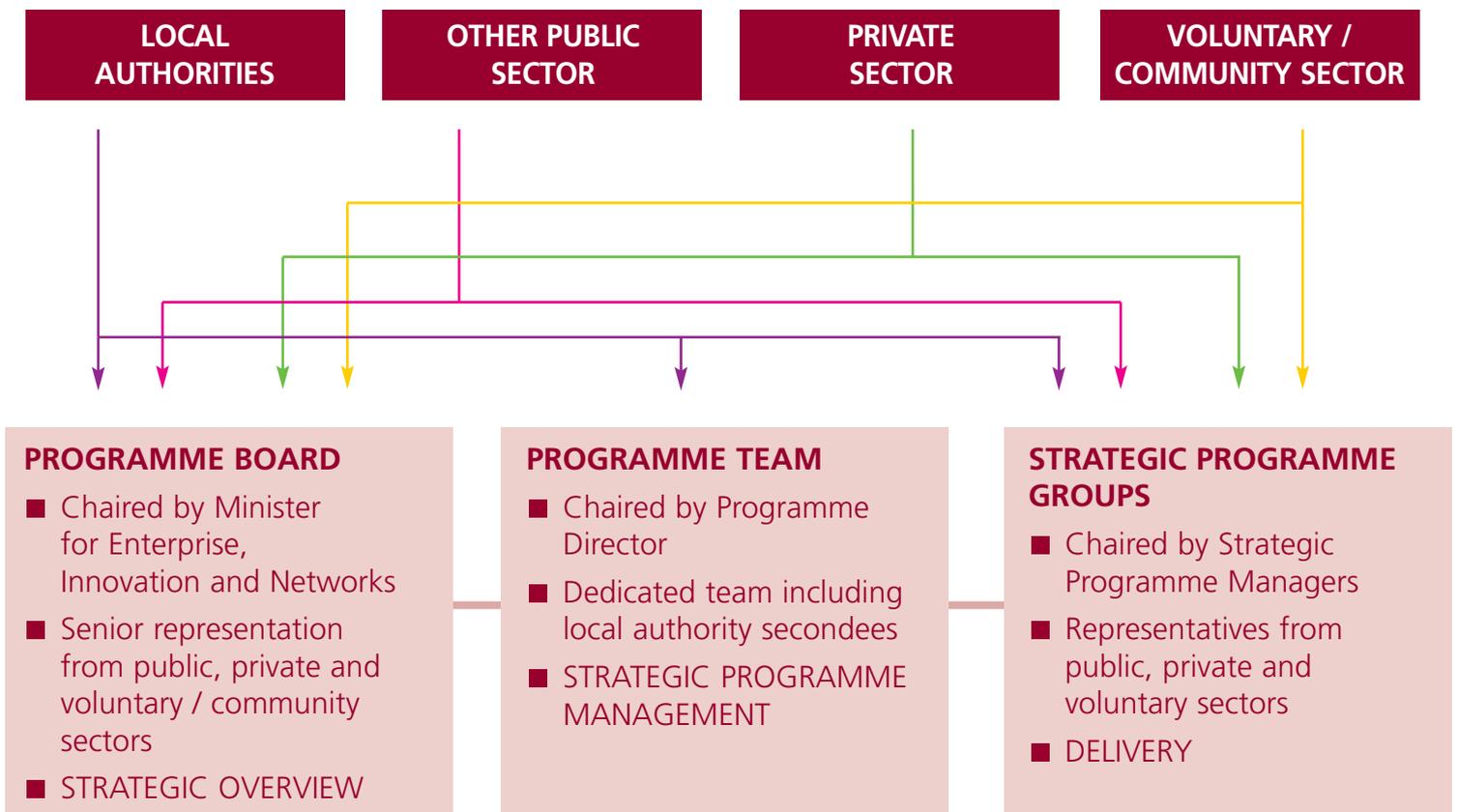
### **Public confidence in a shared bright future will:**

- encourage active involvement in delivery
- help to attract investment.

## TEAM APPROACH

A Heads of the Valleys Programme Board, chaired by the Minister for Enterprise Innovation and Networks, has been established, and is responsible for the overall strategic direction and management of the Programme. The Board comprises senior representatives from each of the five local authorities, as well as other key bodies within local and central government, and the voluntary and community sector. Together with the Programme Team, the Board will seek to improve governance and decision-making by making explicit in planning and delivery the strategic links between themes and programmes, including those of other Government departments and stakeholder organisations. To avoid duplication, private sector input is being obtained via the networks being established through the Wales Spatial Plan.

A Heads of the Valleys Programme Team, headed by the Programme Director, supports the work of the Programme Board and will supervise the delivery of the Strategy. Within the Team, Strategic Programme Managers will have responsibility for the delivery of the 12 Strategic Programmes and the Action Plans. Appropriate groups of key stakeholders will be brought together to provide advice on programme priorities and the options for delivery, and to ensure that projects have community support and fit with local priorities as well as wider objectives. Groups will be small enough to be responsive, yet large enough to be representative of local issues and needs. They will address specific tasks, having a geographical, thematic or strategic focus.



## FUNDING

We will use the special funding of £140million, available over the 15 year lifetime of the Programme, to ensure that the £1billion each year already being spent in the area through central and local government is invested in a more coherent and strategic way, leveraging in significant funding from other sources, especially the private sector.

Our criteria for investing the £140m will include:

- Alignment with Strategic Goals/ Programmes
- Partnership working
- Extent of cross-sector/ cross-boundary working
- Sustainability
- Added value
- Value for money
- Innovation and enterprise
- Leverage of other funds and resources
- Expected outcomes/outputs

The funding will be used as a catalyst, pump-priming and directing the resources of stakeholders towards the implementation of the agreed Strategic Programmes.

Leverage will vary depending on the nature and scale of projects undertaken. As a minimum, however, we expect to lever at least an additional £360m of investment into the area through joint projects with the private sector over the lifetime of the programme.

The EU Convergence Programme is due to take effect from 2007 onwards. It is anticipated that the Heads of the Valleys Programme might act as a vehicle for the delivery of EU Structural Funds, particularly in view of the close alignment between the priority themes in this Strategy and the emerging priorities for the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund in West Wales and the Valleys:

- Improving knowledge and innovation for growth
- Creating a favourable business environment
- Building sustainable communities
- Increasing employment and tackling inactivity
- Improving skill levels
- Building the administrative capacity of our public service

The nature and scale of the Heads of the Valleys Programme, and the high levels of stakeholder engagement and support, also satisfies the objectives of other key funding organisations such as the Big Lottery Fund.

## TRACKING OUR PROGRESS

We will use a number of relevant 'high level' indicators to track our progress towards meeting our strategic goals. We will regularly monitor these indicators so that we can evaluate our performance, taking corrective action where necessary.

PRIORITY	INDICATORS	BASELINE
Environment	Through the Sustainability Appraisal process, we will work with key stakeholders (including Cadw, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency) to identify and agree suitable environmental indicators.	
Economy	Percentage of people of working age in employment	64.3% (2004)
	Percentage of working age population who are economically inactive	30.7% (2004)
	Unemployment rate	7.0% (2004)
Education, skills and health	Percentage of people of working age with no qualifications	24.0% (2004)
	Percentage of people of working age with a limiting long term health problem	36.0% (2004)
	Percentage of 15 year olds achieving 5 GCSEs at A*-C grades	41.1% (2004/05)
Tourism and leisure	Number of hotel bedrooms	225
Public confidence	Population decline	9% to 235,000 in the 21 years to 2002
	Percentage owner occupied households	66.2% (2001)

To measure our progress, we will also conduct surveys of individuals, communities and businesses.



W E

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OF A BAZAAR  
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# Next Steps

The Strategy is being informed by a formal Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process - incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) - to ensure that the economic, social and environmental effects of our actions are predicted and assessed.

A **Sustainability Appraisal** is a process for understanding whether policies, strategies or plans promote sustainable development, and for improving those policies to deliver more sustainable outcomes.

A **Strategic Environmental Assessment** is a statutory process for assessing the likely significant effects on the environment of specific plans and programmes (and involves the preparation of an 'Environmental Report').

We have elected to extend the scope of the SEA/SA to incorporate issues relating to health and race/equalities. The draft report that is being published with this Strategy provides further information on the processes we are following.

The Sustainability Appraisal provides for a consultation period of 12 weeks. During this period, the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities and other stakeholders are being actively encouraged to reflect upon the Strategy. The consultation period ends in August 2006, following which the final versions of the Strategy and Sustainability Appraisal will be published.

The Strategy will be reviewed regularly - at least once every three years - by the Programme Board, in consultation with stakeholders, to ensure that it remains fully fit for purpose.

Following the publication of the finalised Strategy, we will take forward a 'Heads of the Valleys Spatial Framework' (see SP11) and the activities in the 2006/09 Action Plan.

# Appendix – Policy Integration Tool

All significant new strategies and policies of the Welsh Assembly Government are required to be assessed against the corporate Policy Integration Tool in order to ensure that policy development occurs in a joined-up manner.

The results below represent the agreed outcomes of 'Turning Heads... A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020' being tested against the Assembly's Integration Tool that involved representatives from:

Department for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks, South East Region  
Heads of the Valleys Programme  
Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills  
Welsh European Funding Office  
Strategic Policy Unit  
National Public Health Service  
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council  
Torfaen County Borough Council  
Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

The suggested improvements identified during the workshop will be taken into account in further developing the Strategy as part of the consultation process.

<b>Wales: A Better Country Commitment</b>	<b>Overall Contribution</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1. Promoting the Economy	GOOD	Strong on business support, securing quality jobs, local procurement. Could include more on value-added sectors, encouraging research and development, and corporate social responsibility.
2. Action on social justice for communities	GOOD	Very strong on helping people to improve their quality of life. Could include more on community safety and physical activity.
3. Action in our built and natural environment	FAIR	More work needs to be done with the Environment Agency on climate change issues. Strong on encouraging and facilitating use of the countryside.
4. Strengthening Wales' cultural identity	GOOD	Very strong on heritage. Could include more on equality issues, including supporting and promoting the Welsh language.
5. Ensuring better prospects in life for future generations	GOOD	Very strong on encouraging participation, and offering children and young people a flying start.
6. Supporting healthy independent lives	GOOD	Very strong on addressing health problems and encouraging healthy lifestyles. Less evidence of reducing the causes of accidents, though this is not a core activity for the Programme.
7. Promoting openness, partnership & participation	GOOD	Lies at the heart of the Programme. Very strong on integration of public sector strategy and delivery.

**Summary Comments:**

This is a high-level Strategy and proposed actions intended to deliver the outcomes highlighted in the document will be developed with stakeholders. As such the document does not detail specific actions related to every single area, but instead reflects the importance of different issues and outlines the broad approach agreed through extensive and ongoing consultation.



## **FEEDBACK**

We would welcome and value your comments on this Strategy.

For an e-version of this document or for more information about the Heads of the Valleys programme, please visit: [www.wales.gov.uk/headsofthevalleys](http://www.wales.gov.uk/headsofthevalleys)

Write to us at:

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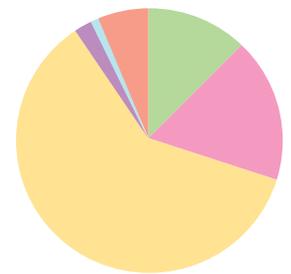
# Action Plan 2006/09

This Action Plan illustrates how the estimated £1bn public sector annual spend relates to our priority themes, and how the Heads of the Valleys Programme special funding is likely to be allocated over the next three years in order to maximise impact and secure wider investment.

## **PUBLIC SECTOR INVESTMENT 2006/09**

The chart shows the estimated future investment through public sector organisations in the Heads of the Valleys over the next three years against our five key priorities.

- Environment - c£300m, including improvements to Merthyr Tydfil, Ebbw Vale, Bargoed, Abertillery, Blaenavon and Mountain Ash town centres
- Economy - c£500m, including the next phase of the A465(T) dualling
- Education, skills and health - c£2bn, including a commitment to deliver a new hospital and a new Learning Campus on the former Ebbw Vale Steelworks site
- Tourism and leisure - c£50m, including local authority investment in community facilities
- Public confidence - c£10m, including Communities First projects
- Other - c£140m, including local authority spending such as personal social services



## **HEADS OF THE VALLEYS SPECIAL FUNDING 2006/09**

Key issues such as raising skills levels and helping people into work will be priorities throughout the lifetime of the Programme. To complement this ongoing work, we have identified a number of key areas which will act as a focus for investment in the first three years of the programme. These are:

- 2006/07: Major environment (landscape-scale) projects
- 2007/08: Renewal of key town centres
- 2008/09: Development of the tourism and leisure offer

By concentrating on one key theme each year, our aim will be for the Strategy to act as a focus for the alignment of the business plans of stakeholder organisations, as well as adding momentum to communication and marketing activities. We will deliver a 'critical mass' of programme activities to maximise impact, capture the public imagination and build confidence.



STRATEGIC THEMES	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	EXAMPLES OF KEY PROJECTS
An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment	£6.75m	£5m	£2m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major transformational landscape enhancements</li> <li>• Work by community groups</li> <li>• Cleaner Valleys Task Force</li> <li>• Renewal of key town centres</li> <li>• Encouraging and facilitating wider access and use of urban/rural areas</li> <li>• Urban cluster strategy</li> <li>• Valleys Regional Park</li> </ul>
A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities	£1.25m	£1.5m	£1.75m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation and potential wider implementation of JobMatch</li> <li>• Business premises/infrastructure mapping /scoping and strategy</li> <li>• Assessment of business development/support</li> <li>• Social procurement</li> <li>• Incubation/supply chain development</li> <li>• Community transport</li> </ul>
A well educated, skilled and healthier population	£0.5m	£0.75m	£0.75m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention measures to encourage healthy living around diet and exercise</li> <li>• Ensuring that schools and colleges offer a wider range of courses across different sites</li> </ul>
An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience	£0.75m	£0.25m	£5m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential investment in key attractions</li> <li>• Encouraging growth in ancillary services</li> <li>• Trail of light</li> <li>• Public art and signage</li> <li>• Marketing activity</li> </ul>
Public confidence in a shared bright future	£0.75m	£2.5m	£0.5m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spatial Framework</li> <li>• Wider engagement including online</li> <li>• PR activity</li> <li>• Potential Heads of the Valleys Visitor Centre in Ebbw Vale</li> </ul>
<b>TOTALS</b>	£10m	£10m	£10m	

In 2005-06, we invested £2m in 'early actions', some of which are described in the Strategic Goals and Programmes section.

Future investment of the remaining special funding of c£108m will be in line with the sustainable development and other principles established in this Strategy.