

# LDP FORUM EVENT RECORD (July 2006)

Valleys Innovation Centre, Abercynon  
25<sup>th</sup> July 2006

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<b>CHAPTER</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. SUMMARY OF PROCESS	1
2. INTRODUCTION	3
3. MEETING AGENDA	5
4. CHAIR'S WELCOME & INTRODUCTION	6
5. TERMS OF REFERENCE	7
6. SEA/SA UPDATE	10
7. DRAFT SPATIAL STRATEGY & PREFERRED OPTIONS WORKSHOPS	12
8. ANALYSIS	21
9. CONCLUSION	24
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
APPENDIX 1 - LIST OF ATTENDEES	25
APPENDIX 2 - MEMBERSHIP OF LDP FORUM	26
APPENDIX 3 - FACILITATOR QUESTIONS	28



## 1. SUMMARY OF PROCESS

1.1. In developing the Special Strategy and Preferred Options Paper, the Council will undertake four key stages:-

### STAGE 1 – LDP VISIONING EVENT

#### **Purpose**

To seek the views of Council Members, Community Representatives and key stakeholders on

- the issues that must be addressed through the LDP; and
- how these issues can be addressed through the development of a spatial strategy that will be implemented through the Local Development Plan (LDP).

#### **Process**

Two visioning workshops were held, one for Council Members and one for Community Representatives and key stakeholders.

#### **Output**

- a). Production of LDP Visioning Event Report (Feb 2006) and
- b). Production of draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper

### STAGE 2 – REPORTING OF THE DRAFT SPATIAL STRATEGY AND PREFERRED OPTIONS PAPER TO CABINET AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

#### **Purpose**

To seek the comments of Cabinet Members and the Development Control Committee on the draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper

#### **Process**

Preparation of reports for Cabinet and Development Control Committee. Discussion of draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper at meeting of Cabinet and Development Control Committees.

#### **Output**

- a). Resolutions of Cabinet and Development Control committee and
- b). Revisions to draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper as required

### STAGE 3 – MEETING OF LDP FORUM

#### **Purpose**

To seek the views of the LDP Forum on the draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper.

**Process**

Workshop meeting of LDP Forum to discuss three main aspects of the draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper

- Spatial Strategy,
- Strategic Sites and
- Strategic Polices.

**Output**

- a). Production of LDP Forum Event Record and
- b). Revisions to draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper as required

STAGE 4 – FULL CONSULTATION ON DRAFT SPATIAL STRATEGY AND PREFERRED OPTIONS PAPER

**Purpose**

To enable anyone to make representations on the Council's pre-deposit document.

**Process**

As laid out in Delivery Agreement (see Table B2) and Preferred Strategy Consultation Plan

**Output**

Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper to be approved by Full Council.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. In January 2006, the Council held two LDP Visioning Workshops. The purpose of these visioning workshops was twofold. Firstly to identify the main issues that the LDP would need to address and secondly, to begin to consider how these issues could be addressed through various future development strategies.

2.2. The record of these events is contained in the LDP Visioning Workshops Report (February 2006), which can be viewed on the Council Website.

2.3. Following this event, the Council began work on the preparation of a draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper. A development strategy was prepared building directly on the work undertaken at the Visioning Events. A process was also undertaken that sought to identify 'strategic sites' that were considered to be fundamental to the successful implementation of the development strategy.

2.4. The draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper was reported to the Council's Cabinet and a special meeting of the Development Control committee in June 2006.

2.5. On 25<sup>th</sup> July 2006 a meeting was held of the LDP Forum at the Valleys Innovation Centre, Abercynon. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the three main aspects of the draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper



- the proposed spatial strategy,
- the strategic sites and
- the emerging spatial policies

2.6. These discussions would directly inform revisions to the Paper prior to Full Public Consultation in January - February 2007.

2.7. This document is a record of this meeting of the LDP Forum.

## **2.8. Delivery Agreement**

2.9. The Delivery Agreement (which can be viewed on the Council's website and at main Council Offices and libraries) provides further detail on the timetable for the production of the LDP and the consultation that will be undertaken at each respective stage of the process.



### 3. MEETING AGENDA

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**  
**Local Development Plan Forum**  
25<sup>th</sup> July 2006  
**AGENDA**

1.00 – 1.30	Coffee
1.30 – 1.40	Welcome and Introduction
1.40 – 2.00	Terms of reference of the LDP Forum (Blue papers)
2.00 – 2.15	Feedback on SA / SEA Scoping Exercise (Green papers)
2.15 – 2.20	Introduction to Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options (White papers)
2.20 – 2.50	Workshop 1
2.50 – 3.15	Coffee and Refreshments
3.15 – 3.45	Workshop 2
3.45 – 4.15	Workshop 3
4.15 – 4.30	Feedback
4.30	Close

Three Workshops will be held to discuss the following topic areas:-

- Spatial Strategy
- Strategic Sites
- Strategic Policies



The logo for Rhondda Cynon Taf, featuring a stylized red and green wave graphic to the left of the text 'RHONDDA CYNON TAF' and 'Rhondda Cynon Taf' in smaller text below it.

#### 4. CHAIR'S WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

4.1. Introductory Speech by Councillor Robert Bevan (Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Employment)



- *Welcome to the Valleys Innovation Centre and thank you for attending.*
  - *As you by now are no doubt aware, the new Local Development Plan or LDP system represents a more progressive and inclusive approach to plan making which will allow Rhondda Cynon Taf to move forward and meet the challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.*
  - *The LDP Forum will play an important role in ensuring that the LDP reflects the development needs and aspirations of Rhondda Cynon Taf.*
- *It will serve as a mechanism for discussion by achieving open dialogue amongst ourselves as a representative cross section of the various stakeholders in the process.*
  - *This is the first meeting of the LDP Forum as a whole, although it builds on the successful Visioning Events for Members and stakeholders held at Tylorstown in January.*
  - *The Vision for Rhondda Cynon Taf, which emerged from that exercise, has now been expressed as a draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options paper to form a framework for the LDP.*
  - *The Council's Cabinet has approved the document as a basis for consultation with this Forum as well as with the Development Control Committee, the Welsh Assembly Government, and adjacent local authorities.*
  - *Any changes resulting from these exercises will be reported back to Cabinet in late August prior to seeking a Council resolution that the document be subject to formal public consultation.*
  - *The purpose of today is to agree a Terms of Reference for this Forum prior to discussing the strategy. Later we will divide into groups to discuss different aspects – a format which proved to be popular at the Visioning events.*

## 5. TERMS OF REFERENCE

5.1. No comments were raised on the proposed Terms of Reference and it was resolved that they be agreed.

5.2. Terms of reference as follows:-

### **Local Development Plan (LDP) Forum Draft Terms of Reference**

#### **Purpose**

The Council is committed to working in partnership with the community as a whole throughout the plan making process. For this reason it is proposed to establish an LDP Forum to assist in and inform the development plan process. The LDP Forum will play an important role in ensuring that the LDP reflects the development needs and aspirations of Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is anticipated that the role of the Forum will be twofold. Firstly, it will serve as a mechanism for discussion which will allow open dialogue to take place between stakeholders on key issues of policy and secondly, it will act as a control group for the various stakeholders in the development plan process.

#### **Objectives**

- To advise officers of the Council in the development of the LDP.
- To provide an effective local focus and mechanism for discussion and consultation on the needs and aspirations of, and opportunities for, local communities, and on the appropriateness of particular policies or land allocations to meet them.
- To provide a focus for continuous improvement in joint working between partner agencies involved in the area, by testing and challenging whether strategies, policies and allocations meet local needs and aspirations effectively.

- To help achieve consensus through open and transparent dialogue on key strategic and policy issues.
- To ensure continuous participation throughout the process by stakeholders and to provide a mechanism to feedback the outcomes of earlier discussions.
- To ensure that the 12 Area Regeneration Partnerships (ARPs) are kept informed of the LDP process through the continuous involvement of their respective ARP members.

### **Membership**

The LDP Forum shall, as far as is practicable, comprise of one third Councillors, one third Community Representatives and one third specific consultation bodies. It is intended that the consultation bodies will include Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and Gwent-Glamorgan Archaeological Trust. The Community Representatives will be drawn from the Area Regeneration Partnerships.

The Partnership will be chaired by the Member of the Cabinet for Economic and Community Regeneration. Lead Officer will be Sheila Davies, Director of Development and Regeneration. Support will be provided by Nicola Gulley, Development Planning Manager.

On occasion, 'visiting members' may be asked to attend the group to assist in particular areas of discussion.

### **Responsibilities**

The Development Plan process can often be controversial, bringing together many different opinions and views on the future

development of an area. It is important therefore to seek to establish the general responsibilities for all members of the LDP Forum, to ensure the process is undertaken in a fair, open and efficient manner.

It is the responsibility of LDP Forum members:-

- to make a commitment to the process – to attend, contribute and generally assist the process of seeking consensus.
- to be willing to listen and engage in discussions and do so with an open mind.
- to respect the opinions of others.
- to have effective mechanisms in place to enable them to communicate regularly with the constituency they represent, in order to ascertain and report their views to the LDP Forum and to inform them of the Forum's work.
- to put the wider interests of the Community before sectoral or other, narrower, interests.
- to highlight what they consider to be any gaps in the evidence base.
- to acknowledge the strict timetable for the production of the LDP and, as far as is practicable, to work to the timetable set out in the Delivery Agreement.

Where LDP Forum Members are also members of an Area Regeneration Partnership (ARP):-

- to report back to their respective ARP on the work undertaken by the LDP Forum, to ensure they are kept fully informed of the LDP process.

### **Meetings**

LDP Forum meeting's will be held at least once a quarter, although extraordinary meetings may be convened, by agreement of the Chair, at other times, as necessary.

### **Declaration of Interest**

Members of the Forum should declare publicly any interest they or the organisation they represent may have in a particular agenda item, before discussion of the matter begins, particularly where they or the organisation they represent would stand to benefit directly or indirectly. Such declarations will be recorded formally in the minutes of the meeting.

Any member declaring a direct or personal financial interest may be asked by the Chair to withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the discussion of that item, or may otherwise be required not to participate in that discussion or in any decision arising.

## 6. SEA/SA UPDATE

6.1. Keith Warren (*Principle Planning Officer, RCT*) referred the Forum to the statement of consultation summary paper (see below).

6.2. An overview of the summary paper was given and it was reported that there had been a good response to the consultation with 12 organisations responding (two of which were internal council departments). The Forum was referred to the statement paper, which highlighted the issues arising from the consultation.

6.3. Keith Warren stated that all issues arising had been noted, although some of the issues were too broad for discussion at this stage of the process and would be referred to and investigated at future stages. The Forum was told that the document would be amended in light of the comments received.

6.4. The Forum had no comments to make regarding this issue.

### **STATEMENT OF CONSULTATION AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO THE DRAFT SCOPING REPORT FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2006- 2021**

#### **1.0 Consultation process**

1.1 The draft SA Scoping Report was published for public consultation on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006 for a five week period ending on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006. The Scoping Report was sent to three statutory Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) consultees, Countryside Council Wales, Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments) and the Environment Agency Wales. As the process comprises an integrated appraisal combining SEA and Sustainability Appraisal (SA), the Scoping Report was also sent to key stakeholders and made available on the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council website.

#### **2.0 Response from consultees**

2.1 Comments were received from the following organisations:

- Pontypridd YMCA
- Cynon Valley Business Community
- Cwmni Community Group.
- Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water
- Environment Agency Wales
- Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC Countryside Team
- Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC Land Rec/Drainage Team
- Glamorgan- Gwent Archaeological Trust

- Countryside Council for Wales
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Cadw
- Redrow Homes

2.2 This represents a good response at this stage and combined with the consultation undertaken with stakeholders through the visioning and a technical workshop has ensured input at strategic and local levels to the process. Table 1 attached details the above responses and the corresponding proposed amendments to the SA Coping Report.

### 3.0 Key Issues

3.1 The key issues emerging from the consultation are the themes identified in the Scoping Report and which are included in the proposed SA Framework.

- Water – protection of the water environment and supply
- Flood risk/climate change
- Sewerage infrastructure – recognition of the deficiencies of the existing infrastructure
- Level of development
- Protection of the natural and historic environment – with more emphasis on biodiversity.
- Transport – the need for better links and public transport

3.2 Much useful information has been supplied on data sources and plans and programmes to improve those

3.3 parts of the Scoping Report. As this process is ongoing and iterative these have been noted and will be incorporated in the later stages of the SA process.

3.4 The consultees have also brought forward suggestions to improve the constituent parts of the SA framework; Sustainability Objectives, decision aiding questions, targets and indicators. Wherever possible these have been taken on board and amendments recommended to the draft Scoping Report. Government Guidance defines the scope of the SA and emphasise that care must be taken that the targets and indicators are manageable within the resources and information available to, or attainable by, the Council. The potential targets and indicators will be further refined as part of the ongoing process.

3.5 Some responses included items outside the scope of the SA and the forthcoming LDP and a level of detail inappropriate for a strategic appraisal. However suggestions which are appropriate for inclusion in the LDP, rather than in the SA, have been noted for consideration in the preparation of the Plan.

### 4.0 Conclusion

4.1 A good response has been received to the consultation which has provided further useful information to incorporate in the SA/SEA process. Overall the key sustainability issues for Rhondda Cynon Taf which were identified in the Scoping Report have been upheld through the consultation process and a consensus has been achieved on which to proceed.

## 7. DRAFT SPATIAL STRATEGY & PREFERRED OPTIONS WORKSHOPS

7.1. Participants attending the event were divided up into three groups and each group took part in three discussion workshops looking at the;

- i) Preferred Spatial Strategy,
- ii) Eight proposed Strategic Sites and
- iii) Proposed Strategic Policies.

7.2. The workshops brought forward a wealth of information from the participants and to avoid an excessively long report the comments have been précised to avoid repetition where there was consensus between the workshops.

### Workshop 1 – Preferred Spatial Strategy

7.3. In light of the recognised disparities between the north and south of the Borough, the approach of Northern and Southern Strategy Areas was generally accepted. It was felt by some participants however, that there was not enough of an explanation as to why the north - south split was required and it would be useful if this were expanded upon.

7.4. There was some discussion concerning exactly where the boundary between the two areas should be drawn, particularly as there are recognised pockets of deprivation in the Southern area and areas of prosperity in the Northern. It was suggested in one workshop that the

boundary separating the Northern and Southern Areas should be on the northern outskirts of Pontypridd, thereby including Cilfynydd in the Northern area. It was also felt that seeking to identify two distinct areas was not black and white and given that deprivation exists in the south and prosperity in the north, the strategy needed to demonstrate more flexibility.

7.5. The Heads of the Valley Strategy was identified as a major factor when considering the northern part of the Borough and it was considered that this Strategy offered the opportunity to redress the imbalance between the north and the south. It was considered important that the LDP Spatial Strategy and the Heads of the Valley Strategy work together to provide the maximum benefit for the area.

7.6. There was a lot of discussion during the afternoon concerning what the Spatial Strategy would mean for different areas within the Borough. There was concern





expressed regarding the lack of major growth areas identified in the Rhondda Fach and Fawr and particularly the failure to identify a principle town in the Rhondda. Given the unique characteristics of the Rhondda it was felt that this area might warrant its own strategy dimension and this was an issue that needed further consideration.

7.7. An issue that was raised on a number of occasions was the need when considering the Spatial Strategy, to also consider what strategic infrastructure provision would be required to support the Strategy. If the Northern Strategy Area and in particular the Rhondda is to grow and the Spatial Strategy is to be supported, there is a need for improved road infrastructure. Were the Porth bypass to be extended for example, this would open up access to the upper Rhondda. Fast link trains along the Rhondda Fawr line would also provide a new dimension to the Rhondda in terms of accessibility.

7.8. With regard the issue of principal towns, it was felt by some participants that Aberdare had less focus that it deserved given its obvious importance to the Northern Strategy Area. The recent new developments at Merthyr were a major threat to Aberdare and its future and the Spatial Strategy needed to reflect this and respond accordingly. Similarly, it was felt that Pontypridd should be viewed as the County Town and it was questioned whether the proposed Spatial Strategy would support this aspiration, as major growth was being directed away from the town.

7.9. Hirwaun was generally viewed as having a great deal of potential and could act as a key driver for change in the Northern Strategy Area. The proximity to the National Park and the soon to be further upgraded A465, offered unique opportunities. Supporting the development of new accommodation, restaurants and public houses and new rail and bus links with Aberdare were all suggested as important if the area was to achieve its full potential.

7.10. In the north as a whole, it was felt that the strategy must ensure the settlements are thriving places to live, that there are real job opportunities and that the services on offer improve the quality of life.

7.11. In the south of the Borough, it was stated that the Spatial Strategy further supported the need for a bypass at Llanharan and that this would also help the proposed film studio development at Brynna. It was suggested that the possible development of a new town centre at Llantrisant/Talbot Green would offer the potential for significant planning gain. However, this proposal would also need to be considered in the light of the need for environmental protection in the area. Concern was expressed about the need to ensure development in the south was managed in order to protect the environment. The relationship between the Spatial Strategy and Cardiff was also raised as an issue that requires careful attention.

7.12. The pattern of development that the Spatial Strategy would promote was also discussed. It was considered that the problems already experienced within the Northern Strategy Area from ribbon development

should not be exacerbated. In the Southern Strategy Area there is a need to avoid coalescence and protect settlement identity.

7.13. Whilst recognising that the Spatial Strategy would inevitably be concerned with the Borough as a whole and the larger towns and patterns of growth, it was considered important that the effect on smaller communities should not be lost in the process.

7.14. Retail was identified as an important issue. It was felt that the retail offer in the key settlements needed to be improved and supported if viability and vitality were to be ensured. Encouraging living above shops was suggested as a key measure to support a vibrant economy and offered the opportunity to provide affordable housing in sustainable locations.

## **Workshop 2 – Strategic Sites**

### **Discussion**

7.15. The definition used to identify strategic sites was generally accepted by the workshops and it was recognised that the development of the strategic sites would have potential benefits to communities, the local economy and the environment.

7.16. Whilst recognising that all the identified sites offered the opportunity for development at the strategic level, the workshops recognised that the Rhondda sites were particularly important to regeneration aims, given the

topological constraints within the Rhondda valleys and the scarcity of large, strategically located sites.

7.17. Similarly, it was recognised that Pontypridd was constrained in its growth and that here also there are a scarcity of large, strategically located sites. However, it was felt by some participants that Pontypridd should be developed as the main town in the Borough. It was also suggested that sites such as the Lady Windsor site, whilst not in Pontypridd itself, offered the opportunity to aid the growth of the town.

7.18. With regard the specific allocation at Mwyndy, concern was expressed by some participants that the scheme could result in exacerbation of existing problems in the area, particularly highway capacity. Concern was also expressed regarding the important ecological nature of the site and the surrounding countryside.

7.19. There was a lot of discussion in the workshops concerning the need for joined-up thinking and delivery, to maximise the opportunities for regeneration in the Borough. The Heads of the Valleys Strategy was cited as a key example, with the potential to provide a ‘multiplier’ effect for the sites located within the Heads of the Valley area. The fiscal resources available, together with the range of other measures the Heads of the Valley Strategy will promote, will serve to support the successful development of sites in the Northern Strategy Area.

7.20. The workshops also highlighted the importance of links with other strategic packages such as Welsh

Assembly Government Department of Enterprise Innovation & Networking land reclamation funds and European Convergence Funding Initiatives. Again the point was strongly made, that when looking at how specific sites should be developed, the potential multiplier effect of these supporting strategies and funds should be fully exploited.



7.21. With particular reference to the sites in the Northern Strategy Area, the issue of phasing the development of the strategic sites was also raised.

7.22. In discussing the suitability of the identified strategic sites, the issue of transportation emerged as a key area of concern in all workshops. Indeed, it was considered that there is a clear need to address the transportation

infrastructure to all 8 strategic sites, if their potential and the resulting benefits to the Borough, are to be unlocked.

7.23. The suggestion that new development offered the opportunity to improve road infrastructure and that strategic sites should be viewed in these terms – as offering the opportunity to secure regional transport infrastructure benefits - was also discussed. The opportunity for the LDP to inform regional transport plans, thereby feeding into a wider regional level was also acknowledged.

7.24. With reference to the Northern Strategy Area, it was felt that accessibility was a major issue in the success (or otherwise) of the strategic sites. In one workshop, it was proposed that the three northern sites could be linked by new road infrastructure.

7.25. In addition to transport, employment emerged as an important issue within the workshops. Common themes of discussion recognised that the former colliery sites were very unlikely to provide the number of jobs they once did. It was also suggested on several occasions, that the age of large-scale, industrial processes had passed and the emphasis should now be on new industries and the emerging knowledge economy.

7.26. It was stressed that when considering the use of the identified strategic sites, emphasis should not be placed on one sector only. Within recent years, the over reliance in the local economy on manufacturing has been replaced by an over reliance on call centres and now this sector too, is

being out sourced overseas. Given the importance of the strategic sites, it was considered that the Local Planning Authority must leave itself 'room to manoeuvre'. Where national and international employment trends change and/or new industries emerge in the future, the strategic sites should be capable of responding and providing viable employment land.

7.27. It was also suggested that the success of future employment development would be dependent on other factors. The location of windfarms for example, could detract from the attractiveness of sites and prevent inward investment from coming forward.

7.28. The location of new retail development was also an issue that emerged during the workshops. It was suggested that recent trends within the Borough indicated a move away from large out of centre stores. The need for further growth in Talbot Green was also questioned.

7.29. Whilst recognising that the strategic sites are by definition concerned with new development and growth, the workshops were keen to ensure that this did not override recognised nature conservation considerations. In any growth scenario, it was stressed that nature conservation remains just as important, if not more so and an appropriate balance must be struck. In Tonyrefail, for example, there are nationally important butterfly habitats, which need to be considered in future development scenarios.

### **Workshop 3 - Strategic Policies**

#### **Discussion**

7.30. One of the most important themes that emerged during all three workshops on the Strategic Policies was the recognition that for the LDP to achieve its maximum potential, it would be necessary to ensure that all the policies and allocations it will contain, are working towards the same objective. If the plan is 'unfocused' the outputs will be 'blurred'. It was also considered that if the objectives were not clearly articulated at the start of the process, it is unlikely that the tools to achieve these objectives will appear at the end.

7.31. Looking at the strategic principles as the overarching policies from which all other policies will be derived was considered logical. By having a clear direction from the strategic policies, it will ensure that as the more detailed policies emerge, they will be focused on achieving the overall objectives of the plan.

7.32. The relationship between the Spatial Strategy and the Strategic Policies was also recognised. As the Spatial Strategy will be delivered through policies and allocations, it is important that they are developed together to ensure full synergy.

7.33. It was argued that the process of developing the strategic policies would only be proved successful, if the strategy and policies stand up to later argument. It was stated that whilst the LDP and its policies should be

aspirational, the strategic policies must be realistic and must be based on sound evidence. It was stated that 'they must work' and do what they are meant to.

7.34. Given the different pressures and issues in different parts of the Borough, it was generally agreed that the approach of developing policies tailored to different areas was the correct one. There was some discussion regarding whether the Borough could be divided into more than two areas. In the Northern Strategy Area for example, it was suggested that clear differences exist between the Rhondda and the Hirwaun area. Strategic policies could be further developed to reflect this.



7.35. One of the key comments that emerged in all three workshops was the importance of recognising the inter-related dimension between all the strategic policies. In the past, key strategic policy areas – housing, employment, transport - have been developed almost as stand alone policies, each seeking to achieve their own objective. It was strongly argued that Rhondda Cynon Taf's problems will not be addressed by one specific policy dimension alone. Rather, it is the combination of these strategic policies, working together to achieve the same aim that will make the greatest difference to the Borough.

7.36. As an example, it was stated that housing, employment, community facilities and education are all interlinked in such a manner, that it is not possible to pull one area out and look at it in isolation from the others. If new housing development is to be a major issue, then so must the places people will work, the facilities they will use and the schools they will go to.

7.37. Similarly, reference was made to nature conservation and sustainable development. These objectives are not met simply through the existence of their own specific policies, but rather the implementation of all the other policies.

7.38. Some of the discussions centred on more detailed aspects of the strategic policies. With reference to SP 1, it was suggested that not all types of development will address deprivation and that the policy should read 'will be encouraged' rather than 'will encourage'.

7.39. It was also suggested that the wording of SP1 should be amended to state that 'Development proposals....will be required to contribute to appropriate forms of growth to address the problems of deprivation...' rather than 'Development proposals....will encourage appropriate forms of growth to address the problems of deprivation...'. It was further suggested SP 1 could be amended to include a requirement for new development to contribute to local housing needs. A point was also raised regarding what evidence would be used to identify the 'problems of deprivation' identified in SP 1.

7.40. Concern was expressed that policy SP 1 placed too strong an emphasis on development. There is an equally strong need to maintain the natural beauty of areas in the Northern Strategy Area, which is in many places the primary asset and what makes the area such an attractive place to live.

7.41. A lot of discussion centred on policies SP4 and SP9. A primary issue of concern that emerged in all workshops was that new development must not exacerbate existing problems. Where, for example, highway problems exist or there are inadequate community facilities in an area, new development must address these issues. Otherwise both existing residents and future residents will suffer. It was suggested that policy SP 4 should clearly state that new development should not exacerbate existing problems. Other participants felt that it was sufficient to address this issue in SP 9.

7.42. There was little discussion concerning the actual numbers of new dwellings specified in policy SP 4 and it was generally accepted that over a 15-year period, this represented a realistic amount. Discussion did however centre on what percentage of these 14, 600 dwellings would be for affordable housing.

7.43. The need for affordable housing was an issue that was repeated throughout the sessions and was an issue that participants felt should be clearly identified through Spatial Policies. It was felt that with regard affordable housing, the issues between the Northern and Southern Strategy Areas were not the same and a more subtle approach was required between the areas.

7.44. It was also highlighted that private social housing was not always welcomed in communities. In Tylorstown for example, 40% of the housing stock is in the rented sector. It was stated that many of the problems in the community, can be directly attributed to the private social landlord sector. It was felt that unlike Housing Associations & Council Housing, these properties aren't managed.

7.45. A point was made regarding part b). of policy SP 9 and it was suggested that rather than read as 'open space and play facilities' it should be amended to 'open space, play and youth facilities'. It was felt that provision for youths was often overlooked whereas in some (albeit rare) cases there was an overprovision of play areas/equipment for younger children. It was considered important to ensure that this was included early in the process.

7.46. It was also suggested that policy SP 9 should specifically mention the need to secure the provision of primary healthcare facilities. It was felt that this was an area that required a specific policy focus. In parts of the Borough there is a high concentration of single practice GPs where the GP is approaching retirement age. In the near to medium future as these practices wind down, there will potentially be a significant short fall in healthcare services at a local level.

7.47. It was also advised that policy SP 9 would need to be informed by the outcome of the recent Planning Gain Supplement consultation.

7.48. There was a lot of discussion regarding Policy SP 11. The general consensus was not opposed to renewable energy, but there was concern that – particularly with regard windfarm proposals – the decision making process could be taken out of the hands of local people. It was strongly felt that the policy regime – both the strategic policy and the more detailed policies that will follow – should be firm enough to allow local decision makers to regain this control.

7.49. It was also suggested that policy SP 11 could at this stage make reference to the acceptable density of windfarm sites and could even, similar to the policy prescribing housing numbers, give an overall total for the number of windfarms that will be allowed. It was also stated that the policy should make clear that environmental concerns would be a key consideration when considering applications for windfarms.

7.50. There was a strong view that the strategic policy should make clear that renewable energy does not simply mean wind energy and that it supports other renewable energy options such as hydro-power. The Council should demonstrate clearly its support for all options.

7.51. The importance of recycling facilities was also highlighted. New regulations coming into force in 2010, will introduce fines for waste that isn't properly recycled. This will require consideration through the LDP.

7.52. Education was identified as a key issue on numerous occasions and it was argued that there was a need for a strategic policy relating specifically to education. It was stated that a school can be more important to some communities than a new road and that as traditional community centres have ceased to exist, schools offer the opportunity to provide new hearts to the community. Schools should be made to work better for the community. They have gyms, libraries, computer and science labs and yet they close at 1600.

7.53. It was also argued that Education should no longer be perceived as an issue relating to schoolchildren alone. Education and Lifelong Learning encompasses children, youths and adults. It also underpins other key strategic policies, such as employment. If new industries are to locate in the Borough, there must be a workforce able to work in these sectors.

7.54. When considering school provision in the future, in view of both the total number of homes to be provided and

the strategic sites which will provide large housing sites, it was suggested that it would be more sustainable and better in education terms, that rather than looking to secure new schools, existing schools should be improved and expanded.

7.55. With regard to strategic transport projects, it was suggested that this was an issue that needed consideration at this stage. A link from the Rhondda to the A465 should be considered, as this would take pressure from southbound traffic and have the potential to open up the Northern Strategy Area.



## 8. ANALYSIS

8.1. Overall, there was a positive response in all three workshops to the proposed Draft Spatial Strategy & Preferred Options Paper and there was general consensus regarding the main issues. The development of a North-South strategy was generally supported, the significant opportunities provided by the strategic sites was recognised and the need for clear direction from overarching strategic policies was understood.

8.2. In analysing the output of the three workshops there were several themes and issues that were articulated strongly across the whole day and are worth highlighting.

### *Rhondda*

8.3. Whilst recognising that this stage of the LDP process is concerned with looking at the Borough as a whole, it was strongly suggested that the Rhondda could warrant its own strategic approach given the uniqueness of the problems it faces. The need to identify principal towns in the Rhondda was also raised in order to ensure the area is given equal standing with other parts of the Borough.

### *Joined-up Approach*

8.4. The need for joined up thinking and delivery was stressed repeatedly. In terms of the strategic policy areas, the interrelated nature of housing, education, employment, infrastructure and so forth was returned to on numerous occasions throughout the day. It was felt that the failure to

properly understand this in the past, had led to many of the problems now faced within the Borough.

8.5. Ensuring synergy with other major strategies to maximise potential benefits was also seen as a priority. In particular, the Heads of the Valleys Strategy was mentioned repeatedly and was seen as a significant opportunity with an obvious relationship with the LDP.

### *Pontypridd & Aberdare*

8.6. The role of Pontypridd was subject to much discussion. Participants were keen to ensure that the Spatial Strategy would do as much as possible to reverse the decline of the town. It was felt that Pontypridd should be regarded as the 'county town' within the Borough and that the LDP should reinforce this.

8.7. Concern was also expressed regarding the future of Aberdare, particularly in light of the new and proposed retail developments at Merthyr. It was felt that the Spatial Strategy needed to provide the framework to allow Aberdare to respond to this threat.

### *Transport Infrastructure*

8.8. The issue of transport infrastructure arose in the discussion of virtually every topic area during the workshops. It was expressed throughout the day that the poor transport network in the Northern Strategy Area together with the overloaded highway network in the

Southern Strategy Area, significantly contributed to the major socio-economic problems in the Borough today.

8.9. Participants felt that attempts to address issues surrounding housing provision, employment, retail and so forth had to be supported by improvements to the transport infrastructure, if these problems were to be properly addressed.

#### *Nature Conservation*

8.10. It was generally accepted that the Borough would inevitably experience significant levels of growth over the next 15 years. Indeed, the strategic policies reference 14,600 new homes to be provided up until 2021. Given that there will be significant levels of new development, the need to ensure that nature conservation is at the fore of all policy development becomes even more essential.

#### *Settlement Identity*

8.11. Following on from this point, participants repeated throughout the day that settlement identity was an important issue locally and whilst new development was not unwelcome in principle, it should not be at the expense of traditional settlement identities.

#### *Mwyndy*

8.12. During the workshop discussions, where specific sites were discussed in the context of strategic sites, principal towns and so forth, there was general

understanding as to why sites had been put forward. With regard Mwyndy however, which is identified as a strategic site in the Draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper, concern was expressed that this site had been considered fully through recent planning applications and was subsequently refused planning permission. It was questioned throughout the day, why this site had been identified in light of this recent history.

#### *Avoiding Over Reliability, Promoting Flexibility*

8.13. There was much discussion during all three workshops, concerning current problems in the Borough and how the draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper would seek to address these. It was felt that in the past the Borough had been over reliant on certain sectors of the economy – from coal mining to more recently call centres. In order to avoid these problems in the future, participants felt that the strategy should not seek to promote only one or two sectors of the economy to deliver growth, thereby creating new over reliance problems for the future, but a range of sectors.

8.14. It was also argued that the Borough needed to have sufficient flexibility to react to changing economic circumstances. Where new business sectors emerge, Rhondda Cynon Taf should seek to ensure it is able to react quickly and provide suitable land and infrastructure and thereby compete for and be attractive to, new industries.

*Planning Gain*

8.15. It was clear from the workshops that there is a broad range of very different interpretations on how planning gain should be sought and what it should be used for. There was however general unanimity that planning gain provided an important mechanism through which the impacts of proposed developments could be suitably addressed. Participants strongly felt that where new development will have demonstrable impacts upon existing communities, and in particular where a new development would exacerbate existing problems within an area, planning gain should be sought to address these problems.

## 9. CONCLUSION

9.1. The meeting of the LDP Forum in July 2006 built upon the Visioning Event held in January 2006.

9.2. The LDP Forum considered the three main aspects of the draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper – the spatial strategy, the strategic sites and the strategic policies and overall there was general consensus regarding the three areas as outlined in the draft document.

9.3. This report identifies the main areas of concern that were expressed throughout the workshops. These issues will be given full consideration prior to the full public consultation on the draft Spatial Strategy and Preferred Options Paper and the draft document will be amended accordingly to take account of the views expressed by LDP Forum members.

**APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF ATTENDEES****Councillors**

Cllr Alby Davies	Abercynon
Cllr Brian Arnold	Ynysybwl
Cllr Kevin Williams	Maerdy
Cllr Roger Turner	Brynna
Cllr Robert Bevan	Tylorstown
Cllr Cennard Davies	Treorchy

**Community Representatives**

Graham Gwillam	TARCA
David Furmage	Pontypridd YMCA

**Consultation Bodies**

Mike Cuddy	Welsh Assembly Government
Karen Maddock Jones	Countryside Council for Wales
David Lewis	DEVCO
Nicola Davies	RCT Local Health Board/Health and Well-being
Robin Simpson	CPRW
Neil Maylan	Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust
Greg Byrne	Business Club
Richard Phipps	Rhondda and Merthyr Groundwork Trust
Bill Daniel	Interlink

**Thematic Partnership Co-Ordinators**

Matthew Easter	Living Space
Carryn Williams	Fframwaith
Strida Davies	Social and Cultural Identity

**Rhondda Cynon Taf Facilitators**

Sheila Davies	Director of Development and Regeneration
Nicola Gulley	Development Planning Manager
Keith Warren	Principle Planning Officer
Gareth Hall	Development Planning Officer
Owen Jones	Development Planning Officer
Clare Richards	Development Planning Assistant
Robert Worgan	Senior Technical Support Officer

## APPENDIX 2 – MEMBERSHIP OF LDP FORUM

### Councillors

Cllr Graham Thomas	Rhigos
Cllr Christopher	Aberaman North
Cllr Alby Davies	Abercynon
Cllr Brian Arnold	Ynysybwl
Cllr Lionel Langford	Ynyshir
Cllr Kevin Williams	Maerdy
Cllr Jeff Williams	Treherbert
Cllr Paul Cannon	Ystrad
Cllr Aurfron Roberts	Gilfach Goch
Cllr Roger Turner	Brynna
Cllr Clayton Willis	Tyn-y-Nant
Cllr Maureen Webber	Rhydfelen Central
Cllr Pauline Jarman	Mountain Ash East
Cllr Robert Bevan	Tylorstown
Plaid Cymru Representative	To be agreed
Liberal Democrat Representative	To be agreed

### Community Representatives

Alan Woodward	Rhigos Community Sports Association
Susan Sexton	Cwmdare Community Action Team
Graham Gwillam	TARCA
Margaret Morris	Taff Ely Access Group
David Furmage	Pontypridd YMCA

Gwyn Poole

Cliff Jones

Keith Addis

Diane Prosser

Lee Nichols

Olwen Chislett

Alan Woodruff

Communities First Ynyshir/  
Wattstown

Blaenllechau Community  
Regeneration

Cwmni

DASH Training

Nichols Building Services Ltd

Beddau Arts Society

University of Glamorgan

### Consultation Bodies

Welsh Assembly Government

Countryside Council for Wales

Environment Agency

Forestry Commission

Town Centre Forum

Home Builders Federation

Commission for Racial Equality

Devco

RCT Local Health Board

Welsh Water

CPRW

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological  
Trust

Business Club

Country Landowners Association

Rhondda & Merthyr Groundwork  
Trust

Capital Region Tourism  
WAG - Education, Lifelong  
Learning & Skills  
CBI  
Interlink

### **Community Plan Thematic Partnership Co-ordinators**

Chris Ashman	Better Life Consortium
Clive Perry/Tony Key	Community Safety
Matthew Easter	Living Space
Nicola Davies	Health and Well Being
Carryn Williams	Fframwaith
Julia Paradine	Bro Dysg
Peter Mortimer/ Joanne Jones	Boosting the Local Economy
Susan Samuel	Children and Young People
Rhian Webber	Older People
Strinda Davies	Social and Cultural Identity
Dilys Jouvenat	Social Inclusion and Equality
George Jones/Paul Dukes	Sustainability
To be confirmed	Information, Involvement and Empowerment

### **APPENDIX 3 – FACILITATOR QUESTIONS**

Workshops were intended to be entirely open and participants were able to raise any issue they wished in regard to the topic of each workshop.

Questions were prepared for the facilitators to offer structure to the discussion where necessary.

#### **Workshop 1 – Spatial Strategy**

1. Will this strategy improve Rhondda Cynon Taf as a whole?
2. Have the correct key settlements been identified?
3. Will this strategy achieve regeneration objectives?
4. Will such a strategy achieve much planning gain to improve local infrastructure and services?

#### **Workshop 2 – Strategic Sites**

1. Should consideration be given to other potential large-scale releases as strategic sites?
2. Should the number of strategic sites be reduced?
3. Will the sites contribute to a more balanced pattern of growth?

4. Will the sites provide new communities with a balanced mix of uses?

#### **Workshop 3 – Strategic Policies**

1. Are there any comments on the content of the draft strategic policies? Views are sought on the wording, emphasis and any issues within the policy that could be expanded upon.
2. Are there any other major topics or issues that are not included within the strategic policies that require their own strategic policy?
3. Does the group think that these policies and their aims will be able to achieve our proposed spatial strategy aims?