

9 Tourism Opportunities Strategy

The purpose of the Study as set out in Section 1 of the report is to identify potential tourism opportunities which:

- Identify linkages between heritage and rural assets;
- Identify linkages between different yet cohesive projects;
- Improved connections between the Valleys within Rhondda Cynon Taff;
- Communication links and the effectiveness of existing infrastructure;
- Develop tourist related infrastructure, including support services;
- Identify gateways opportunities for development as tourism.

The focus of the Strategy is primarily on the enhancement of infrastructure and linkages. Although, the identification of tourism opportunities, as noted in the strategic review, should ensure that sufficient “attractors” are in place supported by “services” (hospitality, accommodation etc.) and “infrastructure” (information, transport links, amenities etc). Therefore, individual tourism opportunities should contribute towards one of three broad categories:



A primary objective for the strategy is to make the most of the existing offer through the enhancement and improved promotion of existing assets. The appraisal of the tourism sector has indicated that new attractions, unless of

a regional scale, tend to dilute visitor numbers at existing attractions, reducing profitability and thus, their ability to maintain and improve quality.

Therefore, the Strategy approach has been to identify a classification of largely existing tourism facilities which have the potential for development to form a network of mutually supportive and interconnected assets capable of raising the profile and improving tourism across the study area and the Heads of the Valleys as a whole. The ‘Hub and Cluster’ approach is common to initiatives such as HERIAN, looking to develop linkages between heritage and rural assets, and the Heads of the Valleys Strategy as a means to create hubs of a suitably large enough scale and significance to act as a springboard for promoting and enhancing linked resources.

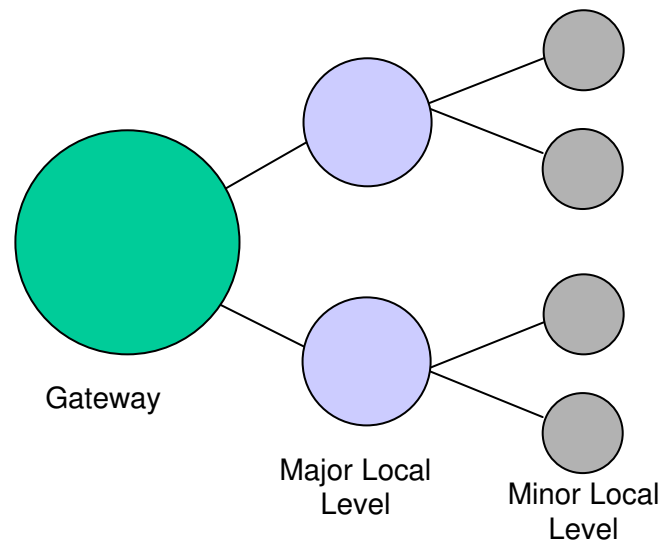


Figure 9-1 Hub & Cluster Illustration

Adopting the principles behind this approach for the Strategy leads to the identification of ‘tourism gateways’ to develop as a core network of hubs which serve as a link geographically and/or thematically to clusters of Local Sites that vary in scale and tourism significance.

9.1 Gateway Opportunities

Gateway opportunities are a core network of sites that serve as a focus for tourism activities and which serve as a link to Local Sites throughout the Heads of the Valleys and RCT. Such sites should provide a minimum of visitor facilities as set out in the following figure.

Tourism Gateway Sites

Function

Visitor Centre or Visitor Reception/Information Point providing a good range of information and interpretive material about the site and the locality, particularly with respect to:

Access and recreation opportunities in the area;

Nearby local sites;

Natural and cultural heritage of the area and other features of interest; and

Public transport links.

Adequate parking, picnic and toilet facilities.

Well-maintained and signed network of paths and trails within the site and linking to other Local Sites nearby.

Selection Criteria

Good road links.

Good public transport links.

Large car parking capacity, preferably with provision for coaches.

Site should be an existing focus for visitor/ tourist activity.

Sites should be distributed so as to provide a good geographical spread along corridors that are currently popular, or have the potential to be popular, with tourist and day visitors.

Strategic location offering convenient access to a range of other Local Sites.

Site with existing/proposed Visitor/Information Centre facility or offering a potentially suitable location and/or building for such a development, especially using ICT links.

9.1.1 GO1: Dare Valley Country Park

The Dare Valley Country Park provides the opportunity to create a tourism gateway for the promotion of the natural environment at the entrance to the Heads of the Valleys and RCT areas.

The site already provides a good level of tourism services and infrastructure within a high quality natural environment and is the principal attraction for the north of RCT. To enhance the attraction as a tourism gateway the opportunity exists to:

- Establish a comprehensive management plan, encompassing infrastructure works, biodiversity management, recreation and interpretation etc. to inform day-to-day operation and potential funding bids.
- Enhanced Tourist Information Point including online facilities to provide information, interpretative and educational material about the location itself and features of interest within the surrounding area including local services and facilities (including accommodation and public transport), and recreational opportunities.

- Enhanced public toilet facilities and expansion of the car park area.
- Increased accommodation to include caravan / camping pitches.
- Establish evening activities within the park, aligned with the accommodation role. This may include linkages to activities within Aberdare Town Centre.
- Enhance wildlife watching as an important recreation activity and attraction as witnessed by the success of Peregrine Watch.

The Park also has a key role to play in promoting educational tourism linked to its environmental studies facilities. As a tourism gateway, the Park should also improve its links with Aberdare town centre through on site public transport links, information, signage and footpaths. An enhanced network of trails would improve links with the open countryside, country parks and amenity areas across the Heads of the Valleys and RCT as promoted by the proposed Valleys Regional Park concept.

9.1.2 GO2: Garwnant Country Park

Garwnant Country Park presents an opportunity to create a tourism gateway as a link between the study area and the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Located along the A470 Merthyr to Brecon Road in the most northerly area of the study area, the Forestry Commission Wales managed park is already a well-established tourism destination offering visitors a shop and cafeteria, education facilities, adventure playground, cycling and a calendar of activities and events. Fishing can be found close by on the Llwyn Onn reservoir and the Taff Trail connects the site to areas south and north.

The opportunity exists, through improved joint marketing and promotion, to promote the Park as a gateway to the Heads of the Valleys from the Brecon Beacons National Park; this can be achieved through enhanced visitor information providing a good range of information and interpretive material about the site and the locality, particularly with respect the South Wales Valleys. The opportunity also exists through thematic and physical linkages to integrate with complementary visitor attractions and tourism facilities south of the A465 Heads of the Valleys road. For example, through promoting the Parks walking and cycling links with the Taff Trail and its wider links with Dare Valley Country Park.

9.1.3 GO3: Rhondda Heritage Park

Although outside of the study area, Rhondda Heritage Park is the principal tourist attraction located within RCT and is important due to its location, size and potential as the southern tourist gateway to the study area. The Park has been nominated as an anchor point on the South Wales route of industrial heritage, part of the international European Route of Industrial



Heritage. A recent strategy for the development and operation of RCT's tourist attractions identified a number of opportunities for enhancing the Park including:

- Upgrading the heritage material including investing in displays and the overall visitor experience
- Marketing entities separately, such as the Heritage Park and the Energy Park
- Grow the educational function of the attraction
- Widen the scope of heritage to include interpretation of heritage in its wider sense, including building heritage alongside mining for example.

Opportunities have also been identified for the Park to develop its role as a centre for social history and genealogy research, linking the history of mining with the people and communities involved. Although the Park currently offers a good level of tourism information and infrastructure, to fulfil its roll as a gateway the Park would benefit from an enhanced visitor information to encourage and promote tourism opportunities throughout the Valleys and Heads of the Valleys area. The level of information should be consistent with other gateways, providing a good range of information and interpretive material about the site and the locality, accommodation including the use of online ICT facilities .

9.1.4 GO4: Aberdare Town Centre

The town is strategically located to provide an important gateway for tourism in the Heads of the Valleys and the rest of RCT from the north. The town centre already has a good environment and has been improved over recent years offering retail, heritage attractions, cultural events and theatre facilities and is easily accessible by road and public transport. The proximity of the town to Dare Valley



Country Park and the Cynon Valley Museum which provides an important focus for visitors, and tourist information for the town centre, and is featured on the regional European Route of Industrial Heritage also enhances the role and importance of the town. The opportunity exists to improve the town further by continuing to improve the quality of the environment, particularly its Victorian character and appearance, the provision of enhanced Tourist Information Centre possibly at the Cynon Valley Museum and to encourage improvements to the range and quality of its retail, food, drink and accommodation facilities.

9.2 Local Site Opportunities

Local tourism sites will vary in scale and importance and offer a subsidiary network of sites that are linked with gateways to provide varied opportunities for formal and informal tourism opportunities.

Reflecting the varied character of such sites, opportunities for the development of new facilities will be dependent on the function and attributes of each and should take account of factors outlined in the following figure. In addition, the descriptions of opportunities identify development principles which allows consideration to be given to how sites, not otherwise prioritised in the strategy, should be treated.

Local Tourism Sites
Function
Sites which offer opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the countryside and wildlife; Sites of heritage or cultural value; Sites offer opportunities for outdoor activities; Sites offering formal small scale visitor attractions/facilities Town centres; and Linear routes and trails, which offer excellent recreational opportunities and provide access links to other sites. Linear routes play an important role in linking other key recreation and tourism sites throughout the study area.
Selection Criteria
Conservation importance and habitats; Profile of actual and potential visitor use, especially in relation to the proportion of local versus tourist visitors; Recreation and access opportunities within the locality; Access links to other sites; and Transport links etc

9.2.1 LS1: Ferndale, Mountain Ash, Tonypany and Treorchy Town Centres

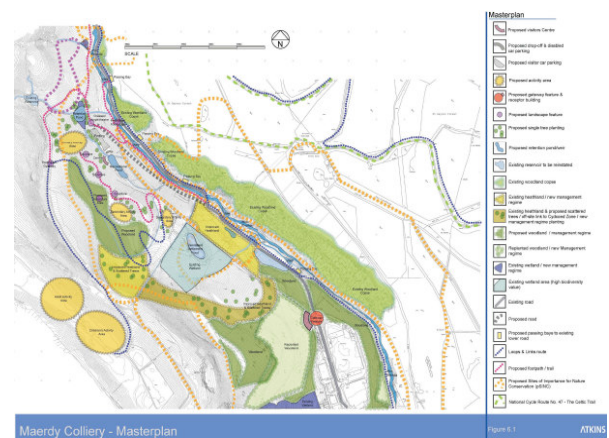
Town centres of local significance throughout the study area have an important role to play as local service centres supporting the tourism sector as promoted by the 'Going to Town' marketing initiative. However, these centres often lack the environmental quality and basic tourism infrastructure to maximise this supporting role. The opportunity exists, through the



regeneration proposals for each of these centres to take full advantage of their tourism potential through improving the local environment, enhancing and promoting their heritage and cultural assets such as the Park and Dare Theatre in Treorchy shown above, the provision of enhanced visitor information, improving the quality and quantity of accommodation, retail, food and drink offer. Another important opportunity is that of farmers market, which currently occur in Tonypanydy and Treorchy. These are increasingly important for both locals and visitors and there is potential to encourage such markets in other settlements, whilst growing the profile and attraction of those that currently operate.

9.2.2 LS2: Maerdy Colliery Site

The Rhondda Fach valley has been identified as an area lacking in tourism attractions and infrastructure. The Maerdy Colliery is located at the northern end of the valley and the site presents a unique opportunity to enhance a reclaimed industrial landscape to create a visitor destination with a high quality natural environment and local heritage features.



The Maerdy Colliery site is also of strategic importance since the site is a linking space between the Cynon and Rhondda Fawr valleys potentially connecting the settlements of Aberdare, Maerdy, Treherbert and Treorchy through countryside and recreational tourism activities.

The site has been subject to a separate feasibility study which examined the sites potential as a site for recreation, leisure and tourism. Opportunities for the site include:

- Enhancement in terms of its landscape and ecological quality and character;
- Potential for camping & caravan accommodation;
- Potential for a broad range of activities including water sports, fishing extreme sports e.g. mountain boarding;
- Linking into other sites and recreational routes and therefore maximises the opportunities of attracting people from across RCT and beyond;
- Strongly interpreting the sites history, the cultural heritage of the locality and its landscape and wildlife qualities to locals and visitors; and

- Promoting tourism / education linked with a proposed wind farm development (a planning application has been submitted and is yet to be approved by the Local Planning Authority).

9.2.3 LS3: Penderyn Welsh Whiskey Company

The Welsh Whisky Company located at Penderyn is currently the only distiller of whiskies in Wales. The production of top quality single malt whisky is only part of the attraction with the distillery also using the high grade local water to manufacture other fine products including Brecon Gin, Brecon Premium Vodka and Merlyn Welsh Cream Liqueur.



The company distillery is located at Penderyn and is currently promoted by Visit Wales and RCTCBC as a 'stopping off' destination between Brecon and the Heads of the Valleys as promotion of local produce. The distillery also offers a niche visitor destination for global whiskey enthusiasts. A visitor centre is due to open in 2007 including distillery viewing and tasting areas, distillery shop and

cafeteria.

Penderyn itself is a location with links to several local tourism attractions including St Cadog's Church and monuments and footpath access to near by Sgwd-yr-eira waterfalls. The settlement is also located within the southern boundary of the Fforest Fawr Geopark, the first geopark in Wales and the 24th member of the UNESCO global network, the park is important for its scientific quality, attractive landscapes, educational value and historical or cultural interest. It is an important location bridging the area between the Brecon Beacons National Park and the Heads of the Valleys, whilst also providing an east / west gateway between the RCT Valleys and valleys to the west. Opportunities exist to improve general signage and information/interpretive provision within the village.

The proposed Visitor Centre presents a unique opportunity to enhance Penderyn role as a key destination to support to growth and development of the tourism sector and encouraging increased visitor links with the Brecon Beacons National Park and the encouragement of foreign visitors. There is the opportunity to enhance the Centres facilities as a potentially suitable location for visitor information provision to promote the whole Heads of the Valleys area providing a good range of information and interpretive material about the site and the locality. Another opportunity within Penderyn is that of the farmers markets which are important for both local residents and tourist, and bring an element of local produce to an area which is increasingly famous for its drink.

9.2.4 LS4: Equestrian Centre

There is potential to further establish the Heads of the Valleys as an area recognised for equestrian tourism. Together with the improvement in the trails network, the opportunity has been identified to encourage the private sector to develop an equestrian centre within the study area. Such a centre has the potential to be supported by both a local market as well as the growing tourism interest in equestrianism.

A centre would aim to attract staying visitors with their own horses and attract visitors from overseas. As an integrated facility the centre would need to be linked with local accommodation, riding for the disabled facilities (currently a centre in Treherbert), and provide for business tourism/corporate team building activities.

Five possible locations for a new or enhanced equestrian facility have emerged from consultations and feasibility studies, but other locations may exist:

- Dare Valley Country Park
- Council owned land in Penpych
- The former Pen Yr Englyn Colliery, Treorchy
- The former Ferhill Colliery
- Land in Private Ownership north of the A465

These locations have no status and would require detailed feasibility if they were to be taken forward for an equestrian centre.

The opportunity would also exist for such a facility to be used as a training base for a national team for the 2012 Olympics.

9.2.5 LS5: Local Parks

There is the opportunity to enhance the quality and linkages between parks and other local level 'green spaces' in both rural and urban areas. The opportunity contributes towards extending the tourism product and offers additional community and economic benefits through enhanced residential environments and recreational opportunities, job creation for maintenance and wardens, and educational benefits.



The opportunity is aligned with the Greening the Valleys Partnership and the Valleys Regional Park concept which is promoting the creation of a high quality and sustainably managed mosaic of interlinked green spaces and amenities offering extensive walking, cycling and active recreation opportunities across the South Wales Valleys. The concept is of a

networked series of outdoor spaces and is supported by the Heads of the Valleys programme.

The opportunity for the study area is to promote and develop country parks and amenity area as part of this integrated regional network of green spaces. This will require additional investment in sites and infrastructure to create a consistent level of management and maintenance of parks, forest areas, upland commons, water courses, river valleys and urban open spaces. The precise areas and the nature of this investment will be determined by the preparation of a future strategic frameworks and business plans. Within the study area the following sites should be promoted:

- Garwnant
- Dare Valley
- Aberdare Park
- Pen Pych Woodland Park
- Glyncornel Nature Reserve
- Darran Park
- Maerdy Colliery Site

As a minimum the investment in each site would include:

- Signage to the site linked with neighbouring sites within the locality
- Provision of a parking areas
- Enhanced accessibility including trails and footpaths
- Enhanced site furniture e.g. picnic facilities
- Interpretation relating specifically to the site and the local community, and
- Information and signage relating to the surrounding infrastructure and tourism opportunities.

9.2.6 LS6: Scenic Routes

The brochure 'Touring Country' already promotes the high quality landscapes and attractive views which can be enjoyed from the road sides of RCT. There is, however, an opportunity to significantly improve the quality of infrastructure necessary to create designated scenic routes.



The routes would primarily provide west-east linkages across the Rhondda and Cynon valleys taking

advantage of views from the higher ground of the valleys. The investment in scenic routes would require distinctive signage from the surrounding road network, good quality road surfaces, an increased number of passing points on narrow road sections and establish well maintained viewing platforms containing local information and interpretation of the areas natural and cultural heritage features on view from the roadside and promote other sites, facilities and attractions in the locality.

The routes would encourage journeys to attractions off the main tourist routes. e.g. the road between Ferndale and Mountain Ash provides a link to Llanwonno which provides a cluster of facilities including a historic church, forest walks, picnic area, Daerwonno outdoor activity centre and a public house.

As well as promoting tourism, the routes would improve connections between the valleys for wider community and economic benefits. The following scenic routes have been identified for development and promotion:

- A4061 – Treherbert to Hirwaun
- Ferndale to Mountain Ash via Llanwonno
- A4233 – Aberdare to Maerdy
- A4061 – Treorchy to Bwlch

9.2.7 LS7: Routes & Trails

RCT already has a good provision of strategic and local walking and cycling routes passing through the area including routes such as the local level river walkway from Tylorstown to Maerdy and Castell Nos reservoir and national and regional routes linking with the wider Heads of the Valleys. The Loops and Links trails developed by Groundwork also provide a particularly valuable network of local level trails linking rural and heritage assets which includes opportunities for horse riding. The opportunity exists to further promote and extend the network to encourage visitors to pass through the study area and visit local attractions and use local services such as food and drink establishments and accommodation. By introducing the visitor to relatively unexplored areas of the natural environment and heritage the development of trails will contribute to improving connections between tourism assets and across the valleys.

With particular regard to cycling, the study area lies between three of the most well established mountain biking destinations in the UK – Forestry Commission Wales managed Cwm Carn and the Afan Forest as well and the Brecon Beacons. The study area benefits from its links with a number of National Cycle Network (NCN) routes which provide for long distance and recreational cycling.

The opportunity exists to market and promote the study area as a cycling destination with the benefit of trails linking with the regional mountain biking destinations. This linking of trails is likely to be achieved through the Valleys Regional Park concept which is currently in its second stage of

development which includes a detailed masterplan and business plan. Encouraging tourists to use the Heads of the Valleys as a base for several days cycling or as a stop off along one of the long distance trails will increase demand for local overnight stays particularly the use of bunkhouse accommodation.

Linear routes should feature:

- Information about recreational opportunities offered by the route;
- Information about public transport links;
- Signing and waymarking of the route and pedestrian/bridle links to other routes;
- Interpretive material about the area's natural and cultural heritage and local features of interest; and
- Quality, range and standards of maintenance of site infrastructure (e.g. car parking facilities, site furniture).

Particular opportunities identified by the study include:

- Completion of the Cynon Valley Trail to further improve the walking / cycling routes throughout the Authority.
- Extension of the of the Loops and Links network into the south of RCT and potentially the wider Heads of the Valleys area to establish way marked trails throughout the region.
- Promotion of the HERIAN 'This is Our Story' programmes which looks to develop interpretation along trails through the implementation of heritage projects by community groups.
- Regional bridleway linking with Brecon Beacons, an opportunity which arose during discussions with the BBNP.
- The development of a Taff Trail Cooperative to develop a marketing strategy to promote short breaks, an opportunity to raise during discussions with Valleys Tourism.

9.3 Services & Infrastructure Opportunities

In addition to identifying priorities for investment in facilities, the strategy recognises other strategic issues, and includes complementary measures, to promote and develop tourism resources and facilities available. These are:

- Signage
- Accommodation
- Information and Interpretation
- Heritage & Culture

- Marketing
- Resources and Management
- Public transport
- Attractions and Facilities

9.3.1 SI1: Tourism Signage

Strategic Signage

This opportunity exists to ensure that all gateways within the study area are effectively signed off the major road corridors including the A465, A470 and further afield the M4. The opportunity should be developed to create a consistent and joined up approach to signage across the Heads of the Valleys/South Wales Valleys. Public art also has a role to play at strategic gateway locations to further enhance the impact of the signage.



Within the study area and immediate peripheral areas the need for strategic signs have been identified as:

- A465/A4061 roundabout for Dare Valley and Aberdare Town Centre
- A465/B475 and roundabout for Dare Valley Country Park and Aberdare Town Centre
- A470/A465 roundabout for Garwnant Country Park and Rhondda Heritage Park
- A470/A472 roundabout for Rhondda Heritage Park, Dare Valley Country Park/Aberdare
- A470/A4060 roundabout for Rhondda Heritage Park, Dare Valley Country Park/Aberdare and Garwnant Country Park

Town Centres Signage

There is a need for signage improvements at key arrival points at all town centres (e.g. Aberdare, Ferndale, Mountain Ash, Treorchy, Tonypany). Well-located brown signs should be provided on the main entrance routes and at public transport hubs to comprehensively inform visitors of the services and facilities within that centre. These signs should include all quality attractions within the centre such as museums, tourist information centres, car parking, accommodation, and theatres. Signage should be consistent across the authority and portray an overarching approach to the branding of tourist information. The photo illustrates an example of the type of signage envisaged.



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Town centre signage is required on the approaches to:

- Aberdare
- Mountain Ash
- Treorchy
- Ferndale

Local Signage

Local level signage includes signage in relation to settlement boundaries and local tourism sites. Through site visits and consultations it has become apparent that the linear development of the valley communities provides poor visitor orientation and legibility, particularly where settlement boundaries area unclear. The opportunity exists to improve gateway signage and this is particularly important within the Rhondda Fach and Fawr valleys where it is sometimes unclear where settlements start and end. It is considered that signage should be distinctive, possibly characteristic of each valley, and positively contribute to the enhanced image of the valleys and form part of small scale environmental improvement schemes. Whilst it is noted that the towns and villages within RCT have a distinct identity which should be reflected in the signage, there is also a need to be consistent in the styles used to reflect a branding of the area as a whole. An example of distinctive settlement signage is provided above, illustrating new signs implemented recently by the Vale of Glamorgan CBC. These signs are distinctive in the settlement emblem at the top of the sign, but consistent in the design and colours used. In addition all local tourism sites identified in the strategy should have tourism signs directing off the nearest A or B classification highways.



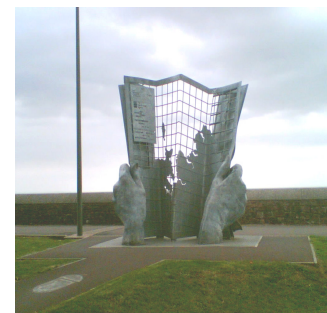
Attractions & Facilities

RCTCBC as the local highways authority regulates the use of brown tourism signs within the study area. Combining the regulatory powers with financial incentives, the Council could provide grants to support private tourism businesses and accommodation providers to install approved and appropriately designed tourism signage.

Landmark Public Art

To complement strategic signage and to visually enhance the tourism offer of RCT and the Heads of the Valleys the opportunity exists to introduce strategically located landmark public artwork in consultation with organisations such as the Arts Council for Wales.

Art could be themed throughout the authority and involve local communities in the design



stage. The illustration shown above is a dominant landmark feature marking the start of the South West Coast Path in Minehead, Somerset.

9.3.2 SI2: Accommodation

Increasing the Quantity and Location of Accommodation

There is a particular need to establish more small-scale B&B style accommodation providers and caravan and camping pitches within the study area. This type of accommodation is particularly in demand by those undertaking short stays. There is a particular opportunity to create an improved distribution of new accommodation so that it is developed in close proximity to (or linked to) strategic trails such as the Taff Trail, county parks, activity centres and town centres.

There is a specific opportunity to increase the accommodation available in the Rhondda Fach and Rhondda Fawr valleys where there is little current provision. In addition to improving B&B provision around Treorchy, Tonypany and Ferndale, the proposed Maerdy Colliery site provides an opportunity to provide a variety of camping, caravan type accommodation.

Although Aberdare has the largest quantity of current accommodation the opportunity exists to expand the range, particularly by expanding camping facilities at the already established site located at Dare Valley Country Park

New and existing accommodation should also be encouraged to provide facilities that complement the specific need of growing outdoor recreation markets. Facilities may include wet and dry changing areas, washdown equipment, the safe storage of specialist equipment such as canoes and bikes and even the provision of stables for equestrian visitors.

Accommodation Promotion Seminars

Consultations with Valleys Tourism indicate a particular barrier to the establishment of new B&B facilities in the study area is the lack of awareness of the economic benefits and potential viability of the industry. There is also an apprehension on the part of new enterprises due to the procedures that are believed to be necessary before becoming established as an accommodation provider.

Seminars, which should be arranged in partnership with Valleys Tourism, should outline the range of support mechanisms in place to help local people become establish as accommodation providers. (E.g. Visit Wales Grants and Local Authority start up and e-commerce grants (Max £2000 or 50% of project costs). Consultations have suggested that these introductory seminars could be targeted at farms within the area who often have the infrastructure / facilities to diversify into the accommodation market. Seminars should also be held to support and encourage existing accommodation providers wishing to expand or improve the quality of their accommodation.

Improving the Quality and Profile of Accommodation Stock

In conjunction with the suggested seminars, there is a need to improve the promotion of initiatives for enhancing the quality and profile of the accommodation stock within the study area. There is evidence of a significant number of accommodation providers not becoming accredited by Visit Wales and improvements can be achieved through promotion of assistance for improvement works and encouragement for accommodation providers to achieve verification. A number of initiatives already offer support / financial assistance to accommodation providers wishing to improve or better promote their business. This assistance includes Visit Wales Grants for establishments wishing to achieve 3-4 star status. There are also the Local Authority capital grants for improvements to buildings.

9.3.3 SI3: Tourism Information

Visitor Information

The Heads of the Valleys is in particular need for a strategic tourist information centre, promoting tourism throughout the South Wales Valleys. Consultations have suggested that such a facility would be best placed near to the A465 or A470, which would make it accessible by road and public transport as well as providing good links with the M4 corridor. This opportunity would require joint working between all of the Heads of the Valleys Authorities to agree a location and its resourcing and management as such a centre would provide a strategic 'stop off' allowing visitors to gather a good range of information and interpretive material for the whole region.

There is also an identified need for an improved network of visitor information points at gateway locations. These gateways would need to be of the highest quality and management to ensure that the tourism destinations provide a consistent quality of information and service to the visitor. This level of information could be achieved through either staffed Tourism Information Centres (TIC's) or un-staffed Tourism Information Points (TIP's). HERIAN are planning a number of tourist information points within RCT to be located at Rhondda Heritage Park, Dare Valley Country Park and the Cynon Valley Museum.

A visitor information point should provide a good range of information and interpretive material about the site and the locality, particularly with respect to:

- recreation opportunities in the area;
- nearby local heritage sites;
- culture of the area and other features of interest;
- accommodation; and
- public transport links.

Each location should provide adequate parking, refreshment and toilet facilities and be well linked and signed to a network of paths and trails linking to other gateway and local sites nearby. Locations identified for enhanced visitor information are:

- Aberdare Town Centre
- Cynon Valley Museum
- Dare Valley Country Park
- Garwnant Country Park
- Penderyn, Welsh Whisky Visitor Centre
- Rhondda Heritage Park

At the local tourism level the opportunity exist to expand the recently developed initiative of providing visitor information through locations within high street business premises. This approach is already being piloted by RCTCBC in Treherbert to assess its cost effectiveness of providing information through a local retail outlet. If proved to be successful, other locations which would benefit from enhanced information provision include:

- Treorchy
- Ferndale
- Mountain Ash

9.3.4 SI4: Heritage and Culture

The majority of initiatives and programmes in relation to heritage tourism within RCT emerge from HERIAN who are considered key to the development of cultural and heritage assets within the area. However, RCT has a statutory duty to adequately maintain its heritage assets, particularly its listed buildings. It is understood that this ongoing maintenance presents a key challenge for the authority and its resources.

HERIAN

The South Wales Industrial Heritage Initiative – HERIAN is central to the promotion and development of study area as it seeks to optimise the cultural heritage of the former industrial South Wales through enhanced levels of interpretation, regeneration of heritage assets and physical and thematic linkages between heritage sites, building on the achievement of World Heritage Site status for Blaenavon and the development of a new Waterfront Museum in Swansea. The opportunity should be taken to support and promote the Interpretation Plan for Industrial



South Wales including the following HERIAN initiatives within the study area:

- HERIAN information points at Rhondda Heritage Park, Dare Valley Country Park and Cynon Valley Museum.
- Trail of Light - A floodlighting initiative that includes Aberdare
- Interpretation through Performance which aims to bring an industrial past to centre stage through a wide range of performance led activities.
- Green Badge Guiding Accreditation which focuses on providing Tourist Guide level training programmes for the local community with local knowledge.
- 'Welcome to our Heritage': community customer care training helping communities become involved and make the most of tourism opportunities.
- Community Heritage Projects which uses a Local Interpretation Plan to support local heritage interest groups in developing local level projects.
- Information Points Project – Including the provision of an interactive information point at the Rhondda Heritage Park, which will act as the information point for the central area within the South East Region.

Genealogy

There has been a growth in the general public interested in family history and as a consequence genealogy led tourism has become established as a consumer proposition in its own right. The rapid industrialisation and subsequent economic depression in the South Wales Valleys meant the area experience both a large influx of population and subsequent out migration over the last century. This has created historic family connection with the study area that extends around the world. The opportunity exists to ensure that appropriate infrastructure is in place to support and encourage the growth in this sector. This would include marketing, information and research facilities such as museums, library services, and social history centre already identified for Rhondda Heritage Park. Promoting genealogy tourism will seek to increase the proportion of foreign visitors, and overnight stays. Improvements to Web based tourism and research information will be particularly important to supporting the growth in this sector.

Events & Festivals

The opportunities identified for developing events and festivals are:

- Build upon existing infrastructure to promote Dare Valley and Aberdare Park as venues for larger scale events and festivals.
- An events and festivals promotion package to assist communities to organise, market and run events which have the potential to attract tourism such as the long established Aberdare Carnival. The support

should seek to develop joint initiative between individual events such as joint marketing, promotion and staff training.

- Promotion of interpretation through performance through programmes such as HERIAN's 'Bringing Our Industrial Past to Centre Stage'.
- Promotion and development of farmers markets throughout the authority which can be key for both locals and tourists.
- Develop events and festivals to promote the areas key tourism assets such as walking and cycling festivals which encourage the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Another such event is the Nos Galan races, held annually to commemorate the Welsh runner Guto Nyth Bran and his legendary athletic prowess. It is felt that this event has the potential to become an event of regional importance.

Sports Events

The presence of the Ryder Cup in Newport in 2010 presents a unique opportunity for the tourism industry in the Heads of the Valleys region including RCT. A major event such as this should act as a catalyst for tourism and investment in South Wales, attracting approximately 40,000 spectators per day.



Aberdare Park is unique in that it is the only motorcycle race circuit in Britain that is situated less than 1/2 mile from the Town centre. This picturesque and quite demanding 0.9 mile circuit winds its way through trees in the local town park. The Aberdare Park Cycle Race is an annual event it attracts several thousand visitors and is hugely popular niche event creating strong demand for accommodation in the locality.

Sports tourism is a potentially strong consumer proposition for the study area which supports the need for investment in near by accommodation, the food offer and local facilities.

9.3.5 SI5: Resources and Management

Tourism Development Resources

If tourism is to achieve an increasing contribution to the economy of RCT, there is a need for a coordinated high quality and sustainable approach to developing the sector. Effective resources are essential to ensure that RCTCBC benefits fully from the £5m Heads of the Valleys budget for tourism available during 2008-2009.

Consultations and previous tourism studies¹⁹ have indicated there is a need for RCTCBC to strengthen the level of staff and resource dedicated to the development and delivery of tourism improvements, particularly the co-ordination, promotion and marketing of the opportunities identified within this study. There is also a need for improved emphasis on the promotion of all RCT attractions by staff at key facilities and information points. This would be one of the roles of the staff at the proposed tourism gateways.

In terms of the management of tourism, there is an issue in relation to the officer resource available to promote and strengthen tourism in the County Borough. The separate marketing and development resources are currently being stretched through the servicing of a wide array of activities. The opportunity exists to establish a dedicated tourism development team which would also encompass tourism marketing and be led by a senior tourism development officer.

The marketing function would focus on driving tourism and building the tourism profile of the County Borough. This would by its very nature contribute in terms of its destination/place marketing effort, to the raising of the County Borough's profile generally for inward investment. It is envisaged that this function would incorporate the existing events resource and would include web site development and management responsibilities.

A new senior level appointment would be necessary although progress would also be made if the present tourism development and marketing resource becomes progressively more dedicated to driving tourism and less diluted by the need to service other non-tourism related activities.

Partnership Working

Despite the need for additional resources for the development of tourism the opportunities and objectives identified within this report and wider strategic documents are not fully achievable by the RCTCBC working alone. There is a need for and partnership working with a number of organisations that are actively involved in promoting RCT and neighbouring areas and it is considered important that the Authority work in partnership to effective coordination requests to draw down funds from the £5m Heads of the Valleys resources available during 2008-2009.

The support of organisations such as those listed below is important to maximise the impact of improving the tourism offer:

- Heads of the Valleys local authorities including BBNP.
- Valleys Tourism Association – e.g. Accommodation Promotion Seminars and other local initiatives

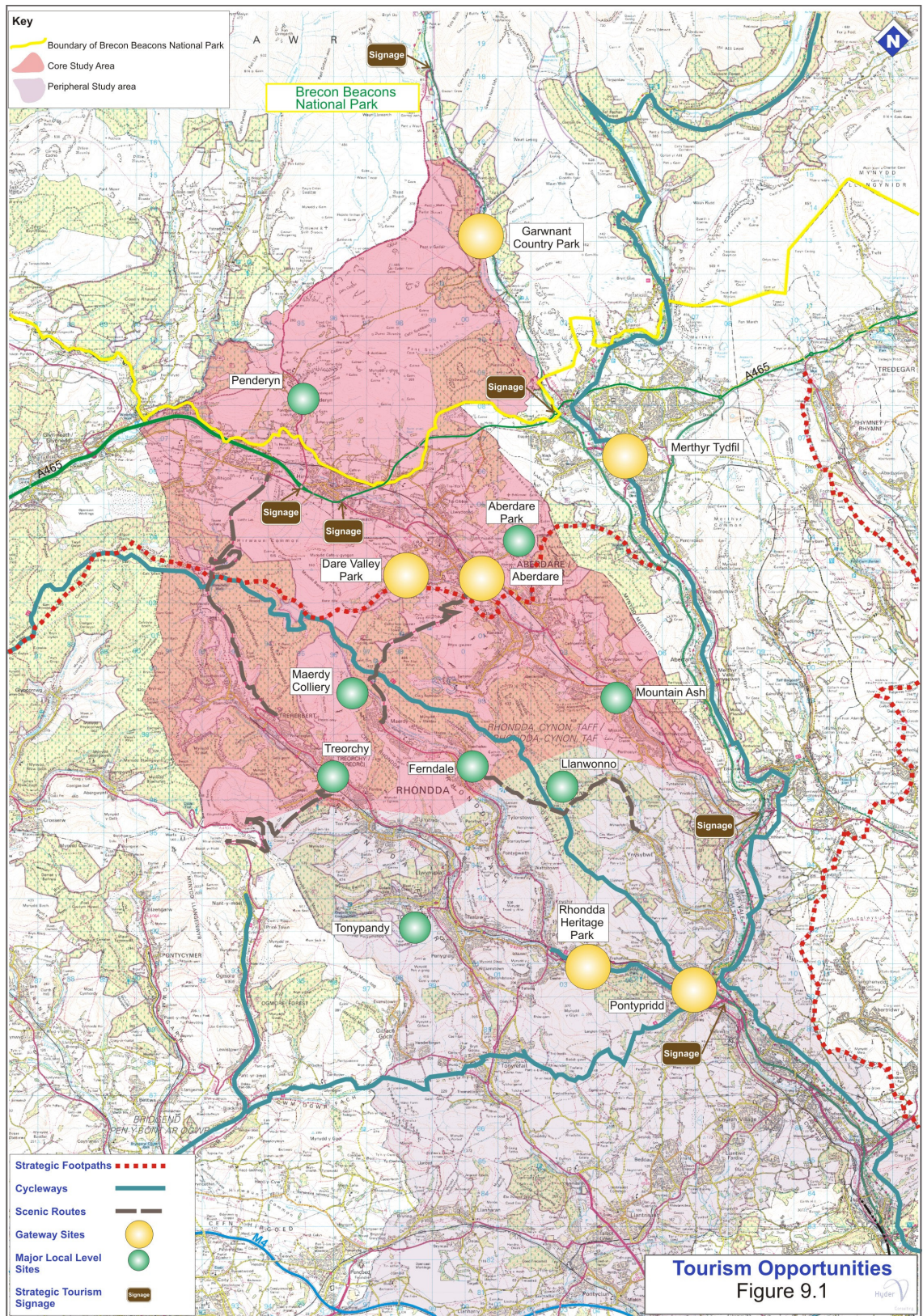
¹⁹ Strategy For The Development And Operation Of The Council' Recreational, Tourism And Cultural/Heritage Attractions, Atkins

- HERIAN – delivery of heritage services and infrastructure improvements
- Groundwork MRCT – enhancement, management and maintenance of amenity areas
- Greening Valleys Partnership – Valleys Regional Park
- Sustrans - cycling network promotion and enhancements
- Forestry Commission Wales – enhancement of forest parks and visitor infrastructure
- Communities First Partnerships – community level initiatives
- Local service providers – in particular attraction and accommodation businesses.

9.3.6 SI6: Public Transport

Public transport is key to providing access to tourism sites and attractions for both those who live within the Authority and the surrounding region or those who are visiting the area. There are a number of opportunities that relate to public transport provision and the main transport hubs throughout the Authority including:

- Improvements to public transport provision to increase services over weekends and bank holiday periods;
- Improvements to services such as the Beacons Bus to allow more people to carry bikes into RCT and the Brecon Beacons, increasing access to the outdoor environment, encouraging the movement of people and the promotion of RCT as an accessible tourism destination; and
- Enhancement of the major transport hubs, such as Aberdare bus station to include tourism information and interpretation.



10 Delivery Plan

Table 10.1 outlines the Delivery Plan for the Tourism Opportunities Study which has identified 26 opportunity areas for development. The opportunities represent a combination of capital and revenue type projects many of which will require further development either from initial concept feasibility or detailed design and implementation.

Most opportunities have been presented as a package of improvements which incorporate either several areas for enhancement or improvements across a number of separate sites. The advantage of this is that opportunities provide an integrated approach to tourism developments with potential to draw together several partner organisations and sources of funding.

The 'gateway' opportunities in particular have been constructed from a combination of enhancements to the attractions, tourism services and infrastructure. Large scale opportunities such as Maerdy Colliery have potential for numerous activities and enhancements, some of which can be brought forward in the short term and others representing longer-term aspirations. Improvements to signage, parks, scenic routes, and trails, for example, incorporate several locations which would benefit from an integrated programme of improvements whilst also requiring bespoke designs involving a range of partners and the local communities for each site.

Therefore, the following table presents an evaluation of each individual opportunity, and their potential to contribute towards enhancing tourism. It identifies indicative costs, where it is sensible to do so, as it is not practical in all cases to present a figure where the feasibility of what can be achieved has not been tested. The table also prioritises the opportunities as a timetable for action. Several projects can be considered as quick wins to demonstrate progress and to provide a focus for investment in the short term.

To deliver the Strategy will require adequate funding from both the public and private sectors, and the delivery plan concludes with details of sources that best fit the opportunities that have emerged from the Study.

Table 10.1 Delivery Plan

Tourism Opportunity		Contribution to Objectives										Overall Contribution to Tourism Objectives *	Indicative Investment	Timescales **
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
GO1	Gateway - Dare Valley Country Park	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	High	(1)	Short Term
GO2	Gateway – Garwnant Country Park	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	High	(1)	Short Term
GO3	Gateway – Rhondda Heritage Park		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	High	(1)	Short Term
GO4	Gateway – Aberdare Town Centre	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	High	(1)	Short Term
LS1	Local Site – Ferndale, Mountain Ash and Treorchy Town Centres			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	High	£150k (2) (♦)	Short/Medium Term
LS2	Local Site –Maerdy Colliery Site		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		High	Several projects ideas – details provided in separate Maerdy Colliery Study (Atkins 2004)	Long Term
LS3	Local Site – Penderyn	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	High	£50K (4) (♦) Contribution to visitor centre and promotion of centre and farmers markets	Short Term
LS4	Local Site – Equestrian Centre	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	High	£375-400k to include stables, indoor arena/school, trails and courses (3)	Long Term

Tourism Opportunity		Contribution to Objectives										Overall Contribution to Tourism Objectives *	Indicative Investment	Timescales **	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
													£30k (4) (#)		
LS5	Local Site – Local Parks	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			High	£200k (♦)	Short/Medium Term
LS6	Local Site – Scenic Drives	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓			Medium	£20k (♦) Route signage & interpretation provision & minor highway improvements.	Short/Medium Term
LS7	Local Site – Routes & Trails	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		High	£35k (♦) Promotion and marketing of routes and trails and promotion of the second stage of Loops & Links.	Short/Medium Term
Services & Infrastructure Opportunities															
SI1	Signage - Strategic	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		High	£30k (♦)	Short/Medium Term
	Signage – Town Centres					✓	✓	✓	✓				Medium	£40k (♦)	Short/Medium Term
	Signage – Local Level	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓				Medium	£20k (♦)	Short/Medium Term

Tourism Opportunity		Contribution to Objectives										Overall Contribution to Tourism Objectives *	Indicative Investment	Timescales **
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
	Signage – Signage Grants	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			Medium	-	Short/Medium Term
SI2	Accommodation – Increase Supply & Quality	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	High	-	Medium Term
	Accommodation - Seminars	✓			✓	✓			✓			Medium	£10k (3) (♦)	Short Term
	Accommodation - Grants	✓			✓	✓						Low	£100k (3) (♦)	Short/Medium Term
SI3	Tourism Information – Gateway TIC/TIP's	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Medium	-	Short/Medium Term
	Tourism Information – Town Centre Information Points	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		High	-	Medium Term
SI4	Heritage & Culture - HERIAN	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	High	£50k (♦) Contribution to achieving HERIAN programme objectives.	Short/Medium Term

Tourism Opportunity		Contribution to Objectives										Overall Contribution to Tourism Objectives *	Indicative Investment	Timescales **
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
	Heritage & Culture – Genealogy					✓		✓	✓	✓		Medium	£10k (♦) Promotion of Genealogy as a tourist activity and improvements to database	Short/Medium Term
	Heritage & Culture – Events and Festivals	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	High	£30k (♦) Contributions towards local level events and festivals and promotion of all events and festivals.	Short/Medium Term
	Heritage & Culture – Sports Events	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	High	£20k (♦) Promotion and marketing of sporting events within RCT.	Short/Medium Term
SI5	Resources and Management - Tourism Development Resource	Opportunity indirectly contributes to all objectives.										High	-	Short Term
	Resources and Management – Partnership Working	Opportunity indirectly contributes to all objectives.										High	-	Short Term

*Overall contribution:- 1-3 objectives covered= low,
4-6= medium,
7-10= high

**Timescales:- Short Term = 1-3yrs,
Medium Term = 3-5yrs,
Long Term =5+ yrs

- (1) The Gateway schemes will incorporate a number of different elements depending on location and may need to be related to other projects so it is not practical to provide individual indicative costs.
- (2) The sum indicated relates to enhancement at Mountain Ash and Treorchy but excludes Ferndale that has been selected under the Heads of the Valley Programme as the RCT town centre for 2007.
- (3) Valleys Tourism Initiative / Private Sector led.
- (4) RCT contribution to scheme.
- (#) Further Studies
- (♦) Implementation Contribution

10.1 Funding Opportunities

To achieve the opportunities identified funding from both the Local Authority and external funders will be integral. To identify suitable sources of funding for each identified opportunity on an individual basis is neither practical or logical for the following reasons: the opportunities will need to be developed which may alter suitable sources of funding; opportunities may need to be packaged strategically in order to attract the required levels of external funding; and there is likely to be a high level of repetition.

Sources of funding have been categorised under five main themes:

- Improving tourism attractions and the visitor experience
- Developing routes and promoting the natural environment
- Enhancing the tourism accommodation stock
- Enhancing town centres
- Focussed initiatives

Sources of funding are not limited to or defined, by these themes. Many of the funds will be appropriate to multiple themes and opportunities. As the opportunities are developed and delivered, Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC's Regeneration Resources Team will provide definitive guidance on the suitable sources of external funding.

The following sources of funding will generally be suitable for [improving tourism attractions and the visitor experience](#):

Visit Wales – Investing in ambition (HERIAN) – Funds capital expenditure in the following categories: interpretation of cultural heritage; improving access to industrial heritage assets; improving information facilities at key industrial heritage sites; introducing arts and sculpture; educational and lifelong learning facilities at heritage assets; improving signposting, routeway marketing and signage; improving picnic areas and vantage points; architectural creative floodlighting of industrial heritage assets; theatrical and 'animation' equipment and facilities. Generally grants of up to £75,000 are available at a rate of 50%.

Heritage Lottery Fund – Heritage Grants / Your Heritage – Projects should conserve and enhance our diverse heritage or encourage communities to identify, look after and celebrate their heritage. Projects should also ensure that everyone can learn about, have access to, and enjoy their heritage. Grants of between £5,000 and £50,000 (up to 100% funding) are available through the Your Heritage programme, and between £50,000 and £5,000,000 (up to 90% funding for under £2,000,000 and 75% for over £2,000,000) are available through the Heritage Grants programme.

Heads of the Valleys – Development of Tourism and Leisure – The Strategic Framework for Heads of the Valleys commits at least £140million to ensure that by 2020 the target area (Upper parts of Cynon and Rhondda valleys) is: culturally rich, dynamic network of vibrant and safe communities; a place where people want to work and play with a sustainable, high quality of life and a thriving population; and helping to drive the success of South East Wales as an internationally recognised Capital Region. Examples of key projects under the ‘development of tourism and leisure’ theme include: potential investment in key attractions, encouraging growth of ancillary services, trail of light, public art and signage, and marketing activity.

The following sources of funding may be suitable for [developing routes and promoting the natural environment](#):

Heritage Lottery Fund – Landscape Partnership - Initiative allows partnerships representing a range of heritage and community interests to tackle the needs of landscapes, whose various elements may be in different ownership. It caters for applications based round a portfolio of projects, which combine to provide a varied package of benefits to an area, its communities which live, work and visit there. The initiative will mainly help us to promote heritage conservation as an integral part of rural regeneration. Grants of £250,000 to £2,000,000 are available at a rate of up to 75%.

Big Lottery Fund – People and Places - Identified outcomes include: creating open spaces for community activities, providing opportunities for communities and individuals to understand the environment and maintain and improve it, and creating spaces for wildlife and people. Grants of between £5,000 to £1,000,000 are available.

Heads of the Valleys – Environment (landscape) - Examples of key projects under the ‘Environment (landscape)’ theme include: major transformational landscape enhancement, and creation of a valleys regional park.

The following sources of funding are suitable for [enhancing the tourism accommodation stock](#):

Visit Wales – Main Grant Scheme – Supports SME’s looking to establish tourist accommodation or upgrade existing accommodation. The following sectors can be supported: serviced accommodation, self catering accommodation, caravan and camping parks, attractions, restaurants, and activity products and centres. Different sectors are eligible for different levels of grant and loan support.

Visit Wales – Bilingual sign scheme – Aims to encourage the provision of bilingual signs for businesses within the private sector. Grants of between £125 and £500 are available at a rate of 50%.

Visit Wales – Access Small Grant - Small grant scheme to assist tourism businesses in Wales undertaking capital investment to improve access and facilities for disabled persons.

In order to **enhance town centres** within Rhondda Cynon Taff a strategic approach must be taken, and proposals are likely to have to form part of a wider regeneration package. The following sources of funding could potentially contribute to such a package:

Heads of the Valleys – Renewal of key town centres – Three town centres in Rhondda Cynon Taff fall within the Heads of the Valleys boundary: Aberdare, Ferndale, Mountain Ash and Treorchy, with specific funds allocated for renewal of town centres.

Welsh Assembly Government – Following the movement of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies into the Welsh Assembly Government in early 2006 there has been some uncertainty of funding available from the Welsh Assembly Government. The Department of Enterprise Innovation and Networks (former Welsh Development Agency) should continue to provide funding for regeneration schemes, through its Town Improvement Grant and other mechanisms. The Communities directorate within the Welsh Assembly Government previously operated the Local Regeneration Fund and Physical Regeneration Fund programmes. It is anticipated that successor's to these schemes will be established in line with the development of the Convergence Programme.

European Funding – Convergence – West Wales and the Valley's has been allocated £1.5`bn Convergence Funding under the next round of Structural Funds (2007 – 2013) to complete the transformation of the region into a strong and sustainable economy. The proposed priorities include 'Priority 2: Creating an attractive business environment' which has themes including 'increasing the accessibility of markets' and 'developing environmental infrastructure' and 'Priority 3: Building sustainable communities' which has themes including 'supporting physical regeneration, the development of sites and premises, regenerating degraded urban and rural landscapes, and improving the quality of public spaces.'

Convergence may also contribute towards establishing 'key funds' that have a regional impact, which could distribute financial support to voluntary and private sector organisations. This could include support to businesses within the tourism sector. 'Priority 1: Knowledge and innovation for growth' has themes including: 'supporting entrepreneurship and assisting the growth and expansion of businesses', improving access to business finance' and 'accelerating Welsh exports'.

Throughout the remainder of 2006 the Convergence programme will be further developed, and the availability of funding for the regeneration of town centres and the establishment of 'key funds' will become more apparent.

Heritage Lottery Fund – Townscape Heritage Initiative - Supports schemes that help to regenerate historic parts of towns and cities. The programme is designed to address problems in areas of particular social and economic need throughout the United Kingdom. It encourages partnerships to carry out repairs and other works to a number of different

historic properties within those areas, and improve the quality of life for all those who live, work or visit there. Priorities for funding are: structural and external repair of historic buildings which are still being used; repair and conversion for new uses of empty historic buildings. The scheme has also previously funded high quality traditional materials in the public realm. Grants of between £250,000 and £2,000,000 are available, generally at a rate of 50%.

There are also a number of more specific sources of external funding that may be appropriate for [more focussed initiatives](#):

Visit Wales – Golf Tourism – Provides assistance for golf businesses aiming to improve on-site hotel accommodation, and improve clubhouse facilities. The support is geared towards maximising the opportunities presented by the forthcoming Ryder Cup in 2010.

Sports Council for Wales – May provide financial contributions to enhance sports related facilities, such as equestrian and cycling.

Capital Region Tourism – Through the Events Support Scheme small grants (generally £5,000 or less) may be available to provide support to events that contribute towards the economic wealth and development of the region, particularly those events that will attract people from outside Wales.

Arts Council for Wales – Public art elements of schemes may be eligible for funding through the Arts Council Capital Grant scheme. Levels of funding range from £5,000 to £100,000+, with match funding generally required.

There are certain opportunities that are statutory responsibilities of the Local Authority, and therefore will have to be funded by [Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC](#). This will include the majority of improvements to highways and infrastructure (including signage), general information provision and marketing, and creation or enhancement of posts and teams (including an enhanced tourism marketing and development team).