

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2006-2021)

Tourism Topic Paper

April 2008

Context

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BACKGROUND

In January 2007 the Council issued for public consultation the Local Development Plan: Preferred Strategy. The Strategy was the first stage of the new statutory local development plan (LDP).

The next stage in the plan making process is the production of a deposit draft LDP. In order to ensure the soundness of the emerging LDP and transparency in the plan making process, the Council has produced a series of topic papers.

The topic papers address the main area of policy to be considered in the LDP. **It should be stressed that these papers are a starting point for policy development, through the sustainability appraisal process and as the Council's evidence base develops, emerging LDP policy will evolve and be refined.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Topic Paper is to set out the suggested Draft Tourism Policies to form part of the Local Development Plan (LDP) 2006-2021. Through the Local Development Plan process a range of sites and policies will be identified for Tourism in order to contribute to a strong, sustainable and diverse economy for Rhondda Cynon Taf and to protect the outstanding natural environment that the Borough is located in.

In order to do this the topic paper will outline:

- **The Policy Context** for the projections, including an explanation of national, regional and local policy;
- **Issues arising**, in Rhondda Cynon Taf;
- **The Preferred Strategy** including relevant objections, representations and responses to these and
- **Draft Local Development Plan Policy.**

2. NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

People, Places, Futures- The Wales Spatial Plan (adopted 2004)

The Wales Spatial Plan, provides a framework for the future spatial development of Wales. Rhondda Cynon Taf along with the neighbouring authorities of Cardiff, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly and the Vale of Glamorgan has been identified as part of the South East – Capital Network Zone. The vision for the Capital Network is:

- “An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life – international yet distinctively Welsh. It will compete internationally by increasing its global viability through stronger links between the Valleys and the coast and the UK and Europe, helping spread prosperity within the area and benefiting other parts of Wales”.
- Whilst the Spatial Plan may not provide a detailed framework for the development of tourism in South

East Wales it does nevertheless provide a number of clear propositions. These include the following:

- Develop areas of Wales to function as broader based economic units with complementary activities in the different centres. Increase the pool of skilled people within the areas and build on local strengths of places rather than each competing to be the same.
- Build on our distinctive economic advantages and potential, from tourism to specialist high-tech industries.
- Promote the efficient management and use of resources for the benefit of business, local communities and the environment.
- Enhance the natural and built environment, which is an economic asset, both as a source of direct activity in tourism and leisure and as part of a wider quality of life.
- Manage the environment comprehensively with respect to its distinctive characteristics, so that it contributes to sustainable development, including maintaining soil carbon, reducing contamination, managing diffuse pollution sources to water, protecting landscapes and enhancing habitats.
- Adapt the land-based economy to focus on high value-added products, and links with tourism and recreation; this should support the enhancement of landscape and biodiversity.
- Develop sustainable demonstration projects to promote best practice in delivering economic as well as environmental and social benefits.

- The tourism and leisure sector has the potential to contribute to a much greater extent to the area's economy. This includes heritage, culture, events and countryside based activities and destinations.

Turning Heads- A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 (June 2006)

Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 as the name suggests, outlines a strategy for regenerating the northern Valley areas of South East Wales. In Rhondda Cynon Taf the strategy area includes Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale, Mountain Ash and Aberdare. The objectives of the programme reflect those of the Wales Spatial Plan in seeking to ensure:

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

With regards to tourism Strategic Goal: An Appealing and Coherent Tourism and Leisure Experience comments as follows:

“In 2020, the Heads of the Valleys will be characterised as an attractive place to live and stay, offering local people and visitors high quality facilities and attractions, including cultural

events such as live music and theatre. The tourism and leisure sector will be playing a more significant role in the economic prosperity of the area, with activities complementing the offer elsewhere, such as Cardiff, Newport, the Gower and Brecon. More people will be spending increasingly longer periods of time in the area, enjoying a memorable 'Heads of the Valleys experience.'

With regards to tourism, Strategy Programme 1: A Sub Regional Approach to Regeneration of settlement comments as follows:

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

Strategy Programme 9: Linked Local and Regional Attractions and Facilities comments as follows:

“Aiming initially to establish the area as a successful day visitor destination, we will then encourage its development into a short break location. We will make the most of the existing offer, including sites within the HERIAN (Heritage in Action) initiative and attractions such as Big Pit, and we will expand the range by adding more quality, family-oriented facilities. Some large regional-scale projects, such as a Valleys Regional Park, will be promoted. In parallel, we will encourage the development of an integrated support network of cultural, heritage, leisure, retail and tourist facilities, within

(or linked to) town centres, including places to eat and stay, and provision for business tourism.”

Strategy Programme 10: An Integrated ‘Offer’ comments as follows:

“Within the context of wider initiatives aimed at promoting the South Wales Valleys as a visitor destination, we will work with partners to ensure that there is an increased focus on tourism in the Heads of the Valleys. A unified and coherent, well-branded proposition, which clearly illustrates what the area has to offer, will be developed. We will organise events to help change perceptions and raise the profile and image of the area. We will use the marketing skills of stakeholders, as well as literature, public art and well placed and creatively designed signage, to tell the 'Heads of the Valleys story', recognising and valuing the cultural and historical character of the area, including the Welsh language. Through all forms of media, we will reinforce the advantages of the Heads of the Valleys as a base for exploring the Brecon Beacons National Park, South Wales and the wider region, and for events such as the Ryder Cup 2010.”

Planning Policy Wales (March 2002)

Welsh Assembly Government tourism policy is embodied in the Planning Policy Wales Guidance (PPW) 2002. Supplementary guidance in relation to tourism is contained in Technical Advice Note 13. The Planning Policy Wales Companion Guide (2006) relates the guidance to the LDP system, identifying clear statements of national policy that should only be repeated in where local circumstance require.

PPW Para 11.1.2 The Assembly Government's objectives for tourism are to:

- "To encourage sustainable tourism in Wales, maximising its economic and employment benefits, promoting tourism in all seasons, and encouraging its development in non-traditional destinations, while safeguarding the environment and the interests of local communities and
- To manage change in the tourism sector in ways which respect the integrity of the natural, built and cultural environment to provide for economic growth, employment and environmental conservation."
- In order to achieve this the Assembly Government will seek to ensure that:
- Tourism development is sustainable in ways, which contribute to economic development, conservation, rural diversification, urban regeneration and social inclusion.
- Appropriate tourist related commercial development in new destinations, including existing urban and industrial heritage areas, should be encouraged.
- Limiting tourism development, which will encourage damage to the environment and the amenities of residents and visitors.
- Well-designed and sympathetic tourist development especially when located in rural areas, in the scale and

nature to the local environment and the needs of the local community.

- Development of tourism should be located on previously developed land.

Technical Advice Note (Wales) 13 October 1997

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 13 provides advice on delivering sustainable tourism in Wales. It highlights the role that tourism has to play in and the benefits that could be achieved from it.

The main advice set out in the TAN 13 for Tourism in Wales related to:

- Hotels
- Holiday and Touring Caravans
- Seasonal and Holiday Occupancy Conditions

Draft Revised Technical Advice Note 13 – Tourism (2006)

Draft Revised Technical Advice Note (TAN) 13 provides an update and revision to TAN 13 1997. It was published for consultation in 2006 but has not been formally adopted as a replacement TAN up to this current date. It provides advice on delivering sustainable tourism in Wales. It highlights the role that tourism has to play in and the benefits that could be achieved from it.

The main objectives set out in the Draft Revised TAN 13 for Tourism in Wales are:

- Creating a sustainable tourism base which reduces the impact of seasonality and which will create a modern economy with a broader economic base.
- Protecting the environmental quality and other qualities of areas in Wales, which are key to tourism.
- Encouraging well located tourist facilities and
- Ensuring that the local identity of communities is safeguarded.

Tourism Opportunities Study – for the Heads of the Valleys area of Rhondda Cynon Taf. Final Report (March 2007) Hyder Consulting

Tourism Opportunities Study – for the Heads of the Valleys area of Rhondda Cynon Taf as the name suggests, outlines a tourism strategy for regenerating the northern Valley areas of South East Wales. The aim of the study was to identify and evaluate potential tourism opportunities. For the purposes of this study, the Heads of the Valleys area of Rhondda Cynon Taff has been considered as the core study area, which includes the upper reaches of the Rhondda Fach and Cynon Valleys including Aberdare, Mountain Ash, Ferndale and Maerdy, Treherbert and Treorchy. Since the tourism sector and tourists pay little attention to administrative boundaries, the study has, in addition to its core area, identified a peripheral area of influence. The periphery consists of the remainder of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough and also recognises the wider influence of the Heads of the Valleys programme area.

The study supports the objectives of the Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020.

The strategic review has identified the following key finding which should guide the development of tourism opportunities for the area:

- There is a need to firstly establish a successful day visitor destination for the area, and then as a short break location.
- It is necessary to make the most of the existing offer; new attractions that are likely to attract less than 50,000 visitors are not normally encouraged as they tend to dilute visitor numbers at existing attractions, reducing profitability and thus, their ability to maintain/improve quality.
- Expand the range of attractions only by adding more quality, family oriented facilities to existing attractions and some large regional-scale projects, such as a Valleys Regional Park.
- Create a unified and coherent, well-branded proposition, which clearly illustrates what the Heads of the Valleys has to offer e.g. the scenery, natural environment, heritage and culture; its proximity to the Brecon Beacons; affordability and special interest and activity holidays
- Encourage town centres to develop as integrated cultural, heritage, leisure, retail and tourist facilities, including places to eat and stay, and with provision for business tourism.

- Focus on growing markets and opportunities to strengthen the areas activity product, rural, sustainable and green tourism, heritage breaks and golf tourism.
- Capitalise on the Heads of the Valleys as a base for exploring the Brecon Beacons National Park.
- Change perceptions and raise the profile and image of the area through events marketing as well as literature, public art which recognises the cultural and historical character of the area, including the Welsh language.

Achieving Our Potential- A Tourism Strategy For Wales (2000)

This document produced by the Wales Tourist Board outlines how and why Wales should capitalise on the assets that it has in order to increase the tourism offer and develop a sustainable economy. It sets out a vision for the future of tourism in Wales as:

- “A mature, confident and prosperous industry which is making a vital and increasing contribution to the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of Wales by achieving sustainable growth through effective co-ordination and collaboration at all levels in the industry.”
- This vision is supported by strategic objectives, which are:
- “To market Wales more effectively as an attractive all year round tourism destination;

- To exceed the expectations of visitors to Wales by providing high standards and ensuring that investment in tourism is responsive to their changing needs;
- To improve professionalism and innovation by raising the profile of the industry and by enhancing skills, training and motivation within the industry.
- To embrace a sustainable approach to tourism development which benefits society, involves local communities and enhances Wales’ unique environmental and cultural assets.”

Achieving Our Potential 2006-2013. Tourism Strategy for Wales Mid Term Review

Achieving our potential is a review of the previous Tourism Strategy for Wales published in 2000. It sets out to answer some of the key strategic questions arising from the initial study and to understand where progress has been made in since the publication. The original vision set out in the 2000 study has since been modified in this document to reflect key changes and targets that have occurred in the interim period. The new vision sets out:

- “A customer responsive, innovative, sustainable and profitable industry which makes an increasing contribution to the economic, social, cultural and environmental well being of Wales,”
- This document also modifies the strategic aims of the 2000 strategy to include:

- “Realising the importance of understanding and responding to customers needs.
- Accepting that there is a value to be gained from doing things differently to our competitors through innovative ways of working.
- Acknowledging the need to secure a sustainable, long-term future through responsible destination and business management.
- Seeking to maximise business profitability to drive growth in the tourism economy.”

3. LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

A Better Life- Our Community Plan 2001-2014

A Better Life - Our Community Plan sets out a framework for creating a brighter future for everyone who lives and works in Rhondda Cynon Taff. The plan was developed through the Better Life Consortium, during 2003/2004. The Community Plan identifies 5 key themes under which are a series of local level aims. The key themes are:

- Safer Communities
- Our Living Space
- Our Health and Well Being
- Boosting Our Local Economy
- Learning for Growth

The key themes identified in the Community Plan has been developed into strategies for improving the quality of life in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Tourism is considered as part of the

Boosting Our Local Economy Strategy. This section of the community plan A better life by boosting our local economy-economic regeneration strategy 2004-2014 sets the following action areas:

- Action Area 1: Creating more varied and stronger businesses;
- Action Area 2: Tackling economic inactivity;
- Action Area 3: Stimulating Community Enterprise;
- Action Area 4: Promoting Smarter working;
- Action Area 5: Improving where we live;
- Action Area 6: Spending public money locally;
- Action Area 7: Promoting a positive image.

Of particular relevance to this topic area are four priorities set out under Action Area 7: promoting a positive image theme. The priorities seek to promote:

- Marketing Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Attracting inward investment
- Promoting heritage through new and existing tourist attractions
- Creating a visible ‘sense of arrival’.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Tourism Strategy ‘Reaching Destination Rhondda Cynon Taf 2007-2013’

Reaching Destination Rhondda Cynon Taf is the Council's Tourism Strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to set out the aims and objectives for tourism within the Rhondda Cynon Taf for the period 2007-2013. The strategy identifies challenges, priorities and actions for the promotion of tourism.

The strategy identifies aims on which it hopes to build a successful tourism trade within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The aims are as follows:

- "To become a destination brand and raise the profile of Rhondda Cynon Taf on the UK tourism map.
- To develop and raise the quality of the Rhondda Cynon Taf tourism offer
- To develop effective partnership working within the tourism industry."

The document also sets some challenges, which it believes will help to meet the aims of the strategy:

- Pre-visit image and information
- Making Bookings
- Journey to destination Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Initial Welcome
- Information provision in destination
- Places to stay
- Attractions and activities
- Places to eat
- Infrastructure and environment

- Farewell and return journey and after visit memory and contact

Hyder Tourism Study (2005)

The study was commissioned by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council to investigate the current and future potential for tourism in the borough. Whilst the study has also subsequently been used to inform the Rhondda Cynon Taf Tourism Strategy 'Reaching destination Rhondda Cynon Taf 2007-2013', many of the findings /recommendations are still relevant

The main findings emerging from this report are as follows:

- The marketing of tourism in the area needs to be improved and needs to distinguish between local tourist facilities and those that are regional.
- Increasing the amount and quality of signage and promotion material for tourism which includes the creation of a website.
- Events in the borough have the ability to attract non-resident visitors and this ability needs to be examined further as at present this is not being exploited.
- Competition from areas such as Cardiff is detrimental to tourism in the area.
- The future tourism profile is more for local need rather than a major regional tourism attraction. This is more viable and a regional tourism offer is not appropriate or profitable for the area.

- The study identifies that there are only three tourist offers in the borough, which have a realistic tourism potential. These are:
 1. Rhondda Heritage Park
 2. Dare Valley Country Park
 3. Ynysangharad Park

Maerdy Site Development Study (Final Report November 2004)

The Maerdy Site Development Study was commissioned as a joint venture between Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, the Welsh Assembly Government and Maerdy Communities first.

The aim of the study was to identify the possibilities of bringing the former Maerdy Colliery Site back into beneficial use. The vision as set out in the strategy is that the Maerdy Colliery site:

- Is enhanced in terms of its landscape and ecological quality and character;
- Offers opportunities to its community for recreation, enterprise and learning;
- Is re-united with its town and its community through its restoration and development;
- Is vibrant as a result of a high level of community and visitor usage;
- Is well used throughout the year by all ages by way of its broad range of activities, its all weather attractiveness and its programme of well

- Organised daytime and evening events;
- Is linked into other sites and recreational routes and therefore maximises the opportunities of attracting people from across Rhondda
- Cynon Taff and beyond;
- Strongly interprets its own history, the cultural heritage of the locality and its landscape and wildlife qualities to locals and visitors alike.

23 project ideas were developed through the study and were packaged into a plan of action, using outdoor recreation, education and interpretation as a driver to community regeneration.

The project ideas, which are grouped under a number of themes, provide for:

- “The creation of ‘gateways’ to the site to create a positive identity for the site, to draw people to it and help ‘bridge’ the space between it and the town. It is envisaged that artwork, sculpture and interpretation will be used in various parts of the site and that this new infrastructure will ideally be developed with the assistance of the community;
- Recreational opportunities through the building of new trail networks (walking, cycling, pony trekking, play and ‘trim’ trails) to create new routes and to link with existing, together with informative heritage and sculpture trails. The aim will be to provide for all levels and ages and help bring people into and enable them to move around the site and the wider locality. This will

better help integrate the site into the wider visitor market and assist in keeping a high level of visitor activity at the site;

- An enhanced landscape setting through new tree planting, land re-profiling and habitat creation, including the enhancement of the settings of the river, together with the creation of new water features and boardwalks as is practical – to provide an inviting landscape for people to enjoy actively or indeed more passively through historical and environmental learning through an ‘outdoor classroom’ concept.

4. KEY ISSUES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The key issues to be addressed in Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP have been identified by making an assessment of the following:

- The results of the pre deposit consultation with key stakeholders
- The results of the sustainability appraisal / strategic environmental assessment scoping exercise and
- A review of baseline social, economic and environmental and environmental information

The issues identified through this process will inform directly the development of the spatial strategy for the LDP.
Pre Deposit Consultation

Tourism issues identified are as follows:

- Need for access to good quality employment and range of employment opportunities
- Attracting employment to the north of the borough
- Low skills base need the appropriate education
- Improve tourism and leisure industry job opportunities
- External perception of the borough needs to be improved
- Need for environmental improvement/protection to support/ promote tourism
- Creating sustainable communities
- Identity and attractiveness of RCT to residents and investors.
- Protection of the environment

Sustainability Appraisal/ Strategic Environmental Assessment

The sustainability appraisal / strategic environmental assessment identified the following tourism issues:

- The previous industrial use of the area has led to degradation of the water environment
- 4.2% of the Brecon Beacons National park lies within the plan area to the north.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf has a rich cultural heritage but few sites are statutorily protected
- Rhondda Cynon Taf has the highest percentage of Welsh speakers in Mid Glamorgan

Baseline information

Tourism issues are identified as follows:

- The highest levels of 'physical environment' deprivation in Rhondda Cynon Taf are located in the central and northern valleys (Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2005);
- Rhondda Cynon Taf has 4 sites of special areas of nature conservation and 11 designated sites of special scientific interest.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf has 17 conservation areas and 360 listed buildings.
- Between 2000 and 2003, Gross Value Added per capita in Rhondda Cynon Taf grew from £9312 to £10,505, averaging some 4.1% a year. This compared with average annual growth of 5.2% in Wales and 5% in Great Britain (Review of Economic Analysis of Rhondda Cynon Taf 2006);
- The highest levels of 'employment' deprivation in Rhondda Cynon Taf are located in the central and northern valleys (Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2005);
- Only 73% of the resident population of Rhondda Cynon Taf are economically active (Review of Economic Analysis of Rhondda Cynon Taf 2006);

Preferred Strategy 2006-2021

The preferred strategy provides the following policy framework for the development of tourism in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Objectives of the Local Development Plan

Paragraph 4.2 of the Preferred Strategy (January 2007) list 16 objectives for the LDP. The following objectives are the most relevant to the topic area;

- Promote and protect the culture and heritage including landscape, archaeology and language.
- Provide for a sustainable economy
- Provide for a diverse range of job opportunities.
- Improve, protect and enhance the landscape and countryside.
- Protect and enhance the diversity and abundance of wildlife habitats and natural species.
- Improve, protect and enhance the water environment.

Development Strategy

Paragraphs 6.1 – 6.11 of the Preferred Strategy sets out a development strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf. The strategy area is divided into two distinct parts: -

- **Northern Strategy Area, and**
- **Southern Strategy Area**

The Northern Strategy area comprises the key settlements of Tonypany, Porth, Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale,

Tylorstown, Mountain Ash and Hirwaun and the principal town of Aberdare. In this area the emphasis is on building sustainable communities and halting the process of depopulation and decline.

The Southern Strategy area includes the principal towns of Pontypridd and Llantrisant and key settlements of Tonyrefail and Llanharan. In the south of the County Borough the emphasis is on sustainable growth that benefits Rhondda Cynon Taf as a whole.

The strategy recognises the important role that principal towns and key settlements play in providing services of both local and county importance. Where possible, development will be focused on the principal towns and key settlements of the County Borough in order to support and reinforce the important role of these centres play as places for social and economic activity.

Tourism

Paragraphs 6.17 to 6.21 of the preferred strategy provide a strategy for the development of Employment and Economic development. Tourism forms part of ensuring a sustainable economy and providing for increased and diverse job opportunities. The paragraphs are as follows:

“Employment and Economic Development

6.17 The employment and economic growth needs of Rhondda Cynon Taf are recognised in the Strategy, which seeks the development of a business environment, which

delivers a strong and diverse economy; quality, well paid jobs, and addresses problems of economic inactivity. The key sectors for employment growth in Rhondda Cynon Taf are: -

- Built Environment
- Social Enterprise
- High Tech Manufacturing
- Knowledge Based Industries

6.18 There have been recent changes in the economy of Rhondda Cynon Taf that are likely to have an impact upon employment land sites. These include decreasing employment in manufacturing sectors; increasing levels of employment in construction; distribution, hotels & restaurants; transport & communications; banking, finance & insurance; etc; and public administration, education & health. Forecasts predict a continued fall in manufacturing employment and continued increase in employment in the service sector. A key issue is to ensure that the changing needs of businesses in Rhondda Cynon Taf are reflected in the supply of employment sites throughout the County Borough.

6.19 Recent studies have established that the overall supply of employment land at 195 hectares is healthy although there has been a rapid take up of B1 land (27 hectares April 2005 to Oct 2006). The current supply does not however, meet future needs, in terms of:

- Type of employment sites and units available – specifically smaller flexible space
- Meeting the demand from micro-businesses

- The quality of office space, including town centre provision

Concerns also exist regarding the redundant nature of industrial space – the ‘large box syndrome’ of provision built during the 1980s; the perceived poor environment of some employment sites including difficult accessibility in many areas and a mismatch of supply around the M4 area

6.20 The employment market is a dynamic and changing sector. Whilst the LDP will maintain an appropriate landbank for general and business park development over the plan period it will also encourage innovation and diversity in the employment sector. The Northern Strategy will give favorable consideration to the development of small-scale employment opportunities in areas such as town centres and residential areas provided that development does not have an adverse impact upon the integrity of these areas. In the Southern Strategy Area and the A470 / A459 / A465 Corridor the emphasis will be on providing land for companies with potential national and global markets.

6.21 The town centres of Rhondda Cynon Taf make an important contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of the area. They account for significant employment opportunities for local residents, provide accessible local services and are a focus of community activity. The Council believes that thriving and vibrant town centres are essential if Rhondda Cynon Taf is to achieve its ambition of building a strong and sustainable local economy. The strategy will seek to support and strengthen the vitality and viability of town centres and recognises the importance of maintaining the

attraction of town centres to retailers and consumers in key settlements. This also requires positive management to provide an attractive, safe and accessible environment.”

Paragraphs 6.22 to 6.23 of the preferred strategy provide a strategy for environmental protection. Tourism aims to use this resource to attract visitors but also to protect the environment for future generations. The paragraphs are as follows:

“Environmental Protection

6.22 The natural environment of Rhondda Cynon Taf has seen considerable changes over the past 30 years. As the pressures put upon it by heavy industry have subsided, the visual and wildlife qualities that are unique to the area have been able to thrive and in some cases, return. However, the landscapes and biodiversity that exist within the northern strategy area and the undulating countryside of the valleys mouths and Vale fringe in the southern strategy area are still under continuous pressure from the large human population that lives there.

6.23 The Strategy will play a vital role in securing an appropriate balance between protection of the natural environment and historic heritage. In order to maintain and improve the local environment, the Strategy is based on providing a high level of protection for important features as well as providing a basis for positive policies on issues such as design, conservation and amenity provision.”

Representations on the Preferred Strategy

Representations made in respect of the Tourism element of the Preferred Strategy relate specifically to the absence of a specific policy context.

Outlined below is a summary of the main representation submitted in respect of tourism.

General Representations in relation to tourism

Issue: Tourism - It is not clear whether any consideration has been given to any tourism implications of the proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Response: Noted. Detailed consideration will be given to this issue in the draft Local Development Plan.

Issue: The LDP needs to give appropriate consideration to Tourism.

Response: Noted. Detailed consideration will be given to this issue in the draft Local Development Plan.

6. DRAFT LDP POLICY

Additional Strategic Policy for Tourism

SP 16: Tourism

The development of tourism in the County Borough will be supported where it protects and enhances existing attractions and facilities and where it promotes new, sustainable provision, which meets the needs of the County Borough.

Justification

Provision of tourism facilities is a means of strengthening and adding variety to the economy enabling it to become sustainable and allowing the creation of employment opportunities. Tourism is a means of supporting inward investment by creating a positive image. The facilities also support business once in the area, and enhance conditions both for the local community and for visitors. Tourism is now acknowledged as a growing employment sector in Wales.

Rhondda Cynon Taf occupies a strategic location in relation to the many visitor routes in Wales. It is an ideal base for tourists to visit local attractions and to go to other areas such as the Brecon Beacons National Park. This strategic position is also important in terms of conference facilities, which together with hotel accommodation should be encouraged in order to maximise benefits to the local economy.

Important visitor attractions in Rhondda Cynon Taf include the Rhondda Heritage Park, Dare Valley Country Park and Ynysangharad Park. The proposed Dragon Film Studios at Llanharan are an example of a major new development that will contribute to Rhondda Cynon Taf's tourism infrastructure. There is potential for enhancing and developing attractions, including use of the industrial and commercial heritage.

Tourism is a sector of the economy, which is being promoted on a regional, national and local level. The benefits of tourism are recognised in as being creation of a sustainable economy, creation of a range of job opportunities, training and the position that tourism has to play in the protection of the natural and social environment in which it is hosted.

Tourism is not only an economic generator in itself, but can also create added value to an economy with the development of linked facilities and opportunities.

Reaching Destination Rhondda Cynon Taf- Tourism Strategy (2007-2013) sees tourism as important for the area. According to the strategy 2,532,000 people visited Rhondda Cynon Taf in 2005. It identifies the area as not meeting its potential with regards to tourism and sees it as an untapped resource. It also identifies how tourism activity has been steadily growing over recent years but how until recently it has not been managed as a priority. Including a policy on tourism in the LDP will help to provide this management tool along with many other partners in the Authority.

Area Wide Policies

Tourism is a sector of the economy in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which is identified in Reaching Destination Rhondda Cynon Taf (2007-2013) Tourism Strategy as an untapped resource. Within the Borough at present tourism provides for 1494 full time equivalent jobs, this is seen as having the potential to be increase. The strategy recognises the benefits tourism can achieve for the County Borough including increased economic prosperity. The strategy also recognises that this provision needs to be managed effectively to ensure the development of a sustainable sector, which maximises benefits and minimises environmental and cultural damage.

PPW Para 11.1.2 objectives for tourism is to provide:

- Sustainable tourism, which benefits the local economy and wider region.
- Tourism, which protects the environment to which it is hosted.
- Tourism, which protects and enhances the community, which hosts it.

The policy framework contained in the LDP will ensure the provision of new sustainable tourism that meets the needs of existing and future residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

T1 New Tourism Facilities in Urban areas

New tourism facilities including hotels and visitor accommodation within Principle Towns, Key Settlements and smaller settlements will be permitted where the proposal:

- i) Enhances the range or quality of tourism accommodation available in the locality**
- ii) Enhances the visitor's enjoyment and understanding of the areas distinctive scenic, cultural and historic character;**
- iii) Enhances the quality of life for local communities through providing local employment opportunities.**
- iv) Accessible to local services by a range of modes of transport, on foot or by cycle.**
- v) The scale, form and design of the proposed development and does not adversely effect the character of the site and the surrounding area.**
- vi) Is compatible with the character, appearance and function of the area and will not result in the generation of unacceptable additional noise or disturbance.**
- vii) Respects and enhances the historic heritage, culture, and distinctiveness of the communities.**

- viii) **The proposed development has a safe access to the highway network, and will not cause congestion or exacerbate traffic congestion.**
- ix) **Provision for car parking can be provided in accordance with the Council's approved standards.**

Justification

The Council recognises the importance of encouraging tourism within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The key to successful encouragement of tourism within an area is to ensure a range of good quality accommodation which is conveniently located and the provision of appropriate tourist facilities in Rhondda Cynon Taf it is essential that this provision is made in a way which is sustainable, respects the culture and identity of the area and protects the natural environment ensuring its sustainability. The Local Development Plan will encourage sustainable tourism and tourist developments that encourage economic improvements, ensure that the environment is protected and that the local communities are protected and benefit from the development.

The culture and heritage of Rhondda Cynon Taf is closely related to the history of the area. This is emphasised in the settlements of the County Borough, which have grown up from the mining era and are individual settlements with their own culture, history and identity. It is crucial that any tourism development respects and acknowledges the importance of heritage and doesn't detract from this aspect of the area.

The Council recognises the importance of hotel and visitor accommodation to the tourist industry and will consider proposals for new visitor accommodation in Principle Towns, Key Settlements and Smaller Settlements. The Tourism Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf –Reaching Destination Rhondda Cynon Taf recognises the need and benefit for increased provision of quality accommodation within the County Borough. A particular emphasis will be on the provision of self-catering accommodation. The Tourism Strategy notes the self-catering sector has grown over recent years and that this is an area, which needs to be encouraged.

The locations of these facilities within the Principle Towns, Key Settlements and Smaller Settlements of the County Borough will promote accessibility, enhance the vitality and viability of these settlements and ensure the continued economic success of these settlements.

T2 New Tourism Accommodation in the Countryside

New tourist accommodation within the countryside including camping and caravans will be permitted where development:

- i) **Enhances the visitor's enjoyment and understanding of the areas distinctive scenic, cultural and historic character;**

- ii) **Enhances the quality of life for local communities by presenting an opportunity for local employment.**
- iii) **Respects, protects and enhances the quality of landscapes, and avoids the physical and visual degradation of the environment the natural environment and the biodiversity of the area in which it is located**
- iv) **The proposed development has a safe access to the highway network, and will not cause congestion or exacerbate traffic congestion.**
- v) **Provision for car parking can be provided in accordance with the Council's approved standards.**

Justification

Sustainable tourism is encouraged in the Countryside areas of Rhondda Cynon Taf. One of the main priorities for tourism development in these areas is to protect the natural environment in which the facilities are located. The countryside areas of the borough are characterised by the open nature and green appearance. The council recognises the need to protect this asset whilst still allowing for some rural diversification such as tourism.

Reaching destination Rhondda Cynon Taf the Council's Tourism Strategy (2007-2013) supports the provision of camping and caravan sites as one of its places to stay

challenges. There is provision of only one caravan and camping site within Rhondda Cynon Taf at Dare Valley Country Park in the Cynon Valley and this is often over capacity highlighting the need for some increased provision. The Heads of the Valleys Tourism Study (???) further supports the need for extra provision. This type of accommodation is particularly in demand by those undertaking short stays.

Policy T2 recognises the benefits of camping and caravans sites but seeks to control the nature of provision to ensure that the area which it is located is protected from any unacceptable harm.

TAN 13 supports the benefits of camping and caravan sites, which can support the existing facilities and communities in the area.

Caravans and camping will particularly be supported in Dare Valley Country Park.

The Council recognises the importance of hotel and visitor accommodation to the tourist industry and will consider proposals for the provision of hotels, guesthouses. Visitor accommodation on farms will be considered in accordance with Policy (TBA) Rural Diversification.

T3 Development of New Visitor Attractions

Land is allocated at the following locations for new visitor attractions:

- a. Maerdy
- b. Aberdare
- c. Dragon Films Studios

Development proposals for new visitor attractions will be permitted where:

- i) **Enhances range of visitor attractions**
- ii) **Enhance the visitors' enjoyment and understanding of the areas distinctive scenic, cultural and historic character.**
- iii) **Enhances the quality of life for local communities by presenting an opportunity for local employment**
- iv) **Compliments the scale, form and design of the proposed developments and does not adversely affect the character of the site or surrounding area.**
- v) **Accessible to local services by a range of modes of transport on foot or by cycle.**
- vi) **The proposed development has a safe access to the highway network and will not cause congestions or exacerbate traffic congestion.**
- vii) **Provision for car parking can be provided in accordance with the Council's approved standard.**

Northern Strategy Area Policy

Introduction

The Northern Strategy area is characterised by steep valleys with linear settlements made up of high-density development including residential and services. The Northern area has spectacular scenery and is limited by its steep valley sides. The geography of the area make it the ideal location for outdoor tourism uses including walking and cycling.

Tourism development within the Northern areas tends to be focused around the Cynon Valley area particularly within Aberdare. This is due to the facilities in the area and the excellent strategic location, which this area has in relation to the Brecon Beacons National Park and the Cynon Valley River Park. The Local Development Plan will build on this success and promote the development of tourism facilities throughout the whole of the Northern Strategy Area.

TN1 Existing Tourism Facilities

Development proposals will only be permitted in the following locations:

- i) **Dare Valley Country Park**
- ii) **Rhondda Heritage Park**

Where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will either protect or enhance existing tourist provision.

Justification

In order to increase visitor numbers to the Rhondda Cynon Taf region it is seen as crucial to consolidate the tourist attractions that are seen to have a sustainable future. By focusing investment on a fewer number of attractions improvements will have greater strength to aid improvement.

The Hyder tourism opportunities study (2007) identified that Dare Valley Country Park and Rhondda Heritage Park were viable tourism attractions, which could be enhanced and expended within the Borough.

The Rhondda Cynon Taf Tourism Strategy – Reaching destination Rhondda Cynon Taf (2007-2013) identifies these attractions well placed to promote specific tourism uses and states that one of its objectives is to support these key attractions. Rhondda Heritage Park is seen as a hub for history, heritage and genealogy. The strategy also identifies that this attraction is one of the most successful in the borough yielding approximately 50,000 visitors per annum.

The park is important due to its location, size and potential as the southern tourist gateway to the borough.

Rhondda Heritage Park is the principal tourist attraction located within Rhondda Cynon Taf and 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 Rhondda Cynon Taf'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 fulfill its roll as a gateway the Park would benefit from 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.

Dare Valley Country Park is located in the Cynon Valley and is seen by the Tourism strategy as a hub for outdoor activities.

The Heads of The Valleys Tourism Opportunities Study (2005) sees Dare Valley Country Park as being able to provide 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.
- 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 them 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.

TN2 Proposed New Tourism Facilities

Land will be allocated at the following locations for the development of sustainable tourism uses.

- i) Maerdy Colliery**
- ii) Robertstown, Aberdare**

Justification

Proposed sites for tourism include the former Maerdy Colliery in the Rhondda Fach valley. This site due to its physical and landscape setting is seen as particularly well placed to host tourism activities. These include such events as grass boarding which has mass appeal from a wide area as only certain physical aspects of an area make it possible. A recent study commissioned on the site made reference to the possibility of eco- tourism and green tourism, which would allow for out door activities to take place but the site could also allow for education and information to be shared on such things as sustainability and renewable energy. Such a site with this unique selling point would act as a major tourist pull and would allow the settlement of Maerdy to benefit from increased spending and visitors to boost its economy.

Adventure tourism includes climbing, caving and pot holing, non-motorised water sports, diving, motorised land sports, air

sports, mountain biking, hill walking / trekking and other land based activities. Adventure tourism currently accounts for at least 1.25 million visits to Wales per year, and in the order of £180 million direct visitor spending. Anecdotal evidence suggests growth in this sector, particularly given facility development, improved access and better marketing and promotion. Rhondda Cynon Taf has 3 activity centres offering climbing, quad biking, shooting and other adventure activities.

The Rhondda Fach valley has been identified as an area with poor existing 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 maximizes 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.

Aberdare town centre is one area of the Borough where tourist facilities, including visitor accommodation will be encouraged. This is because of the strategic position that Aberdare is situated. Locating development in Aberdare accords with the strategy, as it is a principle town, it is also lies at the cusp of the Brecon Beacons National Park allowing it to benefit from visitors at this location. Aberdare is also subject to a townscape heritage initiative, which is a regeneration scheme for the area. Encouraging tourism uses within this settlement will also support this regeneration initiative. Aberdare falls into the Heads of the Valleys study area and has been identified by the HOV Tourism opportunities study as being strategically well placed and recommends that Aberdare should be a tourist area it states that the town provides an important gateway for tourism in the Heads of the Valleys area and to the rest of the Borough. It recognises its heritage and environment and its accessibility. It has a range of facilities and suggests that the tourist facilities and accommodation are encouraged and improved in the area.

Proposals for new facilities will be considered in accordance with Policy T2

Southern Strategy Area Policy

Introduction

The Southern Strategy area is an area of extensively low lying, undulating land, which has allowed for the creation of nucleated settlement patterns and is characterised by open green field areas.

There is significant pressure to develop this area of the Borough as it possess much open undeveloped space. However the strategy aims to consolidated and protect the area whilst allowing it to maintain its prosperity. The location of the south, which has excellent communication links with Cardiff, and the wider SE region. This position makes it an excellent location for some tourist activities. There is a need however to strike a balance between these two needs.

In order to address these issues LDP policy will seek to ensure sustainable tourism growth within settlement of the south, which provide sustainable jobs and allow benefits for the communities in these areas and protect the countryside form urbanisation and incremental loss.

TS1 Existing Tourist facilities

Development proposals will only be permitted in the following locations:

- i) Ynysangharad Park**

Where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will either protect or enhance existing tourist provision.

Justification

In order to increase visitor numbers to the Rhondda Cynon Taf region it is seen as crucial to consolidate the tourist attractions that are seen to have a sustainable future. By focusing investment on a fewer number of attractions improvements will have greater strength to aid improvement.

The Hyder tourism opportunities study for the Heads of the Valleys area (2007) identified that Ynysangharad Park is a viable tourism attraction, which could be enhanced and expanded as a tourism site. It is identified as the hub for events and is promoted as such in the Rhondda Cynon Taf tourism strategy- reaching destination Rhondda Cynon Taf (2007-2013).

The park located in Pontypridd is already a successful hub for events. Such event includes 'the Full Ponty' which attracts people from the whole of Wales. Increasing the number and standard of events held in the park will attract visitors not just to these events but also to the wider borough through linked trips and marketing. There are also proposals to physically improve the park, which include bringing the lido back into public use. Events and festivals are an emergent giant in the competitive leisure & tourism arena. Increasingly public and voluntary organisations are teaming up with commercial operators, to deliver events for dual social & economic rewards. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, there is a proven track record for staging successful events, with over 100 different

events held annually, attracting in excess of 130,000 visitors, a range of target markets are accommodated, with food and agricultural shows, music concerts, fetes, carnivals, community and educational events, as well as Christmas parades, sporting activities and civic functions.

The strategic development of events and festivals as social and economic generators, will greatly enhance the tourism product within Rhondda Cynon Taf, further establish the area's reputation for excellence in this field, and maximise the opportunities for sponsorship and commercial partnerships.

TS2 Proposed New Tourist facilities

Land will be allocated at the following location for the development of sustainable tourism uses:

i) **Dragon Film Studios Llanilid**

Justification

Planning permission for a 452,000 sq ft Themed leisure attraction was granted as part of the Dragon Film Studios development in 2001. The proposal envisaged leisure development incorporating, themed retail outlets, themed restaurants/ fast food counters, a multiplex cinema and parking facilities.

7. FURTHER ADVICE

If you require any further advice or assistance in respect this or other LDP documents or wish to be placed on the Council's

consultation database please contact a member of the Local Development Plan Team at:

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