

Meeting of:	SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3
Date of Meeting:	16 JULY 2024
Report Title:	VALLEYS REGENERATION STRATEGY
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES
Responsible Officer:	DELYTH WEBB GROUP MANAGER STRATEGIC REGENERATION
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	The report sets out the current position with the drafting of a Regeneration Strategy for the Valleys. The outcome of the consultation process to inform the strategy is summarised and the full report included at Appendix 1. The report also provides an update on current investment and project development in the Valleys as requested by the Committee.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on a Regeneration Strategy for our Valleys, and how progress is being made against the economic regeneration initiatives and projects set out under the Corporate Plan objective - A County Borough with thriving valleys communities.
- 1.2 The report also provides the Committee with an update on the outcome of the public consultation process concluded during February 2024 to support the development of a Regeneration Strategy for the Valleys ('the Strategy').

2. Background

- 2.1 The 2023-2028 Corporate Plan introduced a new objective to demonstrate a commitment to support the County Borough's Valleys Communities. Key commitments within this objective relate to providing vehicles to support Regeneration activity and investment in our Valleys and to develop a Regeneration Strategy for the Valleys.
- 2.2 The Corporate Plan also sets out a variety of commitments which will contribute to the regeneration of the environment and economy of the communities of the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmore Valleys.

2.3 A Regeneration Strategy will provide an overarching framework identifying key challenges and ensuring considered and deliverable priorities are set. It will enable projects and investment to be delivered that will make a difference to the Valley communities.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 The Council has commissioned consultants, Mott Macdonald, to produce a Valleys Regeneration Strategy for the upper valleys of Ogmore, Garw and Llynfi. They have been working with officers to ensure that the views of our communities have been sought which will help to shape the strategy, and that the issues and challenges they have identified are accounted for when shaping priorities. The Strategy is due to be completed by March 2025.

3.2 Public consultation took place between 4th January 2024 and 4th February 2024. Local ward Members and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration were also invited to participate in a discussion with Mott Macdonald to support the work. The consultation survey aimed to gain views from as many different people and businesses as possible about what their ideas, options and priorities are.

3.3 Nine public engagement events were held throughout the consultation period, to encourage residents and members to share their views on the consultation. Posters were produced including details of the event which were shared via the Council's social media and distributed at key venues throughout the consultation areas and with relevant stakeholders.

3.4 Public consultation sessions were held at the following venues:

- Betws Life Centre
- Evanstown/Gilfach Goch Bowls Club
- Llangynwyd Village Hall
- Employability Bridgend Hub, Maesteg
- Noddfa Chapel, Caerau
- Blaengarw Workmen's Hall
- Garw Valley Life Centre
- The MEM Boys and Girls Club, Nantymoel
- Ogmore Valley Life Centre

3.5 These sessions were led by the Consultants on behalf of the Council. A total of 65 people attended the engagement sessions, providing the consultants with verbal information and opinions.

3.6 Details of the consultation were also shared with the following stakeholders:

- All schools within the Strategy focus areas.
- All Town and Community Councils within the Strategy focus areas.
- The Bridgend Employability Network, which is made up of key workers from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centre Plus, BAVO, Careers Wales, Llamau, Age Concern, Citizen's Advice, Employability Bridgend, Multiply, Valleys 2 Coast, Hafod and many more.
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Service Board.

- Bridgend County Borough Council departments including Economy, Natural Resources & Sustainability, Planning, Highways, Heads of Service, Conservation, Equalities, Schools, Wellbeing.
- Local service providers including South Wales Police, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Transport for Wales, Awen Cultural Trust, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Local Health Board.

3.7 In total there were 498 submissions to the public consultation. 479 responses were submitted through the online survey, and 19 responses were submitted as paper copies.

3.8 The headline responses from the on-line consultation were as follows, with the full consultation report appended to this report as **Appendix 1**.

- 55.1% of respondents (269) travel out of the valleys daily to access work, facilities, and services.
- 36.1% of respondents (176) visit the village centre/local facilities weekly.
- The majority of respondents (438) live in the area(s).
- 120 respondents visit the village centre/local facilities between 5pm-7pm.
- 113 respondents state they visit the village centre/local facilities between 11am-1pm.
- The most popular mode of transport around the local area(s) is by car (423).
- 68.6% of respondents (313) think there are underused buildings within the area.
- 51.6% of respondents (220) think there are areas of underused land within the area.
- 87.6% of respondents (364) were not responding to the consultation as a representative of a business, service, or group.

3.9 A range of key priorities for the strategy to respond to were identified through the consultation process, and in discussion with local members, most notably:

- A very strong sense of local identity and community pride, and a feeling that the community should be at the heart of the valleys' identity and regeneration.
- A strong sense of pride in the valleys' landscapes and enthusiasm for making the countryside more accessible for the community and for visitors.
- A high level of community activity and volunteering, but more support is needed from the Council and other partners.
- Socio-economic issues are a key concern for the community. Regeneration must offer opportunities to benefit the deprived communities including better access to jobs and education.
- Public transport is seen as being of very poor quality and unreliable, including poor frequency and lack of evening services, particularly in the Garw and Ogmore Valleys.
- Vacant buildings and the general unattractiveness of the environment were highlighted as issues in the community survey.
- There is an aspiration for more events, culture and entertainment, including places to socialise in the evening and places to eat and drink.
- Long-term lack of investment in community facilities and open spaces is a concern for local people.

- 3.10 Alongside the consultants, officers have thoroughly reviewed the findings and will ensure that the primary outcomes will be incorporated and addressed in the draft Strategy.
- 3.11 It is set out clearly within the financial section of this report that there is no corporate or directorate budget ringfenced for the delivery of the priorities which will be set out in the Strategy. Therefore, the views of Scrutiny Committee Members are being sought on the direction and shape that the Strategy could take with this in mind.
- 3.12 Set out below is an update on those commitments already made within the Corporate Plan which will dovetail with the Strategy. This should help to guide the views of Members on the detail and level of commitment that the Council could provide to the public.
- 3.13 The Council has committed to the Valleys Properties Improvement grant (currently supported by the Shared Prosperity Fund), in the Corporate Plan. This grant will support commercial property improvements to regenerate and improve the district centres and local service centres of the Garw, Llynfi and Ogmore Valleys (Bettws North, Bettws South, Blackmill, Blaengarw, Caerau, Nantymoel and Pontrhydydyff).
- 3.14 The purpose of the Valleys Properties Improvement grant is:
1. To enhance commercial frontages and bring vacant commercial floor space back into beneficial use.
 2. To convert vacant upper-floor space into new residential accommodation above commercial units, including internal and external works to bring vacant space back into use for residential purposes.
- 3.15 The grant has a generous intervention rate of up to 80% of eligible costs, up to a maximum grant award of:
- £30,000 for occupied properties,
 - £49,999 for properties that have been vacant for more than 6 months.
- 3.16 To date one project has works underway. Five more applications are currently being processed with new applications having been received for a further three projects. There has been significant interest in the grant from community owned venues.
- 3.17 Despite this, up-take of the grants has been slow as many properties have been empty for a long time. Therefore, the cost of bringing them back into use is high, even with the grant funding.
- 3.18 The Valleys Properties Improvement Grant has supported a condition survey, architectural assessment and concept designs for Bethania Chapel, Cwm Ogwr, to understand potential future uses for the building and how the building could deliver aspirations emerging from consultation during the Regeneration Strategy. This has given the owners the opportunity to understand how they could progress bringing the chapel back into use and its potential opportunity for community use.
- 3.19 Business Development Grants which support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to diversify, decarbonise and grow have also been awarded to eight business in the Valleys, totaling £175k, supported by the Shared Prosperity Fund.

- 3.20 In relation to the development of funding bids for the Valleys to enhance the economy and stimulate new job opportunities, a package of projects has been developed and submitted to the Cardiff Capital Region, City Deal Northern Valleys' initiative. To benefit the Garw Valley a package of projects concentrated around Parc Calon Lan is proposed, and if successful this could include investment into a combination of the following projects:
- Pump track re-development.
 - Work hub building & energy systems installation.
 - Refurbishment of existing mountain bike trails.
 - New mountain bike trail.
 - Improved footpaths.
 - Wi-Fi installation.
 - Interpretation Signs Design & Boards.
 - General Park / Route Signage.
- 3.21 Similar enhancements have also been proposed at Bedford Park. However, this sits outside the area defined covered within this report.
- 3.22 Work is also progressing to increase the amount of land and premises available for businesses, which includes industrial starter units in the Valleys. An additional bid has been made to the Northern Valleys' initiative to create 20 new 500sq ft industrial units at Penllywngwent Industrial Estate in Ogmores Vale. This, if supported by the fund, could draw in a grant of over £5m.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 This report provides an update on positive progress made in relation to commitments supporting Corporate and Wellbeing objective Three, A County Borough with thriving valleys communities.
- 5.2 The report contributes to the following goals within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:
- Long-term - The Strategy will provide a framework to deliver meaningful short, medium and long term projects in the Valley Communities. Investment will be made with long term vision with a long term vision to support future needs of those, living in, working in, and visiting the Valleys.
 - Prevention - The Strategy will support measures to enable investment in the local economy, provision of support to local business infrastructure and district centres. It

is the Council's responsibility to safeguard and enhance buildings and public realm to ensure they are inspiring.

- Integration - The Strategy will set out key objectives which bring together economic, educational, social, environmental & cultural projects to create an integrated community within the Valleys.
- Collaboration - The Strategy will be developed in collaboration with strategic partners operating key to delivery in the Valleys. Local consultation has taken place and the public response will be utilised to help shape the priorities and local projects.
- Involvement - The Council will require the leadership and engagement of all partners and stakeholders to deliver the various priorities within the Strategy.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no adverse Climate Change Implications from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no safeguarding and Corporate Parenting implications from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The Valleys Regeneration Strategy has been funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund.

8.2 It has been reported at Cabinet and Corporate Management Board Meetings that there is currently no ringfenced finance in place to deliver or implement the work emulating from the Valleys Regeneration Strategy.

8.3 The on-going work and development of projects identified within this report are largely funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund programme currently being delivered across the County Borough. Against a backdrop of a very difficult financial position, projects in development are in preparation to be submitted to grant funding programmes as and when the appropriate funding stream and opportunities arise.

8.4 There are no direct financial implications for the Council as a result of the recommendations set out in this report. All financial considerations on investment in projects resulting from the Strategy would have to be made on a project by project basis. Any projects requiring BCBC capital match would have to identify the funding source and be approved by Council before being included in the Capital Programme.

9. Recommendations

9.1 The Committee is recommended to accept the above as an update on a Regeneration Strategy and supporting initiatives within the Bridgend Valleys.

9.2 The Committee is recommended to take the opportunity to engage in and support the on-going development of the Regeneration Strategy for Bridgend Valleys. It is recommended that the Committee considers and comments on the consultation responses with any recommendations being reported and incorporated within the Strategy prior to Cabinet endorsement.

Background documents

Corporate Plan 2023 - 2028