Western Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area

Landscape Improvement Strategy

December 2010

Cyngor Sir Gâr
Carmarthenshire
County Council

Powys

City and County of Swansea
Dinas a Sir Abertawe

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr
BRIDGEND
County Borough Council

Neath Port Talbot County Borough
Bwrdeistref Sirol Castell-nedd Port Talbot

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

The Valleys
Heart and Soul of Wales

Y Cymoedd
Calon ac Enaid Cymru

SECTION

APPENDICES

REFERENCES

Also refer to separate landscape action plans for each of the nine valleys

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

This Landscape Improvement Strategy has been prepared for the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) by Mackley Davies Associates Ltd working with tourism consultant Kim Colebrook. Its purpose is to identify the issues, opportunities and projects for the nine valleys within the Western Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area and to provide priorities for Welsh Assembly Government grants.

This project follows on from a series of strategies written for the then Welsh Development Agency from the mid 1990's as part of the 'Landscapes Working for Wales' programme. The strategies prioritised projects that were visually prominent with a focus on transport corridors, derelict land, gateways and industrial areas, although some biodiversity and recreation needs were also addressed. The study area was defined by the local authority boundary and the projects were often sited outside settlement boundaries. Many of the projects have been completed, where they have not and are relevant to the WVSRA objectives, they have been incorporated into this strategy.

Since the 1990's there has been a significant change to the political agenda. Access for all, biodiversity conservation, obesity, and mental health are more prominent issues, and there is growing concern for the need to mitigate and adapt for climate change.

Welsh Assembly Government funding for the Western Valleys is now focussed on the Strategic Regeneration Area where nearly a third of the population live in Communities First Areas.

BASELINE REVIEW

This strategy and its associated nine valley action plans is a response to needs identified through site visits, discussion with the Countryside Commission for Wales (CCW), Forestry Commission Wales (FCW), Environment Agency Wales and Sustrans amongst others, and workshops with local authority and Communities First officers. The objective was to identify strategic level landscape projects suitable for Welsh Assembly Government funding. Area level projects have been identified through a separate local authority-led process resulting in Valley Area Regeneration Plans (VARPs) which include economic and social as well as environmental needs and projects and will be funded by a different route.

Potential projects have been grouped according to the geographic valley. The study area extends across five local authorities, overlaps with the Valleys Regional Park and lies adjacent to the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area.

This strategy identifies a number of issues for residents, businesses, visitors and landscape managers and highlights potential projects to tackle these issues. Projects will contribute to a number of national and regional objectives, including the WVSRA operating document, the Wales Spatial Plan and Wales Environment Strategy.

VISION

The overall vision is to create a linked network of multi-functional landscapes, a new green infrastructure along each valley, by linking up formal recreation spaces, grass verges, pocket parks, community routes, river and canal corridors, to provide all sectors of communities with access to a diversity of outdoor experience and to create a more attractive environment for residents, visitors, and investors.

The following themes have been developed

1. Greening of key road corridors through settlements
2. Developing and upgrading strategic community routes
3. Transforming public open space
4. Improving landscapes to enhance the tourism offer

Cross cutting themes have also been developed to apply to all projects and other opportunities as they arise:

1. Making the most of new development
2. Creating a sense of place
3. Keeping the landscape strategy and valley action plans open to new ideas
4. Incorporating community consultation, art work/craft work, biodiversity

PROJECTS

A long list of projects was agreed by peer review at the local authority workshops and consists of some 135 projects. Prioritisation criteria was developed and applied to the long list to create a short list of 44 priority projects which best meet the WVSRA objectives (see sections 12 and 13). Projects are detailed in the separate nine valley landscape action plans.

Seven generic projects which address WVSRA-wide issues have also been identified (see section 14) which may require the Welsh Assembly Government to act as the leading organisation.

The scope and scale of projects has been defined against a background of future public sector cuts. Many combine a number of smaller projects and could be phased if required.

The long list represents the start of phase 1 of this strategy where the focus is on delivering the WVSRA objectives and delivering Welsh Assembly Government polices for communities within communities, to improve the places where people live, often work, and enjoy their leisure time.
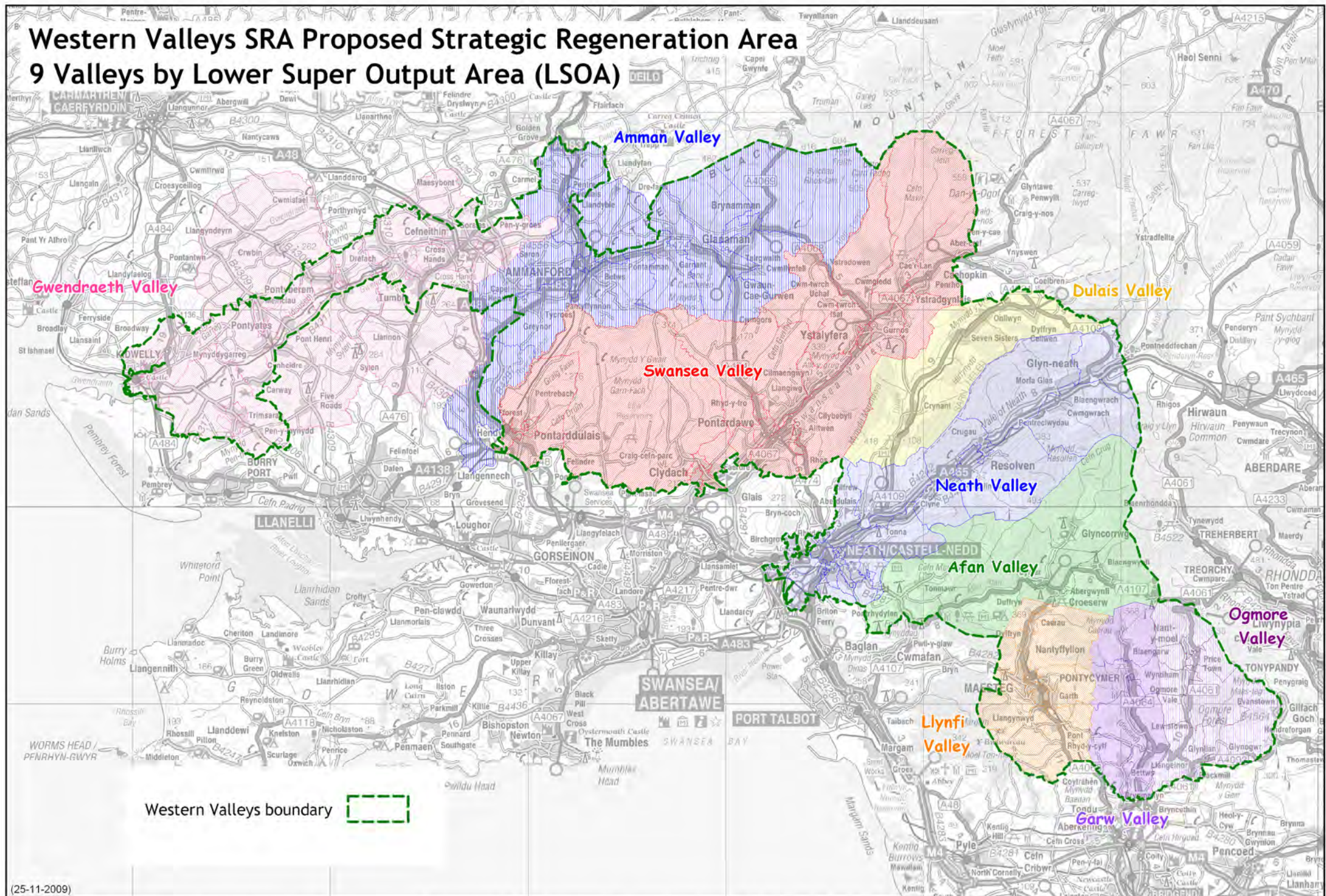
Over time, as the landscape of settlements improves, the focus could be turned to improving the landscape of valley slopes (mostly rural but sometimes urban fringe in character) and on improving access to the slopes from communities. Later landscape improvement phases could focus on the rural upland hilltops and include encouraging public access and understanding of open access and common land, and on enhancing access links across the valleys.

CONCLUSIONS

Defining environmental needs and outcomes is an area which is currently receiving much policy and research interest and is rapidly changing. The outcomes (see section 15) and appendices review how to measure the benefits of environmental change. Often benefits extend across a range of other 'quality of life aspects' and may include: health, social interaction, inward investment, community confidence, biodiversity value and asset value.

Western Valleys SRA Proposed Strategic Regeneration Area
9 Valleys by Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)

Amman Valley

Gwendraeth Valley

Dulais Valley

Swansea Valley

Neath Valley

Afan Valley

Ogmore Valley

Llynfi Valley

Garw Valley

Western Valleys boundary

(25-11-2009)

01   INTRODUCTION

The WVSRA aim is to direct resources to tackle long standing issues in the region. The SRA area covers c150 square miles with a population of 136,000. The WVSRA crosses five local authority boundaries, from the Gwendraeth Valley in the west, to the Ogmore Valley in the east, extending from the M4 to the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Mackley Davies Associates Ltd was commissioned to produce a ten year strategy for landscape projects across the Western Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area for the Welsh Assembly Governments grant programme.

The WRSRA operating document is focussed on benefits for communities and is based on the community geography of valleys rather than political geography. This has also been the basis for our approach.

The WVSRA vision is to approach regeneration in an integrated way, linking physical infrastructure and community regeneration, building on the existing community infrastructure (including Communities First Partnerships) to provide a quality environment in which people want to live and work. The themes for investment (economic investment, environmental improvement and social legacy) provide a framework for regeneration and reflect the key strands for sustainable development.

Working with the five local authorities within the WVSRA, projects were identified at a strategic and area level through site visits, local authority officer workshops and through discussion with selected national agencies and voluntary sector organisations.

Although the scale of environmental needs varies across the study area, there is consistency in the type of need identified (see section 3) and four key themes.

Those projects that met the WVSRA objectives and agreed at the workshops were prioritised in a consistent way by Mackley Davies using simple but robust criteria (see section 12). The result is a long list of some 135 projects for which further site visits, an outline of proposals and budget costs were produced for the short list of 44 which are detailed in nine separate landscape action plans for the following valleys:

Ogmore   [Bridgend CBC]
Garw   [Bridgend CBC]
Llynfi   [Bridgend CBC]
Afan   [Neath Port Talbot CBC]
Dulais   [Neath Port Talbot CBC]
Neath   [Neath Port Talbot CBC]
Swansea   [Neath Port Talbot CBC + City & County of Swansea + Powys County Council]
Amman   [Carmarthenshire County Council + Neath Port Talbot CBC]
Gwendraeth   [Carmarthenshire County Council]

The scope and scale of projects have been developed against a background of public sector austerity measures. Given uncertainty over future budgets, we recommend a review of the strategy in 2015 at the half way point of the programme.

02   WVSRA STRATEGIC REGENERATION

The WVSRA operating framework provides the vision:

> 'By 2015 the Western Valleys will embrace a network of distinctive, vibrant, sustainable communities that are confident and secure in themselves and with their relationship to the wider world.
>
> Communities that are sustained by an increasing culture of self reliance and enterprise in which everyone can fulfil their greatest potential by linking communities with opportunities, whist protecting their first class environment.'

Priorities for regeneration spending will be driven by:

- a consistent approach over time driven by the Wales Spatial Plan
- a strong focus on integrated policy and delivery, underpinned by the Making the Connections agenda
- empowering communities to contribute to their own regeneration and to design services around the needs of the user

There are 14 Communities First areas, where 30% of the WVSRA live, representing the 10% most deprived communities in Wales.

Communities First area	Population	Valley	Local authority
Ystradgynlais	2543	Swansea	Powys
Graigfelen (Clydach)	1735	Swansea	Swansea City
Pantyffynnon	1272	Amman	CCC
Upper Amman Valley *	8373	Amman	CCC & NPT
Neath East	5925	Neath	NPT
Neath North	1500	Neath	NPT
Upper Dulais Valley (Onllwyn & Seven Sisters)	3246	Dulais	NPT
Ystalyfera	3065	Swansea	NPT
Upper Afan Valley	5494	Afan	NPT
Pelenna (Pontrhydyfen based)	1173	Afan	NPT
Caerau	3993	Llynfi	Bridgend
Betws	2327	Garw	Bridgend
Llangeinor	1161	Garw	Bridgend
Blackmill	2034	Ogmore	Bridgend

*   from mid 2010 the Upper Amman Valley Communities First boundary changed to exclude Brynamman

The following extract is from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2008. Red shows the areas which are the most deprived 190 areas out of 1,896 in Wales (figures are based on units of c1,500 population referred to as Lower Super Output Areas or LSOA's).

The index is weighted towards employment and income (at 50%). From 2005 the index has included some physical environment measures (at 5%) although at present this is limited to: air quality; air emissions; flood risk; proximity to waste disposal and proximity to industrial sites. It may be that the geography of these measures also corresponds with areas of poor landscape quality. The Royal Commission on environmental pollution produced a report in 2007 on The Urban Environment and found that the more deprived communities are mostly likely to suffer from a poorer quality environment (including landscape and access) and that this can have an effect on health. The measures currently used may be useful indicators of environmental quality, but perhaps if the link to health was made the weighting would be raised from 5%. Of the priority (short list) projects in this strategy, a significant number are in Communities First areas.
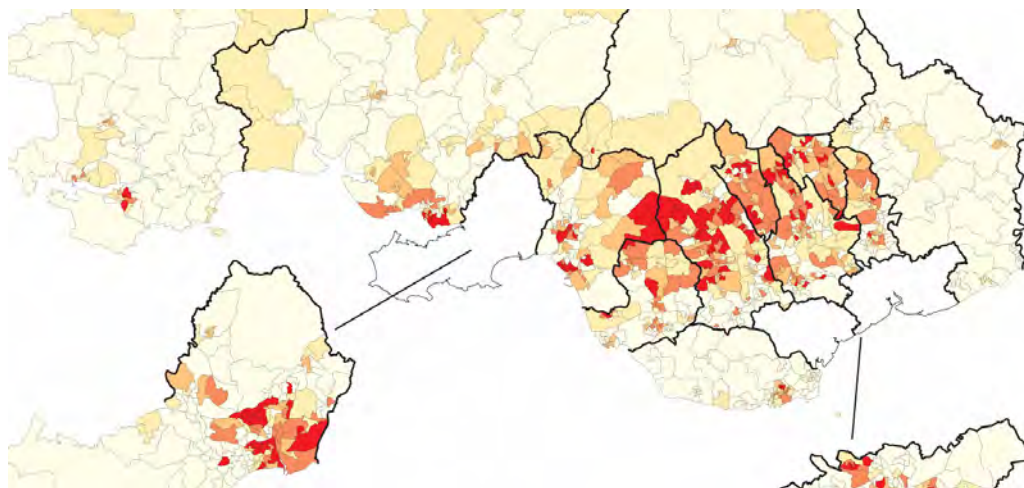
Extract from WIMD 2008

Many of the projects raised in the Landscapes Working for Wales series in the early to mid 1990's were linked to coalfield restoration and from site visits were not seen to be issues today. Projects have sometimes been delivered through Environmental Improvement Grant funding, but also through development, and sometimes through allowing natural regeneration.

The WVSRA landscape should be seen as one 'in recovery' with well designed and maintained environmental schemes making a collective difference to improvement. As the landscape recovers, the area offers more for visitors. There are real tourism gems that could be made more of including: lower Neath Canal from Neath to the Aberdulais Basin; River Tawe route; Cwm Du Glen, Pontardawe; Brynamman Lido; Kidwelly and the coastal strip; and potentially (although there are major detractors) the Tennant Canal. Tourism opportunities will increase as the landscape and rivers continue to recover and more community route loops and links are made, including links to the coast and the future Wales Coastal Path.

The WVSRA is now a focus for West Wales investment by the Welsh Assembly Government, a revised programme for environmental improvements could contribute to the following SRA objectives:

Economic investment
- Improvements to market town building on their special characteristics
- Improvements to business premises
- Increased provision of tourism and informal leisure sites and routes
- Improvements to tourist corridors
- Physically linking communities using former rail/tram routes, waterways

Environmental improvement
- New uses for derelict land
- Improvements to village streetscapes
- Providing places that people want to live and work
- Meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standards for external semi-public spaces
- Improving green and blue infrastructure for biodiversity, leisure, tourism
- Developing sustainable village projects

Social legacy
- Promoting healthier communities by providing more informal recreation opportunities such as linking home to work and community facilities by creating walking/cycling routes.
- Improving community safety by increasing opportunities for: natural surveillance; safe routes to community facilities; off road recreation routes.
- Investing in community parks, allotments, pavilions and sport facilities as hubs for community engagement and activity.
- Expanding open space provision where this is demand-led, for example where there is pressure for more allotment space.
- Improving school grounds to provide a stimulating learning environment and where schools can act as community hubs out of hours.

The strategic environmental projects selected for this ten year strategy will also link to other strategic initiatives within and close to the boundary of the WVSRA such as the Valley's Regional Park and the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area (see section 5).

Valley Area Regeneration Plans (VARPs)

In October 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government decided to target investment on an **area** as well as a **strategic** basis. The plans known as Valley Area Regeneration Plans (VARPs), will be led by local authorities, working to the geography of the nine valleys within the WVSRA.

The aim is to move from a focus on physical regeneration needs and opportunities to a wider, more holistic plan to tackle the range of programmes set out in the WVSRA operational document and 'One Wales'.

VARPs should seek to support delivery of local community strategies and aspirations identified by Communities First partnerships. The resulting shared agenda for regeneration and service improvement would then seek to inform the investment plans of the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities, community/voluntary organisations and social enterprise organisations.

03   LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Many of the current environmental needs stem from the industrial history of the area.

The WVSRA lies within the South Wales coalfield, as does the neighbouring Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area. As a consequence of sharing a common geology and common industrial history, settlements across both strategic regeneration areas share many characteristics. There is also a great similarity with other coalfields in England. Settlements do have their own unique character, but this has and is continuing to be eroded and is often difficult for those who have not been brought up in the area to appreciate the subtle differences that distinguish one settlement from another.

Settlement size in the WVSRA is small, all are less than 10,000 population except Neath, and many are below 3,000.

The South Wales Coalfield is one of the most heavily exploited coal basins in the World. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the South Wales valleys were lightly inhabited. The industrialisation of the valleys occurred in several phases. First, in the second half of the 18th century, when the iron and coal industry was established on the northern edge of the coalfield now known as the Heads of the Valleys. A later phase saw steam coal extraction in the three Bridgend valleys, and a final phase from 1850 saw the west coalfield developed to supply high quality anthracite.

The South Wales coalfield attracted huge numbers of people from rural areas to the valleys. Rows of terraced housing were built along the flatter valley floors and lower valley slopes in an unplanned way, with haphazard location of places of worship, schools, public buildings and recreation areas and a lack of any settlement centre. There was no previous architectural tradition to follow. The coal was transported south along railways and canals to ports on the Bristol Channel including Swansea. In the same period, metal working industries also expanded, particularly in the lower Swansea Valley with ironworks, tinplate works, zinc and copper smelting.

The north west of the coalfield provided anthracite in a belt stretching from the Gwendraeth Valley along the Amman Valley to the head of the Neath Valley. Not reaching its peak until 1934 (compared to 1913 for the coalfield in general) there is still active coal mining and restoration work today.

The Second World War marked the beginning of the end of heavy industry in the valleys. In 1966, the disaster at Aberfan in the Taff Valley led to an Act of Parliament to ensure tips were made safe. The following programme of tip restoration created engineering-led solutions which although met health and safety needs, were themselves obvious man-made features and incongruous in the South Wales landscape.

Former transport routes which have since closed include passenger rail, mineral rail, tramways, and canals and are often still clear features in the landscape. The following have been put to use as public routes:

-   some sections of the Swansea Canal
-   some sections of the Tennant Canal (walking only)
-   Neath Canal

- routes along the following valley floors at: Gwendraeth (currently walking only), Amman, Ogmore, Upper Llynfi, Garw, Afan, Swansea (River Tawe).

Despite this seemingly comprehensive provision of strategic and reasonably level off-road routes, there are significant gaps in the network, and much potential to create links and loops. The highest priorities for strategic community access have been identified as potential projects.

Realignment of the A465(T) through the Neath Valley in 1996 enabled faster links between the English Midlands and the Swansea area, but by-passed communities. The road alignment is also a detractor for residents and visitors to the Neath Valley, with road noise a constant factor for users of the Neath Canal. The numerous bridging points creates difficult access along the Tennant Canal towpath.

Past restoration practice focussed on putting land back to productive use, either as forestry or as pasture. As a consquence the original network of small woodlands and field hedges has been lost, and the Neath, Afan, Garw, and Dulais valley sides are dominated by conifer plantations much of which is owned by Forestry Commission Wales. Forestry Commission Wales has a programme for increasing deciduous woodland cover and converting conifer planted ancient woodland sites back to deciduous woodland (see section 05).

Regeneration study assessments of the landscape quality of the former coalfield is always ranked very high. However there is a real disparity between the high landscape quality of the valley slopes and the often poor quality within the valley floor settlements. The following extract from LANDMAP illustrates the point.

The damaging legacy of mining is subtle, for example where restoration has not restored the pre-industrial patchwork of woodland and hedgerows. The legacy in settlement terms provides the linear layout seen in most of the villages today, poor air quality and rapid development growth may explain the lack of veteran street trees. The original use of local materials and detailing during the period of rapid growth (from 1840's in the east, from 1870's in the Gwendraeth Valley) can still be seen in most settlements but has often been eroded by inappropriate repairs or upgrades. Some of the coal mines developed much later in the 20th century (for example at Carway in the Gwendraeth Valley) and this may explain the lack of vernacular buildings in some villages. Surviving vernacular detailing should act as a point of reference for future change.
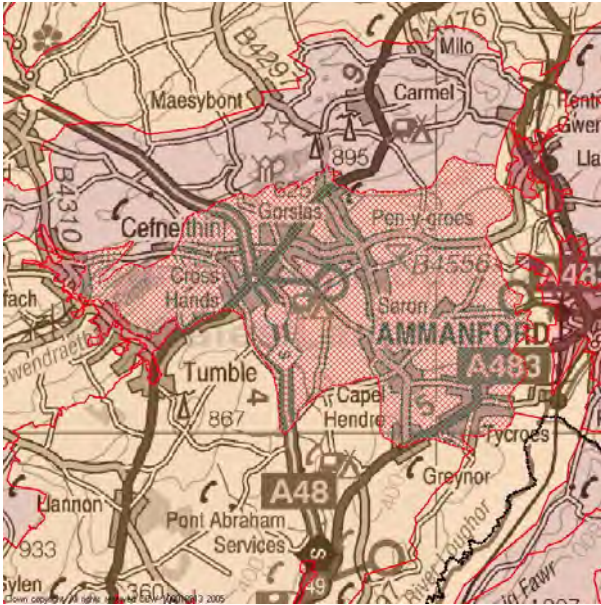
An area of rolling hills crossed by a network of medium sized roads and the A48 [T] with a strong pattern of recent linear development associated with mining giving it a suburban character. Between settlements is relatively poor, often wet, rush-dominated grazing land. High hedgerows with some large hedgerow trees are the typical field boundary - often holly-rich. There are also areas of restored open cast land, where weak hawthorn hedgerows are a feature. More recently some opencast areas have been restored as community woodlands, and area for recreation such as Mynydd Mawr and Penygroes. Typically the agricultural land in this area is not intensively managed. From the area there are views towards the Brecon Beacons and Mynydd Betws. Commercial development at Cross Hands is a not necessarily positive focus for the area. As a result of the traffic the area is noisy especially close to the A48 [T]. It has the feeling of an area through which people are constantly travelling.

Extract from LANDMAP (CCW website) Carmarthenshire : Cross Hands – Capel Hendre CRMRTVSZ77 Rolling lowland/mosaic lowland
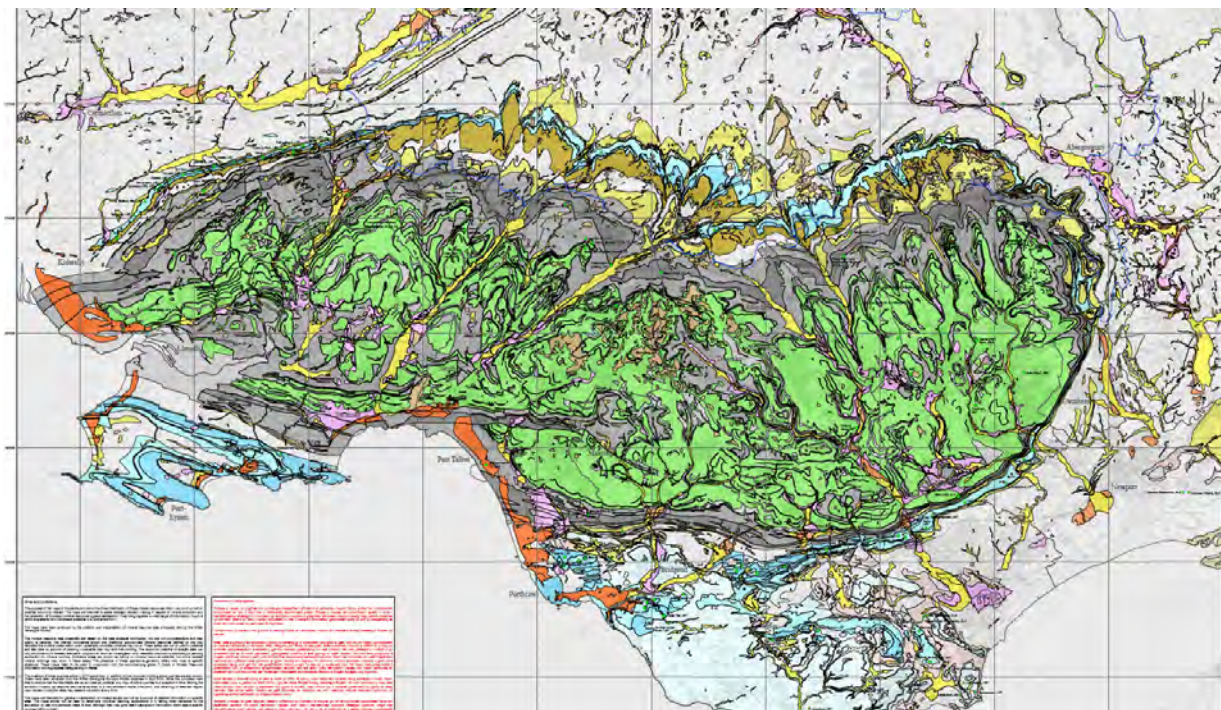
Extract from recently completed mineral resource mapping of the UK by the British Geological Society – available on- line. Dark grey represents coal, green represents pennant sandstone. Limestone (light blue) lies, just outside the WVSRA.
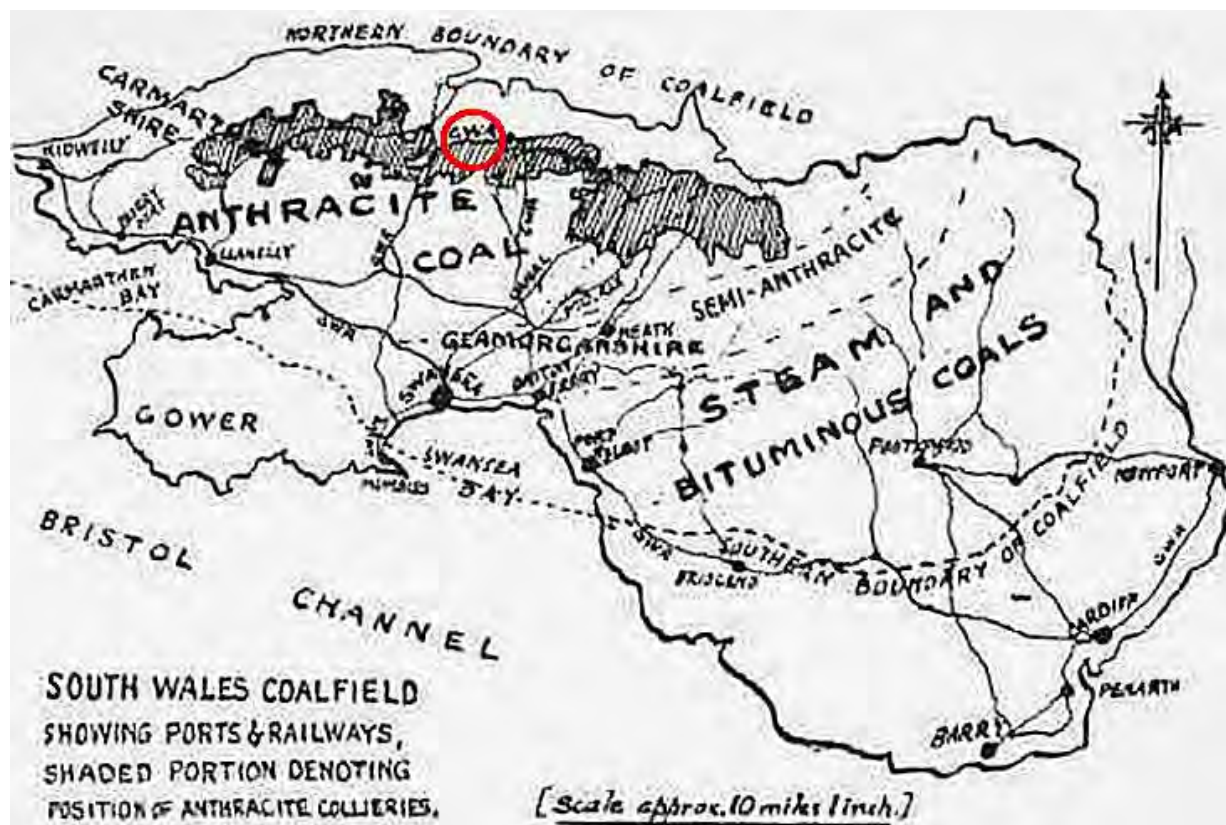
Map to show location of anthracite coalfield - Cwmamman is marked in red.

General characteristics the WVSRA

The areas geology and industrial history has led to the following characteristics of the WVSRA today:

- Eastern valleys with landform of steep sided valleys and narrow valley floors with native oak or conifer plantation
- Evidence of past mining activity (still present in the Dulais and Neath Valleys) with a network of disused railway and tramway lines
- Evidence on valley sides of large scale reclamation work, seen as even valley gradients, even grass cover texture, lack of field boundaries, lack of native tree cover, extent of commercial coniferous forestry
- Sprawling mining settlements as ribbon development along the main road of each valley floor with settlements sometimes joined up
- Even age of older buildings (Victorian and Edwardian) with no obviously earlier buildings within settlement boundary
- Lack of Victorian/Edwardian parks and open spaces (except Neath)
- Lack of mature street trees or mature garden trees within settlement boundaries
- Dominance of overhead power lines
- Extent of roadside barriers for eastern valleys
- Except for the Ogmore Valley and parts of the Llynfi there is little relict ancient-semi-natural woodland on the valley slopes
- Uplands often associated with common land
- Locally important areas of biodiversity along former transport corridors including canals

- Rivers are features of the valley floors, running on steep gradients and with a narrow profile. Water quality has improved greatly post mine closures and now supports sufficient local brown trout populations for angling
- War memorials are often the visual focal point for communities
- Dominance of imposing public buildings in settlements – Victorian/Edwardian working mens halls, chapels, schools; late 20th century police, fire, community centres
- Varied quality of older housing as ribbon development along main road corridors – historically two storey terraced houses of stone with brick detailing, with low stone/brick front garden wall and iron railings; from mid 20th century with rendered elevations and concrete block walls; current housing is mostly detached, red brick, with porches and built-in garages, close boarded fence boundaries
- Front wall coping styles vary and are often a settlement feature; may include use of reformed metal waste slag and river worn limestone
- Significant areas of social housing, some are no longer in local authority control (for example all within Bridgend are owned and managed by Valleys to Coast; Neath Port Talbot have recently transferred their housing stock to Neath Port Talbot Homes), dating from the 1960's and 70's the buildings are often not attractive and the landscape setting is dominated by mown grass. Application of the Wales Housing Quality Standard will help address private space through creating defendable gardens, but the Standard does not address the wider public spaces.
- Strong cultural identity and industrial archaeological interest associated with the history of mining and processing
- To the west, gentler valley slopes and tops are used for pasture with enclosure by hedges, the wider valley floor has seen expansion of light industry at the loss of agricultural landscape and is impacted by road corridors (M4/A48; A465(T)
- Expansion of the original mining settlements to accommodate new housing for commuters

General visual detractors within the WVSRA

The following characteristics are consistent across the WVSRA today:

- Extensive use of concrete block walling or close boarded fencing to define private boundary with public
- Increasing use of crib walling to deal with difficult changes in level
- Extensive use of steel palisade fencing, including around entire park boundaries
- Poor condition of roadside barriers between settlements
- Overhead wires through settlement, services compounds in key locations
- Over-wide junctions in town centres
- Urban style bus shelters in rural areas
- Listed urinals and unattractive mining buildings in key locations but with no interpretation or relevant setting
- Rugby, football club houses, community halls: poor quality of buildings, frontage to public realm, fencing to grounds and lack of maintenance
- New housing lacks vernacular, no relationship with public realm
- Harsh settlement edge with open countryside
- Poor integration of industrial estates into the landscape
- Derelict or disused buildings – primary schools, pubs, chapels
- Garages and car sales often in prominent position
- Extent of highway, marketing signage and street clutter
- Standardised large scale road improvement eg. Ammanford, Kidwelly, A465T, Ffos Las
- Secondary schools and grounds, mown grass with little planting
- Poor condition street furniture
- Impact of new supermarkets

- Merging settlements
- Open spaces in settlements dominated by formal recreation pitches
- Poor urbanised entrance to some valleys eg. Tondu, Briton Ferry
- Extent of Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam

Future landscape change

The main current pressure comes from development for housing, this has several impacts including:

- on the fringes of settlements this creates visual intrusion into rural areas
- there is proliferation of smaller residential development along arterial roads which is collectively changing the character of the streetscape
- much new development turns away from (rather than fronting) roads

Other changes within settlements are likely to include:

- impact of new superstores in settlements
- impact of new schools and re-development of former school sites
- future road improvements
- projects to address on-street parking
- expansion of industrial use, for example storage space
- community heating schemes as fuel poverty issues increase
- flood protection schemes as many settlements share the valley floor with rivers

Around settlements changes are likely to include:

- further coal/mineral extraction
- intensification of agricultural use around settlements (such as a change from pasture to higher value crops)
- hill top wind energy projects
- new pests and diseases such as the current risk to Japanese larch trees
- gradual change from monoculture conifer plantation to mixed woods, and planting of new broadleaf woodlands

Those responsible for managing landscapes, in particular local authorities, need to respond to pressures for change by:

- managing growth and ensure development is appropriate in terms of type, scale, location
- using planting around settlement fringes to integrate new development with the countryside
- using innovative architecture that takes inspiration from local distinctiveness and character but is sustainable and promotes high quality design
- ensuring strategic gaps between settlements are maintained
- providing developers with guidance through settlement design statements to ensure appropriate use of vernacular styles and building materials

These actions are explored in more detail in section 14.0.

04   POLICY BACKGROUND

The future of the WVSRA will be guided to a large degree by the policies of the Welsh Assembly Government and how these are interpreted at a local level by local authorities. The following summarises the key documents and relevant policies to this landscape strategy.

The Wales Spatial Plan : Welsh Assembly Government – update 2008

Most of the WVSRA lies in the area titled 'Swansea Bay: Waterfront and Western Valleys' (see extract below), with the three valleys of Bridgend in the 'South East Wales' area.

The following extracts from the Spatial Plan relate to the key themes and projects in this landscape strategy for the WVSRSA:

14.3 'Conserving and celebrating the unique heritage of each area is important. Key settlements need a high quality environment with quality buildings and spaces, nurturing a sense of identity and community'.

19.41 'Each town and city needs to foster its own distinct sense of identity, building on its heritage and culture to create a network of settlements with real character which complement each other and each add strength to the attractiveness of the region as a whole. Recognising the value of the Area's diversity of landscapes, built environments and distinctive communities will be key to building confidence and helping to market a regional offer for inward investment and for tourism'.

20.9 'The success of the key settlements should improve life in small rural and valleys communities, with good access to services being a key contributor to quality of life. The focus for these places will be to create affordable and attractive places to live with a choice of transport to and from jobs and services, including for example health, when they are not available locally and set within a high quality natural and built environment which everyone can enjoy'.

20.18 'City and town regeneration will build on best practice, with a coherent programme for a settlement running over a number of years, with strong community involvement, associated training and business support, using local people, produce and suppliers wherever possible'.

20.23 'Developing and promoting safer routes for walking and cycling throughout the city region but particularly for shorter journeys within settlements'.

20.50 Tourism and leisure, allied to culture, have the potential to improve health and quality of life, raise economic activity, enhance regeneration and conservation and improve overall sustainable development across the wider region'.

20.59 'Each smaller settlement and town, together with the city, needs to foster its own distinct sense of identity, building on its history and culture. The aim is to create a network of settlements with real character which complement each other and add strength to the attractiveness of the city region as a whole.'

20.61 'New development must add rather than subtract character'.

Environment Strategy for Wales – Welsh Assembly Government 2006

This landscape strategy will contribute to the following Environment Strategy for Wales actions and outcomes:

Actions

18. Develop a strategic approach to local environmental quality and invest in improvements. This will include addressing: litter and dog fouling, fly tipping, abandoned cars, graffiti, noise, green space and landscape.

19.   Rollout CCW green space toolkit to increase the quality and quantity of public green space in Wales.

26.   Seek to manage increased access to the countryside effectively and develop best practice through supporting pilot projects on sustainable public recreation which can be replicated elsewhere.

49.   Targeted action as part of Health Challenge Wales to highlight the relevance of the environment to peoples health and well being.

50.   Health and the Environment – the development and funding of initiatives that showcase, signpost and demonstrate the links between health and the environment by commissioning work thereby ensuring increased sustainability.

Outcomes

20.   The wider environment is more favourable to biodiversity through appropriate management, reduced habitat fragmentation and increased extent and interconnectivity of habitats.

24.   The built environment is high quality and vibrant, reflecting local distinctiveness and supporting strong communities, which are actively engaged in the management of their local environment (measured by % people who feel unsafe in the local area; % people volunteering).

27.   There is easy, equitable access to ample high quality green space (measured by % of people stating they can access a park or open space easily).

30.   The number of people choosing to walk or cycle as a means of transport is increasing (measured by % people who walk or cycle to work; % pupils who walk to school).

Creating Sustainable Places : Welsh Assembly Government

The document sets out sustainability and design quality expectations for all the regeneration projects the Assembly is asked to support. Proposals are judged against the documents objectives and requirements.

Natural Environment Framework : Welsh Assembly Government consultation document December 2010

The Welsh Assembly Government has set out a new approach to managing land, water and seas in the consultation document 'A Living Wales'. The concept is to develop a Natural Environment Framework (NEF) where the focus is on managing the environment as a whole (as an ecosystem) rather than focusing on separate parts. The approach will look at the provision of ecosystem services and their value to communities, society and the economy as it is considered that the importance of the environment in our lives has been underestimated to date. Actions and outcomes have yet to be developed, but some of the projects from this landscape strategy will be able to contribute.

Other key documents include Economic Renewal Programme : Welsh Assembly Government 2010.

05 LINKS TO OTHER INTITIATIVES

The following national agencies and organisations with an environmental remit have been consulted during the course of preparing this strategy.

There are a wide number of initiatives within the WVSRA that this strategy has taken account of and/or which could form the basis for partnership working.

Valleys Regional Park (VRP)

This partnership aims to deliver an environment and heritage action plan to complement the activities of the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area and WVSRA (see plan for how these areas overlap). The aim is to create a high quality, sustainable network of green space.

The Valleys Regional Park aims to raise the profile of the area as a visitor destination, a prime location to live and work in and enhance opportunities for outdoor recreation, heritage and environmental interpretation through:

- Prioritised investments into existing visitor centres including country parks, nature reserves and heritage facilities to create a more enhanced and consistent offer.
- The development of 5 landscape scale visitor destination initiatives.
- A loops and links project that will invest in existing and create new walking, cycling and horse riding links between the visitor destination facilities.
- The establishment of visitor guides to support and guide visitors with a community tourism element to build confidence and create local tourism ambassadors.
- A coordinated events programme.
- A targeted campaign to prevent and remove the blight that detracts visitors from returning.

The Valleys Regional Park focus is to improve strategic and often established tourism destinations which may lie outside settlements. In contrast, phase 1 of this landscape strategy is to improve the environment and access for communities within communities. However, examples of where Valleys Regional Park and landscape strategy projects may share the same objectives or be in close proximity include:

- in the Swansea Valley: access for all and interpretation improvements at Cwm Du Glen, Pontardawe; work at Coed Gwilym Park Clydach and improvements to detractors along the adjacent Swansea Canal
- in the Neath Valley: access improvements to the Neath Canal; work to improve access and interpretation in the Aberdulais Falls area, Tonna
- in the Garw Valley: enhancement to the visitor experience at Bryngarw Country Park

Sustainable Tourism Project – led by Visit Wales

A multi-million pound project (to 2014) to deliver key elements of the Sustainable Tourism Framework and Action Plan for Wales. The project will comprise:

- centres of tourism excellence eg. Gardens Centre of Excellence; Mountain Biking Centre of Excellence, both of which will be based in the WVSRA
- growth markets such as activity tourism (water sports, fishing, walking cycling, riding, adventure tourism and gardens) to extend the tourism season and realise the potential of the natural and built environment

EAW will be a joint sponsor for some water based recreation and fishing elements. Sustrans may be a joint sponsor for development of the national cycling network (NCN).

Heritage Tourism Project (HTP) - led by Cadw

A multi-million pound project (to 2014) to maximise the economic value of heritage through increasing the volume, length and value of visitation relating to heritage whether cultural, built or landscape.

Cadw will be working with communities, heritage partners and the tourism sector across Wales to develop heritage tours, trails and events packages to present visitors with a more integrated range of heritage tourism experiences and to ensure that the Heritage Tourism Project benefits the wider community and tourism industry. The intention is to widen the experience beyond individual heritage sites and to connect with the local community and the surrounding area, as well as to link to broader interpretive stories and themes.

The project is split into themes and will deliver improved access, interpretation infrastructure, visitor facilities improvements and tours, trails and events.

Themes that include the WVSRA are:

- Wales the First Industrial Nation : in particular the copper industry of Swansea
- Castle and Princes – Lords of the Southern March : all across Southern Wales
- Origins (prehistoric and Roman) : Carmarthenshire sites are highlighted

Roman Neath and Bronze Age interest at The Mawr to the east of Pontardulais might represent an opportunity to extend the Origins Theme into the WVSRA.

A 'headline destination' is identified for Swansea/Neath Port Talbot although not yet specified (one of only twelve across Wales). Neath Abbey is identified within the Spiritual Theme.

The Valleys Regional Park programme will also deliver heritage themed projects in support of the Heritage Tourism Project.

Environment Agency Wales (EAW)

Local authorities should seek to influence the Environment Agency Wales' capital programme, in particular flood alleviation schemes to achieve locally needed environmental improvements, for example interpretation, access, habitat management or creation, fishing platforms. Also to identify projects for Environment Agency Wales led initiatives 'Wild Fishing Wales' (working with angling clubs) and 'Salmon for Tomorrow' (improving habitat for fish).

An 'Access to Water Strategy' (for canoeing, fishing etc) is currently being finalised by the Environment Agency Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales and Forestry Commission Wales to identify potential new opportunities for water access and how those opportunities may be delivered.

The Environment Agency Wales oversees a grant funding programme called 'Splash' for projects that secure new or improved public access to Wales' rivers, lakes, canals, reservoirs, and coastal waters for recreational and educational activities.

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

Several of the generic actions identified in this strategy (see section 14) align with the objectives of the Countryside Council for Wales, where this is the case CCW have been assigned to lead.

Examples of current Countryside Council for Wales initiatives that could dovetail with this WVSRA landscape strategy include:

- Implementation of the Wales Coastal Path and its influence on Kidwelly & surrounding area.

- Use of the Greenspace Toolkit outcomes. Developed by CCW to identify access to 'natural green space' the toolkit has been used by all WVSRA local authorities as part of the Local Development Plan process. Although a number of different mapping programmes have been used, CCW plan to review the overall outcomes. This may prove useful in targeting where a change to open space management practice or the creation of new open spaces could feed into this landscape strategy.

- CCW aim to set up a Green Infrastructure Network project for the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area – a similar project could be promoted for the WVSRA.

- CCW are overlaying Landmap + index of deprivation + green spaces for the South East Spatial Plan area (which includes the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmore Valleys), the results may prove useful in targeting projects for this landscape strategy, however there is no planned equivalent for Swansea and Western Valleys Spatial Plan area.

- The Communities and Nature (CAN) programme - although the project area has to exclude the Valleys Regional Park and by default excludes the WVSRA, the aims of CAN programme are closely linked to this strategy. The CAN approach to project development and implementation may provide new ways of working as the aims are:

to maximise the economic value of natural assets through increasing visits to the countryside

to ensure the benefits of project activities are shared with disadvantaged groups, for example through volunteering

to further sustainable development in Wales by providing high quality local leisure opportunities and improving the attractiveness of each Spatial Plan area through improved connection between natural heritage sites and local communities and/or tourist centres

Forestry Commission Wales (FCW)

Several of the generic actions identified in this strategy (see section 14) align with the objectives of Forestry Commission Wales and where this is the case, FCW have been assigned to lead. The Welsh Assembly Government target for new woodland is ambitious, to increase woodland by 100,000 ha over the next 20 years.

Examples of current Forestry Commission Wales or other initiatives that could dovetail with this landscape strategy include:

- Woodlands for Wales – Welsh Assembly Government 2009 sets out to:

    bring more woodland under sustainable management, this includes restoration of PAWS (planted ancient woodland sites) to a more natural state starting with FCW land

    increase the overall level of woodland cover

    and includes actions for urban trees (see Appendix 4)

- FCW have undertaken a desk based geographical information system (GIS) prioritisation of potential woodland sites for community benefit across the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area. The review covered 384 existing woodland sites and 199 potential sites. Thirteen priority sites have been identified on a mix of public and private owned land as set out in 'The Heads of the Valleys Woodland Plan'. The partnership initiative (with CCW, local authorities, Valleys Regional Park, EAW etc) known as Valleys Forest aims to create jobs, boost tourism and improve the health and well-being of residents and is led by a specially appointed full time FCW project manager.

- FCW have appointed an Urban Trees Officer (covering Wales) to meet Woodlands for Wales actions. Existing urban tree cover will be established by reviewing aerial photos (Spring 2011).

- Glastir, the new agri-environment scheme will incorporate Forestry Commission Wales woodland grants.

- The Forestry Commission (England) is involved with an umbrella organisation Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) whose aim is to increase awareness of the need to include trees in the built environment and to publish guidance and case studies on how to tackle barriers to planting large long lived species ('no trees, no future' 2008).

Note that Japanese larch disease is a major concern for Forestry Commission Wales in the Afan and Garw valleys and comprises a significant 18% of the plantation mix.
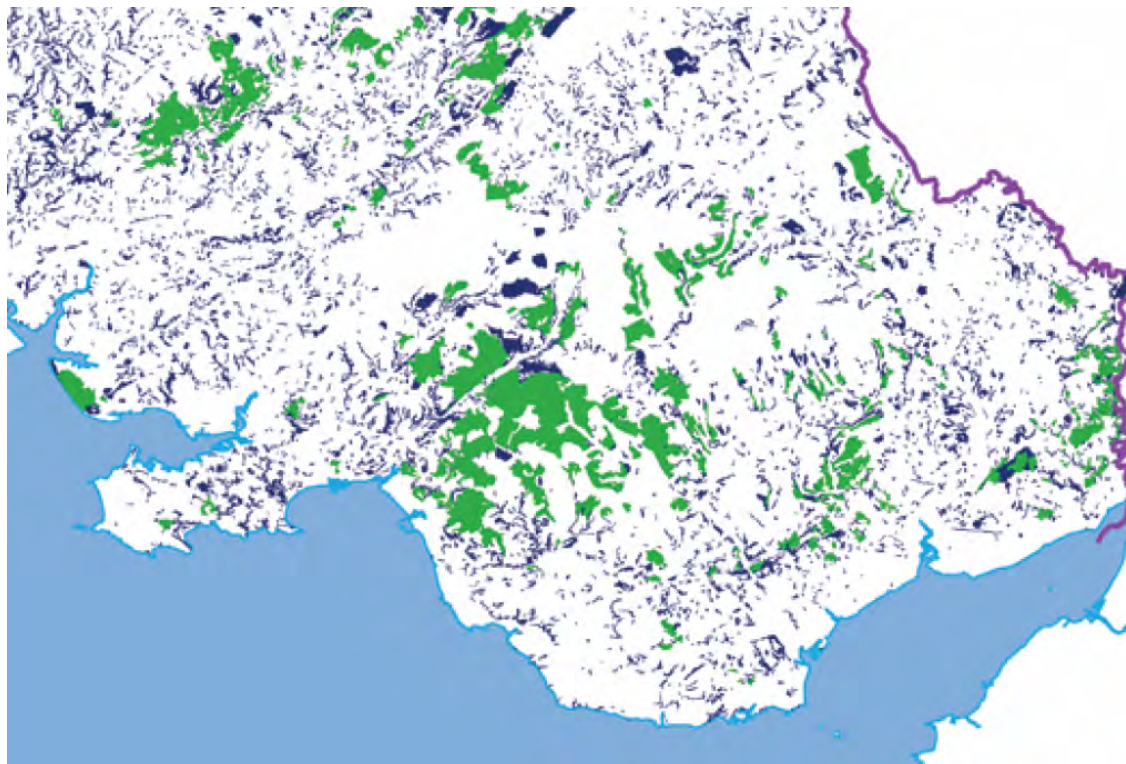
Extract from Woodland for Wales - green = FCW (WAG) woodland, dark blue = other landowners; main concentration of FCW land is in Neath, Dulais, Afan, Garw and Ogmore Valleys

Sustrans

Priority projects for Sustrans are contained in their initiative Valleys Cycle Network. This is a partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities, community and voluntary organisations, to create a network of routes that will help change the economic and social fabric of the Valleys by 2015 (the area includes the Heads of the Valleys). Within the WVSRA, their top three priorities are:

- Connect2 at Clydach
- Ffordd Cwm Gwendraeth community route.
- Neath Canal at Resolven

Others include the completing community routes for the Amman, Afan and Llynfi Valleys, a new route through Pontarddulais, and feasibility of opening former mining tunnels where this links to town centre regeneration (the potential extends into Rhondda Cynon Taff in the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area).

Other initiatives led by Sustrans or which they are involved with include:
- 'Wildlife Champions' (with Local authorities to survey community routes of which the cycle path may only be 10% of the area with the aim of improved management for wildlife)
- Active Travel – cycling officer encourages community use of new routes
- Active Play
- DIY Streets
- Liveable Neighbourhoods

- Bike It – to encourage secondary school pupils to cycle to school

Safe Routes to Communities is delivered by Sustrans in England and Scotland, but in Wales by local authorities.

Regional Transport Plan funding differs between the South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA) where funding for walking/cycling is ring-fenced, and the South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) where it is not.

Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area

The potential to link up with the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area for cross border projects has been reviewed in the production of this strategy. Future projects may include:

- green infrastructure corridors, including linking new woodland sites
- planting management/improvements to the A465(T) corridor (refer project NV05)
- co-ordination of new viewing areas at the top of the Afan Valley (refer project AV12 in Neath Port Talbot CBC) and Ogmore Valley (refer project OV08 in Bridgend CBC) with existing viewing areas within Rhondda Cynon Taff
- feasibility of opening former mining tunnels as cycle routes, Afan Valley into Rhondda Cynon Taff

Glastir – Welsh Assembly Government

From 2012, the four existing agri-environment schemes (Tir Gofal, Tir Cynnal, Tir Mynydd and the Organic Farming Scheme) will be replaced by one scheme, Glastir, which will also incorporate the Forestry Commission Wales woodland grant scheme.

Glastir is a five year whole farm sustainable land management scheme available to farmers and land managers across Wales. Glastir will pay for the delivery of specific environmental goods and services aimed at combating climate change, improving water management and maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. It is also designed to deliver measurable outcomes at both a farm and landscape scale in a cost effective manner.

06 LANDSCAPE AND ACCESS ANALYSIS

The following table outlines the **generic** strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the WVSRA.

Phase 1 of this landscape strategy is focussed on tackling the weaknesses and building on the opportunities and strengths within the urban environment. The key threat comes from a lack of revenue funding: this is an issue in the private sector, and an ongoing (potentially increasing) issue in the public sector since the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in 1980. The impact of inadequate revenue funding cannot be underestimated, for example research into the use of open spaces confirms that it is poor maintenance and a lack of uniformed staff that keeps people away, not poor design.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Extent of Forestry Commission Wales ownership Potential for partnership working, in particular between FCW, CCW, EAW, Sustrans Quality of landscape beyond settlement boundaries – but no national designations Biodiversity value beyond settlement boundaries Extent of open access and common land Extent of rights of way network for walking Extent of community routes (but still some key gaps)	Urban environment has significant detractors Lack of trees within settlements Lack of variety in open space and childrens play provision Settlements turned back on rivers, canals Visitor offer is dominated by Brecon Beacons National Park to north and Gower to south Cycling and walking routes across local authority boundaries suffer lack of co-ordinated promotion Bridleway network is poor Lack of woodland management leading to loss of views Settlement merge Poor access to natural open space in settlements Underutilised heritage (built natural) Poor visitor orientation Poor integration of settlements into natural landscape Loss of field pattern in former mining areas Extent of conifer plantations on some valley slopes Lack of biodiversity connection through settlements Lack of capital and revenue investment by public and private sector

Opportunities	Threats
Industrial heritage – but at risk of being lost	Continued lack of investment, including revenue funding for capital investment
Link up with tourism sector – to promote/access high value natural landscapes, biodiversity, man-made heritage	Vandalism
S106 funding from development	Erosion of sense of place & street scene from poorly designed schemes (retail, industrial, residential, road)
Use new development to create a more positive street scene, reinforce vernacular/sense of place, improve access/permeability of spaces	Flood risk (including impact on potential development land)
Re-use extensive network of mineral lines & tramways for walking, cycling access	Lack of support to make significant changes to highway and parks maintenance regimes
Open up rivers for recreation access	Lack of funding for key gateways & corridors into (but outside) the WVSRA
Linkup long distance walking, cycling, horse riding routes	Loss of Japanese larch forest to disease
Extent of urban green space in public ownership	Erosion and loss of industrial heritage
Recovery of rivers as important fisheries	Spread of invasive non-native species
Link across valleys to join up community routes	
Build on Valley Ambassadors (HoVSRA Heart & Soul) and Street Ambassadors (Ogmore Valley) to support change in public open spaces	
Relatively low cost of land	
Wind farms may bring funding for community projects	

07 TOWNSCAPE IMPROVEMENT

The Welsh Assembly Government WVSRA team has identified eight towns for additional WVSRA funding – see table below. Although Kidwelly is not one of the eight key towns, as a coastal town and a growing tourist destination it is also included in the table.

Improvement to the townscapes of the larger settlements across the WVSRA is an ongoing action as there is usually room for improvement and previous schemes require updating. Maintenance of previous townscape projects has been identified as an issue at Pontardawe and Ystalyfera (Neath Port Talbot CBC).

All eight towns except Pontarddulais have some form of master plan, although the emphasis of the plan will vary depending on the original brief, some plans may be updating or widening in scope to identify current needs and opportunities.

Recent investment is evident at Maesteg and Clydach.

Townscape improvements generally incorporate works to both the public realm and private shop frontages, and involve street surfacing, lighting, street furniture, building elevation upgrades, and upgrades to public toilets and car parking. Regeneration of the local economy is the key driver for improvement, led by public sector investment in the form of Town Improvement Grants.

Less consideration is often given to environmental improvement, for example providing shade, shelter from wind tunnels, screening of visual detractors, opening up attractive views out, providing cycling and footpath access links into and out of the town, tree/hedge/bulb planting to bring countryside species into town centres.

In tandem with a broader range of physical townscape improvements should be the provision of heritage trails, interpretation, improved signage, improvements to open spaces and road routes into towns as all of these factors combine to create a positive impression. This is simply what is meant by good design and as promoted in the Welsh Assembly Government Technical Advice Note: 12 Design and Creating Sustainable Places.

Master plans should incorporate all aspects of good design.

Master plans understandably concentrate on the town centre, often the retail area. In contrast all of the potential landscape projects identified in section 12 lie outside this area. Examples of where the two initiatives could and should meet are listed below:

- providing community routes which are accessible from town centres
- strategic native planting schemes which should take their theme from the countryside into town centres
- amenity open spaces in towns (such as Cwm Du Glen, Pontardawe, or the Pontardawe riverside walk) that are signed and 'accessible to all' from town centres
- tackling major detractors such as Stockhams Corner, Neath, and the frontage to INCO, Clydach which create a poor impression for road users to the town centre
- making the most of new development, such as the mixed use proposals at Cross Hands which could demonstrate the role that well designed development can play in providing for amenity, access and biodiversity

Key towns	Townscape studies	Projects on short list (refer section 13.0)	Projects on long list (refer section 12.0)
Ammanford	Nathanial Lichfield 2008 Atkins ongoing	AM/17 Amman Community Route AM/24 Dyffryn Industrial Estate & community route to Llandybie	AM/09 Ammanford A474 corridor planting
Clydach	Chapman Warren 1995 Mackley Davies (corridors only) 2004	SV/24 Connect2 route & access to/from canal	
Cross Hands	Wardell Armstrong		GV/05 Cross Hands strategic planting
Maesteg	Powell Dobson 2010	LV/18 community route south from Maesteg	LV/19 River Llynfi walking route
Neath	Ove Arup/ Camlin Lonsdale 2001	NV/02 Neath Canal NV/03 Tennant Canal	NV/18 Stockhams corner
Pontardawe	Powell Dobson 2009	SV/22 Pontardawe park SV/23 leisure centre & river walk SV/35 Cwm Du Glen	SV/19 main car park SV/21 roundabouts
Pontarddulais	No study undertaken	SV/31 link to river walk	SV/26 western gateway
Ystradgynlais	Hyder 2009	SV/10 Ironworks	SV/11 recreation ground (note EAW major flood alleviation scheme along River Tawe through Ystradgynlais)

| Kidwelly | Mackley Davies 2004 | GV/15 Ffordd Cwm Gwendraeth community route | GV/14 Kidwelly corridor south |

08   QUALITY OF GREEN SPACE

This has been identified by Mackley Davies as a key issue across the WVSRA and there is significant opportunity for change. This section explains the issues, what can be done to make a change and what the benefits would be (refer also to Appendices 4, 6 and 7).

Key issues

The WVSRA valleys are seen as high quality environments, however this is not true of green space within settlements on the valley floor where communities live, work, and spend their leisure time. In addition, the landscape quality of the civic space/street scene is often characterised by a lack of street trees, the visual impact of overhead services, issues of on road parking, and the standard design (irrespective of context) of new residential development.

There are footpaths to open countryside but research shows these are unlikely to be used by Welsh Assembly Government community target groups (young women; youth; over 60's; disabled; unfit/unwell; non car owners; unemployed). WVSRA landscape funding therefore needs to concentrate on **access to green space within the urban environment.**

Reclamation has made a major difference to improving the landscape but there is still a long way to go, particularly for green space within settlements which is often characterised by:

- dominance of provision for formal recreation, including formal children's playgrounds
- being unwelcoming with no provision of shade or shelter, lack of visual interest, lack of seating, lack of planting

Green space includes significant grass verges to residential frontages along 'A' roads.

Access to natural green space

The following standards have been used to review access to natural green space audits undertaken by local authorities using the Countryside Council for Wales Green Toolkit.

The Countryside Council for Wales recommends that provision should be made for:

- at least 2ha of accessible NATURAL green space per 1,000 population
- no one should live more than 300 metres from their nearest natural green space
- at least one 20ha site within 2km of home
- one accessible 100ha site within 5km of home
- one 500ha site within 10km of home

Additional standards are provided in Welsh Assembly Government Technical Advice Note 16 'Sport, Recreation and Open Space' (TAN16), this quotes targets from the Welsh Assembly Government 2005 Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity 'Climbing Higher' which are to be reached by 2025:

- 60% will use natural environment for outdoor activities (currently 36%)
- no one will live more than 6 minute walk (300m) from nearest NATURAL green space
- 90% of people in Wales will have a footpath or cycle path within a 10 minute walk

Access to childrens playing space

The following standards from the Welsh Assembly Government Technical Advice Note 16 'Sport, Recreation and Open Space' (TAN16) have been used by local authorities to review access to play space:

- designated equipped playing space at 0.25 ha per 1000 population
- informal playing space at 0.55ha per 1000 population
- children's playing space at 0.8ha per 1000 population
- local authorities can set their own quality benchmark standards, the following are references as providing a reasonable benchmark: Children's Play Councils Quality Assessment Tool and the Play Value Assessment for playgrounds
- local areas for play or door step spaces for play and informal recreation within 100m walking distance
- local equipped or landscaped areas for play and informal recreation within 400m walking distance
- neighbourhood equipped areas for play and informal recreation and provision for young people within 1000m walking distance

Opportunities

The standards assess the quantity of green space within settlement boundaries **BUT do not assess the quality** which is often uniformly very poor. Quality standards are more difficult to define and most attempts use the Green Flag as a benchmark – however this standard is onerous for small scale local open spaces.

Green spaces offer significant opportunities to improve the environment for residents, visitors, investors, and wildlife by diversifying uses and providing **informal recreation** access for all sectors of community **within** the community. This can be achieved by:

- Removing barriers to access particularly for target groups such as the young, elderly, disabled, health problems (eg. physical access, reduce concerns about anti-social behaviour and personal safety, provide information)

- Making green spaces more attractive to a wider range of users - to encourage social contact, including between the generations

- Bringing nature into the settlement boundary – as many sectors of the community will not explore beyond urban area

- Green space is free and therefore no sector of the community need be excluded

- Diversifying children's play provision by providing opportunities for natural play ie. less focus on fenced off formal play equipment more on the use of materials such as sand, water, timber, planting to create imaginative play spaces, and provide shade (refer Appendix 7)

- Using road verges and spaces in housing areas as pocket parks & to introduce: street trees, native hedges, bulb planting, seating, hard landscape walling/fencing to celebrate local vernacular; and to diversify mowing regime

- Identifying opportunities to improve access loops and links to green spaces

- Considering green space wardens (creates jobs, creates impression of safer spaces to encourage women and elderly)

- Other uses for green spaces include:
    - wildlife reserves
    - holding community events
    - community recycling facilities
    - community renewable energy projects
    - managing urban surface water run-off (SUDs)
    - allotments/orchards
    - community gardens
    - urban farm (chickens/ducks)

- Creating opportunities to involve local communities (in decisions about change, interpretation of local history/stories, and in future management)

Note that research shows that it is management rather than design that is the key to whether a space is well used or not.

> From the Welsh Assembly Government Technical Advice Note 16 'Sport, Recreation and Open Space':
>
> (3.6) The use of opens spaces and facilities may be affected by factors such as landform and landscape features, their relationship to adjoining land uses, means of access such as footpaths, cycle paths and roads, the mix of users, levels of security, vandalism, unsupervised dogs, maintenance standards, the provision of warden or ranger services, and proximity to home, particularly for younger children. The poor condition of recreational facilities, playing fields and open spaces may be a constraint on their use, particularly in relation to the quality of facilities, surfaces and drainage. In such circumstances it may be appropriate to prioritise improvements rather than to seek additional provision'.

Forestry Commission England have a number of research and policy documents which outline the benefits of natural play for children, how to go about designing for natural play, how to manage natural play risks (refer Appendix 7). Forestry Commission Wales could therefore be a good partner for local authorities in promoting natural play.

Access to and quality of green space is a prominent current topic reflected in the recent number of studies and publications. The evidence base is developing fast.

Linked quality green spaces can form a key part of a settlements green infrastructure, the benefits of which are summarised in Appendix 6.

A project that will be worth reviewing (starting in January 2010) is 'Play and playable spaces' run by The Tri-County Play Association based at Merthyr. Using Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area funding the project covers all five Heads of the Valleys local authorities. Key objectives include: consulting with communities and providing play space to reconnect communities to the natural environment; using local suppliers; encouraging the use of natural spaces; and identifying skills and resources that could be shared.

CCW GREENSPACE TOOLKIT FINDINGS

Local authorities have undertaken natural green space audits using the Countryside Council for Wales Green Toolkit.

The following table summarises findings by consultants Knight, Kavanagh & Page (KKP), in their Greenspace Toolkit study for Bridgend (February 2009). The results show the three WVSRA valleys exceed the minimum recommendation of 2ha per 1000 population by a significant margin – figures in brackets for Pencoed are shown for comparison.

Analysis area	Population (mid-2006 estimates)	No of accessible natural green spaces	Ha of accessible natural green space	Ha of accessible natural green space per 1000 population
Garw Valley	7,639	30	1302.09	170.45
Llynfi Valley	20,682	33	1722.36	83.27
Ogmore Valley	7,890	24	1075.60	136.32
Pencoed	9,757	13	75.37	7.72]

Results for Carmarthenshire (Spring 2010) show much poorer access to natural green space than was expected with many communities not meeting the TAN 16 standards.

Results for Neath Port Talbot area are expected Autumn 2010.

Surveys undertaken for Swansea City Council focussed on Communities First areas and lie outside the WVSRA.

Where studies have identified a deficiency there are a number of actions that can be considered, as follows:

- Provide access at an existing natural site not currently considered to be accessible.

- Undertake modifications/changes in green space management to introduce naturalness to existing open spaces not currently considered to be natural e.g. playing fields, recreational space. Natural areas are mainly characterised by low management intensity and therefore creative green space management can be both cost effective and benefit the natural environment.

- Create new accessible natural green space (for example through S106 agreements).

09 STREET TREES

This has been identified by Mackley Davies as a key issue in most valleys, in particular the Gwendraeth, Llynfi, Garw, Ogmore. There is significant opportunity for change.

A re-survey of urban trees in England, published in 2008 as 'Trees in Towns II' found that town size had no effect on tree density and that often over 90% of trees were in private or less accessible areas such as school grounds. Trees were located in the following locations:

> front gardens 12-26%
> rear gardens 37-60%
> parks and open spaces 11-33%
> street trees 2-14%

A lack of garden trees is location specific across the WVSRA, with whole streets and roads often having no tree or shrub planting at all.

A survey of urban trees in 2002 found that most central European town and cities have between 50-80 street trees per 1,000 inhabitants. Forestry Commission Wales is undertaking an aerial survey of urban trees in early 2001 which will provide information for Wales and could be interrogated to provide comparative information for the WVSRA. The lack of street trees was evident from the drive round and is a generic issue across the nine valleys.

There are no examples of mature street trees in the WVSRA and there are few examples of young trees. Communities where street trees are an important component of the urban landscape include:

> Amman Valley: Llandybie
> Swansea Valley: Ystalyfera; Pontardawe; Ystradgynlais; Pontarddulais
> Neath: Neath and Tonna residential streets

The Bridgend and Gwendraeth valleys are particularly devoid of street trees, although there are examples from recent townscape improvement schemes at Maesteg (Llynfi Valley) and Pontycymer (Garw Valley).

Of the eight towns identified for additional WVSRA funding, Ammanford, Clydach, Cross Hands would benefit from street tree planting.

Trees (and where appropriate, native hedges) provide shade, shelter, biodiversity and seasonal variation (benefits are outlined in more detail in Appendix 4). Barriers to street trees include residents fears they will encourage anti-social behaviour, increase security issues and cause damage to property and pavements. There is a need to provide strategic guidance on street tree planting (right tree, right place), future maintenance, and to help to dispel any unfounded fears. Generic Project 7 (see section 14) recommends this guidance is led by the Welsh Assembly Government working with Forestry Commission Wales.

As noted in Trees in Towns II (page 582):

> 'In some areas, particularly those with high levels of social deprivation, trees have not traditionally been part of the urban landscape and there may be resistance to a scheme for the establishment of new street trees and urban woodlands. In such areas, an active campaign of education may need to precede the consultation process'.

10   ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

The issues facing the WVSRA and potential projects to address the issues have been identified from the following routes:

- from previous community consultation by local authorities as part of the Local Development Plan process or Community Strategy process (these are likely to be augmented through the VARP process);
- feedback through the Valley workshop held with Communities First and other local authority officers;
- from Mackley Davies discussions with the Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission Wales, Environment Agency Wales, Groundwork, Sustrans, Visit Wales;
- from landscape strategies produced as a series of documents known as Landscapes Working for Wales;
- from a drive round by Mackley Davies to identify potential projects.

We have split the issues into two categories to emphasise the point that issues vary depending on the user:

- Residents, businesses and visitors
- Landscape managers (local authority, community council, CCW, FCW, Visit Wales etc)

The short list of some 44 projects (see section 13) and 7 generic projects (see section 14) are assigned to the relevant issues so the link between issues and projects to address them is clear.

ISSUES FOR RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES and VISITORS	
Access to open spaces which feel safe, are welcoming, are well maintained, are interesting, and provide stimulating play space for children, with shade and seating	LV03 Garth Park LV06 Maesteg Welfare Park & hospital frontage LV11 Caerau community building & open space LV12 Caerau Welfare Ground AV09 Croeserw park and informal open spaces DV11 Seven Sisters park NV01ii Glyn-neath park NV06 Resolven park NV14 Briton Ferry social housing open space (link onto Neath Canal) NV16 Neath Penywern open space SV22 Pontardawe industrial estate road corridor & adjacent park SV23 Pontardawe river walk & leisure centre environs (potential natural play demonstration site) AM20 Brynamman park GV09 Pont Henri park GEN 7. WAG guide on natural play

Issue	Short list projects
Access to inter-community cycling routes	**New access:** LV18 Community route south from Maesteg AV05 Ton-mawr cycleway AV06 Efail Fach cycleway SV24 Clydach Connect2 and canal detractors AM17 Amman community route AM23 Pantyfynnon community route AM24 Dyffryn industrial estate & community route link to Llandybie GV15 Ffordd Cwm Gwendraeth community route Potentially NV03 Tennant Canal **Improving existing access:** OV12 Ogmore community route improvement GAV07i Blaengarw community route start AV11 Blaengwnfi open space links NV02 Neath Canal NV14 Briton Ferry social housing open space (link onto Neath Canal) AM20 Brynamman park Projects are often supporting Sustrans in their Valleys Cycle Network Vision
Access to water based recreation (includes waterside routes)	OV12 Ogmore community route improvement LV03 Garth Park LV06 Maesteg Welfare Park & hospital frontage LV11 Caerau community building & open space River Llynfi walking route – LV19 not on short list but in Powell Dobson Maesteg Masterplan
Particular issues for some housing estates such as failing to meet Wales Housing Quality Standards	Local projects to be identified through the VARP process or Housing Renewal programme – refer to Appendix 3 for relevant WHQS
Off road links from main housing areas to key community facilities such as schools, leisure centre, community hall	Local projects to be identified through the VARP process
Access to space for growing food (allotments, orchards)	Local projects to be identified through the VARP process
Tackling invasive non-native species, litter, dog mess, graffiti	Local projects to be identified through the VARP process
Tackling street sign and highway furniture clutter	Local projects to be identified through the VARP process Refer to 'clutter buster' projects eg. Nottingham City Council, Caerphilly CBC
Lack of attractive places to sit in town centres	8 key towns have additional funding Note that for settlements too small for a town centre the local park/recreation ground often becomes the focus for community events – see open space projects above. GEN 6. Townscape regeneration at a ward level

Issue	Short list projects
Visual impact of industrial use – site specific as many estates have now been screened through previous Environmental Improvement Grant projects	AM24 Dyffryn industrial estate & community route link to Llandybie OV11 Ogmore A4061 & A4093 corridors GAV06 A4064 road corridor Blaengarw south NV02 through Neath & Calor Gas at Tonna NV06 Resolven park SV12 Route to Ystradgynlais Ironworks SV22 Pontardawe industrial estate road corridor & adjacent park SV24 Clydach Connect2 and canal detractors (INCO frontage)
Impact of mineral extraction sites, clear felling, wind farms	Ensure conservation of assets and optimal environmental gain through formal Planning Process. Ensure restoration proposals are locally relevant and include opportunities for improving access, biodiversity, landscape, interpretation.
Unattractive streetscapes and road corridors through settlements (need to be cleaner, greener, conserve local vernacular, well maintained)	OV11 Ogmore A4061 & A4093 corridors GAV06 A4064 road corridor Blaengarw south GAV07ii Blaengarw centre pocket park GAV09 Bettws strategic tree planting LV13 Caerau residential open space along A road corridor community route AV11 Blaengwynfi open space links DV01 Dyffryn road corridor DV05 Seven Sisters amenity space near High Street DV06 Seven Sisters High Street SV14 Ystradgynlais A4067 corridor SV24 Clydach Connect2 and canal detractors AM01, AM02, AM03 Gwaun Cae Gurwen AM18 Gwaun Cae Gurwen trotting track GV07 Tumble road corridor GV10 Pontyates road corridor GV11 Carway road corridor GV12 Trimsaran road corridor & leisure centre environs GEN 6. Regeneration at ward level The following settlements have wide ranging environmental improvement needs that lie beyond one strategic landscape project and for which a holistic improvement physical regeneration strategy at ward level is recommended : - Glyncorrwg - Tumble - Seven Sisters - Glyn-neath - Briton Ferry - Croeserw - Blaengwynfi/Abergwynfi - Evanstown - Bettws GEN 7. WAG guide on street trees

Issue	Short list projects
Unattractive road corridors between settlements (need to screen detractors, maintain roadside railings, provide off street parking, reduce signage clutter) – site specific as much of the WVSRA **is attractive outside settlement boundaries**	No short listed projects
Inadequate signage for orientation to amenities and to attractions – site specific as often visitor attractions are well signed	Brown sign issues will be picked up through the separate WVSRA brown sign project
Lack of a sense of arrival at settlement entrances (site specific, not all settlements need gateways)	LV06 Maesteg Welfare Park & hospital frontage AV11 Blaengwynfi open space links GV07 Tumble road corridor
Derelict or vacant buildings, derelict/restoration sites at key locations –site specific	Key locations across WVSRA include: Industrial unit, key junction at Evanstown, Ogmore Valley A4964 Blaengarw, Garw Valley - several shops boarded up; derelict/dangerous chapel (near GaV06); pub/club (near GaV07ii) Boarded up/burnt out shops/pub Caerau, Llynfi Valley Restoration of former coal mining activity within Penygroes, Gwendraeth Valley Town Hall Kidwelly, Gwendraeth Valley
Poor marking of footpath, cycleway access points out from settlements	Local projects to be identified through the VARP process Landscape strategy to pick up poor settlement access to strategic long distance walking, cycling, horse riding routes (see Appendix 9) OV12 Ogmore community route (at Blackmill) GAV07i Blaengarw community route start NV14 Briton Ferry social housing open space (link onto Neath Canal) AV11 Blaengwynfi open space links DV01 Dyffryn road corridor (access to Sarn Helen) NV02 Neath Canal NV03 Tennant Canal SV22 Pontardawe industrial estate road corridor & adjacent park SV23 Pontardawe river walk & leisure centre environs SV35 Pontardawe Cwm Du Glen
Under utilising heritage assets (both built and natural) & poor visitor facilities (lack of: parking; toilets; cafés; information – including pre-visit via leaflets or websites; car parking charges)	Tourism issues should be dealt with by tourism funding streams except where environmental improvement within settlements can make a difference to the tourism offer SV10 & SV12 Ystradgynlais Ironworks & Route to the Ironworks NV02 Neath Canal NV03 Tennant Canal NV09 Aberdulais Basin, Tonna AM20 Brynamman park lido
Large scale industrial, retail, housing development	West Tip redevelopment Cross Hands – Wardell Armstrong Master Plan Ewenny Road Industrial Estate redevelopment Llynfi Valley – Powell Dobson Master Plan 2010 Croeserw role as a 'hub' for the Afan Valley

**ISSUES FOR LANDSCAPE MANAGERS
(LOCAL AUTHORITIES, CCW, VISIT WALES, FCW, EAW ETC)**

Many issues in this section are generic across the WVSRA and extensive in their scale, there may be no obvious or affordable solution. The way forward is to 'chip away' at the issues, and optimise opportunities for change on the back of other capital schemes or programmes (whether private or public funded):
- for delivery via the public sector this may include: Forestry Commission Wales landholdings; Valleys Regional Park projects; Rural Development Plan projects; Cadw/Visit Wales E4G projects; Environment Agency Wales flood alleviation schemes
- for delivery via the private sector this may be through inclusion in Local Development Plans; through development control Section 106 agreements; agri-environment grants

Issue	Short list projects
Poor access to natural open space within and out from communities Raised by local authority studies using CCWs Greenspace Toolkit as part of the Local Development Plan process. A particular issue for the Gwendraeth Valley (Carmarthenshire County Council) as the PROW network and Open Access land is more limited than other areas. CCW will be reviewing results from the overall Greenspace Toolkit programme. There is a need to develop further community routes and improve local links and loops. Former tramways can provide future access opportunities out from settlements. There is a need to link up footpaths from settlements to long distance routes beyond WVSRA (see Appendix 9). The steep valley slopes can be a barrier to access.	GEN 1. Poor access to natural open space within and adjacent to communities
Lack of funding for areas outside WVSRA and which are gateways into the area Key gateway sites are: - from the M4 into the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmore Valleys; - from Cwmafan into the Afan Valley; - from Briton Ferry East into Neath.	
Lack of planted buffer around settlement edges Most settlements are poorly integrated into the open countryside. An issue raised in all Landscapes Working for Wales action plans and one which has yet to be addressed. New settlement edge development is still continuing with no allowance for a buffer (eg. Ffos Las in the Gwendraeth Valley). Settlement buffer planting could be a strategic project for FCW and CCW working with private farm owners (and for Glastir). Local authorities should ensure buffers are built into Local Development Plan policies and actioned as opportunities arise through the development control process.	GEN 4. Increasing woodland and hedgerow cover GEN 5. Strategic ecological connectivity Glastir
Loss of local field pattern due to mineral extraction The historic field pattern could have been restored as part of mineral restoration programme but as a result of poor restoration practice in most cases it has not. Mapping of damaged areas and working with private land owners to restore historic field patterns could be a strategic project for FCW and CCW (and for Glastir). Local authorities should ensure completion of mineral restoration plans is enforced.	GEN 4. Increasing woodland and hedgerow cover GEN 5. Strategic ecological connectivity Glastir

| Issue	Short list projects
Extent of conifer plantation & lack of native woodland FCW key aim is to increase native woodland cover ref: Woodlands for Wales WAG 2009 (although no targets are set). WAG have a target of 100,000 hectares in the next 20 years.	GEN 4. Increasing woodland and hedgerow cover GEN 5. Strategic ecological connectivity Glastir AM18 Gwaun Cae Gurwen trotting track GAV07i Blaengarw community route start
Poor/lack of management for native woodland, bracken encroachment This could be a strategic project for FCW and CCW working with private farm owners through Glastir.	GEN 5. Strategic ecological connectivity Glastir
Lack of connectivity for biodiversity through urban areas Recognised as a strategic issue. NPTCBC Biodiversity Team 'Landscape scale ecological connectivity project' 2010/11 could be a model for other local authorities. A review of outcomes is needed. Work is also being undertaken by CCW on promoting the concept of green infrastructure and links with WAG's consultation document 'A Living Wales' to establish a Natural Environmental Framework.	GEN 5. Strategic ecological connectivity
Lack of a linked bridleway 'network' A 2010 study to identify long distance routes in the WVSRA has been led by WAG Tourism, working with Valleys Regional Park. There maybe potential in the Afan Valley, where bridleways nearly extend into settlements eg. at Glyncorrwg and Blaengwynfi.	
Settlements have historically turned backs on rivers and canals Resulting in either poor public access or unattractive views where there is access. Opportunities need to be taken to improve these corridors for amenity and biodiversity eg. through development control, through public sector land purchase of key sites.	GEN 6. Strategic settlement scale landscape improvement (also refer Appendix 1)
Public agencies need to work on a geographic and integrated basis (inter-department, inter-agency working) 'One Wales' Many of the issues and opportunities identified are either on public sector land or could be controlled through public sector consents or enforcement action.	
Insufficient revenue funding An issue for management of public spaces and erosion of the role of local open spaces as multi-user amenity (apart from their use as formal recreation grounds predominantly for rugby and football). Public open spaces have potential for renewable energy projects which would generate income for improved revenue funding and capital community projects (& supports A Low Carbon Revolution 2010'.	

Issue	Short list projects
Risk from rivers flooding Refer to EAW flood risk mapping and EAW capital programme.	
Man-made barriers to fish migration on rivers and streams The major barriers have been tackled but many key sites remain that prevent full use by migrating trout and salmon of the improved river quality. Consult with Environment Agency Wales on riverside projects to identify potential for collaboration as opportunities arise.	
Impact of new development (in particular of volume house builders) eroding local heritage Poor design results in: breaking up building line of townscape; standard boundary treatment; lack of reference to vernacular in buildings or boundaries; lack of tree planting; planting schemes dominated by short lived ornamental shrubs; lack of buffer for biodiversity movement around or through new development; standard play areas with unimaginative play equipment and lack of shade or shelter.	GEN2. Improving environmental contribution from volume house builders
Underutilised and sometimes poorly understood heritage resource Build on projects such as the Amman Loughor Heritage Trails by Carmarthenshire County Council using a range of media and involving local people.	GEN 3. Defining local character (and refer Appendix 1)
Overhead wires through urban areas Costly to place underground. Use opportunities to place underground as they arise.	
Extent of invasive non-native species A particular issue along river corridors, blocking views and physical access, reducing biodiversity and costly to control. A sub-catchment strategy should be used, starting at the upstream end. Existing programmes are co-ordinated by WAG DE&T, run by local authorities, CCW and EAW.	Invasive non-native species are raised as an issue for several short listed projects, including SV23 Pontardawe river walk & leisure centre environs
Historic ribbon development and settlements merging Identified in this strategy as an issue in the upper Gwendraeth Valley, and in the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmore Valleys. Ensure green wedges to prevent further settlement merge are identified in Local Development Plans.	

Other environmental issues affecting communities

The Royal Commission on environmental pollution produced a report in 2007 on The Urban Environment, the table below is a summary of the issues they cover. This strategy is focussed on landscape and access related issues and so for example does not include discussion on issues of air or water pollution, waste, flooding, water resources, noise, health, contaminated land, or environmental management systems. Neither does this strategy look at the issue of environmental justice. The Royal Commission report highlights that the more deprived communities often suffer from a poorer quality environment and that this can be relative to health impacts.

	Cumulative	Systemic
Built urban environment	Building energy and water use and efficiency Building flexibility Urban density Municipal, commercial and industrial waste Construction waste Regional housing growth	Urban form and function Urban heat island Connectivity – transport, infrastructure, Combined Heat and Power Drainage – sewerage; storm water Sustainable drainage systems Green roofs Sense of place
Natural urban environment	Brownfield land Contaminated land	Urban rivers/hydrology Flooding – particularly pluvial Urban green space – parks, gardens, allotments; green corridors Urban biodiversity
Health and wellbeing	Vehicle emissions – respiratory and cardiac health Social deprivation Noise – impact on hearing/stress 'Sick buildings' Infection/spread of disease	Air pollution hot spots Heat stress-related illness/death Some aspects of mental illness Sense of place

The diagram below from the same report shows the influence that car ownership has had on communities, many of which are landscape related.
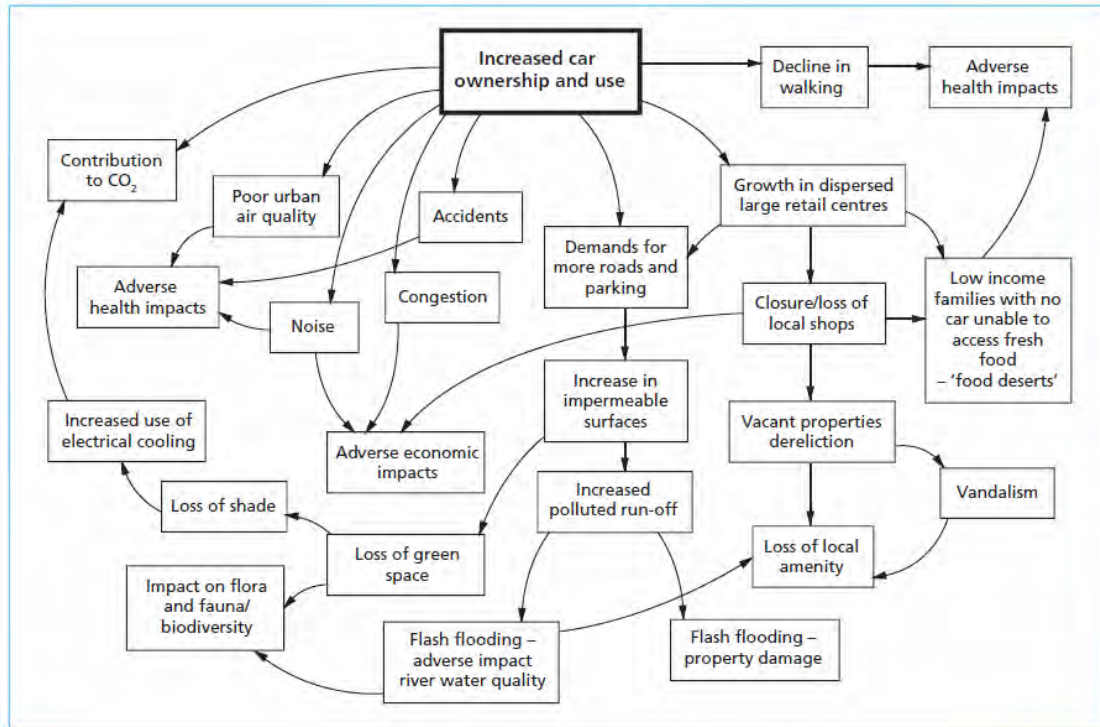
Royal Commission The Urban Environment 2007 – web of connections between increased car ownership and environmental and social outcomes in urban areas

11   STRATEGY VISION

This landscape strategy, seen as the first phase to improving the landscape quality of the WVSRA, focuses effort on delivering the WVSRA objectives and Welsh Assembly Government polices for communities within communities, to improve the places where people live, often work, and enjoy their leisure time.

Over time, as the landscape of settlements improves, the focus could be turned to improving the landscape of valley slopes (mostly rural but sometimes urban fringe in character) and on improving access to the slopes from communities. Later landscape improvement phases could focus on the rural upland hilltops and include encouraging public access and understanding of open access and common land, and on enhancing access links across the valleys.

The vision for phase 1, within communities, aims to create a linked network of multi-functional landscapes, a new Green Infrastructure along each valley by linking up formal recreation spaces, grass verges, pocket parks, community routes, river corridors, providing all sectors of communities with access to a diversity of outdoor experience and creating a more attractive environment for residents, businesses, visitors, and investors.

The vision should be promoted and delivered through:

-   developing partnerships across the public, private, voluntary, charity sectors (and not only with partners who have an environmental agenda)
-   alignment of land management practices by the public sector to achieve the vision on public land (requiring joined up working between local authority departments)
-   promotion of the vision by Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales, Forestry Commission Wales through existing policies and funding mechanisms, including external funding sources
-   promoting best planning and design practice, including via Local Development Planning policies and development control

To achieve the following outcomes:

-   all undeveloped land and derelict buildings to be brought into positive management
-   enhancement of local biodiversity value
-   active involvement of local communities in improving their environment and addressing anti-social behaviour
-   attraction of customers for local businesses
-   well signed facilities for visitors with accessible and imaginative interpretation
-   use of walking and cycling used as alternative transport not just for recreation
-   the use of the local environment as a teaching tool for schools
-   high levels of use of public spaces and use by all sections of the community
-   attraction of visitors through promotion and marketing

Ultimately - environmental improvement leading to economic and social gain for the local community and local area.

The vision of a new Green Infrastructure links with the Welsh Assembly Government concept of a Natural Environmental Framework strategy.

The key themes identified for phase 1 of this landscape strategy 'improving the environment and access to it for communities within communities' are:

Key themes identified for settlements

1. **Greening of key road corridors through settlements**

2. **Developing and upgrading strategic community routes**

3. **Transforming public open space (including formal recreation grounds & children's play)**

4. **Improving landscapes to enhance the tourism offer**

Section 8 discusses why and how public open space can be transformed and section 9 discusses the role of street trees in greening road corridors. The benefits of greening urban areas and development cycling routes are summarised in Appendices 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Four cross cutting themes have been developed which apply across the WVSRA, not just to those areas where improvement is needed:

Cross cutting themes across the WVSRA

1. **Making the most of new development**

2. **Creating a sense of place**

3. **Keeping the landscape strategy and valley action plans open to new ideas**

4. **Incorporating community consultation, art work/craft work, biodiversity**

With budget pressures comes the temptation to reduce project costs by cutting out design input from professionals, whether provided in-house or by consultants. Our recommendation is that this is false economy and that client group needs to work harder to ensure designs meet the following criteria to gain the best value for money, that:

- local services are used for design, construction, and supply of materials
- problems are cost effectively resolved and innovative solutions to problems should be encouraged, for example could re-skilling to change maintenance regimes achieve the desired result but just over a longer time period, similarly can results be achieved by working across departments eg. with tourism or partners with similar objectives such as the Countryside Council for Wales and Forestry Commission Wales

- revenue needs are clearly identified and funded with buy-in from those responsible for maintenance and management
- there is appreciation of the cultural and heritage context
- designs meet the needs of the users and responds to the locality
- waste is minimised
- meeting the above criteria will help to ensure that the project is sustainable over time

Consider alternative ways of delivering outcomes

- where there may be barriers to change or the project is novel, consider **demonstration projects**, for example introducing a natural play area to the leisure centre grounds at Pontardawe as part of an upgraded riverside walk/cycleway SV/23

- break away from a traditional approach to green space design and **involve others in design and aftercare** eg. health sector – to link social, mental, physical health; or education – to link with the curriculum; or Communities First - to link with social enterprises or local skills training; or through initiatives such as Bridgend County Borough Council's adult social care B-Leaf (which provides horticultural services) and Wood-B (which provides timber services)

- use the development control process and Section 106 funding (as opportunities arise) to deliver quality landscape improvements and ensure existing assets are retained (local vernacular built environment, mature trees and hedgerows)

- as revenue funding is vital to ensure the long term success of any capital project review the **use of Section 106 funding** for maintenance and management actions for EXISTING open spaces

CLIMATE CHANGE

What is the expected change over the next decade and how will this affect the environment of the WVSRA?

It is assumed this is ongoing work co-ordinated through the Climate Change Commission for Wales and that no specific WVSRA project is required.
Changes may include:

- an increase in pests and diseases, larch which can be a major component of forestry plantations is at risk and this could see a change to the forested landscapes of the Neath, Dulais and Afan Valleys.
- more accurate flood risk forecasting will squeeze development potential of the valleys
- more flood defences may be required in future
- the visual impact from new wind farms (but these may also be a source of funding for community projects)
- heating systems provided on a community rather than household basis
- an increased need for shade (already an issue for schools and play areas and one that is not being adequately addressed)

The uncertainty around climate change forecasting and the need for adaptation measures is another reason for a review of this landscape strategy in 2015.

12   LONG LIST OF PROJECTS

Potential projects to address the landscape issues facing the WVSRA were identified from the number of sources listed in section 10. Potential projects were peer reviewed at valley based local authority workshops which resulted in a **long list of 135 projects**, these are set out in the nine landscape action plans.

The following scoring criteria were developed and applied by Mackley Davies, with the top ranking schemes for each valley constituting the **short list of projects** (see section 13).

SCORING CRITERIA

Scoring on the long list uses the following response to questions about project deliverability, impact and beneficiaries:

> √√   big yes
> √   yes
> 0   negligible/neutral/difficult to decide/unknown/uncertain
> X   no

Deliverability

- Achievable – scores 0 for private land as this is a risk to the project

- Affordable – projects under £200k are defined as affordable (projects exceeding £200k may be deliverable but with the short to medium term squeeze on public and private sector funding these will probably need to be phased and so are shown as 'X unless phased')

- Value for money – access projects have a high economic gearing; planting only projects are comparatively low cost and provide many social as well as environmental benefits

- Maintenance and management ie. is there a commitment to meeting revenue costs; assumption used is if the land is council or community council the project will be appropriately maintained; a '0' is entered where a previous scheme has not been maintained or there is a history of vandalism or land is privately owned

Impact

- Accessible within the community – ie can get the benefit without needing a car

- Transforming – how much will the project benefit the community of residents, businesses, visitors, biodiversity

- Legacy – medium term benefits across economic, social and environmental agenda (urban trees can live for 50+ years)

- Meets need – this has been assessed by the Mackley Davies drive round and peer review at local authority workshops

- Innovative – examples include strategic street tree planting, bringing biodiversity into settlements and formal open spaces, creating new community routes

- New project – this is a check on whether the project is new and not capital replacement of previously poorly maintained project

Who benefits

0	for road users
√	for residents
√√	for residents + visitors or businesses

The type of project is also shown using the following codes:

A	access
B	gateways
C	open spaces
D	road corridors in settlements
E	road corridors outside settlements
F	tourism

13 SHORT LIST OF PROJECTS

The table below summarises the 44 short list of projects. More detail is available in the nine landscape action plans where a project sheet outlines the issues, opportunities and costs.

The scope and scale of projects has been defined against a background of future public sector cuts. As strategic projects, they may combine a number of smaller projects and could be phased if required.

Budget costs are based on a guesstimate of the type and scale of work that may be required and show the capital cost of the project plus revenue costs for five years (for maintenance to planting). Both capital and revenue costs include consultants fees. Maintenance costs are based on the likely scale of planting as follows:

Small	£3-6k
Medium	£6-10k
Large	£10-15k

Given the high cost of constructing **new community cycling routes,** such projects will likely be funded from a number of sources. Costs should be reviewed to ensure the elements listed below are incorporated into the scheme. This may increase the current cost, as an example around £200k of work has been identified to upgrade the amenity value of the existing cycle way project OV12 Ogmore Community Route. Elements to consider include:

- gateways and signage that are locally relevant in terms of materials and detailing;
- access for all (for example motorised scooters can use cycle ways but need radar key access gates to be provided);
- screening of detractors;
- vegetation management to open up attractive views;
- provision of amenity areas for sitting/picnicking;
- biodiversity enhancement;
- provision of interpretation where relevant.

For the above reasons, the cost of new community cycling routes has generally not been included in the short list. It is suggested that the relevant local authority go through the proposals and costs to ensure the above landscape, amenity and biodiversity objectives are included.

PHASING OF ACTIONS

Some actions lend themselves to phasing, for example OV11 Ogmore Valley A4061 corridor which totals c£300k but is made up of 11 projects with a capital cost range of £10-40k.

Public open space projects could also be phased as follows:
- phase 1: consultation, planting, changing mowing regimes
- phase 2: new seating, signage, paths to improve access for all, wardens for larger spaces (along the lines of existing Street Ambassadors)

- phase 3: diversify larger left over space for allotments, community orchards, community gardens. Add other facilities such as parking for disabled and toilets where open space is successful and used by high number of visitors.

Sufficient lead in time is required for community consultation, particularly where a change to public open space or residential areas is proposed.

Projects in Communities First Areas are shown in bold.

OGMORE VALLEY

Score	Ogmore rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
16	1	OV11 A4061 corridor – significant green verges with no tree or shrub cover **(Blackmill in CF Area)** Combines 11 projects of capital cost range £10-40k	D	L	280 +17
13	2	OV12 Established community route - improvements required to access points, signage, stopping areas **(Blackmill in CF Area)**	A	L	185 +14
				Total	**c500**

GARW VALLEY

Score	Garw rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
16	**=1**	**GAV09 Bettws Strategic tree planting through settlement (excl. phase 2 consultant to review parking at £10k)**	**D**	**M**	**80 +12**
15	2	GAV07i Blaengarw community route start. Upgrade this key location & adjacent bus terminus, open space & play area	C	M	50 +14
12	=3	GAV06 Ffaldau Industrial Estate frontage, and adjacent A4064 road frontage to social housing, police station, play area	D	M	160 +17
12	=3	GAV07ii Blaengarw village centre pocket park in poor condition at a key location on the A4064 (excl. phase 2 road upgrade at £35K)	C/D	S	35 +5
				Total	**c375**

LLYNFI VALLEY

Score	Llynfi rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
16	1	LV06 Maesteg Welfare Park & Hospital Frontage – improve access, diversify use of Maestegs key open space, upgrade key road frontage	C	L	120 +12
15	2	LV18 Community route south from Maesteg – feasibility to extend existing route south, including potential for connection to Bettws in Garw Valley	A	XL	20
14	**=3**	**LV11 Caerau Community Centre & Open Space (used as a nursery, family help) – upgrade associated residential open space and play area**	**C**	**M**	**45 +5**
14	**=3**	**LV12 Caerau Welfare Ground – key open space for social housing, improve access, diversify uses, discourage motorbike access**	**C**	**L**	**100 +8**
14	**=3**	**LV13 Caerau A4063 Road Corridor - upgrade green verges in residential area – take lead from Powell Dobson report**	**C/A**	**L**	**40 +8**
14	=3	LV03 Garth Park – key open space for residents, adjacent to social housing, diversify uses, improve access including along river corridor	C	L	90 +10
				Total	**c460**

AFAN VALLEY

Score	Afan rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
13	**=1**	**AV05 Ton-mawr Tunnels Cycle Way Feasibility - study to re-open mining tunnel routes to improve cyleway links to Afan Forest Park**	**A**	**XL**	**20**
13	**=1**	**AV06 Efail Fach to Briton Ferry Cycle Way Feasibility - study to provide off-road link from Briton Ferry into the Afan Valley**	**A**	**XL**	**20**
13	**=1**	**AV09 Croeserw Park & Informal Open Spaces – upgrade A4063 frontage, diversify uses at Tudor Park, review community uses of informal open spaces (phase 1 costs shown include £10k for open space management plan)**	**C**	**L**	**120 +12**

Score	Afan rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
12	2	**AV11 Blaengwynfi Open Space Links – upgrade village gateways; diversify uses for a series of linked open spaces & upgrade off-road access along the river and to the school (incl. £10k for traffic management plan)**	C	L	140 +17
				Total	**c330**

DULAIS VALLEY

Score	Dulais rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
15	1	**DV01 Dyffryn Road Corridor – upgrade frontages to sheltered housing, school, pocket park, play area/rugby club; provide gateway access to long distance route (Sarn Helen)**	D/C	L	90 +14
14	2	**DV06 Seven Sisters High Street - create new seating area to upgrade environment at this key junction**	D/C	S	60 +8
13	=3	**DV11 Seven Sisters Park – project being led by Groundwork**	C	L	-
13	=3	**DV05 Seven Sisters High Street Amenity Space – update pocket park, improve access links including to adjacent recreation space**	C	M	35 +6
				excl. DV11 Total	**c215**

Note costs are not yet available for DV11 Seven Sisters Park, a project being led by Groundwork Bridgend & Neath Port Talbot.

NEATH VALLEY

Score	Neath Rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
15	1	**NV14 Briton Ferry West Amenity Spaces at Brynhyfryd – production of an environmental regeneration framework & action plan for open spaces within the residential area (including links to Neath Canal)**	C	L	15
14	=2	NV01ii Glyn-neath Park – upgrade entrances, boundaries, encourage biodiversity, resolve major detractors (includes £60k for railings to replace block walls)	C	L	170 +17

Score	Neath Rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
14	=2	NV06 Resolven Park – diversify uses, upgrade boundaries, improve access, screen adjacent industrial area	C	M	100 +14
14	=2	NV09 Tonna Aberdulais Basin – provide interpretation & improved access to built & natural heritage; upgrade detractors	F	L	120 +8
14	=2	NV16 Neath Amenity Spaces at Penywern – encourage biodiversity, plant up road boundaries & review access at two separate spaces (informal open space & formal play area); review options to link both spaces	C	M	50 +14
12	=4	NV02 Neath Canal – upgrade access points, resolve detractors, provide signage, review potential for links to Tennant Canal & Gnoll Park (costs shown are £110k + 17 for work on Canal Co land; extent of work on private land is unknown, £160k included) Consider feasibility study for entire project at £20k	A/F	L	270 +17
12	=4	NV03 Tennant Canal – feasibility to provide for cycling, creating a 6km circular route with Neath Canal, identify need for surfacing, access points, detractors, signage	A/F	L	20
				Total	**c815**

SWANSEA VALLEY

Score	Swansea rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
15	**=1**	**SV10 Ystradgynlais Ironworks Powys - update layout for seating; update interpretation; plant boundary with housing; upgrade link through site to River Tawe walk; provide lighting of ironworks remains**	**F**	**M/L**	**80 +8**
15	**=1**	**SV24 Clydach Connect2 Cycleway & Detractors CC of Swansea - £900k for Sustrans Connect2 project + £235k to tackle canal detractors (excl £211k to tackle phase 2 detractors)**	**A**	**XL**	NEW CYCLE ROUTE+ 235

Score	Swansea rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
14	=2	SV22 Pontardawe Park & Industrial Estate Corridor NPTCBC - diversify park uses, improve access (including to canal) & screen industrial area; add street tree planting to improve park access through estate	C/D	L	85 +12
14	=2	SV23 Pontardawe River Walk & Leisure Centre Environs NPTCBC - upgrade access; planting to soften boundaries; riverside management; update seating and signage; (excl £100k+ for phase 2 natural play)	C/F	XL	95 +14
14	=2	SV35 Pontardawe Cwm Du Glen NPTCBC – upgrade access; signage; interpretation	A	M	100
		(excl SV24 Connect2) Total			**c630**

Also refer to SV12 'Route to Ystradgynlais Ironworks' (costed at £45k + £8k maintenance). Although on its own this is not a priority project for the Swansea Valley the project could be undertaken in tandem with SV10 Ystradgynlais Ironworks.

AMMAN VALLEY

Note Brynamman lost Communities First Area status in 2010.

Score	Amman rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
16	**1**	**AM23 Pantyfynnon CCC – new community route link to Ammanford at £100k**	**A**	**XL**	**NEW CYCLE ROUTE**
15	=2	**AM20 Brynamman Park CCC – Atkins report (Brynamman Environmental Improvements 2010) identified o/a £800k improvements including work to lido**	**C**	**L**	**-**
15	=2	AM24 Dyffryn Road Industrial Estate & Link to Llandybie CCC – upgrade industrial estate public frontage (£60k figure shown) & formalise community route link to Llandybie at £80k	D/A	L	60 +5
14	**=3**	**AM01,02,03,18 Gwaun Cae Gurwen Road Corridor NPTCBC – upgrade boundaries to A4069 & on route to trotting track (excl new woodland at track AM18)**	**D**	**L**	***55 +12***

Score	Amman rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
13	**4**	**AM17 Amman Community Route NPTCBC – extension to existing route from Garnant to Brynamman (following phase to link Rhosaman with Cwmllynfell) £20k feasibility to extend from Garnant to Gwaun Cae Gurwen**	**A**	**XL**	**NEW CYCLE ROUTE**
		(excl AM17, AM20, part AM24) Total			**c135**

Note break-out costs for AM20 Brynamman Park are not available.

GWENDRAETH VALLEY

Score	Gwend raeth rank	Project	Type	Scale	Cost £k
17	=1	GV12 Trimsaran Road Corridor (route to Ffos Las) – upgrade detractors along B4317; provide gateway; upgrade frontage to leisure centre	D	M	65 +14
16	=2	GV11 Carway Road Corridor & Recreation Ground – street tree planting to B4317 (route to Ffos Las); at open space use left over space for community use & upgrade seating	D	M	80 +10
15	=3	GV09 Pont Henri Park – diversify management & uses, upgrade entrances, integrate with adjacent sheltered housing & school	C	M	60 +14
15	=3	GV15 Ffordd Cwm Gwendraeth Community Route – new off-road route from Tumble to Kidwelly along former railway at £500k	A	XL	NEW CYCLE ROUTE
15	=3	GV10 Pontyates Road Corridor – screen detractors; upgrade river bridge steelwork; integrate settlement edge; review space alongside rugby ground for biodiversity	D	M	55 +12
15	=3	GV07 Tumble Road Corridor – street tree planting to B4310; gateway; upgrade memorial area (excludes phase 2 upgrade to park & to on street parking)	D	M	100 +12
		(excl GV15) Total			**c425**

The total cost for projects identified at this stage (but note excluding all new cycle access projects) is circa **£4M** (this includes five years of soft landscape maintenance before handover to the landowner).

14   GENERIC PROJECTS

The following are projects that tackle WVSRA wide issues and are not geographically confined to settlements. Costs are not provided as many of the outcomes could be achieved through collaborative working (possibly by secondment) between the Assembly sponsored bodies: Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission Wales and Environment Agency Wales.

GEN 1.   **Tackling poor access to natural open space within and adjacent to communities**

The issue has been raised in local authority studies using the Countryside Council for Wales' Greenspace Toolkit as part of the Local Development Plan process. This is a particular issue for the Gwendraeth Valley as the public rights of way network and Open Access land is more limited than other valleys.

Note that the work has been undertaken by different consultants working on different mapping platforms. The Countryside Council for Wales will be reviewing results from the overall programme. The Welsh Assembly Government should obtain a WVSRA review of sites and add strategic sites to the relevant valley landscape action plan. Sites may require a change to a less intensive management regime or improved access to the generally high quality natural environment beyond settlements by developing links and loops. Note that the introduction of natural play should be seen as part of access to natural open space. Also see CABE Space 'Skills to Grow' which is a self assessment tool for local authorities to measure open space service performance including measures on community engagement; also see CABE 'Making contracts work for wildlife' 2006.

There may be a need to encourage residents to use new access links. The Countryside Council for Wales and Sustrans have experience of the need to provide social support to encourage access to new environments.

- Agree the roles for CCW and Forestry Commission Wales to create green infrastructure within communities.
- Review outcomes from the 2010/11 NPTCBC strategic ecological connectivity project and consider using the results as a demonstration project (see GEN 5).
- Hold workshops/conferences to promote best practice in creating community green infrastructure – aimed as local authority officers across parks, highways, development control, forward planning, community councils, education, involving those who are already promoting this approach eg. biodiversity, tree officers (an alternative method of delivery raised by the client group for this project is through the Valleys Regional Park or Groundwork Wales).
- Add to the above or hold separately a workshop/conference to promote natural play opportunities, using Forestry Commission expertise and experience (GEN 7).

GEN2. **Improving the landscape contribution from volume house builders –**

In Wales, the key relevant planning guidance is 'Technical Advice Note 12 : Design', a well written and illustrated document. Also relevant is 'Technical Advice Note 22 : Planning for sustainable buildings'. Aspects of BREEAM and the Code for Sustainable Homes also support the implementation of good design principles.

However, CABE Space have identified that although planning guidance is available to require good quality design in housing and that although house builders and developers can demonstrate they are able to deliver urban development of quality design, the actual achievement of this is rare. This is a UK wide issue and it is not clear how best to resolve this.

Ideas on how to resolve this issue should be sought from local authorities, CABE, the relevant professional bodies (RIBA, RICS, LI, RTPI) and the Design Commission Wales.

Some initial ideas are:

- Local authorities to provide more site specific development briefs – but also at a community level (see example in Appendix 1 from Powys County Council Area Centre Appraisals).
- Where development briefs are not provided, forward planning should as a minimum ensure the public realm needs are clearly identified for housing allocation sites.
- Hold meetings with the key volume house building companies.
- Hold a conference and demonstrate best practice through examples such as the work being promoted by Hab Oakus (eg. The Triangle project near Swindon).
- There may be a need for local authority professionals to better understand local man-made heritage.
- There may be a shortage of design skills within local authorities, for example landscape architects, urban designers.

GEN 3. **Defining local character**

There is a need for short and easy to understand settlement appraisals to steer the design, management and maintenance of the public realm – see Appendix 1 for an example. There are some settlements which have a clearly different vernacular, such as the use of red brick detailing in Clydach, but generally the building stone is underlying pennant sandstone with red or yellow brick edging, and vertical railings on low stone walls to define frontages.

In 'Public Realm Design for the Heads of the Valleys' 2008 Powell Dobson identified 'there is a richness in tradition and culture in the Valleys which is often related to the industrial heritage of the area, but is only occasionally reflected in the public realm. Local traditions of craftsmanship only occasionally show and materials and elements in the town centres often come from a standard palette and bear little relation to the region'.

GEN 4.   Increasing woodland and hedgerow cover

Most settlements are poorly integrated into the open countryside and there is a lack of planted buffer around settlement edges. An issue raised in all Landscapes Working for Wales action plans but one which has yet to be addressed. New development is still continuing with no allowance for a buffer, for example at Ffos Las in the Gwendraeth Valley. This could be a strategic project working with private farm owners, including through the new agri-environment programme Glastir.

A linked issue is the loss of pre-industrial field pattern during mineral extraction which has not been subsequently restored. Mapping of these degraded areas and working with private land owners to encourage hedgerow and small woodland restoration could be a strategic project and may also involve Glastir.

Existing native woodland is at risk from either inappropriate management or lack of management. Encouraging active but appropriate management could be a strategic project, again this may involve Glastir.

The Welsh Assembly Government has a target of creating 100,000 hectares of new native woodland over the next 20 years. Identifying sites for new woodland to meet this ambitious target could make use of the Forestry Commission Wales method developed for the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area.

GEN 5.   Strategic ecological connectivity

A strategic approach is needed to tackle the issue of poor ecological connectivity. With built up areas being a key barrier to wildlife movement, providing ecological connectivity through settlements would not only provide benefits for biodiversity but also provide benefits for local communities (see Appendix 6 for the benefits of green infrastructure).

The Neath Port Talbot CBC 'Landscape scale ecological connectivity project' 2010/11 if successful could become a model for other local authorities. A review of outcomes is needed.

Work is also being undertaken by the Countryside Council for Wales to develop the concept of green infrastructure, starting with the South East Wales Spatial Plan Area (which includes the three Bridgend valleys). Refer to WAG/CCW Framework for the South East Wales Networked Environmental Region 2009.

Any strategic projects should link to the Welsh Assembly Government concept of a Natural Environmental Framework as set out in the 2010 consultation document 'A Living Wales'.

This project could link up with GEN 1 and GEN 4.

GEN 6.   Strategic settlement-scale landscape improvement

The following WVSRA towns and large villages have been identified by Mackley Davies as most in need of a settlement-scale approach to landscape improvement due to the extent of landscape issues. We are not aware of existing landscape master plans for these settlements, which if undertaken should be as part of a holistic package of regeneration.

- Glyncorrwg – Afan Valley
- Croeserw – Afan Valley
- Blaengwynfi/Abergwynfi – Afan Valley
- Seven Sisters – Dulais Valley
- Bettws – Garw Valley

- Tumble – Gwendraeth Valley
- Glyn-neath – Neath Valley
- Briton Ferry – Neath Valley
- Evanstown – Ogmore Valley

GEN 7.   Welsh Assembly Government guides on street trees and natural play

Resistance from local authority and community council managers to the introduction of street trees and natural play areas may be a substantial barrier for change in WVSRA communities.

For natural play, existing local authority guidance to developers allows little or no leeway for alternative more stimulating play provision. For example Carmarthenshire County Council requires the National Playing Fields Association Six Acre Standard which states that play equipment must conform to EN1176.

The Forestry Commission have undertaken a large body of research and on the ground projects to demonstrate benefits, how to deal with risk, management and maintenance costs, and work with the Trees & Design Action Group (TDAG) to provide guidance and case studies.

A change of attitude could be brought about through a workshop/conference involving decision makers, in addition to strategic technical guidance to encourage street tree planting and natural play. These initiatives could be led by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Forestry Commission Wales (who have an Urban Tree Officer) working with a network of supportive organisations and officers. For the WVSRA towns with additional funding, Ammanford, Clydach and Cross Hands would benefit from street tree planting and the Welsh Assembly Government should ensure funding meets this need and use these as examples of good practice.

15   OUTCOMES

The justification for social and economic change is often the use of statistics, this information has been collected in a reasonably consistent way and over a long period of time. There is very little equivalent information for the environment.

For many environmental projects the outcomes can be easily measured as the change is physical, examples include length of native hedgerow, number of trees, length of new cycleway or footpath.

For some projects the outcomes can be measured but require monitoring, examples include a change in the number of footpath users, a change to the number and profile of people using public open spaces, other measures will require more complex monitoring, for example the impact that greening up communities has on property values or on inward investment, a change in biodiversity species or numbers.

Other outcomes may be impossible to measure but could be predicted based on extrapolating information from research studies. Examples include a change in the number of people that commute to work by bicycle

> Example: World Health organisation research shows that the risk of mortality for commuter cycling to work is 0.72 compared to the average of 1 for those not. The value of a statistical life is Euros 1.5M so if the number of users is known this could be converted to health impacts in £K. If the journey length is know, the carbon saving could be calculated and converted to £k depending on the current trading value per tonne of CO^2.

For examples of the benefits of the less tangible outcomes refer to the following Appendices:

> 4 - benefits of trees
> 5 - benefits of cycling
> 6 - benefits of green infrastructure
> 7 - benefits of natural play.

The outcomes can only be realised if **staff and consultants** working on the projects are sufficiently experienced, skilled, and up to date with best practice. It will depend on the type of project, but we suggest the following is incorporated into each project brief:

- consultation with the community
- consultation with technical experts: with the local authority biodiversity team; local access group; local history/architecture group
- a review of on-line LANDMAP information to provide a design context (looking at all aspects : cultural; geological; habitat; historic; visual/sensory)
- refer to county based 'Pevsner Architectural Guides' for local architectural materials and styles
- sufficient time allowance to assess the local vernacular
- sufficient lead in time to identify and involve local craftsmen and specialist suppliers in detailed design

- ditto where there is potential for community artwork for example involving local schools
- reference to relevant best practice eg. CABE making contracts work for wildlife: space how to encourage biodiversity in urban parks 2006
- proposals are to follow established place-making principles of urban design and current Welsh Assembly Government guidance such as TAN12, and will be assessed against the guidance in Creating Sustainable Places

For the public realm to conserve the local character and provide sustainable, well designed, successful spaces, the above guidance needs to be followed by staff across **all local authority departments** that are involved with design, management or maintenance.

The following photo sheets show examples of good practice, mainly from the WVSRA, for open spaces, gateways, and street planting.

1. Cwmafan
2. Oxford City
3. Pontarddulais
4. Clydach BMX
5. Oxford City
6. Pontarddulais BMX
7. New Tredegar
8. Skewen
9. Banwen

OPEN SPACES - good practice examples
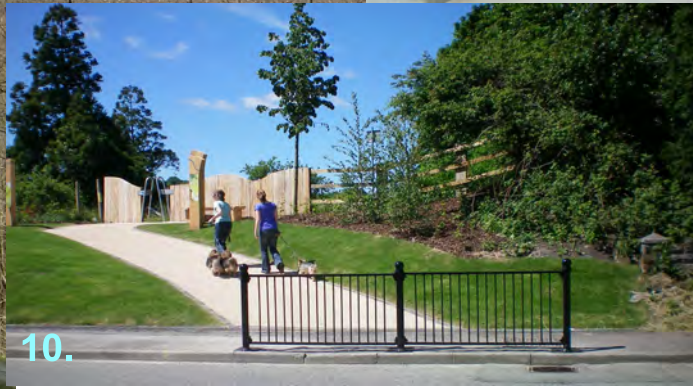
1. Bryngarw
2. Ynysmeudwy
3. Ogmore Vale
4. Blackmill
5. Clydach
6. Maesteg
7. Caerleon, Newport
8. Rhosamman
9. Ogmore Vale
10. Cross Hands

GATEWAYS - good practice examples

1. Seven Sisters
2. Maesteg
3. McDonalds Glyn-neath
4. Pontycymer
5. Ystradgynlais
6. Pontardawe
7. Pontarddulais
8. Neath
9. Cwmafan

STREET PLANTING - good practice examples

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: town appraisals

Appendix A: Area Centre Appraisals

Builth Wells

Builth Wells

1.1   Builth Wells lies on the southern banks of the River Wye, between the Cambrian Mountains to the north west and the wilderness of the Epynt to the South.

1.2   The origin of the town dates with certainty from Norman times with the construction of the timber Motte and Bailey castle.

1.3   Gradually the embryonic town grew in importance and size, so much so that in 1277 it was granted a Royal Charter as a Borough Town.

1.4   The following four centuries saw the sporadic growth of a small market town, which by 1800 had a population close to 700.

1.5   The main fabric of modern Builth dates largely from Victorian and Edwardian times, due to the discovery of the health springs and the arrival of the railway in the 1860's.

Design Characteristics

1.6   As a result of its history, the town has evidence of both pre-railway and post-railway housing, with much of the town centre and core area reflecting the earlier design approach. A high proportion of this housing is in natural stone with natural slate roofs, typically in three storey units, with smaller pane windows. Some properties also have gable walls protected by slate hanging.

1.7   The close integration of these buildings with their later counterparts has meant that they have a more distant setting from the surrounding landscape. In the southern parts of the town, however, topography and the changes in levels - and the character of footpaths and narrow roadways - establishes an intimacy of character not evident in the flatter parts of town.

1.8   The 19th century saw an element of new housing, though at a slower rate than in the 'railway towns' of mid Wales. This brought the introduction of factory-made bricks, which became evidenced partly in brick detailing on predominantly-stone housing and then in use for full elevations. These bricks included the red and pale yellow bricks found in the other towns. A mixture of the two was sometimes used to produce highlights in later decades. Roofing material remained predominantly Welsh slate.

1.9   Later developments have involved rendered properties and a more standardised developer architecture.

1.10   Many of the earlier residential properties fronted directly onto the street or footway. Where forecourts are provided, these are contained by a wide variety of treatments including stone walling, cast iron railings (sometimes on dwarf walls) and hedgerows.

1.11   The more recent 'suburban' development has more typically been open plan or with hedgerows.

Appendix A: Area Centre Appraisals

Builth Wells

Future Development

1.12   The dense character of the town centre is reflected partly in the intimate but lower scale of the nearby housing to the south. A less dense structure exists in the other areas to the west.

1.13   The main highways are fronted by good quality Victorian and earlier housing (and commercial premises) and this gives the opportunity for new development to reinforce the character of the town, and as such, new development should adhere to the following requirements:

- Materials should generally be natural stone or pale render with brickwork detailing (using the same colours). The use of facing brickwork will be permitted only in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated that the local context can accept facing brickwork and where it replicates the historic reds and pale yellows of the town.

- The pitch of the roof should not be less than 35-45 degrees, with vertical gable ends rather than hipped roofs. Chimney stacks should be incorporated in all building groups (whether real or false);

- All roofs should be of natural or reconstituted grey slate.

- Dwellings should generally be set back no more than 3m from the road, being two to three storeys in the town centre and to the south and maybe limited mainly to two storey to the west.

- Windows should have vertical proportions and, where appropriate, arched heads; sills should be clearly defined. Glazing bars should reflect a local cruciform pattern or have smaller panes.

- Facades should generally be restricted to one type of building material, with very limited detailing around windows.

- Preferred front boundaries are low rise walls with railings.

APPENDIX 2: examples of community projects

Community renewable energy projects

Communities within the WVSRA can access free impartial advice through an ESF project 'Ynni'r Fro' which aims to encourage the development of large scale community scale renewable energy schemes. A network of locally based technical development officers is available to help groups develop projects and access funding streams

Contacts within the WVSRA are:
Jenny Carlisle   01639 830870 for Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend
Ben Ferguson-Walker   07740 519397 for Carmarthenshire
Dr Simone Lowthe-Thomas   01982 551006 for Powys

For smaller scale schemes such as photo voltaics on community buildings, there is a gap in terms of access to impartial advice. Since the introduction of the Feed in Tariff Scheme (FiTS) from April 2010 this is a rapidly changing market and the Climate Change team at the Welsh Assembly Government should be contacted for up to date support projects.

In line with the Welsh Assembly Government document A Low Carbon Revolution 2010.

Allotments

Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify allotment areas. There is a groundswell for 'growing your own' which is only likely to increase as petrol prices and food prices rise. At present there is more demand than supply across most of the WVSRA.

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG www.farmgarden.org.uk) support city farms, community gardens, school farms and community-managed allotments. In June 2010 they launched 'Growing together in Wales' and produced a map of community farms and gardens in Wales. The WVSRA is represented by one site, a community garden at Penygroes, Carmarthenshire.

Alongside allotments, community gardens and orchards can be incorporated into existing parks and recreation space where there is a local will and sufficient space.

The Mentro Allan project funded by the Big Lottery – aiming to increase physical activity for hard to reach groups using the local natural environment. Neath Port Talbot 'Mentro Allan', aims to increase physical activity levels of young people aged 11 to 25 at 'risk of disengagement' by increasing their use and enjoyment of the natural outdoor environment in Neath Port Talbot. The project will develop new opportunities for the target group to participate in outdoor adventure and conservation activities, likely to include: walking/hill walking, orienteering, cycling, mountain biking, climbing, canoeing and surfing. Environmental/conservation activities will include green gyms, bush craft, nature walks, dry stone walling, path restoration/construction and local green space improvement.

Bridgend 'Venture Out' - using a 'health by stealth' approach, older participants will be engaged in activities where the physical activity is incidental e.g. historic walks and photographic diaries. A lack of information on the availability of local outdoor areas has been identified as a barrier so the project will produce targeted information involving participants in the production of printed materials, for example taking walk photography and designing way marked trails.

Cwm y Mynydd – funded by the Rural Development Plan in Caerphilly CBC, includes objectives to: safeguard and enhance the rural environment and heritage. including maximising the opportunities presented by the growth in the hospitality/tourism sector; improve the physical environment within rural communities through village restoration and improved community amenities; address the issues relating to rural skills and employment opportunities through a training project.

Natural England Natural Play Invaders – provides local communities with a set of portable natural play elements that can be placed in a public space for a day, weekend, or permanently and aims to reconnect children with their local green spaces.

Communities on Foot - Ramblers Cymru launched Communities on Foot in 2010 following success of the programme in Neath Port Talbot. The toolkit explains how to set up and run a sustainable community based walking group to encourage people to walk in their local area and explains how to build walking into their everyday lives. Those who have taken part in the initial pilot have reported positive results including improved health, sleeping better and a renewed interest in the area they live. The second phase of the project will see the development of a Community Walking hub, based at Glyncorrwg Ponds in the Garw Valley with satellite hubs in nearby communities. It is hoped this will lead to the production of a model for developing Community Walking Hubs that can be adopted by others across Wales.

WECAN (working together for economically prosperous communities through assets of natural heritage) a social enterprise project based on the natural environment, funded through the Valleys Regional Park (an Interreg project, linked to sites in Belgium and France).

Cleaner Greener Communities (BTCV, Keep Wales Tidy, Groundwork), a Welsh Assembly Government funded project across the Heads of the Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area which offers advice, training and grants to local communities.

APPENDIX 3:   Extract from the Welsh Housing Quality Standards 2008

Part 6. Located in attractive and safe environments		
6 (a)	Are roads and footpaths accessible, providing safety for residents, pedestrians and children?	S
6 (b)	Is there soft and hard landscaping with planting in protected areas?	S
6 (c)	Is there adequate street lighting?	S
6 (d)	Is there adequate and safe play space for young children?	S
6 (e)	Are there adequate, practical and maintainable communal areas?	S
6 (f)	Are dwellings clearly identifiable with definable boundaries?	S
6 (g)	Are utility services practically located and well identified?	S
6 (h)	Is there adequate and practically located car parking clearly visible to residents?	S

APPENDIX 4: Benefits of trees

Chris Hastie an Arboricultural Officer at Warwick District Council has undertaken the research and provided a summary of tree benefits below.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Consumer behaviour

A study by the University of Washington established a number of benefits in terms of consumer experiences of business districts with trees (Wolf, 1998(a), Wolf, 1999 and Wolf, 2003). Consumers reported consistently higher ratings for a number of categories related to their perception of business districts with trees. They reported a willingness to pay more for parking in landscaped car parks and on average reported a willingness to pay about 11% more for goods in a landscaped business district than a non landscaped district, with this figure being as high as 50% for convenience goods.

Both the business community and consumers were found to favour business districts with good landscaping (Wolf, 1998(b)).

The quality of landscaping along approach routes to business districts has also been found to positively influence consumer perceptions (Wolf, 2000).

Inward investment

The attractiveness of an environment is an important factor in attracting inward investment. Both consumers and businesses have been found to favour districts with high tree cover and the increase in retail prices that can be commanded in well landscaped areas can reasonably be assumed to be a positive benefit in attracting businesses to the district.

Property values

Several studies in the USA have analysed the effect of tree cover on the price of residential house sales, finding that values of properties in tree lined areas may be up to 6% greater than in similar areas without trees (Wolf, 1998 (c)).

The market in the UK is different and a direct translation of these data is not possible. Never the less, an informal telephone survey of estate agents in the Warwick area suggests that tree cover has a positive effect on saleability, if not directly on price. Properties on tree lined street were said to be in more demand and to sell faster.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Crime reduction

The conventional wisdom has been that trees and other vegetation have a negative impact on crime because they provide cover for criminals and reduce opportunities for casual surveillance.

Research in a particularly deprived area of inner city Chicago has suggested that this is in fact not the case and that appropriate vegetation cover can lead to reduced crime rates (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001(a)). The study dealt largely with mown grass and high canopy trees, which do not provide cover in the same way as, for example, shrub planting. It looked at an area with relatively homogenous architecture and a relatively

homogenous population but with differing levels of vegetation. Areas with higher vegetation cover were found to have lower rates of crime, as measured by reports to the police.

Two mechanisms are suggested by which crime rates might be reduced by trees. The first is through an increase in surveillance, essentially because public open space with trees tends to be used much more than space without trees. The second mechanism relates particularly to violent crime and relates to evidence that vegetation has a mitigating effect on mental fatigue, itself often a precursor of outbursts of anger and violence (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001(b)).

Other social benefits

A wealth of research has been undertaken by the Human-Environment Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois and has identified numerous beneficial effects that trees have on society. A good summary of these is a paper by Frances E. Kuo, "The Role of Arboriculture in a Healthy Social Ecology", (Kuo, 2003).

Many of these benefits relate to encouraging people out of their homes and into public open space, where they react more with others and build stronger social relationships. An additional benefit of interest is the positive effect that contact with nature can have on children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) (Taylor, Kuo, Sullivan, 2001).

Dr Rachel Kaplan has found that desk workers who can see nature from their desks experience 23% less time off sick than those who can not see any nature. Desk workers who can see nature also report greater job satisfaction (reported by Wolf, 1998(d)), whilst hospital patients with views of trees have been found to recover significantly faster than those who can not see any natural features.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Pollution interception

Research undertaken in the West Midlands by Lancaster University (Hewitt et al, undated) has established that trees can remove a number of pollutants from the atmosphere, including ozone, nitrogen dioxide and particles. The news is not all good though. Trees also produce volatile organic compounds, VOCs, which in combination with some man made pollutants can lead to an increase in ozone, particulates and other pollutants. Different species of tree have different net effects on air quality. Willows, poplars and oaks can potentially worsen air quality during hot weather, whilst ash, alder and birch have amongst the greatest beneficial effects. The study estimates that doubling the number of trees in the West Midlands would reduce excess deaths due to particulate pollution by up to 140 per year.

Carbon sequestration

It is well known that trees, in common with all vegetation, absorb carbon dioxide (one of the principal greenhouse gases) and release oxygen during the process of photosynthesis. The carbon absorbed by trees in this process is stored in the wood. Whilst this most well known of benefits is real it seems it is often overstated. The study by Lancaster University of trees in the West Midlands estimated that the total amount of carbon stored in trees within the conurbation represents the equivalent of about three weeks worth of CO2 emissions. Never the less, trees do have an important role to play in reducing the effects of greenhouse gases, not only through carbon sequestration but perhaps more importantly through the effects that careful planting can have on fuel use. [carbon offsetting companies quote 1 broadleaf tree will absorb 1 tonne of CO^2 over its 100 year lifespan].

Fuel use

Careful tree planting can reduce the amount of fuel used on both heating and cooling buildings. A considerable amount of research has been undertaken to quantify this in the United States, but little such research has been undertaken in the UK. Clearly differences in climate mean that figures here can not be directly related to any part of the USA. Trees provide shelter and reduce wind speed, thus reducing heat loss from buildings during winter. They also provide shade in the summer, whilst the evapo-transpiration of water from the leaf surface has a general cooling effect on surrounding air. This can significantly reduce the need for air conditioning during hot weather.

Noise reduction

Trees and other vegetation can play an important role in attenuating noise through reflecting and absorbing sound energy. One estimate suggests that 7db noise reduction is achieved for every 33m of forest (Coder, 1996) whilst other reported field tests show 'apparent loudness' reduced by 50% by wide belts of trees and soft ground (Dwyer et al, 1992).

Hydrology

Trees have a number of hydrological effects. These include reducing erosion and improving water quality through interception of pollution. Trees can also reduce ground water run-off, one study has estimated that for every 5% increase in tree cover area, run-off is reduced by 2% (Coder, 1996).

Wildlife Benefits

Trees are an important wildlife habitat. They provide nesting sites for birds and support a wide range of insects that are an important food source for birds and other wildlife [one mature oak tree can support c300 different species of insect, but London Planes or horse chestnut are <10]. Trees that bear berries are also a direct source of food for many bird species. In an urban setting, linear corridors of habitat are among the most important, connecting otherwise isolated areas to each other and out to the rural surroundings. Trees and other vegetation along highways, waterways and railways are particularly important to wildlife in the respect.

OTHER BENEFITS

Road safety

Trees can help improve road safety in a number of ways. Trees lining streets give the impression of narrowing the street and encourage slower driving. The stress reduction effects of trees (Wolf 1998(d), Kuo and Sullivan 2001(b)) are likely to have the effect of reducing road rage and improving the attention of drivers. Trees along streets also provide a buffer between pedestrians and vehicular traffic.

Road surfaces

Managers of both trees and highways are well aware of the detrimental effects that trees can have on the surface of footways and carriageways through direct damage by roots. Less well known is the fact that the shade cast be trees can significantly increase the life of road surfaces by reducing the temperatures which the surface reaches during hot weather.

2.6 Urban woodlands and trees deliver a full range of benefits

Trees in an urban setting

We want to see woodlands and trees playing a greater and more valued role in towns and cities, so an explicit aim of this strategy is to use the potential of trees and woodlands to improve the quality of life and surroundings of the people who live in these urban areas.

There is a need for a wider appreciation of existing street trees, to help ensure their protection, and for more planting of individual trees in Welsh towns and cities. When associated with buildings, woodlands and trees can soften the junctions between built and natural environments and contribute to greening urban areas and the restoration of industrial land. We wish to see more creative use of opportunities for planting woodlands and trees in new developments, and in the restoration of brownfield sites. We also want to see better quality, easy access to urban and rural green space.

Woodlands and trees have a vital role to play in helping people and biodiversity adapt to the effects of a changing climate, which are likely to include changes in the pattern of rainfall, an increased risk of flooding, and higher peak temperatures (particularly noticeable in urban areas).

Trees in streets and parks help to cool down urban areas in summer, and provide shade for people and buildings. They also help to reduce the pressure on urban drainage systems, by absorbing water that would otherwise run off the large areas of impermeable surfaces.

This is what we want to happen

- Woodlands and trees are used more creatively in new development and in the restoration of industrial sites to provide people with better quality, easily accessible green space.

To get there we shall

- Support local authorities in a programme of urban tree planting and woodland management.

- Improve access to urban woodlands, especially for people who currently do not have easy access to green spaces.

- Work with local authorities, landscape designers, architects and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that the environmental benefits of trees in modifying microclimate and drainage are taken into account in planning guidance and development control, and when creating sustainable urban drainage systems.

- Promote the contribution that urban woodlands and trees could make to other policy agendas, including those which concern climate change, health, social welfare, lifelong learning and biodiversity, and the management of water and soil resources.

23

Extract from 'Woodlands for Wales' Forestry Commission Wales 2009

APPENDIX 5: Benefits of cycling

The following on-line publications provide a good overview of the health benefits of cycling:

Sustrans: The value of investment in active travel

Cycling England: Cycling & Health

Cycling also offers a range of environmental benefits including:
- reducing noise, pollution and carbon emissions
- reducing traffic congestion and the economic cost of traffic delays

APPENDIX 6: Benefits of green infrastructure
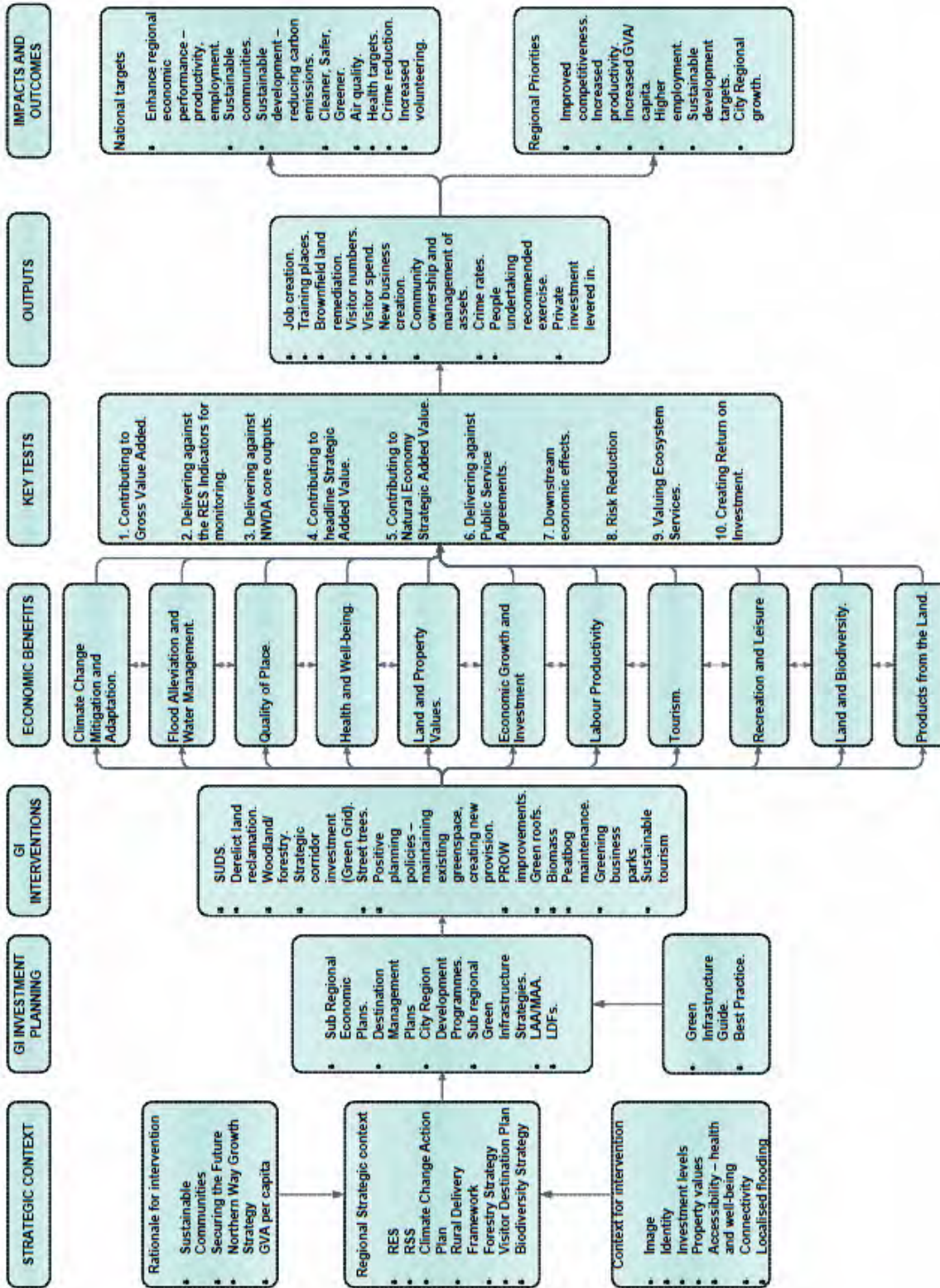
Extract from Ecotec 2008 'The Economic Benefits of Green Infrastructure' for the Natural Economy Northwest

APPENDIX 7: Benefits of natural play

Refer to Forestry Commission England –several documents are available on their website:
Nature Plan; Design guidance for play spaces 2006; Rope swings, dens, tree houses & fires –
a risk based approach for managers 2006; Growing adventure 2006.
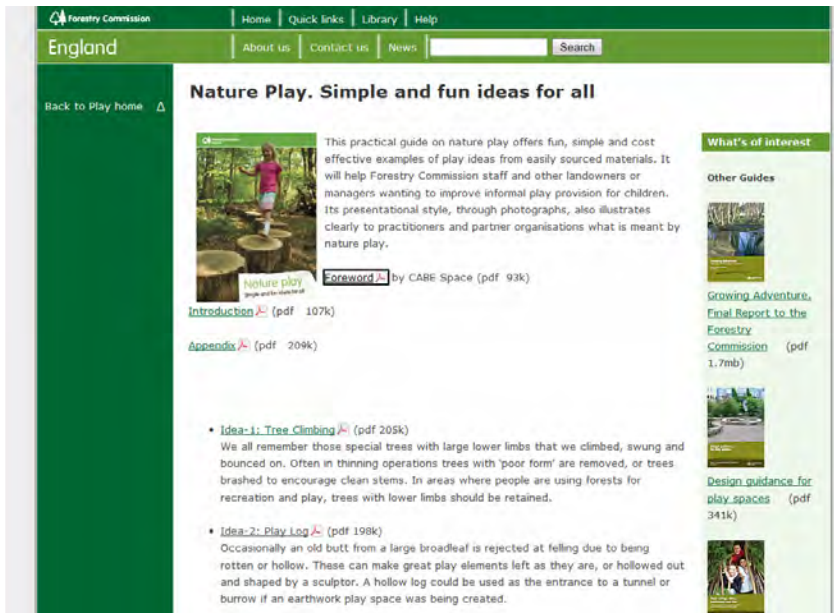
Extract from Forestry Commission England 'Nature Plan'
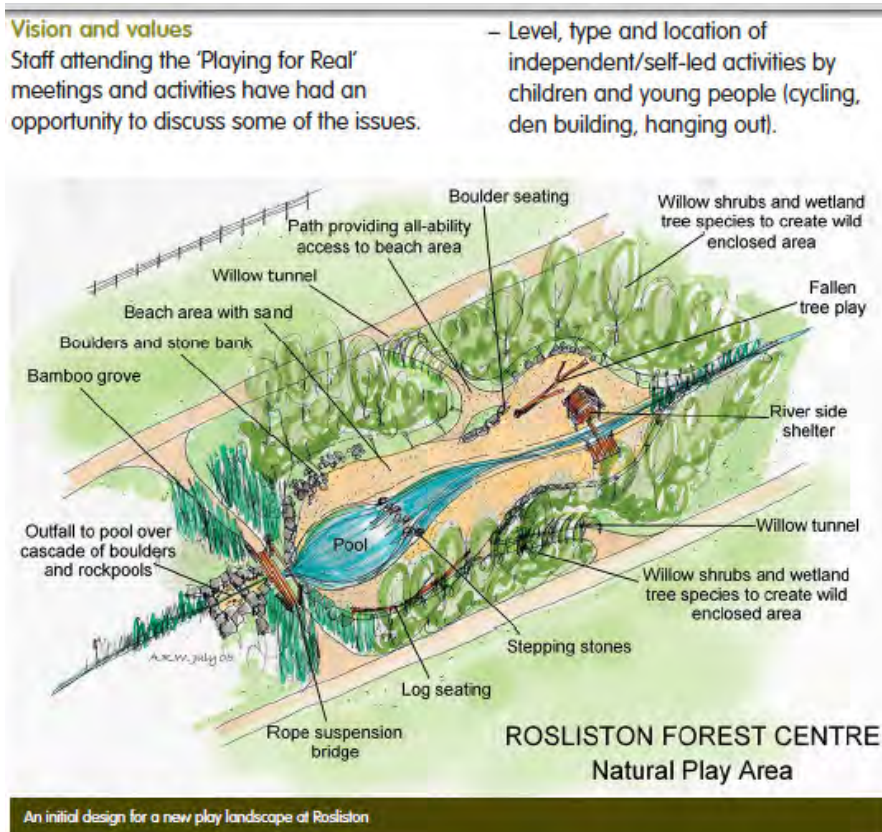
Extract from Forestry Commission England – Growing Adventure

APPENDIX 8:   Contacts for the WVSRA Landscape Improvement
               Strategy project:

Leanne Kyte - Welsh Assembly Government
leanne.kyte@wales.gsi.gov.uk
01443 845863

Alison Smith - Welsh Assembly Government
alison.smith@wales.gsi.gov.uk
01792 222429

Delyth Lewis - Neath Port Talbot (Swansea, Afan, Dulais, Neath, part of Amman)
Environmental Design and Heritage Officer
d.a.lewis@npt.gov.uk
01639 686410

Phil Snaith - Carmarthenshire County Council – Strategic Projects Officer (Amman and
Gwendraeth Valleys)
PSnaith@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
01267 242366

Julian Thomas - Bridgend (Ogmore, Garw, Llynfi Valleys)
Principle Landscape Architect
julian.thomas@bridgend.gov.uk
01656 815202

Tom Addey - Powys (Swansea Valley - Ystradgynlais area)
tomaddey@powys.gov.uk
01639 845051

David Williams - Swansea CC (Swansea Valley – Pontardulais, Clydach, Mawr)
Spatial Development Team Leader
01792 637271
david.williams4@swansea.gov.uk

APPENDIX 9:   Long distance walking routes

St Illtyds Walk
103km

Coed Morgannwg Way
58km

Gower Way
56km

21km Ogwr Ridgeway Walk

Sky to Sea over the Bwlch
Walk 26 km

St Illtyds Walk 103km/64 miles (Carms, Neath PT, Swansea) : Pembrey Country Park to
Margam Country Park (via Pontardulais, Pontardawe, Resolven, edge of Maesteg)
A walk across varied terrain, canals, woodlands and gentle hills crossing the rivers Loughor,
Tawe, Neath and Afan. St Illtyd flourished in the latter part of the fifth and beginning of the
sixth century, and was held in high veneration in Wales. Connects to Coed Morgannwg Way at
Margam, Gower Way, Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk, Taff Trail.

Coed Morgannwg Way 58 km / 36 miles (Merthyr T, Neath PT, Rhondda CT) (from Margam,
edge of Maesteg, Afan Forest Park)
Most runs on Forestry Commission land and connects with the Taff Trail at the finish.. Follows
ancient tracks of Celtic origin and passes close by a number of Bronze and Iron Age
settlements. Along the route there are several good viewpoints, from which you can see the
Brecon Beacons and the Bristol Channel. Connects with St Illtyd's Walk at Margam.

Gower Way 56 km / **35 miles (Swansea) (via Mawr)**
To celebrate the Millennium using existing footpaths and permissive rights of way and some
road sections to form a continuous pathway between the upland areas of Welsh Gower and
the coasts of English Gower.

Ogwr Ridgeway Walk 21km/13 miles (Bridgend, Rhondda CT)
Part of a long ridge walk across South West Wales, links the Taff-Ely Ridgeway Walk (Ffordd y
Bryniau) with the Coed Morgannwg Way. Takes in the valleys of Garw and Llynfi. Start/finish
at Margam, links to St Illtyds Walk and Coed Morgannwg Way.

Sky to Sea over the Bwlch Walk 26 km / 16 miles (Glamorgan, Bridgend)
On public rights of way, forest tracks and minor roads from Dare Valley Country Park, Aberdare to Bryngarw Country Park near Bridgend, passing through some of the most spectacular scenery in South Wales especially across the Bwlch Mountain. Connects to Taff Trail.

Sarn Helen – note there is more than one strategic route named Sarn Helen
Roman route starting at Aberdulais, running on the orignal line of the Roman Road on the ridge between the Dulais and Neath Valleys to Banwen linking to Roman forts, before joining the Beacons Way and Taff Trail in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

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