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mediation of space · making of place

Royal Town Planning Institute
41 Botolph Lane
London EC3R 8DL
Tel +44(0)20 7929 9494
Fax +44(0)20 7929 9490

Email online@rtpi.org.uk
Website: www.rtpi.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 262865
Patron HRH The Prince of Wales KG KT PC GCB

Mr Patrick Lewis,
Director
Heads of the Valleys Programme,
Project Office,
Steelworks Road,
Ebbw Vale
NP23 6YL

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September 29 2006

Dear Patrick ,

TURNING HEADS: A STRATEGY FOR THE HEADS OF THE VALLEYS 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation. The consultation has been considered by the Royal Town Planning Institute's Welsh Planning Policy Panel and as such I can offer the following comments:

"Turning Heads" aims to produce a strategy that takes the Heads of the Valleys forward from its current situation to that of the vision for the areas in 2020 outlined in Heads We Win. Having examined the opportunities and issues for the area it then sets out an outline programme of investments around the preferred delivery approach of balanced communities consisting of twelve key strategic programmes under five themes. An Action Plan is then outlined for the next three years.

In his speech to the Regeneration Conference on September 28 Andrew Davies, the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks emphasised the role of the Wales Spatial Plan and other area based strategic documents recognising a "sense of place". Unfortunately we do not think that this strategy in its current form does that. Whilst Turning Heads seeks to explain how "we will turn our vision into reality" we cannot get a sense of what the Programme is trying to achieve on the ground for the Heads of the Valleys. In our view, whilst we recognise that there are difficult decisions to be made, it is necessary to articulate the spatial plan for the area **at this stage** so that stakeholders can understand how the settlement and transport infrastructure will underpin the investment strategy.

The Strategy offers a small number of "high level" indicators for measuring success. At present the "success statements" at the end of each theme are bland. Whilst we welcome the approach again they do not offer any enlightenment as to what will constitute success on the ground. We also suggest that the strategy needs to contain a description of how progress will be measured and that this could be achieved by describing a number of intermediate milestones at say five year intervals.

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We also have concerns in some cases as to the choice of indicator. For example, in terms of tourism and leisure the chosen indicator is the number of hotel bedrooms, presumably with an increase indicating progress. This will tell us nothing about the quality of those bedrooms (a priority under the Tourism Strategy for Wales) or progress in the wider tourism and leisure sector. Similarly the choice of population decline and % of owner occupied households as indicators of public confidence leaves us unclear as why they are being measured and how progress is defined.

In our response to "Heads We Win" we welcomed the approach of involving a wide range of stakeholders, including the community, in the development of the strategy. However we pointed out weaknesses in the engagement process. This is again manifested in "Turning Heads" in that it is unclear what consultation process has been followed and the ensuing results of that process both in terms of the range and type of response received and their influence on the strategy. For example, on page 16 there is reference to "extensive and ongoing stakeholder consultation" in relation to the options but it then goes on to say that "**we** (our emphasis) have concluded that only a balanced approach will deliver a sustainable future". We would suggest that it would be helpful to explain the evidence as to how the stakeholder consultation, especially with the people and communities of the area, produced that conclusion.

Finally we are disappointed that the document does not explain in detail how the partnership will work. The Assembly Government is putting great emphasis of delivering better services through "Making the Connections" and in our view Turning Heads could provide an effective and exciting opportunity to trial and deliver "connected investment".

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation, I hope the comments are helpful but do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further clarification. We have no objection to these comments being made public.

Yours sincerely,

Owain Wyn
Interim RTPI Welsh Planning Policy Adviser

Tel. 01286 662906
e-mail welshpolicy@rtpi.org.uk