

Heads of the Valleys Programme Team
Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

2005/27

28th June 2005

Dear Sir/Madam

**‘Heads We Win:’
A Strategic Framework for the Heads of the Valleys March 2005**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation on the strategy for the heads of the Valleys (found at <http://www.wales.gov.uk/subitradeindustry/content/consultations/hov-framework-e.pdf>). The consultation paper has been considered by the Royal Town Planning Institute’s Welsh Planning Policy Panel and as such, I can offer the following comments:-

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The Institute supports the Welsh Assembly Government’s commitment to regenerate and improve the Heads of the Valleys area. In particular, we welcome the Assembly’s commitment to co-ordinate efforts and to work in partnership with others to produce a coherent and achievable development strategy.
2. Working with local authorities, voluntary, community and private sector organisations, and focusing on agreed priorities will create new ways of working and provide an opportunity to share resources and concentrate on delivering an agreed programme.
3. The paper – issued in March – states that consultation events will take place before the deadline of 30 June, however, only one such event has been organised to take place on 28 June. This will not give all interested parties and stakeholders an opportunity to participate fully and it is felt that the event is taking place too near to the final deadline for the submission of fully thought-out responses.
4. The joint professions in Wales (Institution of Civil Engineers, Chartered Institute of Housing, Royal Society of Architects Wales, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Royal Town Planning Institute) have formed a Regeneration Skills Collective. These professions are associated with the built environment and we recognise that it is vital that they play a full, co-ordinated and leading part in community and urban regeneration processes. Our aim is to assist decision makers to better plan the skills and resources needed in Wales in the years to come. As such, we have joined together to work with the Welsh Assembly Government, in a practical way, to help deliver its goals in the area of regeneration. We could have organised consultation events in partnership with or on behalf of the Welsh Assembly ensuring that our members have an opportunity

to participate and we would be happy to do so in future as the programme and plans for the Heads of the Valleys are developed.

DETAILED COMMENTS

5. We welcome the Welsh Assembly's commitment to developing the Heads of the Valleys Programme as part of the Wales Spatial Plan which considers the effects of Government actions on communities. Within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan, the Heads of the Valleys Programme is recognised as being within the wider South East Wales Capital Region.

Foreword

6. "The central problem in delivery for the Heads of the Valleys has been a lack of capacity and a lack of proper co-ordination." Resources are a key issue for local authorities in the Heads of the Valleys area – particularly in Blaenau Gwent – with a shortage of planners and staff working to deliver the regeneration programmes. Although the planned merger between the Welsh Assembly, Welsh Development Agency, Wales Tourist Board and ELWa takes place in 2006, the teams working in the WDA's Area Development Department – covering the Heads of the Valleys area - are small and there is a concern that the "lack of capacity" referred to will not be addressed without adequate staff and resources in place to deliver this ambitious programme.
7. Furthermore, it has been difficult to engage the private sector in contributing to the Wales Spatial Plan – at both the strategic and local Area Action levels – due to tight timescales and a lack of capacity by the private sector. Involving them in the Heads of the Valleys Programme could be problematic. It is suggested that any future consultation and moves to involve the public, private and voluntary sectors should be done within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan consultation process and exercises.

Achieving the Vision

8. The South East Wales Capital Region is identified as one of six 'Action Areas' within the Wales Spatial Plan. Within this area, there are four towns that could be considered as 'key centres' – namely, Merthyr Tydfil, Ebbw Vale, Aberdare and Bargoed. However, only Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale have been identified as 'area hubs' in the Heads of the Valleys Strategy "Area hubs such as Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale have an essential role to play in providing the full range of modern facilities necessary to help retain and attract skilled and well qualified people." The RTP1 is concerned that the Wales Spatial Plan's vague strategy map – which only identifies these two towns - is being taken more literally than was the intention. In fact, Aberdare and Bargoed both have a higher ranking than Ebbw Vale in the Wales Spatial Plan's own evidence base (see the draft table 23 on page 79 of the Wales Spatial Plan).

Improving the Built Environment

9. We welcome the Welsh Assembly's commitment to "share best practice in achieving design excellence throughout the area." The consultation paper states that the Programme will "add value by providing additional outside expertise where appropriate" although it does not state where the outside expertise will be sought, there is considerable expertise within the Design Commission for Wales and its Design Panel. The input of the Design Commission for Wales should be sought at the earliest opportunity. Also, the Welsh Development Agency has

recently launched their 'Creating Sustainable Places' design policy developed to improve standards in development, regeneration and building schemes. This should also be included in the Heads of the Valleys Programme.

Improving the Transport Network

10. The Institute welcomes the proposals to develop a modern integrated public transport system and to recognise walking and cycling as an important part of that system. We recommend that proposals to improve the transport network are undertaken as part of the Wales Spatial Plan Area Action programmes which looks at the wider region and is set within the national context. A fully integrated transport and infrastructure programme should be considered at a national level and we point to the recently published '2040 Vision for Transport' paper prepared by the Wales Transport Strategy Group (which represents various professions including the RTPI).

Promoting Innovation & Growing Businesses

11. We support the proposals to ensure that the area has broadband connectivity and to encourage higher rates of innovation. Tourism is an important sector in Wales – especially in rural areas- yet little mention of this is made in the strategy. We urge the Welsh Assembly to include the recently launched Herian programme – the arm of the Wales Tourist Board that focuses on developing industrial heritage for tourism and investment in the South Wales Valleys.

Improving Awareness

12. The proposal to prepare “a high profile communications campaign” is supported; however, we suggest that this is done within an overall communications strategy for the South East Wales Capital Region of the Wales Spatial Plan. This would avoid duplication and help to focus limited resources and effort. It is felt that promoting the Heads of the Valleys Programme within the wider South East Wales Capital Region communications strategy will negate the need for a separate identity and its own website. Yet another identity and logo will cause confusion – especially amongst the communities and other stakeholders with whom you seek to engage.

Providing a Framework for Change

13. We support the proposal to establish a dedicated programme team for the Heads of the Valleys Programme, however, we feel that the proposed 'Programme Board' led by the Minister for Economic Development & Transport – should be part of the Wales Spatial Plan Area Reference Group – which is also led by the Minister but looks at the whole of the South East Wales Capital Region.

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

Yours faithfully

Rebecca Phillips

Welsh Planning Policy Officer