

Rationale paper for the inclusion of Strategic hubs and Valleys Landscape Park (VLP) within the National Development Framework

Strategic Hubs

The Valleys Task Force is part of a long term commitment to improve the lives of those who live and work in the Valleys. The strategic hubs are an important action within the 'Our Valleys, Our Future' delivery plan and a cornerstone of the 'Jobs and Skills' theme. They are defined as areas of focussed public sector investment which then unlocks private capital and the creation of jobs, opportunity and wealth creation across the Valleys.

The driving principle behind establishing strategic hubs is that the greatest impact can be made when investment is targeted at a small number of specific locations for a prolonged period of time, as opposed to a 'scatter gun' approach where funding is spread too thinly to make a marked difference.

The location of the strategic hubs was based upon a number of variables; population density, deprivation levels and current business activity. We then overlaid public transport travel times and our data shows that 80% of the most deprived Valleys communities can access at least one strategic hub within 45 minutes by public transport. This rises to 93% within 60 minutes by public transport.

Since publishing 'Our Valleys, Our Future' in July 2017, the Local Authorities have been in the driving seat in terms of defining what their respective strategic hubs looks like to complement the local opportunities and their aspirations for the future. A list of proposed priority projects was then created to form a 15 year investment blueprint for each hub.

A number of strategic hub seminars were then held between November 2017 and January 2018 where local stakeholders were invited to discuss, challenge and sanity check the current thinking around proposed projects and confirm priorities.

It is envisaged that the most impactful projects to be supported within the rest of this assembly term will be identified by May 2018. We deem this phase 1, with phase 2 (2021-2026) and phase 3 (2026-2031) to follow.

Valleys Landscape Park

The development of a VLP is intended to be the driver for instilling pride in the Valleys and to help local communities to celebrate and maximise the use of natural resources and our industrial and cultural heritage.

The vision for the VLP is that the Valleys is a place where people are proud to call home and businesses choose to operate. It aims to deliver communities that are empowered to show pride in their environment which is easily accessible and widely used.

Through discussions with community groups, local authorities and other key stakeholders a draft proposal has been developed that sets out the aims of the VLP and a set of guiding principles. It also details three themes which will focus the work to deliver the landscape park. This will be tested further through a series of engagement events to be held before the end of April 2018. The aims, guiding principles and themes are set out below.

Aims

- Invest in the Valleys' natural and (associated) cultural assets to deliver enhanced social, economic and environmental benefits to the Valleys and the wider city region(s)
- Empower local communities to celebrate the region's natural and cultural heritage and maximise its potential
- Offer outstanding and accessible recreational opportunities to improve the health and well-being of local people
- Engender community pride in the Valleys which is an attractive destination for visitors and stimulates investment
- Enhance Valleys town centres as vibrant places, with attractive green spaces, which support local economies

Guiding principles

- Enabling and empowering
- Working together
- High-quality, innovative and ambitious
- Connected and at scale
- Resilient, adaptive and diverse

Themes

- Landscape, Culture and Identity
- Recreation and Well-being
- Communities and Enterprise

The VLP will sit within the boundary as defined in the Our Valleys, Our Future Delivery plan. Options for land designation are being developed for consideration by the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services. There must be a long-term commitment to delivering and sustaining the VLP to fully realise its vision and benefits. Experience of regional and similar parks in rest of the UK, and especially Europe, suggests that formal recognition as a coherent, tangible park would provide the necessary visibility to partners, communities, visitors, and businesses to engage and involve them effectively and realise the benefits. However, this may take time and the NDF provides an opportunity to set out the principles against which plans must be assessed to adhere to the VLP vision.

Why the National Development Framework?

The Valleys Taskforce has no allocated funding specifically for the strategic hubs or the VLP, but is a pioneer of cross government working. It has secured commitments

from various funding sources within Welsh Government, and is also working closely with both South Wales City Deals to align and complement investment decisions.

By including the principle of strategic hubs and the Valleys Landscape Park in the NDF, it would provide the mechanism to ensure they become part of longer term planning (15 year investment blueprint). Each Local or Regional / Strategic Development Plan would then be tested against the NDF to ensure they support it.

This would necessitate that any proposed substantial investments outside strategic hubs and the Valleys Landscape Park to be carefully considered and scrutinised, as it may only dilute what can be achieved.