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Welsh Government

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Evaluation of the Severn Valley Strategic Regeneration Programme

Research Summary

Social research

Number: 93/2014

The SVSRP is a £5.4m part-funded ERDF programme of physical infrastructure investments in and around the towns of Llanidloes, Newtown and Welshpool, in the county of Powys. It consists of three distinct schemes, each of which has now been completed:

- site development and servicing: at the Offa's Dyke Business Park (Welshpool) and the Abermule Business Park (Newtown);
- Severn Valley built heritage scheme: physical renovation of specific run down properties, and bringing back into use derelict properties;
- Severn Valley environmental enhancement scheme: investment in the three town centres to improve the built environment.

Evaluation Work Carried Out

The evaluation work involved updating a previous baseline study carried out in 2010 in order to assess how perceptions of the local area have changed, capturing the impact of the programme on these changes. The work included:

- 800 on-street interviews with local residents living within 10 miles of at least one of the three towns;
- 390 telephone interviews with local businesses and voluntary/community groups located within 10 miles of at least one of the three towns, supplemented by a small number of in-depth interviews.

Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

Key Findings: Residents

The vast majority of residents (84 per cent) rated their town as a good or very good places to live (up from 74 per cent in 2010), although far fewer regarded it as a very good or good place to work (47 per cent, although up from 45 per cent) or to shop (40 per cent, similar to 2010). A very high proportion (78 per cent), regard their town as attractive (74 per cent in 2010) and a distinctive place (70 per cent, considerably higher than the 52 per cent figure in 2010).

As in 2010, the most common descriptions of the local economy were “old fashioned” (67 per cent), “slow” (73 per cent), “narrow” (54 per cent); just 13 per cent described their town as “modern” and 12 per cent as vibrant”. Like 2010, just under half of residents believe that the local economy has a good mix of businesses, although far fewer (23 per cent, compared to 19 per cent in 2010) believe that there is a good range of quality jobs and fewer still (18 per cent, although up from 12 per cent in 2010) believe that the local area provides good long-term career prospects.

Social issues are much less of a concern than they were in 2010; there were big falls in the numbers of residents expressing concern about “teenagers hanging around the street”, “rubbish or litter lying around”; people “dealing or using drugs” was viewed as the most pressing social issue, although this was still much less of a concern than in 2010.

Overall, Llanidloes residents are the most positive in their views of their town particularly its attractiveness, distinctiveness and tidiness/cleanliness of their town (as was also the case in 2010), although they are less positive about the local economy; residents of Newtown have the least positive perceptions (in 2010, the picture was more mixed between Newtown and Welshpool).

Key Findings: Business and VCS

Businesses are mostly positive about current trading conditions, with 70 per cent describing a positive trading environment (up from 49 per cent in 2010, possibly reflecting a general upturn in the economy). Just under half of businesses and 64 per cent of VCS organisations rated the local area

as being a good or very good place to run a business or organisation; this suggests that some businesses have a less positive view of their local area than they do about their own business prospects.

Businesses had a particularly unfavourable opinion about the local area as a place to shop (as was the case in 2010), although VCS organisations were much more positive. However, the vast majority of businesses and VCS organisations appear to be confident about the future; 32 per cent were “very confident”, a rise of 10 percentage points on the figure reported in 2010.

As with perceptions about the local area’s business environment, VCS organisations were by and large more positive about its physical environment and appearance, in line with responses to the 2010 survey.

The Business base expressed concerns about the local labour market; just 23 per cent of businesses agreed or strongly agreed that there is good range of quality jobs in the local area (although this reflects an upturn in sentiment among businesses from

2010); even fewer firms agreed or strongly agreed that the local economy provides good long-term career prospects.

Tackling congestion was identified as a key requirement in order to improve the Severn Valley as a place to run a business and to work, especially by firms and VCS organisations located in Newtown, where the need for a new bypass was highlighted.

Impact of SVSRP on Perceptions

Awareness of SVSRP investments among residents was highest in relation to improvements to town centres. Resident awareness of Offa’s Dyke (23 per cent) was higher than that of Abermule (20 per cent); and around 16 per cent of residents were aware of improvement to rundown properties. The largest impacts were perceived to be on the towns as being attractive, having well maintained streets and as places to live and visit. Some 40 per cent of these residents believed that the schemes have improved the local retail offer.

More than twice as many businesses (36 per cent) were

aware of the Offa's Dyke Business Park as were aware of Abermule (17 per cent); around 18 per cent of firms were aware of refurbishments to rundown commercial properties, with 25 per cent of firms aware of improvements to town centres. The largest impacts were perceived to be on the towns as being attractive and distinctive places and as having well maintained buildings and streets.

Among VCS organisations, awareness was highest of the Offa's Dyke Business Park scheme (18 per cent) and awareness of the other investments was very low (under 10 per cent for each strand). Among VCS organisations, the largest impacts were perceived to be on maintenance of streets and cleanliness/tidiness of the towns.

Recommendations

1. Ensure key transport infrastructure investments (eg. Newtown Bypass) are made to ease congestion and open up new sites;
2. Support local businesses, organisations and consumers to maximise use and impact of

new Superfast Cymru broadband infrastructure;

3. Ensure Severn Valley area is encompassed in new spatial regeneration areas (eg. Powys Local Growth Zone);
4. Gap Fund provision of employment land and SME premises where there is a case for public funding;
5. Develop a local enterprise programme that links physical regeneration with support for local businesses, individuals and entrepreneurs.

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ISBN: 978-1-4734-2440-1

4 November 2014