



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# The Valleys Regional Park

Maximising the social, economic and environmental potential of the Valleys' natural and cultural heritage assets

Ein Cymoedd  
Ein Dyfodol



Our Valleys  
Our Future



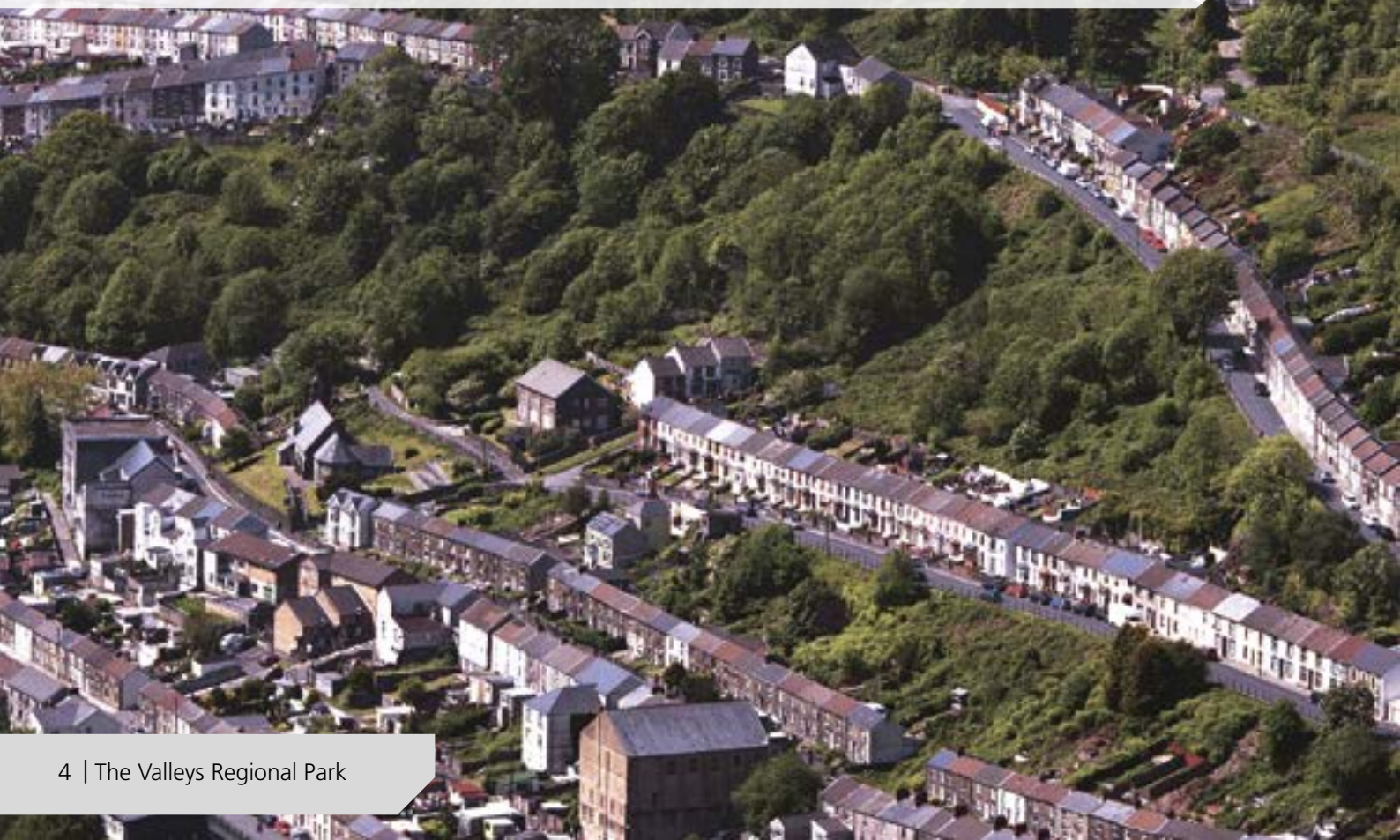
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The Valleys is a place where people are proud to call home and work and businesses choose to operate. It is a place where communities are empowered; the local environment is easily accessible, widely used and at the heart of Valleys life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Valleys Taskforce Delivery Plan



# Foreword

I was born and bred in the Valleys. I grew up exploring the wonderful mix of heritage and beauty on my doorstep as a child and into adulthood.

We have some of the most distinctive and breath-taking, natural landscapes in Wales and the UK. But all too often, the natural beauty, cultural heritage and ability of the Valleys to attract visitors have been overlooked and undervalued. For too long, they have been seen solely through the prism of the coal dust thrown up by the pits and the unemployment left by their closure.

The Valleys are not a single community but many communities, with many different and diverse people – these differences were evident in the large number of meetings and conversations I and the members of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys have had with communities across the Valleys over the course of the last two years as we have developed the *Our Valleys, Our Future* plan together and started to put it in action.

We have heard a wide range of opinions from people and communities about what they value about where they live – from feelings of strong community pride to the sometimes negative connotations which have become unfairly associated with the Valleys.

A clear theme that emerged was that more could and should be done with the Valleys' unique landscape so they can be enjoyed more widely. Moreover, there was a strong feeling that the Valleys' natural and cultural heritage should be the backdrop to a new future for the area and be used to help improve the Valleys' underlying socio-economic status.

The Valleys' landscapes offer a multitude of opportunities to enable communities, organisations and businesses to work sustainably and innovatively to help deliver environmental, economic and social prosperity.

The Valleys Regional Park is not a one-off project or initiative. The intention behind the Valleys Regional Park is that we put the Valleys in the vanguard globally, with a national and international profile, by creating a new type of formally-designated landscape. This will serve our future generations, by creating a sustainable and resilient future.

This prospectus is an invitation to all to join us in creating that future.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alun Davies". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Alun Davies AM**  
Cabinet Secretary for  
Local Government and  
Public Services



'I had now entered into the wild and mountainous region, where nature seemed to reign in stern and unbroken silence. Not a human being besides myself appeared to be treading these solitudes, nor was there habitation to be seen.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Wanderings in south Wales (1837) - Thomas Roscoe

# The Valleys' landscapes: a remarkable story of change

There are few places in the British Isles – or beyond – which have witnessed such dramatic landscape changes as those in the Valleys over the last 250 years.

Until the late 18th century, the Valleys were essentially pastoral and undiscovered before copper smelting and iron-making, followed by deep coal mining began, forged the rich, unique industrial heritage and strong communities of which we are rightly proud.

However, the impact on the Valleys' landscapes was devastating with 'coal-tips ... spread about the floors of the Valleys and on nearby hillsides ... (and) once fair Valleys, with woodlands, pure streams and pastoral scenery, widely despoiled.'<sup>3</sup> In the *South Wales Outline Plan*, Lloyd and Jackson urged that 'natural beauty should be allowed a more prominent place in (its) planning', in keeping with emerging proposals for the creation of a National Park in the Brecon Beacons, eventually established in 1957, and the Gower Peninsula, designated as the UK's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1956.

The amenity map simply denoted most of the Valleys as an 'Upland Industrial Zone'. However, Lloyd and Jackson recognised beautiful, unspoiled areas across the Valleys and proposed the creation of four to serve the industrial centres of population.

The plan was not officially accepted, but significant elements came to fruition. However, the Regional Parks did not and Alwyn Lloyd, one of Wales' foremost architects and town planners, passed away in 1960 without witnessing the next dramatic and remarkable environmental transformation of the Valleys that was about to take place.

In that same year, another man of 'energy and ideas', Robin Huws Jones at University College, Swansea began to address dereliction of the landscapes in the lower Tawe Valley, that had been ravaged and contaminated by the copper industry and mining. The Lower Swansea Valley Project demonstrated the remediation of such land.

In 1966, the year of its initial completion, calamitous tragedy struck at Aberfan, which catalysed more extensive land remediation in the Valleys. It was aimed primarily at use for light industry and housing. But some new recreational areas were created, such as Dare Valley Country Park. It opened in 1973, the first ever created on reclaimed land in the UK.

'Were it not for industrialisation, the Valleys would undoubtedly be one of the UK's most visited National Parks... Beneath a 're-mediated' landscape, it becomes harder to remember how the Valleys used to appear, and easier to imagine how it might have looked two hundred years before.'<sup>4</sup>

Greater strategic recognition of the socio-economic, and indeed environmental, potential of the Valleys' landscapes, rather than simply aesthetic enhancement, came with the 1997 Greening the Valleys initiative. Along with the *City of the Valleys* concept, this resurrected the idea of a Valleys Regional Park. Between 2009 and 2013, this was piloted through two European-funded Valleys Regional Park initiatives that focused on improving tourism infrastructure, community involvement, and business links.

<sup>3</sup> South Wales Outline Plan (1947) - Alwyn Lloyd and Herbert Jackson

<sup>4</sup> The Landscape Opportunity in the Valleys (2008) - Adams and Brook

Together with other developments, such as the Cognation mountain biking programme, this further emphasised the key role of the Valleys' landscapes in creating an exciting, sustainable future in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 2017, 70 years after the visionary Lloyd and Jackson proposals, the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies AM, proposed the establishment of a formally-designated Valleys Regional Park as a key ambition.

This will help change perceptions of the Valleys and position them in the vanguard of how post-industrial areas can work with their natural and cultural heritage assets to drive social, economic and environmental change.

Landscape change in the valleys: Cwm Tyleri – 1972



Landscape change in the valleys: Cwm Tyleri – 2016



# Creating the Valleys Regional Park together



Llynfi Valley - woodland event (Natural Resources Wales)

**The Valleys Regional Park** will provide and sustain the improvement and management of a highly-visible network of uplands, woodlands, nature reserves and country parks, rivers, reservoirs and canals, heritage sites and attractions across the Valleys, linking with our towns and villages.

We will develop a distinct model for the Regional Park that is informed and inspired by those we have explored in the UK and Europe, in keeping with recent reviews of designated landscapes in Wales and the opportunities afforded by new Welsh legislation, including the Well-being of Future Generations Act and Environment Act. This will bring partners together at a landscape scale to enable and deliver significant social, economic and environmental benefits, rather than imposing unnecessary constraints, including:

- helping safeguard and create jobs and training opportunities, supporting local businesses and inward investment

- providing accessible high-quality green space for improved health and wellbeing
- developing community resilience, developing local economic opportunities based on the landscape, making our towns and villages more liveable places
- supporting climate change adaptation by maximising the role of green infrastructure
- improving biodiversity and habitat connectivity
- changing perceptions of the Valleys, internally and externally

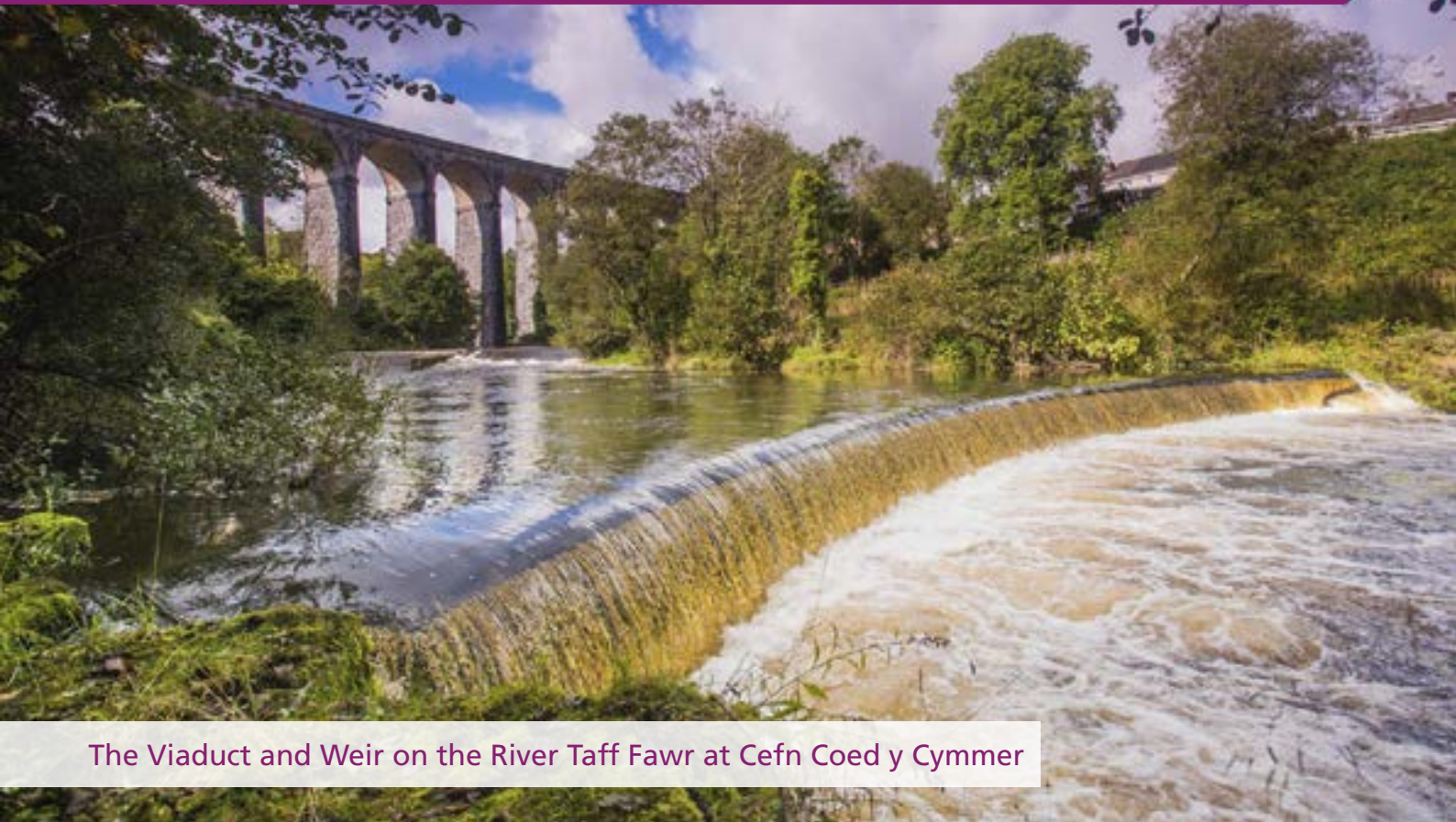
The intention is to seek formal designation of the Regional Park with a model that could be adopted in other areas.



'The Valleys (have a) valuable, sustainable asset... the landscape itself. There are few areas of landscape in the UK as dramatic and as beautiful as the Valleys...'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The Landscape Opportunity in the Valleys (2008) – Adams and Brook

# The Valleys Regional Park themes



The Viaduct and Weir on the River Taff Fawr at Cefn Coed y Cymmer

Based on previous experience, best practice research, and extensive engagement through the Valleys Taskforce, the Valleys Regional Park has three interlinked delivery themes:

- 1. Landscape, Culture and Identity**
- 2. Recreation and Wellbeing**
- 3. Communities and Enterprise**

These are consistent with the principles underlying Europe's Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks and recent thinking on designated landscapes - National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - in Wales in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 2015 Marsden Report recommended three interconnected purposes for designated landscapes in Wales as new, dynamic and productive 'factories of wellbeing':

- to conserve and enhance an area's distinctive landscape qualities
- to promote well-being through the enjoyment and understanding of its landscapes
- to promote sustainable natural resource management and economic and community development that support its cultural heritage

This report was the starting point for the subsequent *Future Landscapes Wales: Delivering for Wales* report, and together these informed the recent Welsh Government priorities statement - Designated Landscapes: Valued and Resilient.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [www.gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2018/designatedlandscapespriorities/?lang=en](http://www.gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2018/designatedlandscapespriorities/?lang=en)



# 1. Landscape, Culture and Identity



'Guardian' - Six Bells, Abertillery



From the ‘forgotten landscapes’ within the World Heritage Site at Blaenafon, right across to the magical moorlands of the Mawr north of Swansea, the unique, wonderful landscapes of the Valleys offer some of the finest scenery and heritage in Wales and the UK.

Moreover, a major characteristic of the Valleys is that the natural environment abuts and envelopes towns and villages, each valley having its own distinct landscapes, heritage and stories to be explored and discovered.

Those familiar with the Valleys already know this. A 2013 survey showed people living in the Valleys were most proud of their ‘new’ landscapes. But they remain unheralded and undiscovered by many; not only among those from outside the area, but also some Valleys’ people themselves.

Consequently, perceptions of the Valleys are often outmoded, leading unfairly to negative connotations and impacts. We want and need this to change.

## Outcomes

- **The Valleys are recognised nationally and internationally for the quality and beauty of their unique, distinctive landscapes and heritage**
- **The Valleys environment is healthy, supporting responses to climate change, water quality and management, biodiversity and habitat connectivity, local economic activity, and people’s health and well-being**
- **The Valleys’ natural and cultural landscapes are at the heart of the Valleys’ identities and culture**
- **The Valleys’ towns are vibrant with high-quality green infrastructure**

## Making it happen

### A long-term collective vision enabled by a designated landscape

We will seek formal designation of the Regional Park, in recognition of the necessary timescale for meaningful change, and to ensure it meets the needs and challenges faced by our communities in the twenty-first century.

### Discovering the Valleys

We will build on the best the Valleys already has to offer. There are excellent country parks and centres that attract visitors and local people. Working with partners, we will develop and enhance a selection of these strategic sites as **Discovery Gateways**.

As well as destinations in their own right, we want them to tell the stories of the Valleys and act as launchpads that encourage local people and visitors to explore and discover the surrounding areas, including our towns and villages, and the wider landscapes.

Discovery Gateways will offer the highest quality standards, enhancing the surrounding area's natural resources, offering produce and goods that showcase and support the local economy, and providing education, learning and skills opportunities through their activities, information and interpretation.

### A highly-visible network

The Valleys Regional Park will comprise a highly-visible, high-quality network of our uplands, woodlands, nature reserves and country parks, rivers, reservoirs and canals, heritage sites and attractions, connected with our towns and villages.

We will work with the emerging Metro to maximise the opportunities for walking and cycling at the developing transport hubs to support shared ambitions of connecting our green infrastructure and attractions with a modern, transport system.

### Developing and creating new landscape assets

The changing environmental and political landscapes offer new challenges and exciting opportunities. The new Environment Act with its required 'area statements', produced by Natural Resources Wales, will provide a sound evidence base and, critically, identify priorities and opportunities to deliver effective sustainable management of our natural resources and ecosystems. In addition, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act requires Public Services Boards to coproduce and deliver long-term Wellbeing Plans to maximise the potential of our environmental assets to improve our wellbeing.

We will explore and deliver emerging landscape opportunities through the Area Statements and the Wellbeing Plans including those to develop, enhance and create new environmental assets across the Valleys.

### Protecting and promoting our landscapes

Wales' iconic landscapes are nationally recognised for their scenic quality, natural and built heritage, and culture. There is an economic value in landscapes as destinations for visitors, but vitally as important places for healthy communities to prosper.

We will support partners through initiatives that encourage responsible use and enjoyment of the Valleys' landscapes. Unfortunately, as in other areas across the UK, there are a small minority of people whose activities impact negatively on the landscapes, such as fly-tipping and arson. This spoils people's enjoyment of our landscapes and deters visitors from exploring the Valleys and critically affects the way our landscapes function to support our wellbeing.

### Landscape and heritage

Embodied in the Valleys' identity, our Valleys' landscapes and proud heritage and culture are intricately intertwined. These are the Valleys that helped shape and change the world. We will explore the opportunities to work with our heritage such as the emerging European Route of Industrial Heritage and associated attractions across the Valleys and beyond.

Furthermore, the pre-industrial heritage of the Valleys is important yet often overlooked and we should ensure that this aspect is rightly acknowledged and promoted.

### Showcasing Arts and Culture

The Valleys Regional Park should provide a framework for using the Valleys' natural and cultural heritage to develop and showcase its arts and cultural activities, creating a national and international profile, such as the pioneering Emscher Landscape Park in Germany.

## 2. Recreation and Wellbeing



Castell Nos Reservoir, near Maerdy



The Valleys are enjoying a growing reputation for outdoor activities and activity tourism, a key growth market in Wales worth nearly £500m per year. The Valleys Regional Park should provide Visit Wales and others, including the private sector, with continuing opportunities to improve the visitor economy in the Valleys.

Increasing levels of physical activity, particularly amongst the least active, is a priority in Wales. Its cost in terms of health and well-being in Wales, through its contribution to key health issues, including cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes, is estimated to be £650m per year. Moreover, it impacts adversely on the quality of life of individuals and their families. Unfortunately, the prevalence of poor physical and mental ill-health in areas of the Valleys is higher than in Wales and much of the UK.

The Valleys Regional Park should provide and enhance the opportunities for active and passive recreation to:

- Improve people's physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Improve social equity and cohesion of people and communities
- Increase people's appreciation of and care for the environment
- Increase the economic benefits of recreation and amenity to Wales

### Outcomes

- **The Valleys enjoy a reputation for high-quality outdoor recreation with communities and businesses benefiting from a thriving visitor economy**
- **People in the Valleys enjoy improved health and wellbeing through enhanced outdoor recreation and more active lifestyles**

## Making it happen

### Developing and promoting outdoor activities and associated tourism opportunities

We will continue to develop and enhance sustainable outdoor activities in the Valleys for visitors and communities alike in conjunction with all sectors, including the private sector.

### Connecting our Great Outdoors

The Valleys is home to several iconic trails for walking and cycling, such as the Taff Trail, connecting Cardiff to the Brecon Beacons, and the Celtic Trail. There are also fantastic walking routes along the historic ridges above the valleys, including the likes of the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway and the Sarn Helen Roman Road.

We will support and promote the best of these, connecting them effectively with the Discovery Gateways and other visitor and amenity sites such as our nature reserves. Importantly too, we want to connect them effectively to our towns and villages, so they continue to develop the hospitality and other amenities that will provide an economic boost.

### Exploring new opportunities to support improved well-being

The Valleys should be at the forefront of working with its environmental assets to support improved health and wellbeing. The Valleys Regional Park will raise the profile of opportunities through increased outdoor activity amongst health professionals and communities

We will seek to actively support green social-prescribing pilots that encourage people to venture out, which will support improved well-being. This means enhanced working with the national obesity strategy, and other similar schemes and initiatives, to promote greater use of the Valleys landscapes to enhance outdoor physical activity.

Proposed Discovery Gateways and the hospitality sector will be encouraged to use locally-produced food and produce, which will also provide an economic stimulus.



### 3. Communities and Enterprise



Beaufort Hill Ponds and Woodlands



Increasingly, communities in the Valleys have recognised and are capitalising on the opportunities provided by their landscapes, such as at Glyncorrwg, Cwm Clydach Countryside Park, and the Ebbw Fach Trail. In Ynysybwl and the upper Rhondda Fawr Valley, exciting new community-led initiatives are being developed to maximise the economic potential of their environmental assets.

Managing land in new and different ways can deliver a range of environmental, economic and wellbeing benefits for local communities, and for Wales, including reduced flood risk, improved air quality, enhanced health and well-being, and opportunities for enterprise activities, helping to tackle social inequity and poverty. The Valleys Regional Park will seek to support greater community stewardship as a cornerstone of its development.

There have been important private sector developments in recent years, creating a more vibrant visitor offer. The Valleys Regional Park should provide a high-profile backdrop to encourage greater opportunities for the private sector. We are also keen to explore how it can help develop and deliver emerging ideas around the foundational economy.

## Outcomes

- **Empowered communities are integral to a new, exciting type of designated landscape in the Valleys Regional Park, with greater stewardship of their natural assets providing local social, economic and environmental benefits**
- **The environment and associated heritage play a key role in a strong foundational economy supporting businesses and social enterprises in our communities**

## Making it happen

### Supporting and facilitating community initiatives

Community groups across and the Valleys and Wales are developing expertise and skills in implementing their projects and initiatives. Nevertheless, they can encounter difficulties in delivering their projects effectively for a variety of reasons, including issues around land ownership and leasing and funding.

Community organisations often learn best from similar groups that have developed skills and experience to address the challenges they encounter. In some cases, they have been supported in exchanging knowledge and best practice through facilitation, such as in the Renew Wales and Create your Space programmes, highlighting the effectiveness of approaches.

Consequently, we will seek to establish a community peer-to-peer network, ensuring that communities are at the heart of the Valleys Regional Park development. This will help to building capacity and confidence amongst community groups and organisations across the Valleys. Where appropriate and possible, we will seek to enable community ambitions through logistical and financial support for developing and existing strategic projects.

### Enhanced community stewardship

There is increasing evidence that where communities have a significant degree of ownership and involvement, there is enhanced collective benefit from the outcomes.

Project Skyline (run by The Green Valleys) is seeking to understand the opportunities around increased community stewardship

of landscape assets with pilots currently in a number Valleys' locations. We will provide logistical support to ensure that lessons learned are heeded and utilised in future Regional Park developments.

### Skills development to deliver change

We wish to create a Valleys Regional Park Guardians scheme, where individuals can be trained to support existing and developing ranger activities across the Valleys.

In addition, partners will be encouraged to explore development of a community-based delivery taskforce to support training, skills development and employment opportunities.

### Fostering appropriate business sector involvement

There have been some very important developments by the private sector in creating a more vibrant Visitor offer based on the local environment in the Valleys in recent years, e.g. Bike Park Wales and Rock UK amongst others.

We are keen that the Valleys Regional Park should provide a high-profile backdrop to encourage greater private sector involvement.

### Developing the Foundational Economy opportunities

The foundational economy is built from the activities which provide the essential goods and services for everyday life such as communication, social care, and food and energy production.<sup>7</sup>

Building on the lessons learned from Project Skyline pilot and appropriate private sector involvement, the Valleys Regional Park will explore the roles and opportunities offered by the local environment in developing the Foundational Economy in our communities.

<sup>7</sup> [www.seneddresearch.blog/2017/03/02/the-foundational-economy/](http://www.seneddresearch.blog/2017/03/02/the-foundational-economy/)

'Drive, cycle or walk to the top of the Rhigos, or the Bwlch, or Gelligaer Common or any of the hilltop spots to view the Valleys and the magnificence of south Wales is spread out before you.'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Aled Blake – Editorial, April 15th, 2018, South Wales Echo



## Prosperity for All: the national strategy

The Valleys Regional Park themes reflect the key priorities set out in this strategy. The key commitments set out in the strategy are mirrored across the themes which also reflect the three priorities set out in the *Our Valleys, Our Future plan* – good-quality jobs and the skills to do them, better public services and my community.

## Taking Wales Forward 2016 – 21

*Taking Wales Forward* is the Welsh Government's programme for government, setting out how it will deliver more and better jobs through a stronger, fairer economy, improve and reform our public services, and build a united, connected and sustainable Wales.

## Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

Public Services Boards and their wellbeing assessments and wellbeing plans will inform the delivery of the Valleys Regional Park and provide an existing mechanism for engaging local communities to ensure they are integral to delivering local benefits from the sustainable management of the Valleys' natural resources. The concept and approach outlined in the proposal reflects the priorities of the Act's five ways of working.

The Valleys Regional Park themes outline mirror the environmental, social and cultural aspects of the well-being themes with improvements to economic well-being flowing through all three themes. In developing the proposals, all five of the ways of working have been reflected with a particular focus on community engagement, to drive the development of the Valleys Regional Park plans through an integrated and collaborative approach working with delivery partners in the public, private and third sectors.

## Welsh Government Natural Resources Policy

The Valleys Regional Park should be an exemplar of this and the interconnected priorities it sets out. We will take an integrated and collaborative regional approach to 'place', the use of nature-based solutions including the provision of high-quality green infrastructure and opportunities to increasing renewable energy and resource efficiency.

## Environment Act

The Area Statements, produced by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), have a key role in providing the evidence and driving forward the actions needed to achieve the Valleys Regional Park vision. Communities have a key role in identifying opportunities within the context of area statements and the work undertaken by the Valleys taskforce team. Local authorities, through coordinated green infrastructure planning and implementation of the updated Planning Policy Wales guidance, will be key delivery partners with NRW.

The Valleys Regional Park will be an exemplar for the implementation of the Natural Resources Policy, taking an integrated and collaborative regional approach. It will use nature-based solutions including the provision of high-quality green infrastructure and opportunities to increase renewable energy and resource efficiency.

## Planning Act

The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 provides a statutory requirement for the Welsh Ministers to produce and keep up-to-date a National Development Framework (NDF) that will replace the current Wales Spatial Plan. We will look to integrate the Valleys Regional Park with the NDF to deliver benefits from an improved context for land use planning.

## Active Travel (Wales) Act

In March 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport announced additional funding of £8.1m to accelerate delivery of a range of travel improvements linked to Welsh Government transport priorities in support. Active travel is a key theme with the aim of co-ordinating and further developing quality cycling and walking routes across the Valleys.

## Healthy and Active Fund

Launched in July 2018, the Healthy and Active Fund is a partnership between Welsh Government, Sport Wales and Public Health Wales, which will strengthen community assets and enable people to adopt healthier lifestyles.

## Partnership for Growth: The Welsh Government Strategy for Tourism 2013 – 2020

The programme supports the Welsh Government partnership for growth strategy for tourism 2013 – 20 through the active promotion and development of tourism activity in rural Wales. The ambition outlined in the strategy is to grow tourism earnings in Wales by 10% or more by 2020.

## A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care

Published in 2018, this plan sets out a long-term future vision of a 'whole system approach to health and social care', which is focused on health and wellbeing, and on preventing illness. In addition to the NHS and social care, it also considers all the other things that can make a difference to people's health, like support for families, education, housing, employment and the environment.

# Contact us

The Valleys Regional Park advertises opportunities to get involved through our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/talkvalleys/](http://www.facebook.com/talkvalleys/) or via Twitter using the hashtag [#ourvalleys](https://twitter.com/ourvalleys).

We appreciate that there are many people who live in valleys communities who may not be able to access social media or have an email account. For this reason we will work closely with community venues to advertise events using posters and via word of mouth.

We will also utilise partnerships with Local Authorities, third sector organisations and business groups, and ask them to share information about events and opportunities for involvement with the Valleys Regional Park within their existing networks.

If you want to get involved or find out more about the Valleys Regional Park and its opportunities, contact us at [OurValleys@gov.wales](mailto:OurValleys@gov.wales)

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