

SD38

Draft Lower Ebbw Fach Valley Holistic Area Regeneration Plan



INTRODUCTION

In early 2008 the Heads of the Valley Programme Team invited Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to prepare and submit Holistic Area Regeneration Plans (HARPs) by end of December 2008.

The Heads of the Valley Town Centre Group had been working on a Spatial Strategy for the area and as a result of this work four regeneration areas were proposed.

These are:

- Upper Sirhowy Valley centred on the town of Tredegar
- Ebbw Fawr Valley centred on the town of Ebbw Vale
- Upper Ebbw Fach Valley centred on the town of Brynmawr
- Lower Ebbw Fach Valley centred on the town of Abertillery

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council welcomed the opportunity to work closely with its partners to prepare and submit four HARPs.

The Council engaged with its partners through a series of meetings and workshops with the assistance of an independent facilitator. A report of the consultation events is enclosed with this HARP. How we consulted and what we consulted on was overseen by a Steering Group comprising public and voluntary sectors organisations (see page 33 for more details) Partners were invited to submit information and projects and were also given the opportunity to shape the prioritisation process. Throughout the process, officers of the Council have been available to discuss HARPs with any interested party. Working within time constraints the Council has strived to ensure that the process of preparing HARPs has been inclusive and have encouraged other organisations to adopt a similar approach. In the Ebbw Fawr Valley, EVAD and GAVO have undertaken an exercise to inform all

community groups in the area of this initiative and to invite suggestions for projects.

As the process emerged the role of Steering Group extended to devising the criteria for assessment of the projects and for undertaking the assessment.

The result of this work is a comprehensive assessment of the issues and opportunities faced by the area, projects underway and package of projects to be implemented.

BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH

Blaenau Gwent is located in south east Wales and was formerly part of the county of Gwent. It is approximately 20 miles south to the city of Newport, 30 miles south west to the city of Cardiff and directly north is the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Blaenau Gwent is the smallest of all Welsh local authorities, at about 10,900 hectares. In Blaenau Gwent there are three distinctive valleys supporting five main settlements – Abertillery, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo & Blaina and Tredegar.

Section 1: Strategic Context

BACKGROUND

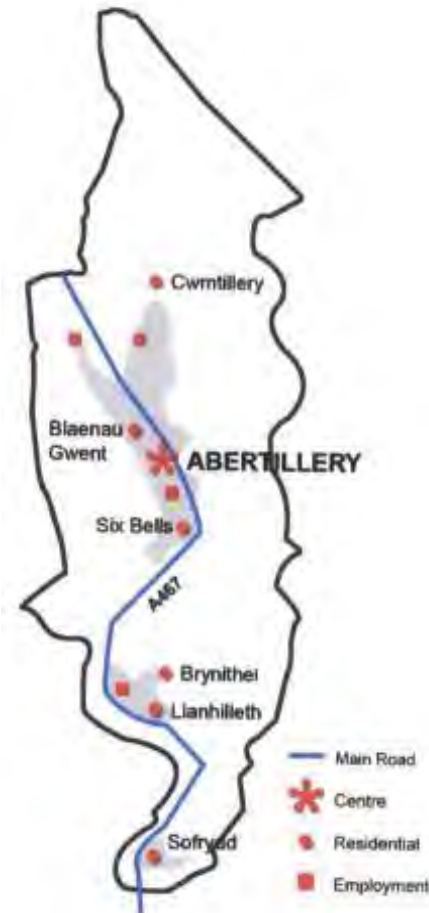
The Lower Ebbw Fach Valley area had a population of 16,272 in 2006 – a decrease of 6% since 1991. It comprises the main settlement of Abertillery, together with Aberbeeg, Cwmtillery, Llanhilleth and Six Bells.

Main Settlements Roles & Functions 2006

Hub: Abertillery town, ranked 38th out of Wales' retail centres, is the hub of this HARP area. It contains over 125 commercial units, an Open Learning Centre, a three Rink Indoor Bowls Centre, and an award-winning Sport and Day Centre Complex offering state of the art fitness equipment and a swimming pool for adults and learners.

Residential areas: Aberbeeg, Cwmtillery, Llanhilleth, Six Bells, Brynithel

Employment areas: The industrial estate and business parks located at Cwmtillery, Roseheyworth and Llanhilleth play an important employment role. Roseheyworth Business Park, in particular, is a high quality development.



Local Transport network

Tourism and potential contribution to the Valleys Regional Park

The area has the potential to make a major contribution to the Valleys Regional Park. The rugged mountain landscape is a potential haven for outdoor activities and there is further potential to develop this opportunity for tourism.

Landscape: The hillsides are dramatic and magnificent views are obtained from minor roads and long distance footpaths along the ridgeways. Cwmtillery, set in a quiet valley, is home to picturesque lakes and rambling farmland and is a popular area for walking.

Biodiversity: The Ebbw Fach river runs from Brynmawr in the north through Abertillery and Six Bells before joining the Ebbw Fawr at Aberbeeg. The river provides an essential wildlife corridor and important amenity resource.

Parks: Abertillery Park is an attractive 20-acre park on the outskirts of the town. The park provides the opportunity for local residents and visitors to appreciate the scenery and local sporting activities.

Cycle paths: there is a planned cycle route for the Ebbw Fach Valley.

Heritage: In the 1920s Abertillery was the second largest town in Monmouthshire, second only to Newport. At this time its population was an incredible 40,000 due to the expansion of the coal mining industry. There are many architecturally attractive 19th century buildings rising to three and four storeys set against a backdrop of steeply sloping and wooded hillsides. Abertillery has an important Victoria arcade.

The ancient church of St. Illtyd sits high on the hillside above Abertillery. This beautifully restored 12th century building retains many original features and was the winner of the Prince of Wales Award and the Civic Trust Award. It is used regularly for live

performances and is open to visitors on summer Sunday afternoons.

Abertillery and District Museum contains a collection of artefacts, documents and photographs dating from the Stone Age through to the Industrial Revolution and more recent history. The museum is housed in the former historic Victorian Metropole Theatre.

Footpaths: There are two heritage trails available. One trail begins at Foundry Bridge, and the other commences at Cwmtillery.

Events: Abertillery Community Theatre has become renowned for the quality of its blues music, attracting performers from all over the world. An annual Blues Festival is held in Abertillery Park which attracts UK and international artists.

The recently refurbished Metropole – The MET – provides a high quality cultural and conference centre in the heart of the town.

Accommodation: The only accommodation available in this area is a Guest House located in Cwmtillery.

Section 2: Analysis of Need

An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment

highest in Wales. There are also higher proportions of people claiming Incapacity Benefits, Income Support and Pensions Credit in Blaenau Gwent than the rest of Wales.

Long term unemployment is a persistent problem. In 2006, 41% of claimants had been unemployed for over six months and over 20% for a year. The proportion of claimants under 25 has increased significantly.

The proportion of the working age population economically active is 69.6% - again much lower than that of Wales. However, the rate has improved slightly since 2002.

Out Commuting. Blaenau Gwent experiences the 6th highest level of net out commuting in Wales, suggesting that Blaenau Gwent is not offering its residents the job opportunities that they are looking for.

Income: For those persons in employment the pay received for their work is lower than in other neighbouring authorities. As measured by Paycheck The mean income is £26,559 which is significantly lower than the mean income for SE Wales at £31,108 and Wales at £30,231. Our neighbouring authorities have higher mean incomes - £27,106 in Merthyr Tydfil, £29,248 in Caerphilly and £29,344 in Torfaen. As a result personal disposable incomes are likely to be lower having direct impacts on life chances.

Enterprise: Only 4.8% of workers are self-employed compared to 8.6% in Wales. The three year survival rate for businesses is just 66%. The UK Competitiveness Index produced by the University of Wales Institute in Cardiff found that Blaenau Gwent is ranked 407th out of 407 local areas across the UK. The Index takes into account factors including research and development expenditure, business start up rates, proportion of the working age population with a degree, productivity, employment rates and gross weekly pay.

Industrial and Occupational Structures: The Blaenau Gwent economy has experienced major structural change moving from dependence on heavy industry towards manufacturing and services. In 2001 manufacturing accounted for 41% of jobs and now it is only 26%. At the same time there has been a small increase of 2,300 service jobs, but the sector is still smaller than in Wales. The largest number of these jobs is in public administration, education and health.

Transport: In terms of travel distances to work, in Blaenau Gwent

The dominant feature of the highway network in Blaenau Gwent is the Heads of the Valleys Trunk Road (A465) located at the northern end of the County Borough. The proposal to upgrade the road between Hirwaun and Abergavenny to dual carriageway standards has commenced. On completion of this work the A465/A40 route between Neath and Monmouth will be to a standard commensurate with its strategic nature. The completion of the section within Blaenau Gwent is expected to commence by 2010. This road combined with the A470 connects Blaenau Gwent to

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child and adulthood. Recent evidence of causes of LBW include mothers smoking during pregnancy, poor diet and excessive

Abertillery also has a high number of calls for noise nuisance (engines revving, car stereos, scramblers and off road bikes).

Anti social behaviour is a primary concern to all communities in Blaenau Gwent. Reducing harm caused by alcohol is a national and local priority as there is a strong causal link to other priorities such as violent crime and anti social behaviour.

Youth related incidents reported to Gwent Police account for 50% of all rowdy/nuisance behaviour calls, which in turn account for 73% of incidents reported to Gwent Police in the period Oct 06-Sept 07. However no correlation has been found between trends in rowdy behaviour and criminal damage or any strong match with school exclusion data. However, it should be noted that school exclusion data relates to the location of the school not the pupil's home address.

Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics show that men and women living in Blaenau Gwent have the lowest chance of survival to the age of 75 compared with other areas in Wales. The survival rate for men is 59.6% in Blaenau Gwent compared to 70.6% in Ceredigion and for women 67.4% compared to Monmouthshire at 80.9%. Sadly the survival rate for women in Blaenau Gwent is the lowest in the whole of England and Wales.

Lifelong Learning: Data relating to education, skills and qualifications in the area indicates a considerable disparity between Blaenau Gwent and South East Wales and Wales. In Blaenau Gwent, the proportion of people holding NVQ level 2, or above in 2003 was 41% compared to 43% for South East Wales and 60% for Wales. The situation is far worse in terms of the proportion of people holding the higher level 4 qualification or above: 10% for Blaenau Gwent compared to 17% and 23% for South East Wales and Wales respectively.

There is also a lower percentage of the population achievix

Using the analysis of need and views from practitioners working in the county borough, it is clear that Blaenau Gwent and in particular the Lower Ebbw Fach Valley has many issues to address. That said, there are a number of key opportunities for the area given its location and varied natural landscape.

Issues and Opportunities across Blaenau Gwent

Issues

- Since the demise of heavy industry the towns and villages are seeking to redefine themselves
- Throughout Blaenau Gwent there are poor quality buildings, some dating from Victorian times, other more modern construction of the 1960s.
- Lack of visitor accommodation and provision
- Poor maintenance of public land and highways
- Lack of business confidence in the area
- Lack of community pride
- Poor signage to towns, villages and places of interest
- Low levels of income
- Smoking, poor diet and obesity rates are significantly higher than the Wales average
- Blaenau Gwent has the highest rates of hospital admissions for alcohol related conditions in Wales, with particularly high rates for women
- Adult population has a high rate of excess alcohol consumption
- Respiratory disease remains high, and death rates do not appear to be reducing.
- Poor mental health (mild level of severity)

Opportunities

- Rich industrial heritage
- Varied landscape

Issues and Opportunities in the Lower Ebbw Fach Valley

Issues

Anti social behaviour in Abertillery town centre
Limited variety of housing type
Cwmtillery and Llanhilleth have high levels of deprivation
Limited retail properties
Poor public realm in Abertillery

Opportunities

Redevelopment of the Six Bells Colliery site for housing and amenity space
Ebbw Fach River & Ebbw Fach Trail
Cwmtillery Lakes area
Rich and varied landscape
Redeveloped Llanhilleth Institute bringing disparate communities together
Historic Arcade in Abertillery
Cultural activities – Abertillery Blues Festival
Four active Communities First Partnerships, championing excellent grass roots projects

Policy Overview

The actions that need to be taken to improve the Lower Ebbw Fach Valley and the county borough as a whole are captured in a number of strategies and plans. These actions are a result of individual need assessments and consultation. Many of these plans will influence the outcomes for the HARP.

The key documents and a brief summary are set out below.

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- Provide a range of types and tenures of new homes to meet local housing needs and attract people to the area.
- Improve accessibility to services through the promotion of sustainable modes of transport, particularly, public transport, walking and cycling.
- Improve education levels and skills through supporting infrastructure development of the Learning Campus, new schools and integrated education services, including life-long learning.
- Create an accessible network of green open spaces and high quality leisure infrastructure to promote participation in sport and active recreation to improve health and well-being.
- Capitalise on the unique landscape and natural heritage, foster sustainable tourism and promote community pride.
- Protect, enhance and manage the diversity of the biodiversity resource of Blaenau Gwent through the identification of ecological corridors
- Raise the standard of design to improve the quality of the physical and natural environment; and protect and enhance Blaenau Gwent's historic and cultural environment.
- To minimise further climate change contributions and mitigate its predicted effects on the County Borough.

Health Social Care and Well-Being Strategy Healthier Future 2 (Draft)

Healthier Future II is the second Health, Social Care and Well-being Strategy for Blaenau Gwent, developed in partnership between Blaenau Gwent Health Board, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and its partners. The strategy sets out a continued commitment to working together to improve the health, social care and well-being of all people living and working in Blaenau Gwent.

The Strategy sets out 18 local priorities for action, many of which are based on working arrangements and implementing existing strategies in terms of older people, young people, maternity care, mental health, learning disabilities, substance misuse, diabetes and coronary heart disease.

Draft Children and Young People's Plan for Blaenau Gwent 2008-2011

The draft Children and Young People's Plan is a 3-year plan, which sets out how all agencies in Blaenau Gwent working with children and young people will cooperate to achieve common goals, to improve outcomes for children and young people. The plan articulates the Partnership's vision, and details the actions it will take, in order to bring about changes in children and young people's lives. The vision for the Partnership is: "Working together we will strive to ensure that all children and young people will be supported to achieve their full potential".

The Plan represents a new way of thinking about how local services need to change in offer to ensure that all children and young people achieve the Welsh Assembly Government's seven core aims by ensuring that young people:

- Have a flying start in life

- Have a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities
- Enjoy the best possible health and be free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation
- Have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities
- Are listened to, treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised
- Have a safe home and community which supports physical and emotional well-being
- Are not disadvantaged by poverty.

Blaenau Gwent Regeneration Strategy (Draft 2008)

The Regeneration Strategy identifies an overarching aim and six principles along with proposals to translate them into action. The

8. People's understanding of their finances will be improved, leading to better financial management
9. There is greater respect, awareness and understanding within the community promoting community integration and pride
10. Due to either demolition, landscaping or high quality renovation schemes there are fewer derelict, neglected buildings or patches of land
11. There are more opportunities to access information and support from organisations that impact on community life
12. There will be increased support and practical measures for families and young children
13. Schools will be a valued resource for communities that lack other facilities and used out of school hours for a range of activities for all ages
14. There will be more businesses set up and managed by the community
15. There will be more support for starting and sustaining local businesses
16. There will be increased support for and take up of local sustainable energy and recycling initiatives
17. More varied cultural activities and facilities are available aimed at all ages, residents and visitors

Section 3: Projects

WHAT ARE WE DOING

The Council and its partners, including HoV are investing in the town of Abertillery to strengthen its position as a thriving town serving the communities of the Lower Ebbw Fach valley. Through

- a Town Centre manager who has already made an impact in the town with regular events such as a continental market and improving the cleanliness and appearance of the town centre

Other recent projects in **Abertillery** include the refurbishment of the Metropole which now provides a modern vibrant facility for conferences and cultural activities. The completion of a nearby car park will only improve this facility. The Metropole is a key venue in the annual Abertillery Blues festival which features artists from around the world and brings in approximately 1,000 people into the area. Providing suitable accommodation for visitors will be crucial in capitalising on the benefits in terms of income spent in the area and job and training opportunities for residents.

Cwmtillery: The boundaries between the settlement of Cwmtillery and Abertillery are not well defined with the two settlements merging. Cwmtillery is further up the valley and as a consequence is a more isolated and remote. The major opportunity for Cwmtillery is its beautiful natural setting. The lakes are owned by Dwr Cymru and through the Communities First Partnership an active group Cwmtillery Lakes Environmental Action Network (CLEAN) has been established.

Six Bells: In 2003 the former colliery site in Six Bells was reclaimed, the last colliery site to be reclaimed in the county borough. The site has the potential to provide a site for high quality housing, a new primary school and open space with biodiversity and heritage interest. It is a well used resource by the community, particularly dog walkers and a recent project to construct walking routes and provision of seating and BBQ

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WHAT'S PLANNED

The challenges for this area are great and varied. The Council and its partners acknowledges that regeneration action needs to be targeted at specific initiatives which tackle issues relating not only to improving places but improving the lives of the people of this area.

Project Assessment Criteria

The assessment process has been agreed by the Steering Group. The assessment was based on the information provided in the proformas which was of variable quality.

Stage 1: From the workshops held in the Lower Ebbw Fach Valley Area a number of strategic outcomes were arrived at (see Section 3 for more information). These strategic outcomes have been used as the first stage of the project assessment process. Projects were required to meet at least 5 of the strategic outcomes before progressing to the next stage.

Stage 2 of the assessment process scored the projects against deliverability, community support, leverage of funding and environmental impact.

The result of this assessment process has been the determination of priority projects, reserve projects and projects requiring further development. Details of all the projects are set out below for your information together with the score. The maximum that a project could score is 20 points. The location of some of the priority projects are shown on Plan 1.

Below are summaries of all the projects submitted, more information on each is available from BGCBC.

Priority Projects

An attractive and well used natural, historic and built environment

Abertillery Town Centre Regeneration: This package seeks to revitalise the fabric of the town providing a more attractive and vibrant town centre experience. The projects proposed will make a lasting and sustainable contribution to the town.

a. Foundry Square:

Environmental streetscape enhancement is required to the northern gateway to the town centre to consolidate the environmental quality as there is currently no sense of arrival in Church Street.

b. Church Street/Somerset Street Enhancements:

Significant streetscape works are required to these streets to enhance the environmental quality of the public realm. Design options are currently being explored following workshops with key stakeholders.

c. Metropole Square:

e. Traffic Management Proposals:

Improved pedestrian linkages from out of town supermarket need to

local people have formed a company limited by guarantee to progress this business venture. Both capital and revenue contributions are sort for the refurbishment and conversion of the building for its new use and for the employment of a manager and

Protect, Progress & Promote:

Building on recent work on protecting and promoting the heritage of Blaenau Gwent, this project proposes further interpretation with site signage, artistic engagement pieces, interpretation of key sites and involvement in regional campaigns.

Borough Wide Valleys Cycle Network

The Council, as part of SEWTA (South East Wales Transport Alliance) in partnership with Sustrans is seeking to deliver the Valleys Cycle Network. Coupled with existing routes, this additional

277 mile network i indGk9pS,xkrSFjjiGk9pS,xkrSFjNpxkuSxknSxknmp9&,LW9Op1jjLW-&p9p,,jxkpSxkiSNkeSjOSxkdSxk SFW1kpSF,kiSNk S,xktSFxkiSNk

shelters, raised boarding platforms, information displays, signing and improved access to stops

Raising the Tourism Potential of Blaenau Gwent - 11/15/2014

Section 4: Community Engagement

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

BGCBC established an internal officer working group whose initial focus was the preparation of the HARP. Through this meeting it was suggested that a series of meetings were held with our partners to explain what HARPs are and to discuss how best to work together. To this end three meetings were arranged. Firstly with all Communities First Co-ordinators in the county borough, the second with 'third sector' organisations such as the two Development Trusts, BTCV, Community Enterprise Wales, Housing Associations, GAVO. The third meeting involved our 'Strategic Partners' – LHB, NPHS, Gwent Police, CCW, WAG.

Simple proformas were designed internally to capture project information in a consistent format. These proformas were made available through existing networks. In some area of the county borough a further exercise was undertaken to capture all potential HARP projects.

The Council has sought to undertake a comprehensive programme of consultation and engagement. A Steering Group was established to support and guide independent consultants, Lynn Wetenhall Associates, who were commissioned to support the Council and its partners through this consultation process.

This Steering Group consisted of 10 officers from a range of public and voluntary organisations as listed below:

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
- Communities First
- EVAD
- GAVO
- Heads of the Valley Programme

- National Public Health Service/Local Health Board
- Welsh Assembly Government

The Steering Group agreed that a series of workshops should be held, one in each HARP area. The purpose of these workshops would be to:

- Inform attendees about HARPs from a HOV and BGCBC perspective
- To discuss and comment on strategic outcomes for the area
- To comment on the process and how to continue engagement in the process

The Steering Group met with the consultants on 2 occasions prior to the workshops to agree content. A sub group of the Steering Group also meet to draft the strategic outcomes. For more information on Strategic Outcomes see section 2.

An invite list was collated by the Council from contact details supplied by council officers, members of the Steering Group and Communities First officers. The workshops, which were half a day, were well supported and attendance ranged from local groups such as Tenants and Residents Associations to BGCBC Councillors.

The workshops were held on:

- Upper Sirhowy Valley, Thursday 6th November
Attendees 20
-

Overall, the feedback received from all the workshops was

Section 5: Planned Expenditure

PRIORITY PROJECTS

Project	Number of Strategic Outcomes	Stage 2 Score	HoV Funding Required						
			2009/10 Capital	2009/10 Revenue	2010/11 Capital	2010/11 Revenue	2011/12 Capital	2011/12 Revenue	TOTAL
Abertillery Town Centre Regeneration	6	9	1,000,000		1,025,000		650,000		2,675,000
CALON	10	13	892,000	17,000		17,000		17,000	943,000
Coach & Horses, Six Bells	10	13	200,000	15,000		15,000		15,000	245,000
Tyleri Valleys Trails	6	9	25,600		35,750		40,523		101,873
Doorsteps	6	12	7,500		7,725				15,225

RESERVE PROJECTS

Project	HoV Funding Required								
	Number of Strategic Outcomes	Stage 2 Score	2009/10 Capital	2009/10 Revenue	2010/11 Capital	2010/11 Revenue	2011/12 Capital	2011/12 Revenue	TOTAL
AVIATOR	4		100,000						100,000
Brynithel Sports Centre	3		378,900		220,000				598,900
Community Computer Centres	3		11,000	1,000	11,300	2,000		2,700	28,000
Turkey Trot	4		152,000						152,000
TOTAL			641,900	1,000	231,300	2,000		2,700	878,900

PROJECTS REQUIRING FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Project	HoV Funding Required							
	Number of Strategic Outcomes	Stage 2 Score	2009/10 Capital	2009/10 Revenue	2010/11 Capital	2010/11 Revenue	2011/12 Capital	2011/12 Revenue
Development of a Bowling Green	Needs further investigation							
Development of a Community Centre	Possible incorporation into CALON project							
Car Park provision at rear of Gwern Berthi Road	Needs further investigation							
Road safety improvements, Aberbeeg, Brynithel, Llanhilleth	Needs further investigation							
Environmental Enhancement, Llanhilleth railway station	Needs further investigation							
Environmental Improvements, Aberbeeg	Needs further investigation							

COUNTY BOROUGH PRIORITY PROJECTS

Project	Number of Strategic Outcomes	Stage 2 Score	HoV Funding Required						
			2009/10 Capital	2009/10 Revenue	2010/11 Capital	2010/11 Revenue	2011/12 Capital	2011/12 Revenue	TOTAL
Healthy Neighbourhood Retailing	7	12	12,000	800	12,000	800	12,000	800	38,400
Head for Arts	6	18	17,850	4,000	6,500	4,000	6,500	4,000	42,850
Protect, Progress and Promote	5	12	82,000	29,000	182,000	29,000	82,000	29,000	433,000
Woodland Management Plans	6	13	37,500	2,500	37,500	2,500	37,500	2,500	120,000
Childrens University	5	9	1,000	16,000	1,500	17,000	2,000	18,000	55,500

COUNTY BOROUGH WIDE – PROJECTS REQUIRING MORE DEVELOPMENT

Project	HoV Funding Required							
	Number of Strategic Outcomes	Stage 2 Score	2009/10 Capital	2009/10 Revenue	2010/11 Capital	2010/11 Revenue	2011/12 Capital	2011/12 Revenue
Emotional Resilience	Needs more development on delivery							
Community Transport	Needs more development on delivery							
Health of Children	Needs more development on delivery							
Green Open Space	Joint bid of Access to Green Open Space and BTCV projects – Green Exercise & Family Employment Initiative recommended Approximate Cost £100,000							

Monitoring and Evaluation

Project Monitoring

It is envisaged that the HoV Programme will undertake monitoring on the individual projects. If BGCBC becomes aware of potential underspend, HoV will be notified as soon as possible. It is hoped that any underspend released from a project will be recycled into another project in that same HARP area.

Information from the HOV Programme Team will be useful in evaluating and revising the plan for 2010/11 funding.

Evaluation

From the workshops held in 2008, a database of contacts has been set up of those people who wished to be kept informed and involved in the development of HARPs.

Information was also captured at these workshops on what participants felt worked well with the 2008 process and what worked less well. These comments will form part of evaluation of the 2008 process and will inform the process for 2009.

APPENDIX 1

WELSH INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION 2008: LOWER EBBW FACH VALLEY

**Overall
(Wales Rank**