

2 East Powys

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The event was held on the 12th November 2003 at Coleg Powys, Newtown. Nineteen people attended, representing a mix of national and local organisations (see Appendix).

2.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW

Whilst one of the smaller events, this was nevertheless a diverse and creative one, because of the range of participants and their willingness to engage in a range of issues constructively and in an integrated manner.

In the morning session, there were a number of challenges to the zoning of the area, which was designated pink in the Plan, suggesting similar characteristics to Cardigan Bay.

This Pink Zone typology was not generally accepted. For example, while Aberystwyth is seen as the regional centre, which accommodates the knowledge economy, East Powys has more cross border issues and has more limited educational opportunities. There were doubts expressed about the practical value of the coloured zoning if it did not reflect the characteristics of the area accurately, and did not relate to administrative boundaries. (This echoed some of the issues raised in Cardigan Bay).

The sustainability matrix and zonal attributes produced lively discussion, particularly around population changes and work patterns. Young people were leaving, while at the same time others are moving in to the area, often across boundaries to take advantage of lower property prices. People could, for example, work from home several days and make occasional trips to towns. Most commercial linkages are east-west, and generally cross-border relationships are important.

Discussions and prioritisation of cards produced themes to address issues raised earlier in the day: the need for affordable housing; and to retain and attract skilled people for tourism and other industries; added value work on products that currently go across the border to England; economic development, particularly enhanced technology systems and support for the knowledge economy.

The more detailed discussions on implementation identified tasks, blockages and in all cases the need for co-ordinated action by agencies already involved in existing programmes. This grouping appeared to demonstrate a strong existing basis for collaborative action, possibly through Mid Wales Partnership

2.3 THE EVENT DETAILS

Following an explanation of the purpose of the day and a presentation of the Plan components, the audience split into four groups. The initial discussions are summarised as follows:

2.4 ZONE ISSUES

- There was concern about the extent to which the Assembly is committed to the eight areas. There was strong discomfort expressed with the nature and extent of the East Powys Pink Zone.
- 'Distinctiveness' can be seen as one of the core values of the Plan but how far is this reflected in each of the zones? This did not necessarily sit comfortably with this zone.
- Generally, the zones themselves do not reflect administrative boundaries, which was considered may be a problem by some.
- Why should Cardigan Bay and East Powys both lie within Pink Zones? While Aberystwyth is seen as the regional centre that accommodates the knowledge economy, East Powys deals mostly with cross border issues and is little concerned with educational services. Furthermore, parts of rural North Wales (Wrexham region) should probably be included in the Pink Zone.
- Concerned was also expressed about the designation of the Green Zone. It was seen as the left over residual once other zones had been designated, with little coherent distinctiveness apart from its geographical location.
- It was proposed that connections between zones need to be identified in greater detail. There is, for instance, a much stronger link between the east and west in mid Wales, rather than the north and south. This reality does not come through.
- There was also some criticism of the focus on sector-based resources in the Plan. Manufacturing is an important sector, which should not be ignored. Human resources also need to be more developed and education services need to be brought back into the area.

2.5 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (1)

1

	Environment	Community	Prosperity	Accessibility
Robust				
Stable				
Fragile				

"NOW"

The diagrams show:

1. The "Now" Matrix set after group discussion (average of all groups)

2. The Matrix adjusted to show the affects of the implementation of the Plan (average of all groups)

Environment

- The assessment was considered to be dependent on the scope of what is meant by the Environment (natural, built etc.)
- The group discussions also indicated the environment is mostly taken for granted by much of the population.
- Welsh Waterways have a role in protection on the Welsh side of the border, so that contributes to making the environment relatively robust. If there was no such protection then the environment would be considered very fragile.
- It was argued by some that despite protection, there remain some threats from, for instance, renewable energies. These are often forgotten.

Generally, the balance of the groups felt the rating given to the Environment should be around high **stable**.

Community

- Population is growing in the area. However, the issue is dominated by the elderly. This has negative impacts on some community issues. The ageing population has an affect on the demand for health services and social care, draw back those who have moved away – but there is nothing much to attract them.
- Some people are moving into area to work at home – and buying bigger properties. Generally, the indigenous population is not as prosperous as those who move into the area. It was claimed bigger houses are being built for those people wishing to move into the area from outside, instead of smaller starter houses to support the locals.

On balance, Communities were reckoned to be less than stable, and assessed at the top of **fragile**.

Prosperity

- In terms of prosperity, the picture looks very diverse. Not all parts of East Powys are prosperous.
- Similarities between Cardigan Bay, the other Pink Zone, and East Powys are minimal. East Powys has a very different economy, migration patterns and is heavily influenced by its proximity to England.
- It was considered that planning policy, which seeks to restrain development on the English side of the border, might be displacing some development across the border (particularly housing). In other words the representations of wealth may not be very local.
- There was less consensus between the different groups on the rating for Prosperity, but it was generally considered to be in the **fragile** to **stable** range.

Accessibility

- The Plan statement that the Pink Zone 'connects' the southern and northern parts of the country was considered to be meaningless, if not false. The same is true in terms of the assertion that the zone has important regional centres. This was generally rejected for the East Powys region. It was said that every region has its regional centres and that this statement is therefore not of great value as a generalised concept and may need to be rethought.
- Commercial relationships only really exist east-westwards but are mainly influenced by England. These relationships are based on service provision. It was also claimed that local salaries do not always reflect the quality of certain jobs.
- Availability of broadband in East Powys – would certainly aid working from home, an important factor now that Powys already has one of the highest 'work from home' rates.
- How can we improve travel times without jeopardising the natural environment? This is one of the big challenges. We could do this by encouraging video conferencing so that people can have all-Wales meetings without the need to travel to Cardiff.
- 'Semi-schedule' transport services e.g. Dial a Ride, may be one way of addressing access & connectivity.
- Cross Border relations are very important, making this different from some other parts of Wales, and also not a self-contained, self-sufficient area.
- There is pressure on the roads because of the traffic created by commuters across and out of the area.
- There is no relationship with any single town over the border, unlike the north and south of Wales, which have predominant connections with Liverpool (& Chester) and Bristol respectively.

The Accessibility rating was set at the top end of ***fragile***.

2.6 PRIORITIES AND TIMESCALES

Groups considered the range of cards listed in the table (and given in the PDF document accompanying this report), representing the ideas and proposals currently in the Plan.

The placement of the cards in the Timescale / Priority matrix is shown in the table below. The darker tones illustrate a higher level of consensus between groups.

Figure 1 - Group Card Placements

Objective	Timescale			Priority			Weighted Priority
	Short	Medium	Long	High	Medium	Low	
Economic/Environmental Opps	2		1	3			9
Economic Development		1		3			9
Services	3			3			9
Tourism	1	2		3			9
Added Value		1	2	3			9
Skilled People	3			3			9
The Knowledge Economy		3		2	1		8
Cultural Opps	1	2		1	2		7
Environmental Capacity	2		1	1	2		7
Transport Services	2	1		1	2		7
Cross Border	1	2		1	2		7
Employment Opps	2	1		1	2		7
Transport	2	1		1	2		7
Travel Times	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Linkages		2	1	1	1	1	6
Competing Demands*	2			2			6
Infrastructure	1		2	1		2	5
Transport Hubs	1	1	1		2	1	5
Rural / Urban Co-operation*		1	1	1		1	4
Towns*		1	1		2		4

Note: Actions with an asterisk indicate that one or more groups dropped them from the selection. Weighted Priority is determined by multiplying High priority scores by 3 and Medium by 2 and then adding across all priorities
Dark cells indicate the degree of consensus light shading indicates little consensus.

Summary

- The greatest agreement and the highest priority were given to a cluster of objectives that concern economic activity. There is a remarkable agreement across all groups on the priority to be assigned to this. The cards for Economic / Environmental Opportunities, Economic Development, Tourism Added Value and Skilled People were given top priority ranking by all groups. The Knowledge Economy was given only slightly less priority and can be considered part of this cluster.



Working with the cards...

...and placing the cards in the Planning Sheet



- The development of Local Services is also given high priority and is unanimously considered to be achievable in the short term.
- A large and diverse group of objectives relating to communications – Transport Services, Transport, Cross Border, Travel Times, Linkages was given medium priority by most groups.
- One group rejected Rural Co-operation and the Role of Towns

Added Cards:

A number of new cards were added to pick up themes the groups thought important:

- The need for Review frameworks which influence choices
- The need to increase local skills and opportunities
- The need to provide affordable housing
- Establish environmental capacity for all new development
- Optimising broadband opportunities
- Address Further / Higher Education needs / opportunities
- A balance of indigenous development and sustainable inward investment
- Reduce travel need through IT, development location, etc

In discussing and prioritising the cards in their categories, comments drawn from the groups and noted by the facilitators included:

Environment

- Participants had problems understanding what 'environmental capacity' means. Does it mean how much the environment can cope with e.g. renewable energy? Or how much renewable energy can we get from our environment? It is considered to be the former – in terms of carrying capacity, but could be confused with the latter.

Community

- Service provision: the provision of health care challenging and problematic throughout the area, notably in eastern Powys. Access to retail services can also be problematic.
- Education services are considered to be very good.
- Cultural opportunity is valued differently throughout the area. Eastern Powys is very much influenced by the West Midlands, whereas the more western parts are more conscious of the Welsh heritage. There is a need to recognise both approaches and to respect this diversity.

Prosperity

- The groups did not view this as a straightforward wealth issue. Rather it was about a range of factors and opportunities contributing to quality of life.
- There is a need to increase practical skills in the area. For instance, the tourism industry is seasonal and most

employees work part-time. There is also a shortage of dentists in the region.

- The knowledge economy cannot grow without practical skilled people. High tech industry can be attracted but a mix of different economies needs to be ensured.
- Added value: was seen as economically very important. The main problem is the fact that all farm products go over the border. Furthermore, the group decided that East Powys would have to decide whether it want to concentrate on IT or agriculture. The improvement of the quality of either of these products was seen as highly important. Furthermore, niche markets would have to be found and local markets established.
- Formerly, people moved to East Powys because they were attracted by the countryside - so employers did not have to pay high wages. This has changed dramatically.

Accessibility

- Transport services need increased investment over the next few years
- Accessibility was seen as problem through long travel times and the lack of efficient public transport

General

- Enhancing cross border relations is not as important as maintaining them. The main issue concerns administrative boundaries that can become a blockage
- Rural/Urban cooperation: need to develop clusters and get people working together. However, this card was seen as meaningless (“double Dutch”) and vague.
- Linkages: groups found the card not meaningful

2.7 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (2)

This is a summary of the adjustments that groups made to the Matrix assuming that the prioritised proposals identified for the Plan had been implemented.

	Environment	Community	Prosperity	Accessibility
2				
Robust				
Stable				
Fragile				
	"THEN"			

Environment:

All groups agreed that the actions would not have much affect on the Environment of the area.

Community:

There was a general feeling that the various dimensions of Community would be made more **stable**

Prosperity:

A substantial improvement in this was indicated over all groups, and reflected the kinds of initiatives identified.

Accessibility:

Minor improvement was indicated, reflecting a general view that geographical dimensions were fixed and capable of only marginal improvement.

2.8 IMPLEMENTATION DISCUSSION THEMES

From the morning's session worksheets the following key priorities were selected for examination in terms of delivery. Some of these are effectively amalgamations of the clusters of projects identified in the placement of cards on the sheets.

1. Affordable Housing
2. Retaining and Attracting Skilled People
3. Cross Border issues
4. Economic development (ICT, the knowledge economy)
5. Transport and linkages
6. Added value
7. Tourism
8. Services

Each group selected three topics for discussion

Affordable Housing

There is a need to define affordable housing – do we mean affordable, social rented or shared ownership? We also need to be clear what the local needs are - they may be different from other parts of mid Wales

Housing sustainability – the higher design standard and lifetime durability of homes - was emphasised.

Partnerships need to be established (between planners, developers, communities, housing associations, etc.) to help identify and meet these needs. No one party can do it alone. There is also a need for clearer, flexible and more appropriate planning policies to address these issues.

Funding comes from the social housing grant, conversion grant, housing capital receipts – its is recognised that the state must subsidise housing to make it affordable

Robust Section106 agreements can help – but cannot be the only means of delivery.

Furthermore, there is a need to ensure affordability in perpetuity. Short-term initiatives can lead to loss of stock over the medium term.

Blockages:

The difficulties in taking this forward, include

- Lack of control over existing stock, including the impact of the sale of LA housing
- Land prices and tender costs
- A relatively buoyant housing market
- A lack of cross-boundary working, given some of the pressures and impacts were coming from England
- Some local community opposition to the idea of affordable housing 'near them'
- Opposition from developers who may have to help solve the problem

Actors:

- Local Authority, communities, developers, housing associations/ registered social landlords

Skilled people

To attract and retain this important dimension of the community, the discussion identified:

- A need for suitable employment and training, ideally locally
- The de-centralisation of government departments and posts
- Need for better and more vocational training – for instance in skilled local services, such as ‘more plumbers please!’
- Possibly a need for assisted placements

There was considered to be a need for a living environment that people with a range of requisite skills might ‘want to come back to’.

It was suggested there is a need for a strategic and coherent package to address these issues (for instance by Welsh Development Agency/Education and Learning in Wales and other key partners)

The use of incentives could be considered to attract skilled people. Attracting inward investment and encouraging the development of indigenous businesses, is also a way of growing skill sets from the demand side

Improving accessibility would also help support these economic and training initiatives

Targeting funding packages should be used to focus on the right needs& opportunities

Marketing: could be used to attract high-fliers to come back into the area for quality of life reasons

Offering training courses – they are the point of entry into market on the supply side

Expansion of Llwybro Routes may also bring benefits

Actors:

- Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Development Agency, Local Authorities, Education and Learning in Wales, Mid Wales Manufacturing Group, Chamber of Trade, Career Wales, Job Centre, Careers advisors (schools, colleges, universities)

Blockages:

- There is something of a chicken-and-egg situation: do we need the skills or jobs first?
- There is a lack of local jobs – so we certainly need more of these
- Finance for different initiatives is a challenge
- Problems of accessibility and infrastructure (proximity to markets, for instance) is a difficulty for this area

- Lack of joined-up thinking and actions, such as being explored by this process
- The lack of an existing skilled practical workforce, for instance to train others
- The absence of an HE institution makes things difficult
- The lack of one or more major employers is a constraint
- Lack of social amenities (“bright lights”) for workers and managers means that the area cannot compete with cities and larger towns

Cross-boundary issues

We need to identify common issues and problems which affect either side of the boundary, and which would benefit from collaborative approaches to joint working (e.g. in transport and planning)

We should forge better links at national, regional and local level

There may be a need for some budget-pooling (both within Wales and outside) to fund some of the work

We should also identify any apparent detrimental effects of devolution – such as “iron curtains” in key policy areas?

Blockages:

- One of these is the different interpretation of EU legislation and requirements

Actors:

- Office of Deputy Prime Minister, Welsh Assembly Government, regional development agencies, Local Authorities, business groups, communities

Economic development (ICT, knowledge economy)

It was felt there was a need to raise awareness about this sector and its significance to economic and social well-being

We should develop skills by offering courses but there is also a need for infrastructure investment, particularly in broadband

There is probably a requirement for a resource centres network

There is probably a need for training: focused in areas such as innovation, marketing and new ideas

The focus should be on current, and particularly, on future needs

There is also a prospective need for management development to help adopt and use ICT effectively in different sector

Blockages:

- The current infrastructure is a constraint
- Linkages are not as well developed as they might be

- Fundamentally, attitudes from individuals and businesses could be more positive and progressive. The culture is not as proactive as it could be
- There are considered to be political and financial barriers

Actors:

- Education and Learning Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Development Agency (knowledge exploration fund), BT and other providers, Opportunity Wales, training providers (as a consortium? Re-create the Training and Enterprise Councils?!), Welsh Development Agency

Transport and linkage

A number of themes were explored and proposed, including:

- Reducing need to travel (incl. For job, education, services), presumably by co-location or clustering
- Create flexible services to meet travel needs (e.g. by Community Transport)
- The need for some road network improvements: this would help reduce travel times
- In particular, improve east-west links
- Improve train services
- Possibly, redirect freight onto rail, if feasible

Blockages:

- Availability of finance
- People's attitudes
- Inflexible working (including employers' demands)

Actors:

- Welsh Assembly Government, Powys County Council

Added Value.

This focused on building and retaining added value locally

- Audit of Assets:
 - We need a SWOT analysis of what we have (e.g. food futures, timber products, energy)
 - Capacity – we need to understand and be realistic about this
 - The environmental impacts – of any action need to be anticipated
 - Policy reconciliation may be necessary
- Cost-benefit Analysis
 - Aim to identify and match sustainable benefits: economic / environmental / communities
 - Problem: there are difficulties in comparing different values, e.g. low tech community projects versus large scale projects

- Policy Framework
 - Mid-Wales Regional Strategy
 - Policy integration and rationalisation at all levels is necessary
 - Identification and rationalisation of funding and existing budgets will also be required
 - Delegation of funding streams to regional body and other drivers

Blockages:

- Cultural change – not easy to achieve
- Entrepreneurship/skills
- Support structures
- Environmental considerations
- Market availability
- Capacity and sustainability

Actors:

- Local Authorities, Welsh Development Agency, National Farmers Union, FE, ASPB, Welsh Assembly Government, EA, Countryside Commission for Wales

Resource implications:

- Capacity: raw materials, transport, local markets, and the synergy of activities
- Need for capital/revenue funding versus grant dependency

Tourism

There were a number of proposed actions, including:

- The need for a regional strategy - is already substantially completed
- The need for co-ordinated activities
- The rationalisation of funding streams
- New and existing product development
- Branding and marketing
- Skills development

Blockages:

- The current structure of funding streams
- Tourism not statutory bodies
- Quality dependent - on product and people
- Training is required
- Seasonality constraints
- Attitude and perception
- Funding: work with existing budgets

Actors:

- Wales Tourist Board, TPMW, Education and Learning in Wales, Local Authorities, Welsh Development Agency, Tourist Associations, private sector, community, leader groups, ASPBS

Services

Actions proposed included:

- An audit of needs: with public consultation, and a community strategy to help meet local needs,
- Recognising distinctiveness, a regional study of retail choice, with ideas for diversification
- Set priorities for action
- A reconciliation of policies: identification of any gaps, enabling development, protect smaller businesses, and take account of communities and transport issues
- The provision of infrastructure and utilities was stressed

Blockages:

- Infrastructure availability
- Environmental considerations
- A lack of critical mass, sites and capacity
- General lack of IT provision and broadband
- Lack of available finance

Actors:

- Local Authorities, regeneration partners, health and education authorities, ASPB, community groups, users, private sector, Welsh Assembly Government

Appendices

LIST OF ATTENDEES

- Steve O'Sullivan British Waterways
- Alice Earp Institute of Rural Health
- Cllr Michael Jones Powys County Council
- Graham Davey Powys County Council
- Ian Fraser Powys County Council
- Jessica Bradley National Council for Education and Training for Wales
- Chris Lambert National Trust
- Steve Burgess Powys County Council
- Dave Keast Powys County Council
- Chris Wilson Powys County Council
- Dee Reynolds Wales Tourist Board
- Ken Jones Environment Agency Wales
- Deb Wozencraft Council for Protection of Rural Wales
- Nick Smith Powys County Council
- Mike Lloyd Powys County Council
- Mike Bacigalupo Welsh Development Agency
- Hazel Drewett Countryside Council for Wales
- Trish Armstrong Wales Tourist Board
- Gwenan Davies Wales Council for Voluntary Action