

5 Cefn Gwlad

5.1 INTRODUCTION



Neill presents the Plan

The consultation event was held on the 2nd December 2003 at the Elan Valley Hotel in Ryader. Twenty-seven participants attended, representing national and local organisations, as shown in the Appendix.

There was a good mix of participants and a diverse range of views. Partly because of the compact venue this, seemed like one of the more intense events. The views and opinions expressed were not always consistent, and occasionally contradictory. However, it was probably one of the strongest in terms of generating bottom up community-focused ideas.

5.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW

Following opening presentations, participants commented that the role of community strategies appeared not to be addressed in the plan; the Green Zone seemed essentially to be a 'left over' from the other zones; and that 'spatial' is not a good description for most of the plan, which is mainly about integrating social and economic policy issues.

Discussion of zone attributes in groups led to observations that population statistics including students provide a misleading picture, masking out-migration; wilderness features, historic environment and natural resources should be featured much more strongly; and renewable energy is a key resource for the area.

Discussion of the sustainability index and zone attributes revealed concerns about the vulnerability of the environment, and rural communities – despite perceptions of their strength and attractiveness. Prosperity is considered fragile because of limited opportunities and one main employer. Both physical and broadband access is poor, leading to poor access to services. The positive side of this is low crime rates and attractiveness to tourists looking for quiet holidays.

The cards provided a more focused means to take forward discussion of these themes. Environmental stewardship was seen as important. Action needed to strengthen communities included affordable housing, educational provision, retaining and attracting young people. Broadband access and other ICT development could help enhance prosperity, with the main emphasis generally on building on local strengths including natural resources, renewable energy, agriculture and lifestyle. ICT was also a high priority for accessibility.

In the afternoon plans for action focussed on: vibrant sustainable towns; affordable rural housing; local communities, commercial opportunities; indigenous economic development; environment; water; and ICTs. The proposals were constructive and in some instances very progressive.

5.3 THE EVENT

Following an explanation of the purpose of the day and a presentation of the Plan components, comments and questions were taken from the audience. These concerned:

- To what extent will the Spatial Plan take account of community strategies? The role of community strategy and its coordination with the Plan appears not to be addressed.
- The word 'spatial' is not a good description of the intentions of the Plan. It is somewhat misleading, as the Plan attempts to reach beyond purely spatial factors and is largely about integrating different non-spatial elements (such as economic and social issues), albeit across different areas.

The audience then split into four groups to consider the components of the Plan in more detail. The initial discussions are summarised as follows:

5.4 ZONE ISSUES



Assessing the Zone

- The statistics underlying the Plan were considered by some to be flawed and will therefore lead to an incorrect picture of the area. The student population is included in the statistics, which suggest that there is population growth in the area. This is not accurate. Cefn Gwlad suffers from the net out-migration of young people.
- The age *balance* of the area is problematic. The out-migration of young skilled people creates an aging population in Cefn Gwlad.
- The Green Zone appears to be what is left after defining the other zones. Local distinctiveness is therefore lost in generalisation and the quest for similarity between Zones of the same colour. This one does not hang together.
- Wilderness is also a special feature of Cefn Gwlad that should be acknowledged more explicitly in the Zone's attributes. The historic environment (of field structure and settlement pattern) is also important.
- The settlement structure is undoubtedly *different* in the Zone but should not be described as *weak* in the Plan. The settlements are still seen as important and should be acknowledged for their contribution.

- It was felt that the area has greater natural resources than mentioned in the Plan. Particularly emphasised was renewable energy as a key resource for the area. Ideally, renewable energy measures should be included in each zone.
- Sub-categories are needed to emphasise the differences *within* the Green Zone, given its scale and diversity.
- The Green Zone is characterised through its national parks and settlement structure but little else. However, the national parks could not be regarded as an important element of the Cefn Gwlad zone since they are controlled on a national level.
- Anglesey should be included in the Green Zone as it faces similar challenges and has common attributes. (This was also suggested at the Menai event).

5.5 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 landscape is of outstanding beauty. However, this does not mean that it is not vulnerable; in fact the opposite may be true. Indeed one group felt that the area was under threat, and it was very sensitive to changes
- There is a high dependency on environmental assets as the economy is, to a large extent, built on tourism and agriculture
- The lack of biodiversity is a key problem within the Green Zone, suggesting it was not the most robust environment
- The environment may appear as robust at present but is likely to deteriorate through measures that will harm the environment in the long term (e.g. emissions).
- The Environment average – drawn from different group perspectives, was around the **stable** category.

Community

- While incomers see the Green Zone as an area with strong communities, long-standing residents perceive these communities to be fragmented and fragile
- The out-migration of young skilled people will continue to harm local communities.
- Some communities are more robust through the presence of market towns scattered around the area, each of which has developed their own strong identity. Their relative isolation contributes to their

robustness in one sense. However these centres need to be stabilised and strengthened.

- Some thought efforts should be directed to the rural areas rather than market towns and critical masses have to be established and maintained.
- English people are moving into the area, bringing in their own 'culture'. Many incomers are still 'urban' in mindset even though they are living in rural areas.
- There is a huge cultural difference between the north and south of the region.
- On balance the impact of in-migration, loss of youth and agricultural change meant the Community being graded as **fragile**

Prosperity

- KTH is a big employer in the area – if they were to leave or close down it would have a huge impact on the prosperity of the area.
- Tourism helps but it can't be relied on to maintain the prosperity of the area, given its scale and seasonality.
- The prosperity of the area is also greatly influenced by external factors like EU Common Agricultural Policy and migration issues. On balance, the combined grading was set at **fragile**

Accessibility

- There is poor public transport and poor access to services across the zone. Within local centres access is poor – a new general hospital in the area is not likely to happen.
- Transport routes are insufficient but this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.
- There are positive aspects of poor accessibility: low levels of crime and attractiveness to those tourists looking out for a quiet and peaceful holiday. Inaccessibility may also foster community cohesion and mutual support.
- The absence of broadband is a serious drawback for certain areas.
- There is also an issue of water extraction and the impact that has on other areas. On balance, Accessibility was graded as **fragile**

5.6 PRIORITIES AND TIMESCALES



Considering priorities

Groups considered the range of cards representing the proposals in the draft Plan (and given in the PDF document accompanying this report.)

The placement of the cards in the Timescale / Priority matrix is shown in the table below, with darker tones representing higher levels of consensus.

Figure 1 - Group Card Placements

Challenge	Timescale			Priority			Weighted Priority
	Short	Medium	Long	High	Medium	Low	
Skilled people (10)	3		1	4			12
ICT (13)	4			4			12
Local opportunities (9)	1	3		3	1		11
Environment (1)	1	3		3	1		11
Economic Development (8)	1	3		2	2		10
Towns (4)		4		2	2		10
Stewardship (3)	2	1	1	2	2		10
Infrastructure (7)	1	2	1	2	2		10
Accessibility (11)	1	2	1	1	3		9
Centres (12) *	1	1	1	2	1		8
Biodiversity (2)*	2	1		1	2		7
Managing Change (6)*		2		1	1		5
Urban/rural partners (5)*			1	1			3
Collaborative Work:							
Renewable energy (G)	1	3		2	2		10
Agriculture subsidies (C) *	1	2		3			9
Rural population (A) *	2			2			6
Economic opportunities/ Land econ. (D) *	1	1		1	1		5
Services (E) *	1	1		1	1		4
Economic development/ distinctiveness (F) *	1		1		2		4
Market towns (B) *			1	1			3
<p>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</p> <p>Dark cells indicate the degree of consensus light shading indicates little consensus.</p>							

Added cards:

The following cards were added to represent themes either absent or underplayed in the document.

- Nurturing Welsh language communities
- Maintaining local primary and secondary schools
- Retaining and getting back young people

- Providing affordable housing
- Addressing water extraction
- Enhancing North-South links
- Local procurement: cost of local service creator, supra-national rules
- Rural development
- Environmental care: tourism and water
- Energy efficiency measures and promotion
- Developing capacities in the community to work more closely together
- Ensure UPD plan policies, allow appropriate dispersed development in line with the principles of sustainability
- Male plan and male issues and outcomes; does not address softer issues/values/emotions
- Broadband provision
- Managing change and events/ establishing processes

Summary

The highest priorities were given to the retention of skilled people and the development of ICT.

A further cluster of priorities revolved around the development of local opportunities and economic development through improved environment and better stewardship. Bearing in mind the rural and environmental concerns, infrastructure and the improvement of towns was also stressed.

The lowest priority was given to “management” aspects such as managing change and the development of the urban / rural partners.

In terms of collaborative work, renewable energy and agricultural and rural matters were given greatest priority. The development of services, the encouragement of economic development that emphasises distinctiveness, and a focus on market towns were rated lower.

Comments drawn from the groups and noted by the facilitators were:

Environment

- Environment should focus on biodiversity and issues of longer term stewardship
- Increase biodiversity in degraded areas: plus in non-degraded areas.

- “Farming programmes to increase environmental stewardship”: these are becoming more important over the years

Community



Assessing the cards

- Stabilising and enhancing the communities is important
- “*Encourage co-operation between rural and urban areas as partners*”: This objective was seen as inappropriate as there are *no* proper urban areas within the green zone.
- “*Identify infrastructure capacity constraints*”: The constraints have already been identified. It is time to tackle them.
- The view was expressed that the Plan contains no new concepts and is written from a male perspective, which downplays people’s needs and abilities. It can be seen as a mechanical solution which does not consider whom the plan is made for and what the Welsh can actually contribute to it.
- Educational policy, particularly the lack of funding, drives young people out of the area. A lack of education facilities can be considered to be a major problem. The outcome of the current education system is of high standard however (one of the best A-level results UK-wide).
- There is really a need to create critical mass in the countryside and villages to attract and maintain services that are essential for local communities.
- Affordable housing is restricted by rules and procedures. There is a need to have greater commitment towards affordable housing without a right-to-buy basis (discussed in more depth later).

Prosperity

- Broadband and ICT were viewed as key to changing
- Attracting back and retaining skilled people – using ‘the quality of life’ as a selling point
- “*Mobilise opportunities for economic development linked to indigenous potential, particularly in terms of tourism and recreation; natural resources; renewable energy; agriculture and lifestyle*”: The main focus should be to build on *local* strengths.

Accessibility

- Improved accessibility, but recognising that this works both ways – it can bring in benefits as well as taking them away

- “*Improve accessibility to larger centres to reduce travel times and increase opportunities for travel without threatening the environment*”: Public transport does not receive serious attention through the aforementioned lack of a critical mass.
- “*Use ICT to overcome accessibility constraints and provide economic opportunities e.g. e-learning, tele-working, tele-medicine and e-commerce*”: Connecting households to broadband *at affordable levels* is a key priority within Cefn Gwlad. This will particularly serve the elderly, less mobile and those living further from services.

5.7 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (2)

As a result of the proposals discussed, the matrix was re-visited to consider the likely impacts.

2

	Environment	Community	Prosperity	Accessibility
Robust				
Stable				
Fragile				

"THEN"

Environment:

- The Environment was generally held to remain as **stable** and was not felt to be much affected, although its position may be *maintained* by some of the Plan provisions
- Communities were generally made more **stable** as a result of the proposals.

Prosperity:

- Prosperity was held to be enhanced by the Plan and the economy gauged more **stable**.

Accessibility:

- It was considered Accessibility would be little affected by the Plan, largely because of the geography of the area. It remained as

5.8 IMPLEMENTATION DISCUSSION THEMES

From the morning's worksheets the following key themes were selected for further examination.

1. Towns & Settlements
2. Urban Rural Split
3. Affordable Rural Housing
4. Local Communities, Commercial Opportunities
5. Indigenous Economic Development
6. Environment
7. Water
8. ICT

Each group selected two topics for discussion

Vibrant sustainable towns which retaining local distinctiveness

Actions:

- Define towns according to the range of facilities available and the size of the population. However the definition should also take account of how a settlement sees itself, e.g. some small villages perceive themselves as towns.
- The definition of a town can also depend on what funding is being sought and from who/where.
- Enhancing capacity, particularly by promoting ownership, is desirable
- Identifying good practice within towns and creating linkages between them
- Promotion of small local businesses is essential to build up pride in local identity and capability

Actors:

- Local Authorities, Key agencies, Community groups, e.g. town and community councils, Town regeneration partnerships, Residents associations, Community *champions*

Existing Structures:

- Town festivals, Town bands, Drama/theatre groups, Sports groups, Farmer markets, Not enough is made of Section 106 agreements.

New Structures:

- Incomers: see them as a positive new resource, Good practice: look internationally for ideas, Developing new farmers markets



Presenting results

Blockages:

- Lack of funding
- Political will – is it there?
- Apathy within the community
- Insularity and fear of change

Affordable Rural Housing

Current problems:

- This includes a lack of starter houses
- Also there is a lack of small houses
- There is an out-migration of young people who cannot afford to buy a property in the area

Actions:

- Match housing supply to changing needs: such as the aging population, and more single person households
- Employment opportunities should be linked to low cost family housing
- Use supply to redress the role of outward migration, inward investment, location of aging population and relation to services

Actors:

- The roles of community driven initiatives, housing associations, private sector (controlled land supply, affordable housing need, planning considerations), all necessitated an approach based on co-operation

Existing Structures:

- Shared ownership has a lot of potential,
- A local needs assessment should form the basis of the approach, agricultural needs should also inform the approach

New Structures:

- Key worker initiatives may be necessary, strengthening of local needs recruitment, Community ownership should be promoted
- Public investment is necessary in the existing stock
- Mortgage security, particularly for young people entering the market, is an issue
- Hostel accommodation for migrant workers is another creative idea

Blockages:

- Funding
- Political will

- Land cost (profit driven by values in the UK)

Other:

- Note that type of housing affects the type of inward migration (may have negative effect if we get it wrong)
- Co-operation necessary
- Control of the stock could be exercised through clauses?
- Community ownership as a solution? But can we do that at the community level? Is dependent on dynamic individuals

Local communities, commercial opportunities

Actions:

- Stimulate the creation of new businesses (social economy over mainstream)
- Focus on the development of existing businesses
- Particularly by adding value to existing businesses
- Stimulate the knowledge economy (as little or no transportation costs are involved!)
- Stimulate appropriate inward migration
- Get community to use their own networks

Actors:

- Dynamic individuals linked to agencies for marketing and tourism purposes

Existing Structures:

- Specialised (market) towns: Hay on Wye (book town), St. David's festivals, etc

New Structures:

- These could include themed development built on natural resources

Blockages:

- People are often unaware of their own abilities, potential and opportunities
- The big problem to achieve critical mass for each enterprise
- The lack of second wage earner job opportunities can be a disincentive for returning couples

Other:

- Welsh culture can be a positive resource and should be viewed as such

- Can local area be networked to make best of ICT opportunities
- Interest free loans a solution to helping establish new businesses?

Indigenous Economic Development

Actions:

- Establish demand for business advice (identify gaps versus provision)
- Redefine the role of local enterprise agencies, e.g. Antur Teifi, business mentors
- Encourage and strengthen niche market businesses, based on assets of area
- Secure the removal of bureaucratic obstacles: but provide necessary advice – for instance, on environmental health matters

Actors:

- Local Authorities (small business funds), Welsh Development Agency (but not very not small business friendly), Local enterprise agencies

Existing Structures:

- LEADER funding, Rural community action

New Structures:

- There was a perceived need for more business advice out of hours: DBRW used to do this

Blockages:

- Banks: are not seen as being particularly helpful to small businesses
- There is also a mistrust of the public sector
- Fragmented business advice is therefore the norm
- Need for single source funding and advice on “business connect model”: goes to people and businesses
- We are not really an economically confident society

Environment

Actions:

- Working with the wider environment is important, not just those areas with protective designations
- Environment has to be seen as a resource (e.g. Red Kite)
- Streamline funding would be helpful
- Open access to the countryside is desirable – at least from the perspective of some

- The global environment has to be considered, something we are not always good at.

Actors:

- Landowners, Countryside Council for Wales, FE/FC, Local Authorities, Countryside bodies, Environmental Agency, Welsh Development Agency

Existing Structures:

- Common Agricultural Policy – Pillar II, Existing environmental protection designations, Land use policy

New Structures:

- Entry level Agriculture-Environmental Scheme, S.F.P. (not new money)

Blockages:

- Finance for Agriculture-Environment
- Over-subscription of TirGifel
- CAP (modulation)
- Farm cash flow
- Insurance (open access to woodland)

Water

Actions:

- Address this as a major “National Strategic Issue”
- Water supply industry is experiencing growing demand across all its demand sectors – this needs to be addressed
- The rising demand has implications for new or expanded facilities – and also for employment
- Environmental impact: there is an interaction with tourism and biodiversity

Actors:

- EAW, There is the need for overview at national level

Existing Structures:

- Green Zone: this area is a major supply source for urban areas (e.g. in West Midlands) and other Wales Spatial Plan zones

New Structures:

- Need to raise awareness of the issue – possibly dramatically so
- Impose recycling restrictions, etc.
- National overview is urgently needed! Could the Assembly take a lead?

Blockages:

- Political sensitivity
- Inter-company working can be challenging
- Awareness is still at a low level

ICT

Actions:

- Roll out access of broadband (also to schools)
- Understand capability of infrastructure – what can it do for us?
- Create new opportunities, e.g. video conferencing, which may be beneficial

Actors:

- TEL COs – market failure
- Subsidise: reverse auction of TEL CO consortia
- Who drives it? A role for Welsh Assembly Government?

Existing Structures:

- Demand low for broadband, Some ADSL capability, Some trigger levels set, Some are achieving trigger level to justify investment

New Structures:

- Combination of technology – should aim to reach all
- New ways of working, leisure and education
- New ways of training to ensure we optimise the opportunity
- A Business/Community step change, which includes access to services and considers new ways of service delivery?

Blockages:

- Coverage, extent of area new infrastructure can access
- Operation: retail end of the telecommunications market
- How far will Welsh Assembly Government be able to reach?

Appendix

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS:

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