Heads of the Valleys Low Carbon Zone

Plans are underway for an ambitious multi-million pound programme to improve energy efficiency in homes across the Heads of the Valleys and establish the region as one of the largest low carbon zones in the UK.

The HoV Low Carbon programme is designed to deliver social, environmental and economic benefits and will introduce energy reduction measures never undertaken on this large a scale in the UK before.

The intention is to install sustainable energy measures into 40,000 socially owned homes in the region – reducing energy consumption for some of the least able to pay.

It is also designed to create a new industry base in the region linked to job creation, and skills development.

It is anticipated that over the 15 year programme a sum in the region of £70 million will be secured from a number of funds including the Carbon Energy Reduction Target (CERT) obligation, community energy saving programme; the Low Carbon Building Programme (LCBP); social landlords, the Welsh Assembly Government and the private sector.

The project initially includes assessing 65,000 homes for energy efficiency measures; improving the energy efficiency of 40,000 homes including the installation of renewable energy technologies, and developing the largest concentration of renewable energy businesses in Europe.

Aberdare will become the first low carbon town in Wales, championing the latest renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency measures as part of the wider initiative.

In the first year 500 of the 1500 social housing properties in Aberdare will be targeted with around 300 renewable energy systems installed. These will include solar thermal hot water heating systems, solar photovoltaic panels for electricity; the very latest micro-CHP (combined heat and power) systems for heat and electricity generation, and air source heat pumps for hot water to help reduce CO2 emissions and fuel bills.

Leighton Andrews, Deputy Minister for Regeneration, said: “The long term aim is to create a new industry base in the region linked to job creation, skills, training and the development of indigenous businesses. Investment in renewable energy provides real opportunities for Welsh businesses in the region linked to job creation, skills, training and the development of indigenous businesses.

The Heads of the Valleys programme is designed to create a new industry base in the region linked to job creation, skills, training and the development of indigenous businesses. Investment in renewable energy provides real opportunities for Welsh businesses to expand into this emerging sector.”

New Green Skills Centre will train over 1,300 people per year

British Gas and the Welsh Assembly Government have recently announced that the UK’s first dedicated Green Skills Training Centre will open in Tredegar later this year with the aim of training over 1,300 people annually.

In particular, it will help the Welsh Assembly Government deliver energy efficiency measures to 40,000 homes, including the installation of large volumes of microgeneration and renewable technologies, as part of its Heads of the Valleys Low Carbon programme.

First Minister Rhodri Morgan welcomed the investment to create a centre of excellence in skills training for the rapidly growing green energy sector.

“It is against these targets and this context that the importance of this unique training centre for green skills can be fully appreciated. We welcome the steps that British Gas is taking to support these ambitions by developing this centre in the South Wales Valleys where it will become a UK wide resource for industry and job creation while also enabling the Heads of the Valleys to become a leading player in this emerging sector.”

Councillor Des Hillman, Leader of Blaenau Gwent Council, said: “Our vision is to transform Blaenau Gwent into a centre for 21st century learning, training and skills. This is one of the reasons that the Green Skills Training Centre – a first in Wales and the UK – is joining us as part of our Heads of the Valleys regeneration drive.”

It will include specialist provision to help local long term unemployed people to find work in the emerging green economies. British Gas will also use the Green Skills Centre to train its new staff and up-skill its existing force in renewable technologies.

With JobMatch, Jobcentre Plus, Summit Skills and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as strategic partners, the Green Skills Centre will play a key part in helping to drive regeneration, aid sustainability and reduce fuel poverty in the region.

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Wales to create innovative regeneration fund

Plans are on target to develop a multi-million pound investment fund, under the European Commission’s Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas (JESSICA) programme, to create a vitally important financial boost for regeneration schemes in Wales.

Wales is amongst the leaders of European Member States in setting up an urban development fund through the JESSICA programme.

The Welsh Assembly Government is seeking ERDF Convergence funding and private sector investment to form a JESSICA investment fund for Wales. This will focus initially on schemes within the West Wales and Valleys Convergence area with investment returns being recycled within the fund and reinvested into regeneration projects beyond the Convergence Programme period.

Deputy Minister for Regeneration Leighton Andrews said the long term intention is to create an all Wales fund so that all regions of Wales can benefit from the investment opportunities.

"Through a fully balanced portfolio of regeneration investment, the fund will have the potential to support a diverse range of schemes, emanating from both the public and private sectors, provided that financial returns at the fund level are maintained.

The JESSICA fund will be capable of providing loans, equity and guarantees to regeneration schemes. This is especially needful given the current economic and funding market conditions where private funding sources have virtually dried-up.

"It has the potential to make Wales a particularly attractive proposition for investors and developers, stimulating investor confidence and enabling large scale regeneration development projects to go ahead while providing the public sector with value for money."

He added that JESSICA would further consolidate the public sector shift in Wales from a grant culture to an investment culture and presented a significant opportunity for both public and private sector led regeneration schemes to benefit.

Jane Evans, Project Director from Navigant Consulting, added, "It brings a new model of public-private delivery to the market place. This innovative approach will deliver better value for money than traditional grant funding, whilst also creating a balanced portfolio of exciting investment opportunities for private investors."

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The report ‘Good to be here: Positive aspects of the Heads of the Valleys and highlights the positive aspects of the region has been welcomed by Leighton Andrews, Deputy Minister for Regeneration.

"We are increasing opportunities for employment and training. Negative images are damaging and do a disservice to the people working and living in the Valleys and I hope this report will help to change these outdated perceptions."

The summary of the report highlights key qualities of the region including:

• The Heads of the Valleys offers a good quality of life;
• The environment emerges as a major asset;
• The economy and labour market have key strengths;
• The workforce has many skills to offer;
• Schools are in a number of important ways better than those in other parts of south east Wales;
• Health and social car services face heavy demands but on a number of criteria offer better care than counterparts in other parts of Wales;
• It has a unique culture and heritage and an increasingly vibrant arts scene;
• Community life is strong and relatively safe.

It concludes that public policy needs to make the most of these positive features to build a successful and prosperous region at the same time as tackling poverty and disadvantage.

Events taking place this autumn

The second Wales Regeneration Summit, organised by the Welsh Assembly Government will take place on Thursday 22 and Friday 23 October at Venue Cymru, Llandudno.

It will provide an opportunity for regeneration practitioners to meet and debate key issues with the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities, developers and investors.

For further information please visit www.walesregen.co.uk

The first Wales Low Carbon Summit will take place on Thursday 12 November at INNOVA1, Tredegar Business Park.

It is targeted at those engaged or interested in the Low Carbon Zone project including local authorities and other housing providers, policy makers, planners and sustainability or renewable organisations.

For more information please visit www.cih.org/cymru

Recently announced projects

A number of regeneration projects, some of which are linked to Wales’ heritage and culture and the 2010 Valleys Homecoming initiative, have been announced. They include:

• A Centre for Regeneration Excellence in Wales is to be established. This follows the recommendations of a working group which highlighted the potential to develop a Centre with an international reputation for training, research and exchange of good practice that covered physical, economic, social, community and environmental regeneration activity.

• The Rugby Community Development Project - a partnership between the Heads of the Valleys Programme and the Welsh Rugby Union which recognises that in many communities clubs act as a hub for a variety of community activities, going beyond the core purpose of playing and developing rugby. Funding is designed to upgrade facilities to encourage greater community use and greater participation to ensure sustainability.

More news on these will follow in the coming months.
Merthyr Tydfil crowned most enterprising place in Wales

Merthyr Tydfil has been named ‘the most enterprising place in Wales’ in a national competition which celebrates and rewards the most enterprising places in the UK that have helped transform the social and economic fortunes of their area.

The Enterprising Britain competition is run by Enterprise Insight on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and in partnership with the Regional Development Agencies and Devolved Administrations.

Judges visited the Orbit Business Centre, Cancer Aid Merthyr Tydfil, Spine of Merthyr chiropractic clinic, Enterprising Art & Business and Merthyr College to see examples of the enterprising work taking place in the town before making their decision.

The judges were impressed by the visit and said that they were struck by the enthusiasm of everyone they met and the desire to change the negative perceptions of Merthyr Tydfil.

The entry was based on work undertaken in Merthyr Tydfil by the Enterprise Group, which comprises local businesses, Communities First representatives, Merthyr College, business support organisations, JobMatch and is facilitated with integral support from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council staff. All of these individuals have the shared goal of stimulating enterprising activity within Merthyr Tydfil.

Leader of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Councillor Jeff Edwards said: “I was delighted to hear that the team are going on to represent Wales in the national finals in October. It reflects the hard work and dedication of a small team of people who are committed to the regeneration agenda and making a difference for Merthyr Tydfil.”

The overall winner in the national Enterprising Britain 2009 final will be named in October.

For more information about the Enterprising Britain competition please visit www.enterprisingbritain.org.

Terraced houses will be eco showcase homes

Six traditional terraced houses in the South Wales Valleys will be transformed into modern, spacious and energy efficient homes fit for the 21st century with £400,000 funding from HOVP.

The pilot project is being undertaken on the Cynon Tâf Community Housing Group homes in Penrhwiweiber to create a showcase of what can be achieved and a model that could be adopted and adapted anywhere in Wales.

Each property’s interior will be completely redesigned to maximise use of space and light while the Building Research Establishment (BRE) has advised on energy and sustainability issues to ensure they reach the Eco Home Excellent standards.

The houses are built on a hillside and the architectural designs will make the most of the superb views over the valley and may incorporate balconies and open plan extensions.

The houses will meet the energy performance standards of new homes which will result in an immediate 60 per cent improvement. The internal fabric of the houses will be insulated to improve energy performance and other features will reduce water demand.

Antonia Forte, Deputy Chief Executive of Cynon Tâf Community Housing Group said the initiative is part of a holistic regeneration plan for the Ty’r Felin Street in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taff County Council.

“The original intention was to sell the houses to families through affordable shared ownership, but given the current climate for mortgages, the properties would be targeted at economically active people who could purchase once the economic climate improves, thus allowing the capital receipt to be reinvested to extend the number of houses refurbished’.

An architect’s design for the new eco homes
Plans for multi-million pound Learning Zone are unveiled

Plans have been unveiled for a new multi-million pound state of the art educational facility to be built at the former steelworks site in Ebbw Vale.

The Learning Zone at The Works: Ebbw Vale is the first step of the wider Learning Campus project and aims for new leisure, sports and performing arts facilities to be included as regeneration gathers momentum.

It will be part funded by an award of £46 million from the Welsh Assembly Government and bids for match-funding from Europe have also been submitted.

Blaenau Gwent Council has invited local people to give their views on the design of the Learning Zone, which will offer post 16 education opportunities for more than 6,000 students and adult learners every year.

Residents have had the opportunity to view presentation boards displaying the designs, plans and elevations and photographs in Abertillery, Blaina, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo and Tredegar.

A detailed model of the 200 acre site and another model of the Learning Zone have also been on display at the Project Office, Ebbw Vale, alongside display boards.

Councillor Des Hillman, Leader of Blaenau Gwent Council, said: “We have great ambitions for the regeneration of the former steelworks site – and to create an exciting and modern 21st century Learning Campus there. For example, the new project can bring together education opportunities for 6,000 students per year - replacing worn-out buildings with the best modern facilities.

“Our public exhibitions are for local people to see the new designs and images from the architects. They give a good idea of the scale of the scheme. We believe that this will be the first new centre in Wales to provide learning, training and skills at college and university levels.”

Rugby’s Tom James opens Parc Taf Bargoed Activity Centre

A new activity centre which aims to motivate young people in the Merthyr Tydfil area to become more active has been officially opened by Welsh rugby star Tom James.

The activity centre, which has been funded by HOVFP and the EU Convergence Fund, will house a new tourist information kiosk and warden point, canoe store, toilets and anglers’ store beside the Parc Taf Bargoed lakes.

It will enable more events and activities to be held in the park, support the local environment and encourage more people to enjoy the natural environment of the area.

The kiosk and warden point will act as a satellite tourist information service to the existing Merthyr Tydfil Tourist Information Centre providing visitors with more information on activities in the park, local accommodation and attractions as well as borough wide tourist attractions.

Jeff Edwards Leader of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council said: “The support of the Heads of the Valleys Programme, Welsh Assembly Government, EU Convergence Fund, and Interreg and COLLABOR8 project has been essential to Taf Bargoed Regeneration delivering this fantastic new centre and we would like to thank all those involved.”
New garden gives ‘roots’ to local community

As part of the Communities First led project new bedding plants, flowers shrubs and ornamental grass were planted and seating for families and visitors was installed.

The main focal feature of the garden is a hill top beacon (pictured), which has remained in storage at Pontypool Museum since the closure of Trevethin Community School in July 2007.

Representatives from the community garden will work closely with the School Family Link project to provide a safe environment for out of school activities to help to engage hard to reach families and children.

It aims to provide skills needed to ensure that the children and young people have a better start in life whilst promoting the benefits of recycling and raising awareness of the surrounding wildlife.

The garden will also deliver opportunities for young and old to access training through volunteering, building on existing skills, improving self esteem and raising aspirations with a view to progress to further education or to enter or return to employment.

To find out more please visit our website - www.wales.gov.uk/ headsofthevalleys

If you have a story suggestion please email Shan.EKin-Wood@wales.gsi.gov.uk

The Heads of the Valleys Programme is a 15 year regeneration project to make the region an increasingly successful and attractive area for people to live, work and play. Led by the Welsh Assembly Government, the initiative is working with local authorities and many other organisations to benefit communities in Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

A total of £140 million investment has been ring fenced for the region and will be used to stimulate regeneration, economic growth, and environmental improvements. This money is in addition to the funding already made in the area by the Assembly Government, councils and other organisations and will act as a catalyst to attract other funding and private sector investment.