7 Tourism Strategy

7.1 Themes and Principles

The study has identified eight overarching themes relevant to enhancing opportunities for tourism. Addressing these themes will help to achieve the vision for the development of tourism within the Heads of the Valleys as set out in the Turning Heads[18] strategy. Work programmes of organisations such as HERIAN and Groundwork are already looking to link some of the themes identified.

- Landscape and Environment

- Heritage and Culture

- Outdoor Recreation

- Information and Interpretation

- Accommodation

- Accessibility & Transport

- Resources and Management

- Marketing

7.1.1 Landscape and Environment

The character of the study area and its appeal to visitors owes much to the natural beauty of its landscape. In particular, the long distance views across wooded glacial valleys and towards the Brecon Beacons and the numerous waterfalls create a sense of openness, wilderness and tranquillity.

The attractiveness of the uplands between the Rhondda and Cynon Valleys owes much to the lack of intrusive development and the conservation of its natural habitats. The future promotion and management of these areas should seek to maintain and enhance the visual qualities of the landscapes so that they can continue to be enjoyed both by local people and by visitors to the area. Care should also be taken to ensure that development in the countryside, tourism development pressures and visitor impacts do not adversely affect the area's key natural environment and wildlife resources.

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[18] 'Turning Heads' – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys until 2020, WAG, (June 2006)

Heads of the Valleys Tourism Opportunities

7.1.2   Heritage & Culture

Perhaps better known for its industrial heritage, the study area's heritage is much more diverse, going back through the Iron, Bronze and Stone Ages. However, it is the history of the Industrial Revolution that provides a strong heritage brand for the South Wales Valleys, and this reflects the growing confidence in the cultural and economic potential of the areas industrial legacy and the successes of high profile initiatives developed by HERIAN.

The European Routes of Industrial Heritage initiative also provides the opportunity to promote the study areas heritage on a European scale. Both the Cynon Valley Museum and Rhondda Heritage Park (recently nominated as an 'anchor point' along the route) are identified sites along the South Wales Regional Route, and this establishes tourism links with more prominent regional attractions at Big Pit and Swansea's National Waterfront Museum.

The Valleys cultural identity is also closely aligned to the traditions of music, literature and sports, and the enhancement and promotion of modern cultural activities is important in term of promoting an attractive vibrant image.

Events and festivals are critical in promoting local arts and culture, encouraging community participation. Although festivals and events vary considerably in size and level of attraction, they share the potential for encouraging local tourist expenditure and over night stays and to develop into regional or potentially national festivals and events.

7.1.3   Outdoors Recreation

The appraisal of the tourism sector demonstrates that whilst a broad range of recreation and outdoor activities already exist, there is significant potential for strengthening the promotion of these attractions to encourage growth within the sector. This would encourage less seasonal tourism and encourage more short breaks as well as encouraging higher expenditure and demand for local accommodation.

Adequate visitor facilities should be provided at a small number of key, strategically located sites and should accommodate the needs and interests of visitors engaged in informal and passive forms of recreation. At other sites that are open for public access, the provision of visitor facilities should be consistent with the level and nature of visitor use, their environmental and ecological sensitivity, and the opportunities that they offer for active and informal recreation, environmental education, and interpretation of the area's natural and cultural heritage.

With regards to routes and trails, the opportunity exists to further promote and extend the network to encourage visitors to pass through the study area and visit local attractions and use local services such as food and drink establishments and accommodation.

Tourism promotion should focus on opportunities for income and employment generation by focusing on growing niche markets that capitalise on the distinctive assets and facilities of the study area, namely: walking, cycling, horse riding, activities including air and water sports, bird watching, and golf.

7.1.4 Information and Interpretation

Information provision for visitors should focus on improving awareness of tourism opportunities within the Heads of the Valleys, giving people the confidence to exploit these opportunities, and encouraging responsible use.

Strategically located and good quality tourism information is an essential component of the information infrastructure required for the successful promotion and enhancement of tourism activity throughout an area. Within the study area there are at present no TIC's, the nearest being located at Merthyr Tydfil or Pontypridd. There is also an inconsistent approach to the quality of information provided at key attractions and a significant absence of town centre or road side information and interpretation.

The quality and quantity of road signage provides an emblem for the profile and importance of tourism to an area. In locations where regeneration is a priority it can also contribute to raising self-esteem and business confidence within local communities. Signage, of all types and location is noticeably poor within the study area. Signage for attractions, services and infrastructure is treated inconsistently and in most cases is absent all together.

Interpretive provision should promote messages that convey a positive image of the South Wales Valleys as an attractive and interesting place to visit with lots of things to see and do: this should focus on a number of key themes, most notably:

- the diverse landscape with its importance for natural history, wildlife importance;

- the influence of the Industrial Revolution in shaping the development of the South Wales Valleys; and

- the rich cultural heritage of the South Wales Valleys

The content and medium of information and interpretive provision should pay careful regard to the audience at which it is being targeted, especially in distinguishing between the needs and interests of local residents and repeat visitors against those of first time and staying visitors.

7.1.5   Accommodation

Good quality, variety and location of accommodation are essential to the successful development of tourism destinations. Significant opportunities for improving accommodation exist including the increase in the quantity and location of bed spaces, improvement to quality of accommodation facilities.

7.1.6   Accessibility and Transport

Good and convenient accessibility to and within the study area is critical for promoting the study as a tourism destination. The dualing of the A465 and planned road improvements along individual valley roads are important to encouraging visitor movements throughout the Heads of the Valleys, but there are opportunities to improve the connections across the higher ground of the valleys to encourage visitors to explore isolated destinations as well as improving the connectivity between local communities.

The greater use of public transport to gain access to the Heads of the Valleys should be actively promoted both to foster the sustainable use of the area and to encourage socially excluded sections of the community to make greater use of the area for leisure and recreation. Information about public transport services that provide access to the area should be published and actively promoted through a range of media.

7.1.7   Resources & Management

To ensure the study area develops as a sustainable and all encompassing visitor destination requires adequately resourced and strategic approach to tourism development. This will require a RCTCBC tourism development team and partnership working if the opportunity to maximise the impact of tourism is to be achieved.

Enhanced site management is also important if there is to be reduced problems of litter and vandalism and to maintain the quality of sites. A greater presence of rangers/site staff is an important consideration. Ensuring all staff deliver a high standard of service to visitors through adequate training is essential to all aspect of visitor development.

7.1.8   Marketing

With regards to marketing, there is a need to create a unified and coherent, well branded proposition which clearly illustrates what the study area has to offer within the context of promoting the South Wales Valleys the Heads of the Valleys and RCT. The enhancement of web based facilities is increasingly important to successfully promote destinations.

7.2 Common Principles

In addition to the eight themes, there are a number of common principles which the strategy should adopt if it is to deliver the desired tourism, economic and social benefits, whilst improving the profile and perceptions, of the area. These are:

Sustainability

To ensure current and proposed activities are environmentally and economically sustainable.

Distinctiveness

To identify, package and promote the unique selling points of the Heads of the Valleys developing positive images and an identity for the area.

Quality

To deliver a quality visitor experience that meets visitor expectations.

Coordination

To work in partnership to deliver a coordinated product, improving effectiveness of resources, exchange of information and best practice and deliver a strategic approach to tourism facilities.

Inclusiveness

To ensure that the local communities are involved in the development and management of facilities and their local environment.

Competitiveness

To maintain and increase the competitiveness of the study area in a regional context, thereby maximising economic benefits and employment opportunities.

8   Objectives of the Strategy

Taking into account the overarching themes and principles allows a set of objectives to be defined which can inform all aspects of the strategy.

These objectives will, when taken together, help to achieve the vision for the Heads of the Valleys and guide the strategies of the various organisations involved in its delivery.

The formulation of objectives has been guided by key consultations, the strategy review and by the strengths/weaknesses analysis outlined above. This creates a tangible link between the study analysis and the identified opportunities.

Table 8.1: Strategic Objectives

Objective	Strategic Compatibility
1 Work in partnership to ensure tourism opportunities are joined up, strategic and supported across all sectors – public, private, voluntary and community.	This objective is in line with the aims of wider Heads of the Valleys initiatives, particularly strategic goals SP9 and SP10 of Turning Heads. The objective is also in line with Achieving our Potential – A Tourism Strategy for Wales.
2 Create opportunities that address geographic gaps and are integrated as part of a wider network of attractions including: cultural, heritage, natural environment, activity, events & festivals and recreational facilities.	This objective is in line with Turning Heads strategic objectives to create linked attractions and an integrated offer, and reflects the vision put forward by organisations such as HERIAN
3 Create opportunities to conserve and where appropriate enhance the environmental quality of the Study area**.**	This objective is in line with strategies such as the Sustainable Tourism Framework.
4 Create opportunities to maximise the economic development and regeneration of the Study area e.g. create full time employment, skills development training and enterprise support	This objective is in line with a number of themes in Turning Heads and wider strategies such as WTB's "Achieving our Potential" and the Rhondda Cynon Taff Tourism Strategy.
5 Create opportunities that enhance and promote the existing tourism offer to attract both the day and short break market.	This will ensure that tourism development opportunities are in line with grant funding guidelines of Visit Wales and objectives set out by Capital Region Tourism in relation to the development of visitor attractions.

6 Create opportunities that enhance town & village centres as integrated and attractive tourist destinations	This is in line with themes within Turning Heads, the relax and revive theme promoted by Visit Wales through Wisdom and Walks
7 Create tourism services and infrastructure (accommodation, information, signage and amenities) that meets the needs of the emerging tourism sectors.	This is in line with trends established within Achieving our Potential the Rhondda Cynon Taff Tourism Strategy.
8 Create opportunities that encourage community ownership and involvement to develop, deliver and manage tourism opportunities and encourage community champions**.**	This is in line with objectives within Turning Heads and supports the work of schemes such as Greencare operated by Groundwork Wales. This objective would also be strongly supported by Communities First.
9 Create opportunities that support a unified and coherent, well-branded tourist proposition for the study area as part of Rhondda Cynon Taff/Heads of the Valleys that also contributes towards changing perceptions of the area.	This objective is in line with Turning Heads, Capital Region Tourism and the Rhondda Cynon Taff Tourism Strategy.
10 Create opportunities that are strategically aligned so as to achieve funding leverage and add value to programmes.	