

2 The Strategy

2.0.1 With an understanding of the key issues and challenges facing the County Borough, this section of the Plan sets out the following:

- The Vision;
- Objectives; and
- The **Development** Strategy (including ~~the~~ Growth **Strategy** , Spatial **Distribution Strategy** and Strategic Diagram).

2.1 Vision

2.1.1 The Local Development Plan (LDP) Vision for 2026, that is how Neath Port Talbot is envisaged to change over the Plan period, is set out below.

The LDP Vision

The natural beauty and environmental importance of Neath Port Talbot's waterfront and coastal corridor area will be protected and conserved while previously developed, underused and unsightly former industrial and commercial areas are redeveloped, transforming the function and appearance of the whole coastal belt.

Key sites at central Port Talbot, Baglan Bay, Coed Darcy and the Swansea University Science and Innovation Campus, coupled with the area's good and improving transport and communication links will help deliver a competitive, knowledge-based economy. New and expanded settlements will provide sustainable housing and employment to meet the needs of local communities and the wider area.

The County Borough's rural areas and valley communities will be supported and revitalised through encouragement of new and expanded economic activity through provision for sustainable small scale employment, including tourism initiatives capitalising on existing successes such as the Strategic Tourism Destinations at Margam Park and the Afan Valley.

Benefits from natural resources will be maximised and the cultural, historic and natural heritage will be supported and enhanced. Economic growth and community cohesion will be promoted by concentrating development in key areas to provide benefits to a wider hinterland.

2.1.2 This overarching vision has guided the development of the strategy and the integrated set of policies contained within the Plan. It also complements the Authority's overall vision as set out in the Single Integrated Plan.

2.1.3 The vision sets out how existing assets located along the urbanised coastal belt will be enhanced and utilised to improve the economic and social outlook for the whole area, while improving the general environment. The future role for more rural parts of the County Borough is outlined, together with the way that the economy and communities of the valleys will be supported and enhanced.

2.2 Objectives

2.2.1 The LDP Vision will be delivered through a number of objectives which will address the key issues facing the County Borough. The objectives are fundamental to the LDP and form the basis for policy development. For clarity, the key issues to which each objective relates is identified.

2.2.2 The first four objectives are considered to be overarching in that they are wide ranging and will inform all areas of the Plan. The area based objectives concern the two

identified strategy areas, while the remaining objectives are grouped under the following themes identified in the Wales Spatial Plan:

- Building Healthy, Sustainable Communities⁽⁵⁾;
- Promoting a Sustainable Economy;
- Valuing Our Environment;
- Achieving Sustainable Accessibility; and
- Respecting Distinctiveness.

Overarching Objectives

OB 1: Minimise the causes and consequences of climate change through reduced greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change through consideration of it's effects in the design and location of new development.

[KI 1]

OB 2: Reduce people's exposure to the determinants of poor health and provide an environment that encourages healthy, active and safer lifestyles.

[KI 2]

OB 3: Deliver sustainable, safe and confident communities and develop vibrant settlements supporting a range and mix of facilities and services.

[KI 5]

5 The title of the first theme has been amended by the addition of the word 'healthy' to reflect the importance of tackling poor health in Neath Port Talbot

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OB 4: Maximise accessibility to a range of leisure, recreational, health, social and community facilities in line with the role and function of settlements.

[KI 2]

Area Based Objectives

OB 5: Realise the diverse potential and opportunities available for sustainable economic development along the Coastal Corridor to foster economic growth, with Coed Darcy, Swansea University Science and Innovation Campus, Baglan Bay and Harbourside being the anchors for growth.

[KI 3]

OB 6: Reinvigorate the Valley areas and improve economic prospects, recognising the role of Glynneath and Pontardawe in delivering sustainable growth.

[KI 4]

Building Healthy, Sustainable Communities

OB 7: Provide an adequate supply, mix, type and tenure of housing within sustainable settlements to meet the needs of the projected population.

[KI 5, KI 6 and KI 7]

OB 8: Provide additional affordable housing units throughout the County Borough and ensure new housing developments make a fair and justified contribution towards the provision of affordable housing.

[KI 6]

OB 9: Deliver additional pitches, to meet the identified need of Neath Port Talbot's Gypsy and Traveller community.

[KI 7]

OB 10: Deliver more equitable open space provision within and around settlements.

[KI 2 and KI 8]

Promoting a Sustainable Economy

OB 11: To promote and protect a diverse portfolio of employment land and employment opportunities to meet the needs of residents and businesses and stimulate economic growth.

[KI 3, KI 4 and KI 9]

OB 12: Improve and strengthen the economic base of Neath Port Talbot to increase economic activity, reduce the unemployment rate in line with the Welsh average and negate some of the impacts of a reduced working age population.

[KI 9]

OB 13: Maintain, enhance and develop a hierarchy of retail centres in line with the settlement framework recognising the principal role of Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe town centres.

[KI 10]

OB 14: Provide a holistic approach to tourism development to capitalise on Neath Port Talbot's growing tourism industry, specifically growth in the Neath and Afan Valleys to support the local economy.

[KI 3 and KI 4]

Valuing Our Environment

OB 15: Conserve Neath Port Talbot's important landscapes, undeveloped coast, important wildlife, habitats and geodiversity sites, ensuring that developments throughout the County Borough respect all landscapes and minimise adverse impacts.

[KI 11 and KI 12]

OB 16: Address air quality issues and minimise the adverse impacts from noise generating and polluting activities.

[KI 13]

OB 17: Promote the efficient use of land and safeguard the quality and quantity of environmental assets.

[KI 14]

OB 18: Safeguard the County Borough's mineral resource and make a proportionate contribution to the supply of mineral reserves to meet local, regional and national demand whilst ensuring adverse impacts are minimised.

[KI 11]

OB 19: To make a proportionate contribution towards the energy needs of Wales with a focus on renewable energy.

[KI 11]

OB 20: To meet the requirement to make adequate and appropriate provision for waste treatment and disposal facilities.

[KI 15]

Achieving Sustainable Accessibility

OB 21: Increase accessibility, promote active travel and encourage a shift to more sustainable modes of transport for people and freight.

[KI 16]

OB 22: Reduce impacts of traffic growth and congestion and promote the efficient and effective use of the transport network.

[KI 16]

Respecting Distinctiveness

OB 23: Protect and enhance the County Borough's historical heritage, built environment and identity.

[KI 17]

OB 24: Conserve and enhance the County Borough's main arterial gateways.

[KI 17]

OB 25: Preserve and enhance the area's cultural heritage and identity with a focus on the Welsh Language in language sensitive areas.

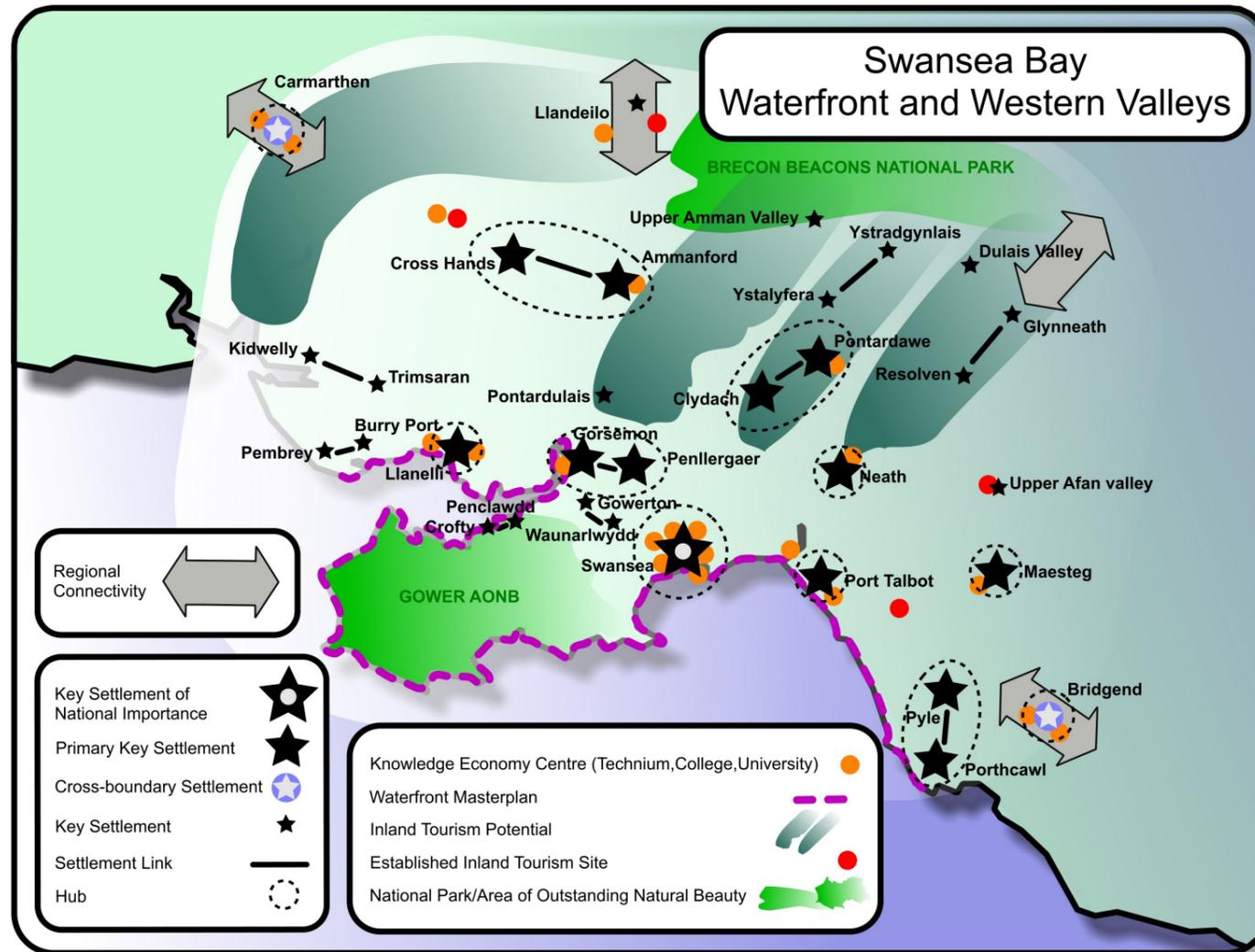
[KI 18]

2.3 The Strategy

2.3.1 ~~The Development Strategy (comprising both Growth and Spatial Strategies) is a fundamental element of the LDP Strategy. In addition, the topic based policies are derived from the strategies set out within the Strategic Policies (SP).~~

2.3.2 The ~~LDP~~ Strategy guides the Plan and provides the overarching framework to meet the vision, objectives and key issues outlined in the previous sections. The ~~LDP uses this strategy is used~~ to provide a land use structure which focuses on providing sustainable, prosperous communities creating social and economic opportunities. The strategy is derived from having regard to national, regional and local policy whilst focusing on issues that are specific to Neath Port Talbot

Map 2.1 Waterfront and Western Valleys Spatial area



Regional Context: Wales Spatial Plan (WSP)

2.3.3 Neath Port Talbot sits within the Swansea Bay Waterfront and Western Valleys spatial area alongside Swansea and parts of Carmarthenshire, Bridgend and Brecon Beacons National Park. Neath Port Talbot's role in meeting the region's aims, objectives and aspirations is to support the City and County of Swansea through steering growth towards the identified key settlements of Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe and to the supporting communities within the Valleys. This regional settlement hierarchy will ensure compatibility of

strategies between Authorities within the region. Growth and the distribution of that growth should therefore complement and adhere to the regional context.

2.3.4 With the aim of creating sustainable communities the analysis undertaken by the Settlement Review / Urban Capacity Study, established a Settlement Hierarchy which defined those areas which are the most sustainable locations to accommodate future growth in terms of their role and function within the wider context.

2.3.5 In addition to having regard to the policy context for the area the strategy has been shaped through: the unique characteristics of the area; the feedback from community and stakeholder engagement; infrastructure and environmental constraints; past trends; the availability of sites; economic growth; viability; deliverability / market demand and the outcome of the Sustainability Appraisal.

2.3.6 The LDP has been prepared in a challenging economic climate and as such ~~the strategy~~ adopts an aspirational approach to future development, aiming to provide a prosperous society whereby allocations and new development can foster economic and sustainable growth within Neath Port Talbot.

All communities within Neath Port Talbot can help to achieve the aims of the Plan and therefore the strategy recognises all communities and their function within the County Borough.

Local Context: Neath Port Talbot - Coastal Corridor & Valleys

2.3.7 At the outset of LDP preparation the County Borough was divided into eight Spatial Areas. Comprising the two towns of Neath and Port Talbot and the surrounding areas of the Afan Valley, Amman Valley, Dulais Valley, Neath Valley, Pontardawe and Swansea Valley, each of these areas were considered to have their own unique identity (refer to Map 1.1). As Plan preparation progressed, the eight spatial areas were refined into two area-based strategies to include the Coastal Corridor (comprising the two main urban towns and supporting communities of Neath and Port Talbot); and The Valleys (comprising the Afan Valley, Amman Valley, Dulais Valley, Neath Valley, Pontardawe and Swansea Valley).

2.3.8 The 'Coastal Corridor ~~Strategy Area~~' contains the main centres of population, infrastructure and facilities and benefits from easy access to the M4 making the area more attractive in terms of investment for business, commercial and residential development.

2.3.9 Moving towards the northern part of the County Borough the topography changes from flat, open landscape towards a setting of river valleys separated by upland plateaus and mountains. In the 'Valleys ~~Strategy Area~~' the scope for development is further reduced due to topography and access to the main arterial transport routes (rail and M4). ~~The Valleys area is made up of five main valleys; the Afan, Amman, Dulais, Neath and Swansea and the town of Pontardawe.~~

2.3.10 The strategy for Neath Port Talbot therefore advocates a different approach to development within each of these two strategy areas of the County Borough.

~~The Development Strategy~~

2.3.11 The ~~Development~~ Strategy aims to:

Facilitate growth within Neath Port Talbot, with a focus on the Coastal Corridor whilst reinvigorating the Valley communities.

2.3.12 This means:

- **Focusing development along the coastal corridor and in the urban areas of Neath and Port Talbot, in recognition of the important role these settlements play within the wider context;**
- **Maximising the benefit of market interest along the coastal corridor and stimulating growth through the delivery of strategic employment sites and strategic regeneration areas;**
- **Identifying Pontardawe and the Upper Neath Valley as strategic growth areas in the Valleys which will create a mechanism to co-ordinate investment and ensure the benefits of growth and regeneration are shared more widely throughout the valley communities;**
- **Providing a flexible approach to development within the Valley communities.**

2.4 Growth

2.4.1 The level of growth is based on an economic-led ~~strategy scenario~~ which complements the approach being taken by the City and County of Swansea and addresses the key issues of Neath Port Talbot in order to achieve the LDP vision and objectives.

2.4.2 The chosen economic-led scenario is aspirational in its approach and aims to maximise job growth within the local economy. In order to address the key issues of the County Borough, wealth creation through job growth is fundamental to achieving the LDP vision.

2.4.3 This method has enabled the Authority to forecast how economic changes over the Plan period equate to the requirements for employment land and the number of new homes needed to accommodate the projected total population and required labour supply. This ensures alignment between ~~the~~ employment and housing ~~strategies~~ resulting in a more sustainable pattern of development which in turn improves the robustness of the ~~LDP Strategy~~.

2.4.4 This approach has used the Welsh Government's 2008 population and household projections and detailed analysis of underlying trends in mortality and fertility rates and average household size. Based on the aspirational scenario of job growth (taking into account the Authority's aspiration to reduce unemployment and increase economic activity rates in line with the Welsh average), the population growth for the area has been driven by the ratio of working age population to total population. It is considered that this approach makes the projections more robust than purely trend-based projections which do not accurately reflect the Authority's aspirations for the area.

2.4.5 The growth in population and households complements the economic prospects for Neath Port Talbot and the relative performance of the South West Wales economy as a whole. The level of housing has been mainly driven by the reduction in average household size, however, it has been promoted and encouraged to a far greater extent than in the past to ensure it meets the needs of the existing population but also encourages an element of migration into the County Borough. The level of growth aims to ensure the County Borough becomes more independent and less reliant on outside sources of labour by improving the economic activity rates of its residents.

Climate Change, Health & the Environment

2.4.6 The County Borough prides itself on its cultural, historic and natural heritage. As such, development has been directed to parts of the County Borough that have the environmental capacity to accommodate ~~it~~ growth without

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causing undue harm to areas that are intrinsically valued in terms of biodiversity, landscape, historic or conservation interest.

2.4.7 The level of growth needed to achieve the Plan's objectives has to balance a drive for economic prosperity against protecting the environment and health and well being of the County Borough.

2.4.8 Two of the four overarching objectives ~~strategies~~ of the Plan include climate change and health which will be ~~embedded~~ ~~implemented~~ through all of the Plan's policies and proposals. Alongside creating sustainable communities and providing both physical and social infrastructure, these two strategic issues lie at the heart of the Plan.

2.4.9 The level of growth has therefore been heavily influenced by these factors. Development allocations have been selected in accordance with sustainable development principles to be in locations that take account, as far as possible, issues such as dependence on the private car, flood risk, air quality and access to facilities.

Population, Housing & Economic Growth

2.4.10 Based on the projected economic-led growth scenario of 3,850 jobs for the area, the Plan makes provision for an additional 8,000 new residential units, leading to an increase of approximately 7,000 people and a total population of 146,300 by 2026. This approach is aspirational, linked to the local economy and is set to complement the projected growth in economic activity and reduction in average household size in addition to helping meet the need for additional affordable residential units.

2.4.11 Fundamental to delivering economic success is to ensure an appropriate supply, mix and range of high quality employment sites that can support emerging business and employment needs. At the local level, economic growth has

stagnated over the last 10 years. This has not been helped by the global recession. In order to meet the aspirations of the 15 year vision, key regeneration schemes and projects such as Harbourside, Coed Darcy Urban Village and Baglan Bay will transform the area by redeveloping previously used, unsightly former industrial land. These projects together with the relocation of Swansea University's Science and Innovation Campus at Fabian Way will attract high-tech industries and widen the skill pool for prospective employers.

2.4.12 The level of employment land has been assessed to ensure it can be delivered within the Plan period. In order to meet the overall vision and strategy for the area, 96 hectares of land is allocated for employment, comprising of 32 hectares for Conventional B Class uses and space to accommodate the needs of the energy sector and ancillary facilities and services which support and complement the wider role and function of B Class Uses. In addition, eighteen existing employment sites are safeguarded for employment purposes.

2.4.13 Baglan Bay provides a large brownfield site which can meet current and future requirements in existing and emerging economic sectors both during the Plan period and beyond. Whilst the site comprises 75 hectares of land, it is anticipated that only part will be developed within the Plan period with 11 hectares allocated for conventional B Class employment uses. A full range of activities and uses can be attracted to the area including energy sector schemes of all sizes and scales. Many energy generating proposals will not fall within any use class, for example, Photovoltaic schemes. Proposals for such uses would not contribute to the projected need of 20 hectares set out by the Economic Assessment and Employment Land Provision Study ⁽⁶⁾ as this is specifically related to conventional B Class uses (commercial, industrial and storage).

2.4.14 The land could be attractive to future aspirational industries and sectors (i.e. those not anticipated within the economic growth projections) and the amount of land take up will be monitored as will the employment that is generated, to ensure that the performance of Baglan Bay aligns with other elements of the ~~EDP~~ Strategy (and other national and regional objectives).

2.4.15 Tourism within Neath Port Talbot has become a significant contributor to the local economy and has provided a variety of opportunities, especially within the Valley areas. In 2011, the revenue to Neath Port Talbot from tourism was estimated to be in the region of £92million⁽⁷⁾, indicating the paramount importance of this sector to employment and business opportunity. Given that the Valley communities offer the greatest concentration of tourism facilities, growth in this sector has the potential to be a major regenerative tool.

Deliverability & Flexibility

2.4.16 Large areas of the County Borough are previously developed, former industrial, brownfield land. The strategy therefore aims to redevelop these areas through strategic regeneration schemes. This will ensure that investment is channelled into these areas preventing any unnecessary loss of greenfield land.

2.4.17 To ensure that this rate of growth can be delivered over the Plan however, a mixture of both brownfield and greenfield sites has been included within the housing land supply. All sites have been robustly assessed in accordance with the Council's Candidate Sites Assessment Methodology and Sustainability Appraisal.

2.4.18 In order to meet the level of growth an element of flexibility has been incorporated into the housing land supply to allow for sites not coming forward as originally anticipated.

6 Peter Brett Associates (2012) Economic Assessment and Employment Land Provision for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot

7 STEAM Report (2011).

The total housing requirement over the Plan period (to 2026) is 9,150 residential units which includes an element of flexibility.

Infrastructure

2.4.19 The LDP recognises the need to ensure that appropriate infrastructure is already in place or can be provided to accommodate the level of growth identified. Without appropriate investment to enable the provision of improved or new infrastructure, the proposed level of growth will neither be sustainable nor acceptable. New development may therefore be required to provide or contribute towards the provision of necessary infrastructure to enable it to be provided within the Plan period.

2.4.20 An integral part of the LDP strategy is to deliver new infrastructure to support allocations and future growth. The strategy supports a number of key infrastructure projects that are essential to delivering a number of strategic allocations, including housing, employment and regeneration sites.

2.4.21 The development of major new roads will allow the region to open up to the opportunities presented by future development and achieve its full potential. Development such as Harbour Way (Peripheral Distributor Road); the Southern Access Link Road at Coed Darcy; Baglan Energy Link Road and other planned improvements will provide additional capacity within the region to facilitate planned developments and foster economic growth.

2.5 Spatial Distribution

2.5.1 This section identifies the broad locations for meeting the growth strategy and development needs for the future provision of housing, employment, retail and infrastructure.

2.5.2 The urban towns of Neath and Port Talbot are identified as the County Borough's most sustainable settlements where there is the greatest potential for reducing the need to travel due to co-location of houses, jobs, shops, community facilities and public transport.

2.5.3 Within the Valleys, Pontardawe and Glynneath are identified as the most sustainable settlements in which to focus development to ensure benefits of growth and regeneration are shared more widely throughout the valley communities. A more flexible approach to development in the valleys compared to the coastal corridor will also help to reinvigorate communities through small scale retail and employment opportunities (including live-work units) seeking to sustain the existing population and reduce out-commuting.

2.5.4 ~~The settlement strategy is a fundamental mechanism for the Plan, identifying communities that have the sufficient capacity and resources to accommodate new development within designated boundaries.~~ The identification of a 'settlement hierarchy' has identified communities that have the sufficient capacity to accommodate new development within designated boundaries. It has been used to provide a balanced approach to managing growth, directing development to areas reflecting the attributes contained within that community and their ability to accommodate growth. Such an approach identifies key settlements that have the appropriate infrastructure and will maximise the opportunity for resource efficient settlements that contribute to the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the County Borough. Settlement limits are used to provide clarity of where development may be directed.

2.5.5 In terms of the direction of new development, in recent years the greatest proportion of house building and economic investment into Neath Port Talbot has been concentrated in the urban areas of Neath and Port Talbot. These urban areas are situated along the M4 corridor, providing a strategic link to the wider area, fostering strong transport and communication links to neighbouring Authorities.

2.5.6 Demand for new industry and housing within the Valley communities has been lower with less private sector investment, a decline in traditional industries and a reduction in some facilities and services in certain communities. Whilst there has

been an element of decline, these communities have retained a strong community spirit and are rich in cultural and natural heritage.

2.5.7 Based on recent trends and market focus, it is envisaged that the majority of investment will continue to be along the M4 Corridor, with demand in the Valley communities more limited. The strategy therefore focuses on the Coastal Corridor and Valley areas within a different context to reflect their varying potential to accommodate new development. In doing so, the strategy provides a balance between facilitating economic development, acknowledging the Coastal Corridor as the strongest area for attracting inward investment whilst recognising the key function Valley communities have and reinvigorating these areas to make them more resilient.

2.5.8 The legacy of past activities in the County Borough, mainly relating to heavy industry along the coastal corridor, has resulted in large areas of brownfield land (some of which is contaminated). In line with national policy, the Authority has taken the opportunity to optimise the allocation of brownfield land where possible.

2.5.9 The Coastal Corridor will therefore accommodate a significant amount of housing and employment opportunities to promote the regeneration of areas which have suffered from the legacy of heavy industrial activity and bring growth to the area as a whole.

2.5.10 ~~The strategy provides a different approach~~ In the Valleys, ~~where the identification of~~ growth areas are identified in recognition of their role as service hubs within the valley communities will promote wider benefits that can filter through to other surrounding areas.

Economic Considerations

2.5.11 Over recent years, Neath Port Talbot has experienced low levels of economic activity and high levels of unemployment among the working age population, indicating a relatively large untapped labour force. The strategy, which encourages economic development therefore seeks to increase

economic activity rates and reduce unemployment levels in line with the Council's planned interventions. This, combined with the trend of younger generations achieving improved higher education standards, could indicate a shift from the traditional, declining sectors of mining and manufacturing to higher knowledge based sectors.

2.5.12 This shift is further supported by the development of the Swansea University Science and Innovation Campus at Fabian Way, the regeneration of Coed Darcy and Harbourside and the identification of strategic employment sites at Baglan Bay and Junction 38 (M4), Margam.

2.5.13 In addition to the employment allocations, the LDP also seeks to ensure the needs of existing businesses and residents can be met through the identification of existing employment areas and the development of suitable vacant and previously developed land within these. Furthermore, a more flexible approach to employment growth will be adopted in the Valley communities to reinvigorate the local economy.

2.5.14 Tourism within Neath Port Talbot has become a significant contributor to the local economy and has provided a variety of opportunities, especially within the Valley areas. The ~~LDP~~ strategy and policies seek to support this industry by taking a flexible approach to new tourism proposals and resisting where possible the loss of existing facilities.

2.5.15 Housing and employment allocations are supported by the identification of a retail hierarchy which further embeds the principles of sustainable development and reflects the function of centres in terms of their existing commercial role and retail offer.

Social and Environmental Considerations

2.5.16 The County Borough is enriched with areas of natural beauty, with the urban, rural and coastal areas having a distinct, valued and unique natural environment. This, combined with a strong natural and cultural heritage, provides diverse

opportunities for tourism, recreation, leisure, alternative energy and helps to promote a healthy, more vibrant quality of life for residents.

2.5.17 New development can have an adverse impact on the environment, with potential to cause contamination, pollution, loss of habitat and impact upon the landscape. In supporting new development, the LDP sets about sustainably balancing the need for development whilst minimising the potential for harm upon the environment. Such protection includes restricting development within the open countryside and within areas that pose a flood risk that cannot be mitigated against and protecting and enhancing the natural, historic and built environment and high value landscapes.

2.5.18 Poor health is identified as a key issue for Neath Port Talbot. The strategy supports a number of principles that will help to foster healthier, more active lifestyles and looks at measures to help improve access to employment, services and facilities whilst encouraging more active travel.

'The Coastal Corridor'

(Comprising of the Neath and Port Talbot Spatial Areas)

2.5.19 The greatest concentration of housing and employment allocations are focused within key settlements along the Coastal Corridor in recognition of the important role these settlements play within Neath Port Talbot and the regional context. The town centres and surrounding areas have a key function as social, economic and commercial hubs. Focusing key, strategic developments in these locations will maximise the opportunities available and their development potential whilst capitalising on the transport networks and strategic links.

2.5.20 There are a number of major developments planned for this area that are of paramount importance in building sustainable, prosperous communities and delivering the LDP vision. Strategic Regeneration Areas at Coed Darcy and Harbourside and the construction of the Swansea University Science and Innovation Campus at Fabian Way are key

developments for Neath Port Talbot and will have a wider role in enhancing economic prosperity to the region acting as a catalyst for future growth.

2.5.21 Coed Darcy will create a sustainable urban village, regenerating a large scale brownfield site. The mixed use development will comprise an element of residential, education, employment, retail and other community facilities. Highway improvements, including the creation of the new southern access road, public transport routes and walking and cycling links are all integral parts of the scheme. The Harbourside redevelopment will provide major regenerative effects to Port Talbot, with the mixed use proposal comprising of housing, bulky goods retail, waterside leisure shopping, sports, education, business and office facilities.

2.5.22 The housing supply within Neath and Port Talbot will be made up of brownfield re-development, greenfield sites and existing commitments, with the regeneration of brownfield land being balanced against the release of greenfield areas. In releasing sites for development, the strategy provides sufficient and viable housing sites that seek to maximise the potential to achieve affordable housing. As Neath and Port Talbot present the greatest market demand, these areas are required to provide the greatest contribution to affordable housing.

Economy & Employment

2.5.23 Strategic employment sites are allocated at Junction 38 (M4), Margam and Baglan Bay. They are located in an area of high market demand along the M4 corridor and have excellent transport connections. The employment strategy will be supported through the other key proposals, such as Harbour Way (PDR), Baglan Energy Park Link Road, improved transport corridors and the Swansea University Campus, Fabian Way.

2.5.24 Existing employment sites are safeguarded in recognition of the existing role they play within the local economy and provide sufficient scope for infill development which will provide opportunities for existing businesses to relocate and expand.

2.5.25 In addition, tourism within the Coastal Corridor is supported to ensure Neath Port Talbot becomes a well established tourism destination. Attractions in the urban areas such as the Gnoll Country Park, Margam County Park, Aberdulais Falls and Aberavon Seafront will contribute to the tourism economy and support tourism in the Valley areas by promoting Neath Port Talbot as an inclusive tourism destination.

Retail

2.5.26 The town centres of Neath and Port Talbot are identified at the top of the retail hierarchy, as they provide a principal function, with the greatest concentration of goods, services and employment opportunities. In reflection of their regional importance, the strategy will improve the vibrancy and vitality of these centres. The retail led regeneration scheme for Neath Town Centre and the retail led development at the former Glanafan Comprehensive School, Port Talbot will improve facilities and make the town centres more attractive shopping destinations. Improvements to Port Talbot Parkway, the new interchange facility and the redevelopment of Harbourside will also improve access to Port Talbot and give the Town Centre an increased function. Such improvements, in addition to recent public realm enhancements, will make the key centres more resilient and able to compete more effectively with out of town retail and other regional centres.

2.5.27 Away from the main town centres, other housing areas within the coastal corridor are served by a range of smaller retail centres. District centres have been designated in Briton Ferry, Skewen and Taibach each providing a range of functions and services for surrounding settlements.

Sustainable Transport

2.5.28 The coastal belt constitutes a strategic transport corridor that both links together areas of the County Borough and its neighbouring authorities. ~~The Plan strategy is A number of measures are identified~~ to encourage a modal shift, to more sustainable forms of transport.

2.5.29 The redevelopment of Port Talbot Parkway Station and development of an associated integrated transport hub will make the station more accessible and user friendly for all, provide an enhanced park and ride facility, and provide an efficient interchange facility for users. In addition, a Park and Share facility at Junction 38 (M4), Margam will be developed to reduce congestion and emissions and will promote a sustainable and efficient transport network.

2.5.30 The construction of Harbour Way (PDR) will help to alleviate congestion in Port Talbot and the M4 whilst acting as a catalyst for the regeneration of the Harbourside area. In addition, the Baglan Energy Park Link Road will improve the public transport infrastructure and accessibility to the area, allowing the site to reach its full employment potential. Such transportation improvements, along with the Coed Darcy Southern Access Road, completion of the Ffordd Amazon (Stage 2) Road and cycle ways will provide increased accessibility to the area and enable Neath Port Talbot to be better placed to benefit from future economic growth.

Conserving our Environment

2.5.31 The strategy recognises the need to consider the environmental impacts of proposed development and will balance growth with environmental considerations. The designation of Special Landscape Areas conserves the highest value landscapes and the identification of Green Wedges prevents urban coalescence and protects the setting of the urban area. The identification of 'Arterial Gateways' such as the M4 and mainline railway at Margam in the South East and along the A483 Fabian Way from Swansea aims to protect such areas from visually intrusive and inappropriate development.

'The Valleys'

(Comprising of the Amman Valley, Afan Valley, Dulais Valley, Neath Valley, Pontardawe and Swansea Valley Spatial Areas)

2.5.32 The Valley communities have a long tradition of strong cultural heritage and community identity, with a wide range of natural resources. In recent years however, some of the Valley areas have faced more challenging times, with a decline in many traditional industries, poor health, deprivation and out migration.

2.5.33 In response, the valleys need to become more economically resilient through diversifying away from traditional industries of agriculture and mining and provide new opportunities for growth, investment and job/wealth creation while preserving the character and heritage of the area.

2.5.34 A number of recent regeneration and funding initiatives have attempted to try to counterbalance the decline experienced and reverse the cycle of deprivation. Such initiatives have produced positive results, with areas seeing an increase in tourism related opportunities and an increase in some community and leisure facilities. However, the Valley areas are still experiencing decline and far greater intervention is required to provide a more prosperous future.

Growth Areas

2.5.35 The ~~EDP~~ strategy seeks to reinvigorate the Valleys principally through the identification of two growth areas, namely Pontardawe and the Upper Neath Valley. Development in these areas will provide managed growth consolidated into existing communities having regard to the social and economic role these settlements play within the wider context.

2.5.36 Pontardawe and the Upper Neath Valley are identified as key and supporting settlements respectively within the Wales Spatial Plan and present a spatial advantage through their

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strategic location as service hubs where the positive effects of development will have a wider regeneration function to the surrounding area.

2.5.37 These two growth areas are supported and supplemented by other settlements within the settlement hierarchy. Whilst the majority of large housing allocations are focused around the growth points, in remaining areas, growth will be delivered on smaller sites within the identified settlement limits.

Pontardawe

2.5.38 The town of Pontardawe is the third largest settlement in the County Borough and the largest settlement in the Valley areas. It connects to the M4 via the A4067 and acts as a transport hub with access to Neath and Swansea and is also a gateway to the valleys and beyond. Pontardawe sits at the foothills of the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountain and is situated alongside the River Tawe that winds its way through the valley towards the open sea at Swansea.

2.5.39 Pontardawe functions as a town centre for the Valley communities, providing a varied range of retail services, leisure facilities, education establishments and employment opportunities. There have been a number of recent regenerative works to the town centre, including refurbishment to existing facilities and enhancements to the public realm, creating a high quality public space that can be used for the town's festivals and events which are held throughout the year. Such schemes have improved the accessibility and attractiveness of the town centre.

2.5.40 The retail park at Ynysderw offering a range of retail uses has pedestrian links to the town centre which helps support and complement its retail offer and vibrancy. Alloy Industrial Estate is also within walking distance of the town centre and offers a range of employment and community uses. This area is safeguarded for employment uses which encourages, in

principle, employment uses on the available land and premises within the estate. A more flexible approach to employment proposals will also help revitalise the area.

2.5.41 The Pontardawe area has the ability to accommodate, and has an evident demand for, an additional amount of new housing development. As such, the strategy supports a significant amount of new housing that will reflect its function and growing status as a town and retail centre and act as a catalyst for further investment into the Valley areas. Additional housing in Pontardawe is allocated across the spatial area allowing the population to expand, support growth in retail, industry and community facilities and provide much needed affordable homes.

Upper Neath Valley

2.5.42 The strategically located settlement of Glynneath is situated along a key transport corridor, with the A465 (T) linking the Heads of the Valleys Road and the Midlands to Neath, Swansea, Cardiff and West Wales. Its location allows the town to provide cross valley links, serving a range of settlements from both the Neath and Dulais Valley.

2.5.43 The identification of this route as an 'Arterial Gateway' aims to protect such areas from visually intrusive and inappropriate development.

2.5.44 Glynneath, currently acting as a hub, provides a key retail function hosting a range of services, facilities and leisure uses. As such, the existing shopping centre is allocated as a District Centre to retain the broad range of services. The Glynneath Town Centre Regeneration Scheme will improve the public realm and provide enhancements to improve the appearance of the town, ensuring the town is welcoming to residents and visitors alike.

2.5.45 The Park Avenue site is allocated for a retail led regeneration development, that includes a housing allocation for 150 units and new food store which will help to support the town centre, provide employment opportunities and promote growth throughout the Valley.

2.5.46 Glynneath has a range of employment opportunities focused around the existing retail centre, village workshops, tourism industry and mineral operations that are still present in the Neath Valley. Glynneath Village Workshops are safeguarded for employment uses together with a more flexible approach to employment proposals to help revitalise the area.

2.5.47 The Upper Neath Valley has the potential to support and increase tourism related industries. As a consequence, the area has the potential to develop a high quality tourism hub and a gateway to other valley areas. Glynneath lies at the heart of a variety of tourist attractions providing a strategically located base in which to explore a number of attractions across the broader area, including the Brecon Beacons National Park, waterfalls and canals.

2.5.48 The area has many attractive walking and cycling routes which allow access to the picturesque landscape and scenery the area has to offer in addition to a variety of existing sports, leisure and community facilities. Each year the area also hosts the World Rally Championships and Welsh National Championships.

2.5.49 Furthermore, the proposed tourism led mixed use scheme at Rheola will provide holiday accommodation and ancillary facilities which will further support the development in Glynneath and provide benefits for the wider community.

A Flexible Approach to Development

2.5.50 Due to their topography and distance from the main centres of population the Valley communities have suffered from decline and a lack of investment. There are communities that are vulnerable to further economic decline, deprivation and out migration. The LDP therefore seeks to encourage a more flexible approach to development in the Valleys in order to build sustainable, resilient communities with an aim to halt the process of depopulation and decline.

2.5.51 In terms of employment, the Valley areas have seen relatively low levels of market investment over recent years. That said, there are existing businesses within the Valleys that

provide a positive economic function and have continued to thrive despite low market demand and other challenges faced by Valley communities.

2.5.52 Farm diversification to tourist related activities has been one such success providing additional visitors to the area and creating jobs. Furthermore, workshop units within certain communities have seen high occupation rates, particularly for smaller units and as such, the LDP provides a framework to allow space for local and social enterprises to expand and thrive.

2.5.53 A flexible approach will be taken with appropriate employment and 'live-work' units being acceptable outside of, but immediately adjacent to settlement limits and retail proposals considered at locations outside of designated town, district and local centres. This approach aims to support new and existing employment, create jobs and revitalise the area.

2.5.54 Existing employment areas are safeguarded reflecting the important function they have within the Valley communities, including employment sites not contained within the growth areas, namely within the Afan, Dulais and Amman Valleys. The reuse of vacant premises and the development of land within the estates will also be encouraged in principle. In line with national policy, home working, rural enterprises and farm diversification will also be supported.

Tourism, Heritage & Culture

2.5.55 A wide range of visitor attractions and areas of natural beauty present opportunities for Neath Port Talbot to continue to build on its tourism industry. The LDP acknowledges this and seeks to support the industry by taking a more flexible approach to new tourism proposals and resisting where possible the loss of existing facilities. Rheola has been allocated for a new tourism development providing holiday accommodation and ancillary facilities to attract visitors to the area.

2.5.56 The Afan Valley offers a range of adventure sports, in particular Mountain biking, with facilities and recent investment from the Cognation project resulting in the Afan

Valley receiving national recognition as a mountain bike destination, providing world class trails. Accompanied by Afan Forest Park Centre, Glyncoirwg Ponds and its links with Margam Park, the area has become the main tourist attraction in Neath Port Talbot, with an increase in visitor numbers which has in turn seen the development of small scale accommodation in the area.

2.5.57 The Vale of Neath has become an important tourist destination, with the Waterfall Country and Neath Canal seeing increased visitors and opportunities for growth. In addition, the Swansea, Dulais and Amman Valleys present opportunities with tourist attractions in these areas and also their close proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park.

2.5.58 Linked to tourism, the strategy supports enhancements in leisure and open space provision for visitors and residents alike. Walking and cycling is promoted and facilities enhanced with the creation of the Amman Valley Cycle Track and Afan Valley Trail which links Aberavon Seafront to the Afan Valley, enhancing tourism facilities and improving connectivity between areas.

2.5.59 Transport has been an issue within some Valley communities with a decline in public transport services which has had an impact on accessibility. The growth points identified provide public transport links and are accessible through a range of transport modes, for both leisure and everyday needs.

2.5.60 In terms of the Welsh language, communities with a high proportion of Welsh speakers and where the language forms part of the cultural heritage have been identified as Language Sensitive Areas. In these areas the implications of new development on the Welsh language will be assessed and taken into account.

Strategic Diagram

- Legend**
- Coastal Corridor Strategy Area
 - Valleys Strategy Area
 - Spatial Area
 - Settlement
 - ★ Strategic Regeneration Area
 - Strategic Employment Site
 - Strategic Growth Area
 - ← Benefits of Growth
 - Town Centre
 - District Centre
 - ★ University Campus
 - ★ Strategic Tourist Destination
 - ↔ Primary Network Link
 - ↔ Core Network Link
 - Tidal Harbour / Docks
 - M4 Motorway
 - Primary Road Network
 - Core Road Network
 - Rail Line

Picture 2.1 Strategic Diagram

