

## SECTION 5

### THE THREE ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

#### 5 Development Options

- 5.1 An important new feature of the Local Development Plan system is the emphasis on identifying and testing realistic strategy options for meeting the Vision and the stated objectives of the plan. It is important to recognise that the LDP sits within a complex National and Local policy framework and as such in order to be achievable each of the options need to be capable of delivery within this complex policy framework.
- 5.2 It should also be recognised that the pressures for development, availability of suitable sites, the willingness of the private sector to invest, the sensitivity of the environment and the basic transport and service infrastructure vary widely across the County Borough. It is therefore necessary to consider these factors when determining the options to guide development over the plan period.
- 5.3 In order to arrive at a preferred strategy the Council in consultation with partner organisations and key stakeholders originally identified and refined a number of strategy options through the pre-deposit participation process.

#### OPTION A

##### CONTINUATION OF UDP DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (Continuation of Existing Trends)

- 5.4 For the purposes of Option A and in line with the principle of sustainability underlying the LDP the preferred location for development as part of this strategy option is within the boundaries of existing towns and villages in the first instance. In particular the re-use of previously developed land or brownfield sites is a priority. Development of such sites can help regenerate the communities in which they are located without adversely affecting the environment.
- 5.5 In some parts of the County Borough any further growth outside settlement boundaries would result in the development of particularly sensitive areas such as Special Landscape Areas or Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. In such areas the ability of the environment to accommodate development without undue harm is very limited, particularly where further constrained by topography.
- 5.6 The distribution of the designation of such valued and sensitive areas gives a broad indication of environmental capacity in different parts of the County Borough in relation to the limits of existing settlements. It should be noted that the areas in question are subject of review as an integral part of the LDP process and that the environmental capacity is based on existing evidence as at 2006.
- 5.7 However, it also has to be recognised that not all development can be accommodated within existing settlement boundaries.
- 5.8 Based on the distribution of environmental capacity, forecast needs, and anticipated pressures and opportunities, Option A is based on three broad areas:
  - **AN AREA OF CONSOLIDATION**
  - **AN AREA OF GROWTH**
  - **COMMUNITY REGENERATION AREAS**

### **Area of Consolidation**

- 5.9 The southern part of the County Borough is under continuing pressure for development arising from the growth in the M4 Corridor and has limited capacity for development without causing environmental harm. A large part of the area is highly valued and sensitive environmentally, although there remains considerable potential for development within existing urban areas. In the Area of Consolidation the objectives would be to consolidate development within settlement boundaries in the interests of the environment and the principles of sustainable development, to consolidate major improvements to the environment and to reinforce environmental protection.
- 5.10 In the narrow, steep-sided lower parts of the Sirhowy and Ebbw Valleys nearly all developable land has now either been used or is already committed for development.
- 5.11 In the Caerphilly Basin development in recent years has been rapid, the level of out-commuting to Cardiff and Newport is high, and the pressure for development is expected to continue. Only a limited amount of land remains undeveloped outside the built-up area and areas of environmental designation and this must be conserved. However, there is a considerable land-bank of housing sites with planning permission and significant potential for development within settlement limits. In particular, there are a number of large sites within settlement boundaries which require substantial remedial work before development can take place, where the required infrastructure improvements could be secured through the development potential of the site. The most important of these sites in the area are Bedwas Colliery, Ness Tar and land at Pontypandy. Therefore it is considered that little additional greenfield land should be allocated for development within this area.
- 5.12 Rapid growth in the Lower Rhymney Valley has put increasing pressure on its infrastructure, in particular the road network. If growth were to continue at a rapid rate then it would require a substantial allocation of limited resources to road building in the Lower Rhymney Valley, which would inevitably add to pressures for development with adverse effects on the surrounding environment. In order to mitigate this, developers will be required to contribute (through Planning Obligations) to improvements to the strategic road network as an integral part of this Option.
- 5.13 Though growth is to be constrained in the Area of Consolidation it will not be stifled. The opportunities from existing commitments and potential development within existing settlements, harnessed to the pressures for development, will add to the wide choice of housing stock.
- 5.14 Caerphilly is seen as the most promising area in the County Borough for much needed growth in retailing and employment in the service sector and appropriate allocations are made within settlement boundaries to provide for this. As a significant employment location there will be a need to allocate a limited amount of new land for employment use within the Caerphilly Basin, however the priority and emphasis will be on the redevelopment of existing sites.
- 5.15 Caerphilly plays an important sub-regional role in relation to shopping, employment, leisure, and tourism, and proposals for development will be welcomed which support this role in a way that is compatible with the strategy and policies of the Plan.
- 5.16 Because of its environmental attractiveness considerable steps have been taken towards the development and management of large recreation and amenity areas in the Area of Consolidation. The Cwmcarn Forest Drive, the Caerphilly Mountain Joint

Project Area and the National Cycle Route along the Lower Rhymney Valley have a strategic role, whilst there is a range of other schemes of local importance. Recreation development and management continues to be a high priority in the area and the LDP has a considerable role in protecting the quality of the wider environment on which such development relies.

### **Area of Growth**

- 5.17 The Area of Growth corresponds broadly with a Mid Valleys Corridor along the line of the A472. It is attracting substantial private sector investment to reinforce the considerable public sector investment, which has achieved a major transformation in recent years, giving confidence that a strategy based on growth in this area is viable and likely to be effective to the benefit of the whole County Borough. The objective in the Area of Growth is therefore to stimulate development centred on improvements to the A472 and the provision of major industrial sites.
- 5.18 Though parts are afforded environmental protection, a significant proportion of the Area of Growth lies outside designated protection areas giving greater capacity for the release of development sites in the area without causing undue environmental harm. The area also has many brownfield sites available for reclamation and redevelopment for a wide range of uses including housing, community facilities, employment and recreation. Notably Oakdale Colliery reclamation scheme, which is one of the largest industrial development opportunities in Wales and the new general hospital are located in the Area of Growth.
- 5.19 The corridor along the A472, has been the subject of on-going improvements for over a decade, and the Council's investment in new infrastructure, namely the development of the Sirhowy Enterprise Way, the Penallta Link Road and the Oak Terrace By-Pass together with policies to protect the core network have provided considerable improvements to the road links. The LDP will build upon this work and seek to continue to make improvements to the core network to facilitate a first class road network across the A472 corridor with eastern and western links to the M4 and to the M50/M5.
- 5.20 It is appropriate that provision for economic growth be paralleled by provision for house building, particularly in view of the limited provision in the Area of Consolidation. However, this must be tempered by the fact that the employment created will provide opportunities for people in other parts of the County Borough, particularly the communities with high unemployment in the north. Similarly, it is recognised that the Oakdale site is of regional significance and likely to attract a workforce from a wider area. Balancing these factors, Option A proposes that a significant percentage of the County Borough's new housing allocations be made in the Area of Growth.
- 5.21 Part of the growth potential of the Mid Valleys area is the development of Blackwood as a sub-regional shopping centre and as a key settlement within the County Borough. Accordingly this strategy option seeks to direct new retailing and employment opportunities to Blackwood Town Centre.
- 5.22 An extensive allocation of countryside recreation facilities, including the Penallta Country Park and strategic cycle routes and footpaths run throughout the area, will contribute and exploit the considerable potential for enjoyment of the rural environment.

- 5.23 Industrial decline in the past has left a number of vacant and derelict sites allowing a significant amount of the development in the Area of Growth to take place on brownfield sites.

### **Community Regeneration Areas**

- 5.24 There are two Community Regeneration Areas, one comprising the whole of the northern part of the County Borough and the other comprising the Aber Valley in the south. They are characterised by the highest levels of unemployment, social deprivation and population loss in the County Borough and have more difficulty in attracting private sector investment. Both areas are the subject of comprehensive community regeneration initiatives by the Council, including social and economic measures as well as the land-use based measures contained in Strategy Option A. The objective is therefore to consolidate major changes to the environment and secure community development to produce attractive residential communities linked to areas of employment and service facilities.
- 5.25 Although there is sufficient capacity to accommodate growth without undue environmental harm, both these areas have seen limited private sector investment in the past and the choice of housing in particular is very limited. In some villages a high proportion of housing is pre-1914 terraced housing and where this figure is lower, most of the remainder is public sector housing. It is likely that the lack of choice of modern private housing is a major factor in the continued out-migration of young families from these areas.
- 5.26 Considerable investment has been made in environmental improvement in the Community Regeneration Area in recent years and it is intended to continue this work through initiatives such as '*Turning Heads... A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020*'. There is significant potential to create primarily residential village communities with a wide choice of housing types, set in attractive and accessible countryside within easy reach of employment opportunities and urban services.
- 5.27 It is not proposed to release any new land for employment within the Community Regeneration Area. Instead, the emphasis will be on improvement programmes to make existing industrial sites and buildings more attractive to inward investment. However, major employment opportunities will continue to be found in adjoining areas such as the Mid Valleys Growth Corridor. Many of the communities in the northern part of the County Borough are close to the large industrial sites and employment opportunities in neighbouring authority areas.
- 5.28 Recent road improvements to the A465 have significantly enhanced transport links within the Heads of the Valleys area. Challenges remain however, and there is a need to develop an integrated public transport system across the area.

### **OPTION B URBAN CONTAINMENT STRATEGY**

- 5.29 For the purposes of the Urban Containment Strategy (Option B), and in line with the principle of sustainability underlying the LDP, the preferred location for development as an integral part of this strategy option is on brownfield sites within the boundaries of existing towns and villages in the first instance. Development of such sites can help regenerate the communities in which they are located without adversely affecting the environment. The key objective of this strategy would be to promote resource-efficient settlements that minimise land take and urban sprawl, through the reuse of

suitable previously developed land and buildings wherever possible, and to consolidate development wherever possible to within existing settlement boundaries across the whole of the County Borough.

- 5.30 The County Borough has significant areas of brownfield land available for redevelopment across the whole area. The most notable sites being Oakdale Colliery, Penallta Colliery, Ystrad Mynach, Bargoed Plateau, Aberbargoed, Bedwas Colliery, Bedwas, Ness Tar and land at Pontypandy, Caerphilly and Risca Foundry. In addition the diversification of the economy, and the ongoing restructuring of public services offers the opportunity to utilise other brownfield sites such as former hospital sites, office sites, industrial and other sites that are no longer required to accommodate their existing use for alternative land uses. The Upper Rhymney Valley area in particular has a significant amount of employment land on existing estates (approximately 34 ha) that has the potential to accommodate alternative land uses, whilst retaining an employment function. The location of many of these sites however is largely predetermined by the industrial and cultural heritage of the area and as a result the distribution of proposed development sites across the county borough will be predetermined.
- 5.31 The re-use of previously developed land will serve to promote regeneration of the County Borough as a whole and will reduce the need to identify a substantial amount of new greenfield sites to accommodate future growth. It is recognised however that a number of brownfield sites will have significant problems associated with them; for example contamination, access constraints and ecological constraints, which could make them very expensive to redevelop. The strategy therefore recognises the need to release additional greenfield land where appropriate in conjunction with brownfield land to act as a catalyst for development. The release of additional greenfield land will serve to attract inward investment to more problematic sites where the scale of dereliction and / or contamination may be such that the economic viability of redeveloping a brownfield site in isolation is unrealistic. This will be particularly the case in the north where land values are not as high as in the mid valleys and south of the County Borough.
- 5.32 The distribution of valued and sensitive areas such as Special Landscape Areas (SLA), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), Historic Landscapes etc; gives a broad indication of environmental capacity in different parts of the County Borough in relation to the limits of existing settlements. The ability of the environment to accommodate development without undue harm is very limited, particularly where further constrained by topography. The Council will give careful consideration to the extent of any greenfield development that will be permitted to facilitate the development of brownfield sites outside settlement boundaries, in order to ensure that such sensitive sites are not threatened or lost to development. *(It should be noted however that all SLAs and SINC are subject of review as an integral part of the LDP process and that the environmental capacity is based on existing evidence as at 2006)*
- 5.33 As an integral part of the Urban Containment Strategy all existing land allocations and other areas of open land within existing settlement boundaries will be rigorously reassessed with a view to reallocating land where appropriate for alternative land uses. Care will be taken to ensure that vulnerable land uses such as open space, leisure land and community uses have sufficient protection, to avoid their loss to more profitable development such as housing and to avoid the potential for town and village cramming.

- 5.34 The Strategy will promote sustainable patterns of development and as such the LDP will identify brownfield locations where higher density development will be particularly appropriate due to the proximity of the site to the transportation network and in particular the public transport system. This strategy will seek to direct development wherever possible to sites close to railway stations and key transportation hubs.
- 5.35 The Strategy will also seek to direct higher density development to within settlement limits where there is an identified need to support threatened services for example the local school, neighbourhood shop or in order to maintain the local bus service.
- 5.36 Where new development is proposed in the south of the County Borough and in the Mid Valleys Corridor it is recognised that this will add to the problems of congestion and place additional strain on the existing infrastructure in the area. Developers will therefore be required to contribute (through Planning Obligations) to improvements to the strategic road network and other necessary infrastructure improvements, including improvements to the public transport system as an integral part of this Option.
- 5.37 The corridor along the A472, has been the subject of on-going improvements for over a decade, and the Council's investment in new infrastructure, namely the development of the Sirhowy Enterprise Way, the Penallta Link Road and the Oak Terrace By-Pass together with policies to protect the core network have provided considerable improvements to the road links. The LDP will build upon this work and seek to continue to make improvements to the core network to facilitate a first class road network across the A472 corridor with eastern and western links to the M4 and to the M50 / M5.
- 5.38 The recent investment in the new link road at New Tredegar and the proposed investment in the new road at Bargoed, namely Angel Way, will have a significant impact on the ability of the Upper Rhymney Valley area to attract inward investment to existing settlements in the area and to brownfield locations, in particular in Bargoed Town Centre and Aberbargoed, where a high proportion of this land is located.
- 5.39 Recent road improvements have also been made to the A465, which have significantly enhanced transport links within the Heads of the Valleys area. Challenges remain however and there is a need to develop an integrated public transport system across the area.
- 5.40 Rhymney has the potential to provide a key gateway into the county borough from the Heads of the Valleys area and further afield and the urban containment strategy would serve to help the area redevelop in a way that makes it more attractive to visitors and residents alike. Rhymney has a significant amount of employment land within existing settlement limits, much of which is not used efficiently and there is considerable scope for the area to benefit from a strategy of urban containment. This strategy would direct alternative land uses to inefficient industrial land with a view to reconfiguring the distribution of land uses within the area generally.
- 5.41 The Upper Rhymney Valley also plays an important role in relation to tourism. Centrally located in the Heads of the Valleys area it is uniquely placed to help change the perception of the sub-region through enhancing the visitor and tourism role the area has to offer through the development of the Valleys Regional Park. Existing countryside recreation facilities in the area, together with the strategic cycle routes and footpaths that run throughout the area and existing tourism facilities, will contribute to the considerable potential for enjoyment of the rural environment.

Wherever possible land will be identified within existing settlement limits for tourism development opportunities that can promote and support this concept.

- 5.42 In recent years Blackwood Town Centre has experienced significant levels of private sector investment leading to the development of two substantial new retail developments at either end of the Town. In addition, the Town has received significant levels of public sector investment in order to improve its public image, in the form of environmental enhancement work. This investment has increased Blackwood's significance within the retail hierarchy and the area is now recognised as a sub-regional shopping centre and as a key settlement within the County Borough. Accordingly this strategy option seeks to continue and improve on this role and as such it will direct new retailing and employment opportunities to within Blackwood Town Centre.
- 5.43 Bargoed is the only significant retail centre in the north of the County Borough and its importance is recognised by the Heads of the Valleys programme in that the town is identified by the Welsh Assembly Government as a regeneration priority area. The emphasis in Bargoed will be on restructuring the existing town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This strategy will seek to secure the redevelopment of existing land within the town centre to improve the retail and leisure offer for the Upper Rhymney Valley area.
- 5.44 Caerphilly Basin is seen as the most promising area in the County Borough for much needed growth in retailing and employment in the service sector and appropriate allocations are made within settlement boundaries to provide for this. As a significant employment location there will be a need to allocate a limited amount of land for employment use within the Caerphilly Basin, however the priority and emphasis will be on the redevelopment of existing sites. Caerphilly Town plays an important sub-regional role in relation to shopping, employment, leisure, and tourism, and proposals for development within the Town Centre will be welcomed which support this role in a way that is compatible with the strategy.
- 5.45 Risca is the largest town in the Lower Islwyn Area and provides the main shopping centre for residents who live in this part of the County Borough. The possibility exists to restructure the town centre to provide for new mixed-use development comprising employment, retailing and housing development on brownfield land on both sides of the River Ebbw.

### **OPTION C SUSTAINABLE GROWTH STRATEGY**

- 5.46 For the purposes of Sustainable Growth Strategy (Option C) and in line with the principle of sustainability underlying the LDP, development will be targeted to individual villages and towns in order to underpin the specific role and function of that settlement.
- 5.47 An integral part of this strategy option is an emphasis on the development of a settlement hierarchy that will provide the framework for managing the scale and type of development that will be permitted in different locations. The key objective of this strategy would be to promote resource-efficient settlements that sustain and promote the role and function of individual villages and towns
- 5.48 Within the County Borough there are very few settlements that are capable of being self sufficient in terms of comprising an adequate range and mix of land uses. As a

consequence most settlements enjoy a close relationship with a cluster of other villages and towns in order to provide the range of services that are needed to sustain them.

5.49 In order to understand this relationship a functional analysis of the five Community Plan Areas has been undertaken as an integral part of the plan preparation process (refer to **Appendices Section 6**). These areas are:

1. Upper Rhymney Valley - incorporating Bargoed and Upper Sirhowy
2. Mid Valleys West
3. Mid Valleys East
4. Lower Islwyn Valley and
5. Caerphilly Basin.

5.50 Whilst this analysis will inform all Strategy Options it is particularly pertinent to the Sustainable Growth Strategy.

5.51 The roles and functions of the numerous settlements need to be considered in terms of both their location within the County Borough and within the wider region. Broadly speaking the Community Plan Areas can be divided into two broad strategy areas as follows:

**Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area** - Upper Rhymney Valley & Upper Sirhowy Valley

**Connections Corridor** – remainder of the county borough.

The Strategy further distinguishes between the **Northern** Connections Corridor (Mid Valleys East and Mid Valleys West) and the **Southern** Connections Corridor (Caerphilly Basin and Lower Islwyn) where the influence of Cardiff and Newport is much more marked.

5.52 Within each of the Community Plan Areas there is a cluster of settlements that are centered on a primary centre, which acts as the hub for activity. A number of secondary centres and a cluster of primarily residential areas support the primary centre.

5.53 The Southern Connections Corridor and in particular Caerphilly Town is the County Borough's most attractive area to potential investors, but a strategy which relies solely on the south of the County Borough for economic progress is unsustainable in the long term. The Sustainable Growth Strategy advocates a more balanced approach to managing future growth, in which development opportunities are targeted to other primary and secondary centres across the County Borough.

5.54 The Sustainable Growth Strategy will seek to direct appropriate forms of development to primary, secondary and residential settlements to reflect the specific role and function of the area. Further it will target new development opportunities to areas where there is an identified need to support threatened services and to bolster declining settlements for example the local school, the local shop or in order to maintain the local bus service. This will involve the release of greenfield sites on the edge of settlements in some instances and will result in some settlements being expanded to ensure their continued sustainability. It is not envisaged that any of the settlements within the County Borough will actively be allowed to decline.

5.55 Where greenfield land is released to support a specific area the Council will give careful consideration to the extent of any development that will be permitted in order to ensure that sensitive sites such as Special Landscape Areas and Sites of Importance



for Nature Conservation are not threatened or lost to development. *(It should be noted however that all SLAs and SINC's are subject of review as an integral part of the LDP process and that site assessments are being undertaken based on existing evidence as at 2006)*

- 5.56 This Strategy will also promote more sustainable forms of development across the whole of the County Borough and will identify opportunities for development where higher density schemes will be particularly appropriate due to the proximity of the site to the transportation network and in particular the public transport system.

### **Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area – Upper Rhymney Valley and Upper Sirhowy Valley**

- 5.57 **Bargoed** is the primary centre in the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area. As the main town, Bargoed provides a range of functions and services for the surrounding settlements that are not available elsewhere in the Caerphilly Heads of the Valleys area. The importance of the Town is recognised by the Heads of the Valleys programme and as such the Welsh Assembly Government designates it as a regeneration priority area. It is anticipated that the development of 'Angel Way' will serve to improve the accessibility and attractiveness of the town and will act, as a catalyst to attract much needed public and private investment into Bargoed Town Centre.
- 5.58 The emphasis in Bargoed will be on restructuring and redeveloping the existing town centre to ensure that it is a viable retailing, leisure and employment centre and that it is fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The redevelopment of the town will improve the image of the whole of the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area and will improve the range of important services and the leisure and retail offer available to the northern parts of the County Borough.
- 5.59 **Rhymney** is the secondary centre for the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area and it has the potential to provide a key gateway into the county borough from the Heads of the Valleys area and further afield. Centrally located in the Heads of the Valleys area it is uniquely placed to help change the perception of the sub-region through enhancing the visitor and tourism role the area has to offer, by for example the development of the Valleys Regional Park. Existing countryside recreation facilities in the area together with the strategic cycle routes and footpaths that run throughout the area also contribute to the considerable potential for enjoyment of the rural environment that Rhymney has to offer.
- 5.60 Rhymney also comprises a significant amount of employment land on existing industrial estates. The changing pattern of employment land requirements indicates that these sites offer the opportunity to accommodate alternative uses, whilst retaining an employment function, potentially diversifying the role of Rhymney to the benefit of the whole area.
- 5.61 The Upper Rhymney Valley is also the area that offers the most significant potential in terms of energy production within the County Borough due to its valuable mineral reserves and its potential in terms of renewable energy generation schemes. The Plan will need to balance the requirement to allow for renewable energy schemes and the extraction of minerals in an environmentally acceptable manner against the need to safeguard the natural environment to benefit the future tourism development potential of the area.

### **Northern Connections Corridor - Mid Valleys East and Mid Valleys West**

- 5.62 Since 1996, the Council Approved Unitary Development Plan for Caerphilly County Borough has targeted new development toward the 'Area of Growth' that was centred along the A472 Mid Valleys Corridor. As a consequence the community plan areas of the Mid Valleys East and Mid Valleys West, which form the Connections Corridor has become a focus for substantial private and public sector investment in recent years.
- 5.63 An unfortunate by-product of the success of the development strategy contained in the Unitary Development Plan has been a significant increase in congestion within the Connections Corridor, in particular at critical parts of the strategic network, such as along the A472 road corridor. This is not considered to be sustainable. Where new development is proposed it is recognised that this will add to the problems of congestion and place additional strain on the existing infrastructure. Developers will therefore be required to contribute (through Planning Obligations) to improvements to the strategic road network and other necessary infrastructure improvements, including improvements to the public transport system as an integral part of this Option.

### **Oakdale Business Park**

- 5.64 Oakdale Business Park together with Penylan Industrial Estate comprises approximately a square kilometre (106 hectares) of existing and planned employment land. The Business Park has taken 6 years and over £10 million to reclaim, creating one of the largest employment plateaus in the South Wales Valleys. On completion the Business Park has the potential to pump thousands of jobs into the local economy to the tune of £100 million per year. The site has already attracted major inward investment projects and proposals are in place for the future development of the site, providing a blend of properties to suit the needs of modern business. The success of the Business Park is critical in terms of ensuring economic prosperity for residents of the county borough, and in particular in offering much needed employment opportunities to residents of the Heads of the Valley Regeneration Area.
- 5.65 **Ystrad Mynach** and **Blackwood** are the primary centres within the Connections Corridor. These centres have a key role as primary centres for the more deprived communities further north in the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area. They have the potential to connect the most deprived parts of the County Borough in the north with economic, leisure and cultural opportunities offered in the Mid Valleys area and in the South of the County Borough.

### **Ystrad Mynach**

- 5.66 **Ystrad Mynach** is well served in terms of the transportation network being located along the main Rhymney to Cardiff railwayline, complimented by a Park and Ride facility, it is strategically located between the A469 and A472 road corridors. Given its excellent location the town has evolved as the civic centre for the County Borough, and as such the new Council Headquarters is presently being developed there. It is also home to the New District General Hospital, Ystrad Mynach Further Education College, Ystrad Mynach Leisure Centre and the Area Police Station.
- 5.67 In recent years there has been significant public and private investment in the area, which has raised the profile of Ystrad Mynach and which has also been instrumental in the diversification of the retail offer within the town through the development of a Tesco superstore, and a Lidl store. Collectively these services attract substantial numbers of people to the town from the surrounding area. The emphasis in Ystrad

Mynach will be on exploiting the significant benefits that can be derived from being the civic centre for the county borough and exploiting the close proximity of major employers such as the Council Headquarters and the Hospital. This will involve building on the investment in the area to date and consolidating the town into a more identifiable centre.

### **Blackwood**

- 5.68 Blackwood is the primary town centre in the Mid Valleys East. The town has experienced significant levels of public and private investment in recent years with the development of substantial new retail units in both the north and south of the town. Blackwood is increasingly being recognised as an attractive sub regional shopping centre attracting people from a wide catchment area. The town is also easily accessible by car from Oakdale Business Park (the largest employment site in the county borough) by the Chartist Bridge in the north. There is considerable potential therefore to exploit the relationship between the town and the business park.
- 5.69 Access to the town has improved dramatically with the development of the Sirhowy Enterprise Way and the investment in the new Blackwood Bus Station. There is however a need to further improve links to the town from the Heads of the Valley Regeneration Area. In particular there is a need to establish more effective public transport links to the Rhymney Valley Railway line at Ystrad Mynach and to ensure that new links to the Ebbw Valley Railway line at Newbridge are created.
- 5.70 The future role of Blackwood will be critical to the success of the Connections Corridor in servicing the needs of the population in the immediate and wider area and in pushing investment northward towards the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area. The emphasis in Blackwood over the plan period will be to build on its existing strengths as an excellent sub regional shopping centre and continue to improve the retail offer of the town, whilst diversifying the town centre to provide appropriate opportunities for commercial leisure and centrally located office development.
- 5.71 Secondary centres in the Connections Corridor include Nelson in the west and Newbridge in the east.

### **Nelson**

- 5.72 **Nelson** is the most westerly settlement in the Mid Valley's West Community Plan area and is situated at a strategic location on the A472 approximately 2 miles from the Junction with the A470.
- 5.73 The village centre in Nelson offers a wide range of small shops and services to serve not only the Nelson area but also adjoining villages in Merthyr such as Treharris, Trelewis and Quakers Yard. Recent improvements to the central bus station have significantly improved the accessibility of the village centre to the surrounding area.
- 5.74 The national cycle route (47) runs through Nelson adjacent to the Wern Woodland Park and links the area to Penallta Community Park. Together these facilities provide a very attractive rural backdrop to Nelson. Wern Woodland Park also provides a valuable link for visitors to the area to a range of small shops and services within the historic village centre. Given the range of heritage and visitor attractions in the vicinity, Nelson could have significant tourism potential.
- 5.75 Nelson also comprises a number of existing and proposed employment sites on its periphery. In particular land at Ty Du has been safeguarded for employment land for many years and given the proximity of the site to the prestige office complex in

Ystrad Mynach an opportunity exists to promote the Ty Du site as a business or higher education facility to complement the business park.

### **Newbridge**

- 5.76 Newbridge is situated at a strategic location at the crossroads of the A472 and the A4046. The opening of the Ebbw Vale Railway and the new rail halt in Newbridge scheduled for 2008 will connect the town with the Southern Connections Corridor and with the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area in the north. The planned improvements to the public transport infrastructure will offer opportunities for economic diversification and improve the prospects of attracting new investment into the town.
- 5.77 The town centre currently offers a wide range of small independent shops and services to serve not only the Newbridge area but also the surrounding area. The emphasis in Newbridge over the plan period will be to build on its existing strengths as an excellent local shopping centre and continue to improve the retail offer of the town, whilst diversifying the town centre through the redevelopment of key brownfield sites to provide appropriate opportunities for new economic activity, housing, cultural activities, public open space and car parking.
- 5.78 The redevelopment of the former South Celynen Colliery site for housing will serve to diversify the housing stock within the town and it is anticipated that this, together with the wide range of leisure and sporting activities available in the area will help to encourage young people to remain within Newbridge.

### **Southern Connections Corridor - Lower Sirhowy Valley and Caerphilly Basin.**

- 5.79 **Risca and Caerphilly** are the two primary centres located in the Southern Connections Corridor. For some decades economic policy in the region has involved exploiting the opportunities presented by the M4. As a result, significant levels of development have occurred along the M4 outside of the County Borough boundary in Newport and Cardiff and at motorway junctions in particular, as nodes of economic growth. As Cardiff and Newport have become more successful, Caerphilly and to a lesser extent Risca have experienced increased development pressure. Significant levels of new development have occurred, particularly in the Caerphilly Basin as a result in recent years.
- 5.80 An unfortunate by-product of the success of the region's economic policy has been a significant increase in congestion within the southern part of the County Borough. This is not considered to be sustainable and as a result, where new development is proposed it is recognised that this will add to the problems of congestion and place additional strain on the existing infrastructure in the area. Developers will therefore be required to contribute (through Planning Obligations) to improvements to the strategic road network and other necessary infrastructure improvements, including improvements to the public transport system as an integral part of this Option.
- 5.81 Whilst there is a need for Risca and Caerphilly to continue to capitalise on their proximity to Newport and Cardiff respectively and exploit the economic fortunes that this can bring, there is also a need to ensure that the remainder of the County Borough shares in any future prosperity. Furthermore it is imperative that these areas do not 'over-heat'. As significant retail, employment and residential locations there will be a need to allocate a limited amount of land for such uses within both Risca and Caerphilly, however the priority and emphasis in this area will be on the

redevelopment of existing sites and not on the release of any substantial greenfield land.

### **Risca**

- 5.82 **Risca** is the primary centre in the Lower Islwyn Area and provides the main shopping centre for residents who live in this part of the County Borough. The commercial function of the area is largely overshadowed by its close proximity to Newport and to some extent Blackwood. However the possibility exists to restructure the town centre to attract inward investment and improve the attractiveness of the area to residents and visitors alike. Scope exists to exploit the opportunities afforded by the re-opening of the Ebbw Valley Railway line and the restoration of the canal; and to provide for new mixed-use development comprising employment, retailing and housing development on brownfield land on both sides of the River Ebbw. Care will need to be taken however as large areas of the valley bottom are identified as being at risk from flooding.
- 5.83 **Caerphilly** Town Centre is the primary centre in the Caerphilly Basin and it plays an important sub-regional role in relation to shopping, employment, leisure, and tourism. Proposals for development will be welcomed which support this role in a way that is compatible with the strategy and policies of the Plan. Appropriate allocations will be made within settlement boundaries to provide for this. As a significant employment location there will be a need to allocate a limited amount of land for employment use within the Caerphilly Basin, however the priority and emphasis will be on the redevelopment of existing sites.

### **Bedwas**

- 5.84 The village centre in Bedwas offers a wide range of small shops and services to serve not only Bedwas but also the adjoining settlement of Trethomas and neighbouring residential areas at Graig y Rhacca and Waterloo.
- 5.85 The area has maintained a strong industrial base and as such the village accommodates two large successful industrial estates at Bedwas House and Pant Glas totalling approximately 61hectares. It is proposed that the area continues to provide this important function over the plan period.
- 5.86 The area also could have tourism potential given its close proximity to Caerphilly Castle and to Caerphilly Town Centre. The redevelopment of Bedwas Colliery will have a significant impact on the future role and function of Bedwas and Trethomas in this regard. This large brownfield site offers an opportunity to expand the residential role of Bedwas and also provide associated community and leisure facilities to further increase the attractiveness of the area for residents and visitors alike. The redevelopment of the site would require substantial highway improvements to be undertaken in the area.
- 5.87 There is also an opportunity to exploit the village's riverside location by developing a riverside park from an existing area of woodland meadow situated between Bedwas and Trethomas.