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WELSH-ENGLISH BORDER STRATEGIC REGENERATION PROGRAMME

SUMMARY NOVEMBER 2009

West Midlands
Regional Assembly



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION REV'D NICK READ, O.B.E.

Since the cross-border Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2007 between the Welsh Assembly Government and the West Midlands Regional Assembly, over 60 organisations have also committed themselves to improved cross border dialogue and co-operation.

The Welsh-English Border Strategic Regeneration Programme represents an opportunity to put flesh on the bare bones of this co-operative approach, leading to real economic, environmental and social improvements for the benefit of the people who live in the border area and beyond. We very much hope that you will want to join with us in this exciting programme of regeneration.

Rev'd Nick Read
Chairman

IN DIFFICULT ECONOMIC TIMES, IT IS THE RIGHT TIME TO THINK ABOUT NEW WAYS OF WORKING. HOW CAN WE MAKE THE BEST OF THE RESOURCES WE HAVE, IN ORDER TO CREATE MORE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES? RECENT WORK COMMISSIONED BY THE OFFA'S DYKE COUNTRY PARTNERSHIP SUGGESTS THAT THERE IS A REAL NEED AND A CLEAR WILL TO TAKE A NEW APPROACH IN THE WELSH-ENGLISH BORDER AREAS. WHY HERE? WHY NOW? WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE?

THE CONTEXT

For more than a year, the Offa's Dyke Country Partnership has been meeting. Officers came together because each of them, in their particular roles, recognised a need to develop a strong, diverse and sustainable rural economy based on environmental excellence, across the Welsh-English border.

Their experiences suggested that the Welsh-English border area was 'different'; had particular needs, but at the same time benefitted from a very rich natural resource base. However, they had only their own anecdotal experience to draw on; more detailed research was needed for confirmation. Consultants were engaged to assess the needs and opportunities, and to make proposals for a strategic regeneration programme, if this was found to be an appropriate way forward. Most importantly, any proposals should only be considered if they added value and built on existing initiatives and interventions. The area that should be included was investigated.

THE ISSUES

The study identified a number of issues that affect how the Welsh-English border areas perform economically and as communities:

- The area is similar to many administrative border areas, suffering from an 'edge effect'. National and regional strategies often do not deal adequately with border areas, with a lack of priority for many aspects of support and provision.
- In common with other rural areas, service providers struggle to reconcile the need for services and the costs and practicalities of providing them for a scattered and often sparse population. These are exacerbated by the difficulties presented by the Welsh-English border. There is a perception that national and regional economic interventions favour areas with concentrated populations and larger businesses, with insufficient recognition of the important role that rural areas can play in economic resilience.
- Residents perceive a unique identity to the Welsh-English border areas - large stretches of which are often known as 'The Marches' - which is intimately connected to local history and culture.
- The economic assets of the Welsh-English border area are very closely linked to its natural assets.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

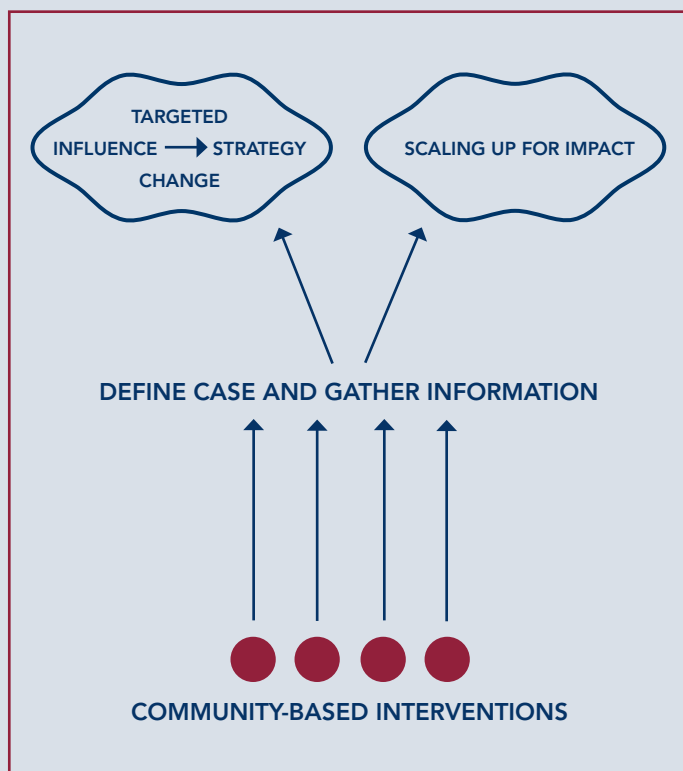
A holistic strategic regeneration programme for the Welsh-English border areas could offer a number of very positive contributions:

- Providing a means to meet the needs that local communities, businesses and service providers have expressed, which are particular to this geographical area and not currently being well met through current interventions;
- Enabling businesses and public sector organisations to make linkages with complementary businesses and organisations elsewhere in the area, for mutual benefit;
- Showcasing what can be done in terms of rural regeneration, making the Welsh-English borders synonymous with innovation and achievement;
- Acting as a template for wider national learning, particularly in relation to rural proofing and 'deep rural' issues.

SO WHAT HAS BEEN PROPOSED?

The proposal is for a strategic programme made up of a linked series of interventions that together are intended to bring about sustainable economic regeneration.

Schematic of Strategic Programme Role:



On their own, community-based interventions will not be enough to bring about the scale and types of changes and benefits that the Partnership are aiming for. So additionally, a small number of process interventions are proposed.

There are three key pathways to added value:

- Scaling up to achieve impact and added value
- Information sharing, learning and networking
- Providing a robust evidence base for influencing key organisations at local, regional and national level in terms of policy-making and service delivery



There are many opportunities where intervention might be beneficial, however only a limited number of these combine serious interest and potential for implementation. The recommended programme is made up of three strategic and five thematic interventions:

| INTERVENTION | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| PROCESS INTERVENTIONS | |
| Stronger Strategic Voice for the Border | Influencing and advocacy at national, regional and local level. |
| Framework for the Border | Framework mapping out the key elements of sustainable regeneration for the border, so empowering local communities to drive their own agenda and providing a basis for managing and measuring performance. |
| Better Networking and Information Sharing | Enabling communities and businesses to share good practice to meet their common challenges |
| THEMATIC INTERVENTIONS | |
| Sustainable Tourism | Strengthening the existing tourism offer in the Welsh-English border areas; creating a distinctive sustainable tourism offer that supports and promotes the local brands. |
| Border Link | Providing pro-active support for business (especially micro-business), social enterprise and individuals and for community groups. This would complement existing services with an engagement and sign-posting role |
| Sustainable Business - Eco Innovation | Demonstrating how businesses can meet the challenges of climate change |
| Thriving Communities | Increasing the resilience of local communities |
| Benefiting from Natural Resources | Making use of and showcasing the area's natural resources in a responsible way |

The recommendation is that, in the first instance, the programme is focussed on the 'central zone' of Central Wales-West Midlands area, building on the Memorandum of Understanding. Once there is a firm foundation, ongoing work will develop collaborative relationships to the north and south, focussing on interventions where there are real gains from a holistic north-south approach, such as sustainable transport and tourism.

AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The first crucial step is to get widespread and effective commitment at the highest level from the organisations that will be key to its development. With this in place, it will be possible to review the resources available and those needed additionally.

WHY SHOULD YOU COMMIT?

This programme aims to make new linkages – across borders, between strategic and grassroots. It has the potential to be an effective vehicle to deliver strategic aims at a local level, in a geographical area that is traditionally 'hard to reach'. It has the potential to meet real expressed local needs, then scaling them up to have an even greater impact. It has the potential for synergies between existing organisations and initiatives, for mutual benefit.

Ultimately, this is about keeping jobs in rural communities, having better quality jobs and more of them. It's about having communities with a heart and with energy. It is about valuing the quality of the natural environment that makes the Welsh-English border areas what they are.

Talk to us and let's see what we can achieve, together.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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