

WELL-BEING ASSESSMENT BRIEFING DOCUMENT: ENVIRONMENT

1. Introduction

Through the Understanding Our Communities project, public services are gaining a better understanding of the good things about communities, what matters to people and how their experiences and what they have to offer can help us to plan and provide services.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act has been put in place to make sure that public services are doing all that they can to improve the cultural, economic, environmental and social well-being of people and communities, and working in ways that will help to create a Wales we want to live in, now and in the future.

The Act means that public services will have to:

- Think about the long term;
- Look to prevent problems;
- Look to contribute towards the Act's seven well-being goals in all that they do;
- Work better with each other; and
- Work better with people and communities.

Under this Act, public services must carry out and publish a Well-being Assessment, which looks at the state of well-being of people in the area, people within specific communities within that area and think about what this picture is likely to look like in the future.

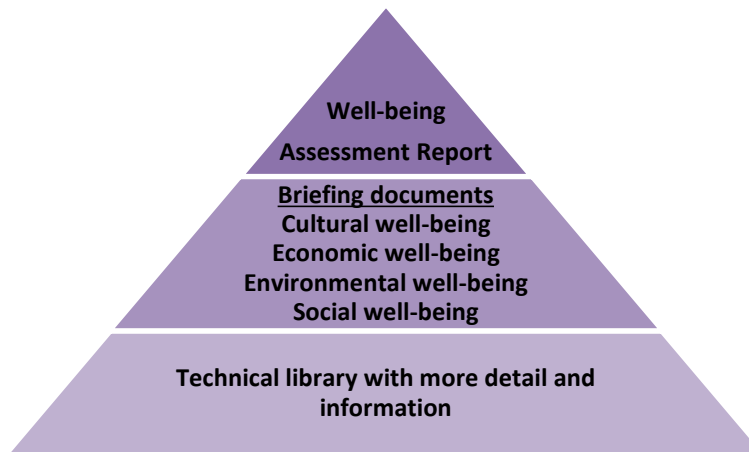
In Cwm Taf, we have been collecting lots of information for the Assessment, from the people making policy and commissioning decisions about services, the people delivering services and the people receiving services.

We then spent some time, talking with these people about the headlines that emerged under each theme and really thinking about how they affect well-being and what the impact of these headlines is likely to be on communities, now and in the future.

A summary of the headlines relating to environmental well-being are contained in this document. The document shows both how each headline relates to well-being and how environmental well-being relates to the other well-being themes.

The headline information across all themes of well-being is reported in the overall Cwm Taf Well-being Assessment. Each level of this Assessment is supported by a more detailed level of data and information. All of the information gathered throughout the project to inform these headlines will also be available in an online library.

Figure 1: Structure of Cwm Taf Well-being Assessment



2. Environmental well-being

Environmental well-being in Cwm Taf is a clean, safe environment which people value, use and enjoy. People are proud of the area's outstanding landscape, and regularly spend time outdoors in good quality, accessible greenspace. Children enjoy spending time outside, feel connected to nature and are proud of where they live. Communities help improve their local areas, learning new skills, building strong social bonds and helping wildlife flourish.

Green areas designed to reduce flooding and retain water during drought mean towns and villages are prosperous and resilient to a changing climate, attracting business and inward investment. A focus on new, emerging 'green' technologies means people have the skills and jobs that put them at the forefront of sustainability. Cwm Taf's landscape is inseparable from its culture, and visitors enjoy exploring the area for recreation, food and drink, heritage and the arts. An increasingly popular place to visit and stay, local business is buoyant.

3. Headlines

A healthy natural environment is the foundation for sustained economic growth, prosperity and resilience

A healthy natural environment can be a cost-effective way of regenerating and enhancing neighbourhoods. There is evidence that a well-managed urban environment can increase economic growth at a local and national level, attracting inward investment and increased visitor spend. For example, the UK NEA estimated that amenity value of green-space alone could range from losses of £1.9 billion p.a. to gains of up to £2.3 billion per year to the UK's economy, depending on policy scenarios¹.

Good quality greenspace can provide a safe, welcoming environment for people, and investment in green infrastructure can increase levels of development / occupation rates, attract skilled workers, business and inward investment, and help attract and increase visitor spend². It can also reduce flooding, improve air and water quality, help capture greenhouse gases and create attractive landscapes, helping people re-connect with nature.

Flooding and extreme weather events which damage assets and disrupt business operations pose the greatest risk to Welsh businesses now and in the future³. Developing a low carbon economy can enable sustainable growth, and help build resilience and capacity in adapting to climate change, ensuring town centres and communities are also attractive, viable and better protected. A focus on new, emerging 'green' technologies can also help develop skills, training, and employment that will put Cwm Taf at the forefront of sustainability.

The environment has a significant influence on tourism which supports inward investment, provides employment, and offers opportunities to develop new skills. The value of wildlife and outdoor activity tourism to Wales is estimated to be in the region of £6.2bn with an estimated 206,000 jobs across Wales⁴. The quality, accessibility, and diversity of natural landscapes are significant factors that encourage tourist visits to Wales - the top reason for coming to Wales, given by both UK and overseas visitors, is to enjoy the landscape and scenery.

¹ [The UK National Ecosystem Assessment](#)

² [Green Infrastructure](#)

³ [Wales National Summary](#)

⁴ [Well-being in Wales](#)

How does this headline impact on well-being?

A healthy natural environment can increase economic growth, attract inward investment, increase visitor spend, and build resilience to climate change.

Flooding impacts on jobs and income through, for example, employers closing businesses temporarily, being forced to change employment conditions, or leaving an area due to unacceptable flood risks.

Attractive greenspace encourages greater social activity and more visitors than barren areas. Residents get to know their neighbours, and crime is lower in inner-city areas with more areas of natural vegetation⁵.

What are the risks of not maintaining or improving well-being in relation to this headline?

A degraded environment means less resilience to environmental risks for businesses and residents. It also: deters inward investment; lowers property values; leads to long-term avoidable costs to the economy; fails to attract skilled workers; leads to low levels of development / occupation rates; and attracts fewer visitors which means less tourist spend.

Examples of current practice to build on:

Three key green infrastructure schemes to learn from: Greener Grangetown, Cardiff; Vastra Hamnen, Malmo; and Connswater Community Greenway, Belfast.

Cwm Taf's tourism offer as an outstanding area for recreation, culture and heritage. For example, cycling is worth £3bn a year to the UK economy⁶, and there are opportunities to build on Cwm Taf's potential as a premium cycling destination.

What additional information would help in relation to this headline?

There is a need to build understanding among decision makers to better recognise the links between the environment and regeneration, prosperity and resilience. This is often overlooked in both strategic and local scale regeneration planning and delivery.

Green infrastructure schemes are still few and far between in Wales, despite the wide range of benefits they can bring. What will help bring green infrastructure into mainstream planning and delivery in Wales?

⁵ [Aggression and violence in the inner city: effects of environment via mental fatigue.](#)

⁶ [The London School of Economics and Political Science](#)

High levels of employment are critical to well-being. How does the PSB engage with the business community to better understand their role and contribution to local well-being?

Cwm Taf's environment (urban and countryside) has an important role to play in improving people's health and well-being

The cost of physical inactivity to Wales is estimated to be £650 million per year⁷. However, it's widely recognised that many of the key health issues are in many ways considered 'preventable'⁸⁹.

There is growing international evidence that contact with, or access to, nature or greenspace may have beneficial implications for physiological and psychological health¹⁰. There is also evidence that socio-economic inequalities in health may be narrower in places with better access to green spaces, compared with those with poorer access.

Levels of adult physical activity in Cwm Taf are amongst the lowest in Wales, but engagement told us that many people's immediate association with health and well-being is time spent outdoors. However, people shared their concerns on the quality, accessibility and awareness of greenspace, in both urban areas and the wider countryside. People commonly reported not knowing where they could go or what they could do. In particular, that greenspace isn't always located near to the people that would benefit from it the most, and often not managed in ways which make them accessible and attractive to use.

Path networks, urban trees and other green infrastructure aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of neighbourhoods, can play an important role in improving people's health and well-being, whilst providing safe access to key facilities, services, employment and areas of recreation. Research shows that people are more active if they live within an attractive and inspiring environment¹¹.

Poor air quality has a direct impact on health and can also discourage people from venturing outdoors, which in turn contributes to more sedentary lifestyles. The main sources of air pollution in Cwm Taf arise from heavy traffic flow, particularly where there is frequent queuing and congestion, often made worse by new developments.

⁷ [Climbing higher: creating an active](#)

⁸ [Chief Medical Officer Annual Report, 2013-2014](#)

⁹ [Chief Medical Officer Annual Report 2014-15](#)

¹⁰ [Life Course, Greenspace and Health, 2016.](#)

¹¹ [Health Inequalities: progress and next steps.](#)

Vulnerable groups include older people, adults with long-term limiting illnesses, and babies and children.

Integrated active travel can play a key role in improving the health of local residents, serving local transport needs, and helping address the issues of congestion and pollution from car dependency. A 2011 report by the London School of Economics highlighted that a 20% increase in cycling by 2015 would save the economy £207m in reduced traffic congestion, £71m in lower pollution levels, and £52m in NHS costs.

How does this headline impact on well-being?

Increasing levels of physical activity increases peoples' healthy lifespans and reduces the incidence of chronic disease, including cardiovascular disease, some cancers, type II diabetes and osteoporosis.

The connections between greenspace and health include improved air quality, physical activity, social cohesion and stress reduction. For example, children living in areas with more street trees have lower prevalence of asthma¹².

The natural environment can support social resilience by providing opportunities for interaction and engagement. Many outdoor recreational activities are free, enabling participation across communities.

What are the risks of not maintaining or improving well-being in relation to this headline?

The risks include: increased mental and physical ill-health; associated spiralling costs; further reductions in community cohesion and interaction; with adults and children becoming increasingly disconnected from their local landscape and greenspace.

Examples of current/best practice to build on:

The Taff Trail is one of Wales' most synonymous active travel routes. Cwm Taf has over 800km of public rights of way, and about a third of land is open access.

The South East Wales Valleys Local Transport Plan (January 2015) aims to protect the environment by promoting walking, cycling and quality public transport.

Cwm Taf's environment has a wealth of community based activities and sports clubs, e.g. Parkrun in Pontypridd attracts runners and volunteers every weekend.

¹² [NRW Core Management Plan for Gower Commons SAC](#)

'Beat the Street' aims to improve active travel rates. 175,000 people played in 2015 and there may be opportunities to align with existing active travel routes.

What additional information would help in relation to this headline?

A new dialogue with communities in the South Wales Valleys is needed to positively promote the countryside as theirs to use. Information, awareness, and joined-up promotion will be key. What are the best ways to do this?

Identifying the main barriers that prevent people using, enjoying and interacting with their local landscape in the South Wales Valleys. This would help organisations better understand what they can do to help break down those barriers.

Are we clear which communities in Cwm Taf have relatively poor access to greenspace?

People want to live in a clean, safe environment and increasingly want to help manage their local areas

Engagement in Cwm Taf told us its environment is perceived as a tremendous asset, and it makes people feel proud, positive and happy about where they live.

However, crime and anti-social behaviour was highlighted as a constant challenge and significant barrier for people using and enjoying their local environment. Living in community spaces that are full of dog mess, litter, fly-tipping and drug paraphernalia were common issues that people expressed concern about. People also revealed feeling neglected or even exploited in decisions regarding management of their local areas. They want access to 'good quality' greenspace and in some cases, more involvement in managing their local areas.

Equality of opportunity means addressing not only social and economic inequality but also environmental inequality¹³. Relatively large areas of Cwm Taf are publically owned/managed, and many of these areas, particularly the forests and woodlands, are located close to towns and communities. This is a major asset and opportunity for collective action between organisations, businesses and the community.

Greater community involvement can be a catalyst for improving physical and mental well-being through developing skills, combating isolation, encouraging social bonding, building community capacity, and culture, the arts and language in describing a relationship to the environment. This can increase a sense of ownership, activity and visibility ('capable

¹³ [Well-being in Wales](#)

guardians’) in areas, which in turn can help deter crime and anti-social behaviour. It also benefits organisations who are under increasing financial pressure to manage their assets.

How does this headline impact on well-being?

Crime and anti-social behaviour prevents people using and enjoying their local environment, undermines the safety and well-being of residents, impacts the local economy and environment, hinders prosperity, and reinforces negative perceptions of the area.

Initiatives aimed at involving communities in the management of their local parks and woodlands have been shown to increase social capital, improve community cohesion and reduce antisocial behaviour¹⁴.

What are the risks of not maintaining or improving well-being in relation to this headline?

The risks include: public bodies spending more in the long run, working reactively in response to incidents; continued impacts to the cohesion of communities; negative perceptions of the area; missed opportunities for community initiatives; and disconnected/poor quality greenspace.

Examples of current practice to build on:

The relatively large proportion of publically owned/managed land in Cwm Taf provides a great opportunity to encourage more community use and ownership.

Cwm Taf has 10 green flag areas and 2 green flag communities, and 59 schools have achieved green flag status since 2014.

PAWS is a local initiative that has successfully engaged dog walkers in reporting anti-social behaviour.

Community groups across Cwm Taf are active in their local environment, demonstrating how the environment can support community cohesion, sustainability, participation, health, education and training, e.g. Friends of Parc Taf Bargoed and Welcome to our Woods.

¹⁴ [*An evaluation of Cydcoed: The social and economic benefits of using trees and woodlands for community development in Wales.*](#)

What additional information would help in relation to this headline?

How can public organisations be less burdened by processes and procedures that prevent many local opportunities from being realised? Individuals and community groups commonly feel frustrated when working with public organisations.

Do Public Service Boards have a clear understanding of the costs of crime and anti-social behaviour, and are they benefitting from shared intelligence?

Communities face significant risks from a changing climate, now and in the future.

There is clear evidence of climate change in Wales¹⁵. In broad terms, the most urgent risks for Wales are: more frequent flooding to communities, businesses and infrastructure; impacts to health and well-being from high temperatures; water shortages; impacts to the benefits nature provides (natural capital); food production; and new and emerging pests and diseases¹⁶.

Flooding is the most frequent type of “natural” disaster affecting homes, businesses and infrastructure in Wales and can disrupt the normal functioning of whole communities. In Cwm Taf, the risk of river and surface water flooding is high and expected to increase in the future, owing to the high rainfall and mountainous terrain. Cwm Taf has some of the highest proportion of socially disadvantaged communities located in flood risk areas. For some properties, flood insurance and mortgages may become increasingly difficult to obtain.

There are around 2,000 heat-related deaths per year across the UK, and the risk to health is projected to increase in the future as temperatures rise¹⁷. Wildfires deliberately caused by arson affect the South Wales Valleys every year, and Cwm Taf is one of the worst affected areas. Higher temperatures could result in more frequent and severe wildfires, threatening the safety of people, the environment and resulting in significant costs to the local economy.

Cwm Taf will need to plan adaptation measures to secure the long-term resilience of its communities from the impacts of severe weather. A relatively large proportion of Cwm Taf is publically owned or managed, providing opportunities for improving community resilience, both at a local and landscape scale. Moving to a low carbon society will also help build resilience and capacity in adapting to climate change.

¹⁵[The climate of the United Kingdom and recent trends.](#)

¹⁶[Wales National Summary](#)

¹⁷[Wales National Summary](#)

How does this headline impact on well-being?

Flooding and heat impacts on people's physical and mental health and life expectancy, as well as people's living conditions and disposable income, and through direct economic damages to properties. Flooding can cause death, illness, injury and stress with impacts possibly greater for more socially vulnerable communities¹⁸.

Research found the highest incidence of wildfires in the South Wales Valleys occurred in areas with the poorest and least healthy population, who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of wildfires. Smoke from wildfires is toxic and the impact is much greater on those with respiratory or cardiovascular illnesses, the elderly and very young¹⁹.

What are the risks of not maintaining or improving well-being in relation to this headline?

The risks are: potential harm to life and critical community assets, likely to increase with climate change predictions; long-term avoidable costs to the economy; impacts on services; missed opportunities to build community resilience; impacts on the social environment, e.g. through the potential loss of social cohesion, historic places, and the natural environment.

Examples of current/best practice to build on:

The relatively large proportion of publically owned/managed land in Cwm Taf is a major asset and opportunity for collective action to help address the challenges faced by a changing climate, at both a local and landscape scale, e.g. restoring Cwm Taf's upland peat can help reduce downstream flooding and improve air/water quality.

Local Development Plans identifying suitable sites for future development.

Investment in green infrastructure to help reduce the risk of flooding, improve air and water pollution, capture greenhouse gases and create attractive landscapes.

'Healthy Hillside' (2016 Sustain Wales Award winner), a multi-partner approach pro-actively managing the Rhondda's hillsides for people and wildlife, and minimising the impact and severity of wildfires.

¹⁸ [Climate change, justice and vulnerability.](#)

¹⁹ [The public health impact of wildfires in Wales](#)

What additional information would help in relation to this headline?

Greater emphasis and capacity is required on planning for 50 to 100-year time horizons, particularly in how action on climate change is delivered locally. As the governance of climate change in Wales is unclear, how do PSBs achieve this?

Adapting to climate change is a collective challenge, requiring a joined-up approach. New forms of strategic co-operation are needed to help manage the environment in ways that meet the challenges of a changing climate.

There are calls for larger scale experimentation in land management (natural flood management) as a way of absorbing floodwater, e.g. farm payments that subsidise land use as a way to reduce downstream flooding. How can this be progressed in Wales?

Cwm Taf's unique wildlife is increasingly fragmented and under threat but people can make a difference and help wildlife thrive.

Nature enriches our lives and provides us with the foundations and protection for life. However, the 'State of Nature' report published in 2013 highlighted that 60% of species assessed had declined in the last 50 years²⁰. The main pressures on nature were highlighted: habitat change, climate change, pollution, over-exploitation and invasive non-native species²¹.

The wildlife of Cwm Taf is unique, diverse and important (nationally and internationally). Its landscape has been shaped by people who have lived and worked in it. However, recent studies suggest people's connections with nature are being lost, with negative implications for well-being²². More positively, research shows that 94% of the UK population agree we have a moral obligation to halt biodiversity loss²³.

The Environment (Wales) Act introduces a new biodiversity duty for all public bodies to promote the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in their work. In Cwm Taf, relatively large areas of land are publically owned/managed (e.g. the forests managed by NRW account for approximately 19% of the area). The new legislation and public assets in Cwm Taf provide opportunities for organisations and communities to work together to help wildlife flourish, showcasing how investment in nature benefits people and the environment.

²⁰ [State of Nature report.](#)

²¹ [Global Biodiversity Outlook 3](#)

²² Louv (2010) – Last child in the woods: saving our children from Nature Deficit Disorder – Atlantic Books.

²³ [Attitudes towards biodiversity](#)

How does this headline impact on well-being?

A healthy natural environment supports people in many ways, such as food production, clean water and pollination. It builds resilience to both climatic and other changes, e.g. flood protection, pollination for crops and flowers, improved air / water quality, carbon storage.

Rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands provide drinking water and contribute to our enjoyment of life through the opportunities they provide for leisure and recreation.

Nature sites provide access and recreation opportunities that contribute to well-being and can be a fundamental part of the local landscape, its cultural heritage and economy. In 2011, Defra estimated that protected sites contribute £128m annually to the Welsh economy.

What are the risks of not maintaining or improving well-being in relation to this headline?

The risks include: the loss and further deterioration of natural processes that support society; vulnerability to pests and diseases; and reduced resilience to climate change. The State of Natural Resources Report (2016) published by Natural Resources Wales highlights the significant consequences to society from the loss of pollination. Replacing it with hand pollination has been estimated at £1.9bn per year in the UK.

Examples of current/best practice to build on:

Restoring peatland and upland habitats via planning conditions and agreements for windfarms, and bringing them into long-term positive management.

‘Healthy Hillides’ (2016 Sustain Wales Award winner), a multi-partner approach pro-actively managing the Rhondda’s hillsides for people and wildlife, and minimising the impact and severity of wildfires.

Joint working groups to: protect and manage the marshy grassland habitat the Marsh fritillary butterfly relies on at a landscape scale; understand the unique industrial history, geology, biodiversity and community value of coal spoil tips; promote sustainable grassland management for conservation benefit (led by PONT Cymru).

An increase in community food growing encouraging people to grow and eat their own fruit and veg, helping reduce the risk of ill-health and obesity.

What additional information would help in relation to this headline?

There is still uncertainty in accurately measuring and outlining the value that nature provides to society, which is often referred to as 'natural capital'. NRW will be developing this alongside their delivery of Area Statements in 2017.

Children are spending less time outdoors but access to safe, natural play space outdoors has been shown to improve children's physical and emotional well-being

Welsh children are the least connected to nature in the UK. 1 in 4 children in Wales never play outside and just under 90% of children feel disconnected from the natural world.²⁴

Research shows access to natural play space and contact with nature positively impacts children's learning and well-being. Play Wales highlight how playing in nature strengthens resource to cope with stress, encourages an interest in looking after the environment, and contributes towards agility, balance, creativity, social cooperation and concentration²⁵.

In Cwm Taf, children told us they enjoy outdoor activities that are challenging, but there's often a lack of activities and 'things to do'. This message was shared by parents in Cwm Taf who also highlighted the need for safe environments for children to learn, play and interact.

How does this headline impact on well-being?

Contact with nature enhances children's education, personal and social skills, health and well-being, leading to the development of responsible citizens²⁶.

It strengthens resource to cope with stress, improves children's cognitive development, encourages an interest in looking after the environment, and contributes towards agility, balance, creativity, social cooperation and concentration²⁷.

What are the risks of not maintaining or improving well-being in relation to this headline?

The risks include: children who are less physically active with habits likely to continue into adulthood; an increasingly unhealthy population, placing

²⁴ [Connecting with Nature](#)

²⁵ [Why playing matters and what we can all do about it.](#)

²⁶ [The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature](#)

²⁷ [Why playing matters and what we can all do about it.](#)

unsustainable pressure on health services; increased disconnection from the natural world; less people taking an interest in looking after their local environment.

Examples of current/best practice to build on:

The first ever Skogsmulle leadership course in the UK was held at Dare Valley Country Park, Cwm Taf in 2015. Skogsmulle is the Swedish early years outdoor learning approach that facilitates children’s learning through first hand sensory experiences in the outdoors. A local school has taken up Skogsmulle sessions with its Year 2 children.

‘Walk to the Wild’, a schools project to enable teachers to walk their pupils to a local ‘wild’ site for a (regular) half day outdoor learning experience.

Cwm Taf’s School Sport Survey shows that young people increasingly enjoy participating in sport.

4. Links to other well-being themes

Environmental well-being does not stand alone and has many links with the other well-being themes. Below are some of the key topics and links which have emerged:

Building on strengths	A common theme throughout. The relatively high proportion of publically owned/managed land in Cwm Taf offers a great opportunity to: build climate resilience; improve people’s health; encourage cultural activity; improve wildlife; enable communities to manage areas to improve skills, social bonding and combat isolation.
Crime and anti-social behaviour	The impacts of crime and anti-social behavior are far reaching, affecting people, the environment, local economy, and cultural perceptions of the area.
Movement connections and	Transport, access to services, active travel, community links, congestion, air quality. All of these things relate to how people move and connect across Cwm Taf. This is a broad, hugely significant topic that cuts across the four well-being themes.
Awareness information and	Whether people want to know what’s on in the area, how to access services, or where they can safely go for a walk, people’s awareness of what’s around them is often limited. A new dialogue with communities is needed.

Resilience to climate change	This will be a key determinant of well-being that cuts across each of the four well-being themes, particularly people’s health and well-being, inward investment, infrastructure, development, services, public sector finances, and community resilience.
A low carbon future	We will need to better understand ways of promoting well-being without a corresponding increase in ecological footprint. Moving to a low carbon society will help develop workers’ skills around emerging green technologies, and help build community resilience and capacity in adapting to climate change.
Prevention	The pressures on public organisations are unsustainable. Preventative approaches to issues such as health can help create a more sustainable future.
Tourism, recreation and leisure	Tourism is playing an increasingly significant contribution to Cwm Taf, particularly in relation to recreation, leisure, food/drink and heritage. Managed and promoted well, it supports the local economy, cultural heritage, provides new, exciting opportunities for businesses, and encourages more people to visit/stay.
Evidence	The main messages on evidence have been around openness, transparency and rationalisation. There are some opportunities for Cwm Taf’s PSB to do this, e.g. Adopting ‘flymapper’ for all field-based officers to build a robust base of fly-tipping evidence from which to plan and respond.