



# Living Levels Landscape Partnership Landscape Conservation Action Plan August 2017

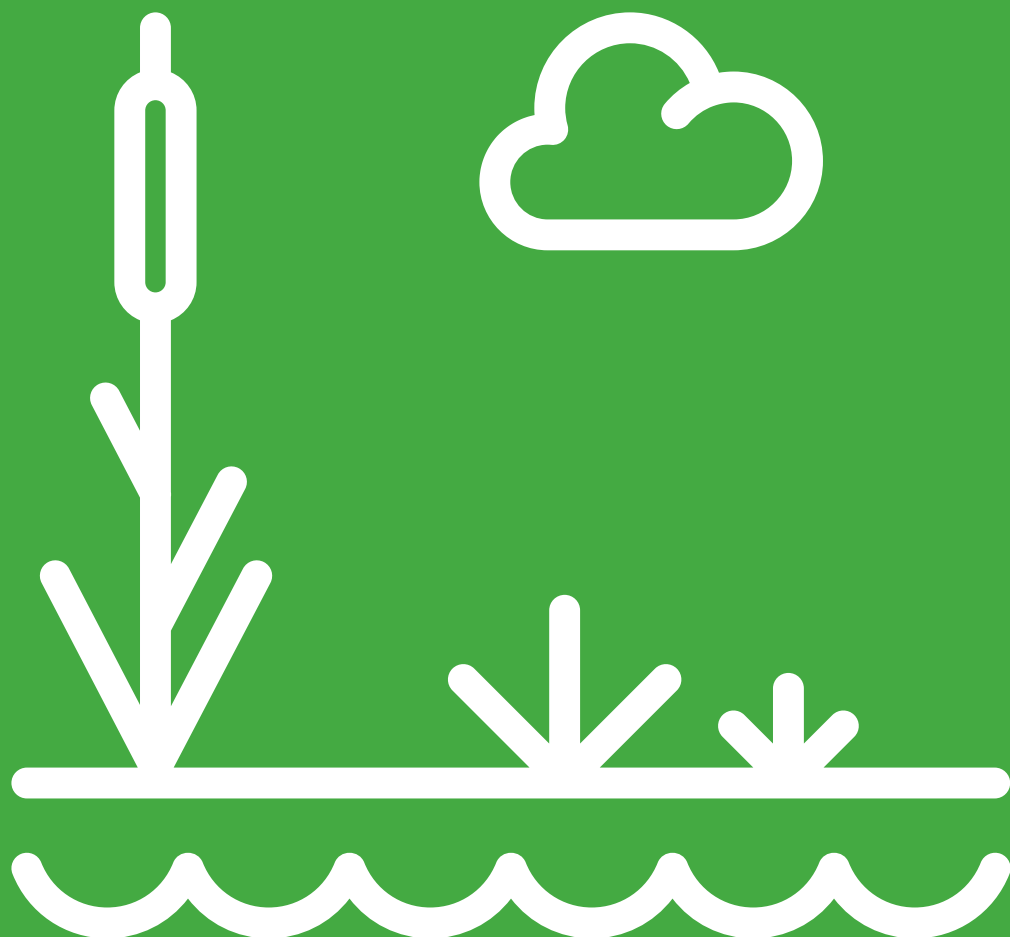


Supported by  
**The National Lottery**<sup>®</sup>  
through the Heritage Lottery Fund

Cefnogwyd gan  
**Y Loteri Genedlaethol**  
trwy Gronfa Dreftadaeth y Loteri

The aim of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership scheme is to reconnect people and communities to their landscape to provide a sustainable future for this historic and unique area.

[livinglevels.org.uk](http://livinglevels.org.uk)





## Part One – The Scheme Plan

<b>List of Acronyms and Abbreviations</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Threats and opportunities in the landscape</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>List of Figures and Appendices</b>	<b>5</b>	Changes in Agricultural Land Management Practices	119
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>	SSSI Condition	120
Executive Summary	13	Field Underdrainage	124
Introduction	15	Farm Economics	125
Plan Authors	21	Loss of Historic Orchards	127
Gaps and Limitations	22	Climate Change	128
Who's Who – The Partners	25	Invasive Not-Native species	129
<b>What matters about this landscape?</b>	<b>29</b>	Fly-Tipping	130
Study Area: Justification of Boundary	29	Disconnection with Heritage and Loss of Skills	132
<b>Summary of engagement to produce this plan</b>	<b>33</b>	Development of Tourism, Leisure and Recreational Facilities	134
Community Engagement July 2016 – August 2017	33	Land Use	137
Stakeholder Engagement	42	<b>Development of the programmes and projects</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Introducing the Gwent Levels landscape</b>	<b>45</b>	Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy	145
Geological Landscape	45	Scheme Aims and Objectives	150
Historic Landscape	47	Our Target Audiences	152
Landscape habitats and biodiversity	53	<b>Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLLP) programmes</b>	<b>156</b>
Cultural Landscape	58	Programme 1 – Conserving and Restoring	156
Industry and Settlement	60	Programme 2 – Understanding and Appreciating	178
Transport Infrastructure	62	Programme 3 – Learning and Engaging	207
Leisure, Tourism and Recreation	63	Changes since Round One Application	226
The Linguistic Landscape	64	Scheme Gantt	231
Folklore	65	Scheme Costs	232
The Artistic Landscape	66	<b>Delivery of the LLLP</b>	<b>234</b>
Public Perceptions of the Landscape	67	Roles and Responsibilities	234
Recreation and Sites of Interest	69	Programme Management and Core Team Job Descriptions	235
Demographics	71	Role of Partnership Board and Delivery Group	241
Socio-economic Trends	74	Project Management	247
Health and Well-being	76	Financial Management	249
Well-Being Objectives	79	Risk and Opportunity Management Matrix	251
Summary	81	Legacy and Sustainability	253
<b>Visitors</b>	<b>83</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation	262
Who Visits and Who Could Visit	83	Summary of Evaluation Activities	266
Living Levels STEAM Analysis	85	Reporting and Dissemination	267
Visitor Demographics	89	<b>Adoption and Review</b>	<b>269</b>
Perceptions of the Gwent Levels as a Destination	93		
<b>Statement of Significance: What makes the Gwent Levels special?</b>	<b>97</b>		
A Unique Hand-Crafted Cultural Landscape	97		
A Wildlife Oasis	100		
A Hidden Landscape	102		
Dramatic and Dynamic Seascapes	104		
The Historic Drainage System	105		
Archaeology	107		
Levels Lingo	110		
Ecosystem Services	112		
Summary: What Makes the Gwent Levels Special?	116		

## Part One – The Scheme Plan / List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

---

<b>AM</b>	Assembly Minister
<b>AOD</b>	Above Ordnance Datum
<b>BAME</b>	Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic
<b>BAP</b>	Biodiversity Action Plan
<b>BBCT</b>	Bumblebee Conservation Trust
<b>BTEC</b>	Business and Technology Education Council
<b>CC</b>	Cardiff Council
<b>CCW</b>	Countryside Council for Wales
<b>CEO</b>	Community Engagement Officer
<b>CROW</b>	Countryside and Rights of Way Act
<b>DEFRA</b>	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
<b>DNS</b>	Developments of National Significance
<b>ENGO</b>	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>ES</b>	Ecosystem Services
<b>GA</b>	Gwent Archives
<b>GAVO</b>	Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations
<b>GI</b>	Green Infrastructure
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information System
<b>GWT</b>	Gwent Wildlife Trust
<b>HER</b>	Historic Environmental Record
<b>HLF</b>	Heritage Lottery Fund
<b>ID</b>	Identification
<b>IDB</b>	Internal Drainage Board
<b>IDD</b>	Internal Drainage District
<b>INNS</b>	Invasive Non-Native Species
<b>LCAP</b>	Landscape Conservation Action Plan
<b>LLLP</b>	Living Levels Landscape Partnership
<b>LSB</b>	Local Service Board
<b>LSOA</b>	Lower Super Output Area
<b>LWS</b>	Local Wildlife Sites
<b>MCC</b>	Monmouthshire County Council
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NCC</b>	Newport City Council
<b>NCN</b>	National Cycle Network
<b>NEETS</b>	‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’
<b>NNR</b>	National Nature Reserve
<b>NRW</b>	Natural Resources Wales
<b>PES</b>	Payment for Ecosystem Services
<b>PROW</b>	Public Rights of Way
<b>PSB</b>	Public Service Board
<b>RGIS</b>	Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy
<b>ROI</b>	Return on Investment
<b>RSPB</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>SEWBRcC</b>	South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre
<b>SEWREC</b>	South East Wales Racial Equality Council
<b>SLM</b>	Sustainable Land Management
<b>SPA</b>	Special Protection Area
<b>SPG</b>	Supplementary Planning Guidance
<b>SSSI</b>	Site of Special Scientific Interest
<b>STEAM</b>	Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor
<b>VFR</b>	Visiting Friends and Relatives
<b>WCP</b>	Wales Coast Path
<b>WFD</b>	Water Framework Directive
<b>WG</b>	The Welsh Government
<b>WIMD</b>	Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation
<b>WJEC</b>	Welsh Joint Education Committee


## Part One – The Scheme Plan / List of Figures

---

<b>Figure 1</b>	Designated Heritage Assets	<b>16</b>
<b>Figure 2</b>	LLLP Area Boundary	<b>30</b>
<b>Figure 3</b>	Surface Geology	<b>31</b>
<b>Figure 4</b>	Topography and Hydrology	<b>48</b>
<b>Figure 5</b>	Ecological Designations	<b>50</b>
<b>Figure 6</b>	Designated Heritage Assets	<b>51</b>
<b>Figure 7</b>	Gwent Levels SSSIs	<b>54</b>
<b>Figure 8</b>	Air Quality Map of Wales	<b>76</b>
<b>Figure 9</b>	GI Assets	<b>77</b>
<b>Figure 10</b>	Flood Defences	<b>114</b>
<b>Figure 11</b>	Access and Recreation	<b>134</b>
<b>Figure 12</b>	Field Ditch Categories of the Gwent Levels SSSIs	<b>121</b>
<b>Figure 13a</b>	Historic Orchard coverage, Redwick (1882)	<b>127</b>
<b>Figure 13b</b>	Modern Orchard coverage, Redwick (2010)	<b>127</b>
<b>Figure 14</b>	INNS Fishbone Diagram	<b>129</b>
<b>Figure 15</b>	Fly-tipping Hotspots Map	<b>131</b>
<b>Figure 16</b>	Proposed M4 Scheme Route Map	<b>140</b>
<b>Figure 17</b>	Proposed Living Levels Routes and Visitor Hubs	<b>186</b>
<b>Figure 18</b>	South East Wales Tourism Action Framework	<b>198</b>
<b>Figure 19</b>	Beneficiaries of Learning and Engaging programme	<b>209</b>
<b>Figure 20</b>	Causes of Fly-tipping Wishbone Diagram	<b>216</b>
<b>Figure 21</b>	Scheme Governance	<b>241</b>

---

<b>Appendix 1</b>	Landscape Character Assessment
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Living Levels Visitor Experience Destination Management Plan
<b>Appendix 4</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
<b>Appendix 5</b>	Draft Living Levels Brand and Logo Guidelines
<b>Appendix 6</b>	Letters of Support for the LLLP
<b>Appendix 7</b>	Landowner Agreements for the LLLP
<b>Appendix 8</b>	Good Levels/Bad Levels Data
<b>Appendix 9</b>	Record of Development Phase Community Engagement
<b>Appendix 10</b>	Various Stakeholder and Community Workshop Notes
<b>Appendix 11</b>	Proposed Access and Signage Protocol for the WCP
<b>Appendix 12</b>	Involve Newport Citizen's Panel Survey, LLLP Online Survey and LLLP Lighthouse Inn Survey Data
<b>Appendix 13</b>	Scoping Survey of the Historical Documentation for the Gwent Levels and Glossary of Levels Lingo
<b>Appendix 14</b>	Audience Development Notes
<b>Appendix 15</b>	Walkover Notes and Route Guidance – LLLP Walking Routes
<b>Appendix 16</b>	LLLP Volunteer Plan
<b>Appendix 17</b>	LLLP Staff Job Descriptions
<b>Appendix 18</b>	LLLP Partner Board ToRs
<b>Appendix 19</b>	LLLP Communications Protocol
<b>Appendix 20</b>	LLLP Memorandum of Understanding – signed by all partners
<b>Appendix 21</b>	LLLP Financial Underwriting Commitments –core partner letters
<b>Appendix 22</b>	LLLP Procurement Strategy
<b>Appendix 23</b>	Magor Marsh Architect Plans



**"I think the Living Levels project is way overdue. Over recent decades there have been many threats to this wonderful part of our countryside and there will be more threats in the future. By raising awareness of this unique landscape the project will help to ensure that more people enjoy its beauty and its natural and historical features. This will help protect the Levels for future generations, preserving the essential features of the landscape while making it accessible to those who enjoy it, particularly on foot and by bicycle."**

---

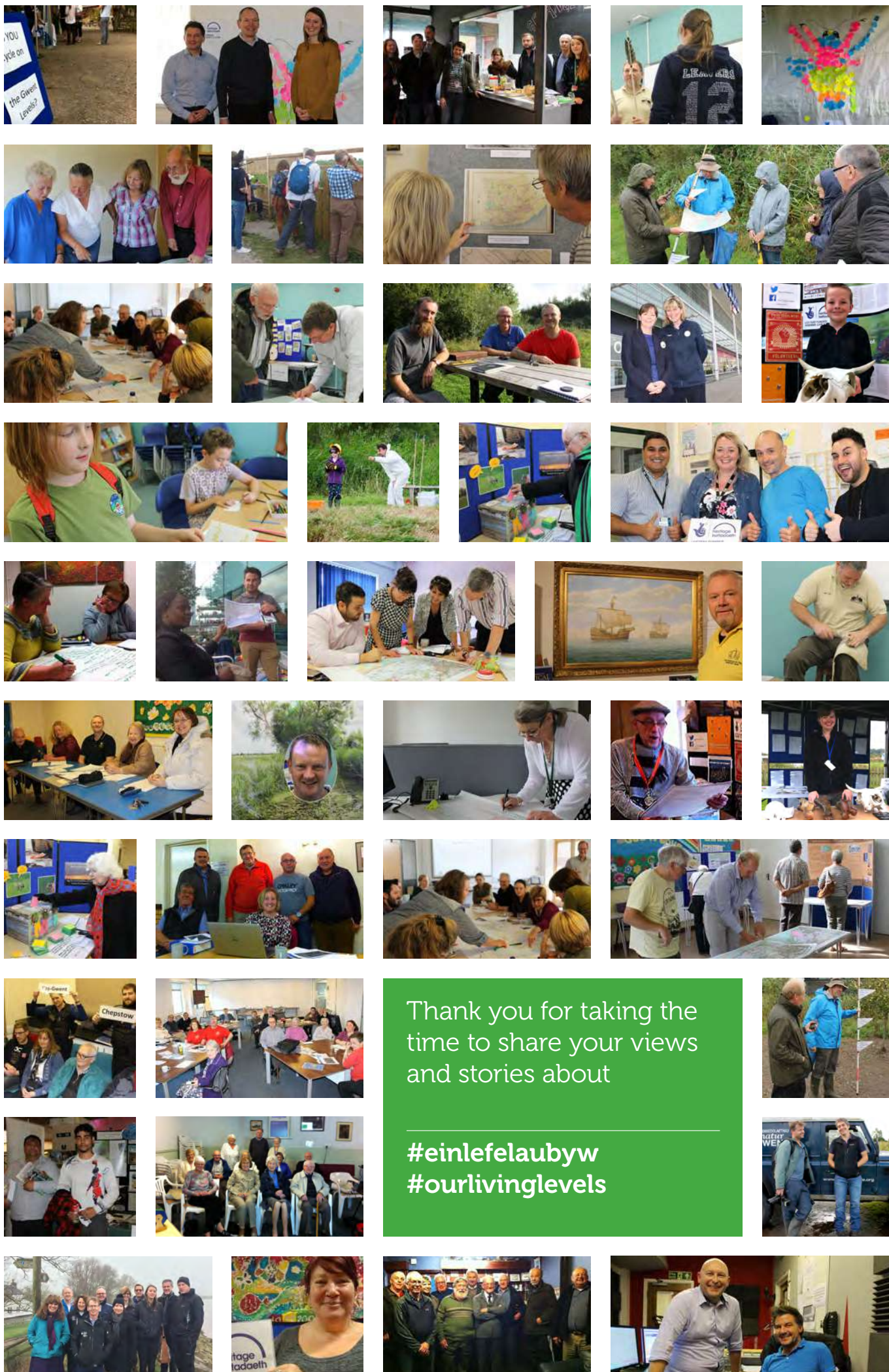
Peter Strong, Caldicot and District Local Historical and Archaeological Society

















---

# Part one – The Scheme Plan







### Executive Summary

---

The Gwent Levels in South Wales are a mosaic of lowland wet grassland, reclaimed from the adjacent Severn estuary through a complex system of drainage, that has been developed and maintained by human hand for more than two millennia. Intensification of agricultural land use, heavy industry and commercial development have had a profound impact on the character of the Levels in the last fifty years. People are increasingly disconnected from this landscape; its nature, stories and skills - as traditional management is lost and both physical and intellectual accessibility have declined.

The Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLLP) has come together to promote and reconnect people to the heritage, wildlife and wild beauty of this historic landscape. The Programme seeks to conserve and restore the natural heritage of important features of the area, to develop a far greater appreciation of the value of the landscape through improving interpretation, promotion and access and finally to inspire people to learn about and participate in the heritage of the Gwent Levels.

There is a significant opportunity to restore and re-discover this fascinating, rural area, a world away from city life as a 'green lung' for the people of the big cities of Cardiff, Newport and the South Wales valleys. With the valuable support of the HLF and other funders, the partnership seeks to deliver heritage and skills projects that showcase integrated approaches to environmental, social and economic challenges and make a significant contribution to the well-being of local people and future generations.



Image Credit:  
Mike Boyes



### Introduction

---

First impressions of the Gwent Levels to some people are of an unassuming and relatively empty, flat and open agricultural landscape next to the Severn Estuary. The small number of dispersed rural villages and remote farmsteads within the Levels sit in the shadow of extensive urban areas (Newport, Cardiff, and the 'Severnside settlements' in Monmouthshire), juxtaposed with major energy infrastructure (Usk power station, high voltage power lines and Llanwern Steelworks) and bypassed by busy transport routes (mainline railway, motorways and the Severn bridge crossings). On further inspection however, the Gwent Levels are revealed to be an appealing and remarkable coastal landscape of high skies, low horizons and a geometric network of narrow water-filled ditches and narrow rural lanes and tracks that cut across some of the most productive agricultural land in Wales. Even a superficial sweep of the area's natural and cultural heritage throws up a succession of fascinating vignettes – the impacts of the 1607 Great Flood etched into medieval church walls, Brunel's Great Western Railway and Severn Tunnel, prehistoric footprints and trackways snaking towards Somerset, the bones of a long-extinct Aurochs, Roman drainage channels, a unique watery lexicon, the imposing silhouette of the Transporter Bridge, spectacular murmurations of starlings. It is an isolated landscape, but with a fascinating, unique and rich-heritage.

The three discrete areas encompassed within the Gwent Levels have been shaped by climate and sea-level change, and modified, since Roman times, by human intervention – primarily through reclaiming land from the sea. Draining the land involved enormous human effort: constructing a sea wall and digging the intricate network of reens, drainage ditches and grips to allow the land to be used productively. Over a period of two thousand years, a succession of landowners, farmers, engineers and official bodies have maintained the land, recognising its value, initially for agriculture and more recently for housing, transport and commerce. The legal framework that grew to ensure the maintenance of this network is of itself a fascinating part of the Levels' story. Over many years, the drainage system has facilitated the development of settlements, local industries, unique wildlife and biodiversity and an agricultural system that continues through to the present day, making the Gwent Levels one of the most enduring historically maintained landscapes that exists in the UK, if not Europe.

The complexity and subtlety of this historic system is inspiring. Rainfall and run-off from the uplands has driven the creation and management of the ancient drainage system that maintains this wet landscape. A complex system of channels that work almost entirely under gravity, carry surface water off fields through structures known as field 'grips' (shallow surface ditches in the field), into field-ditches and then into the interconnected 'reens' that surround each field and main rivers. This water is then released at intervals into the Severn estuary first through tidal creeks known as 'pills' and then out through tidal flaps known as 'gouts'. The lay of the land if viewed from above, with ditches creating lasting field boundaries,

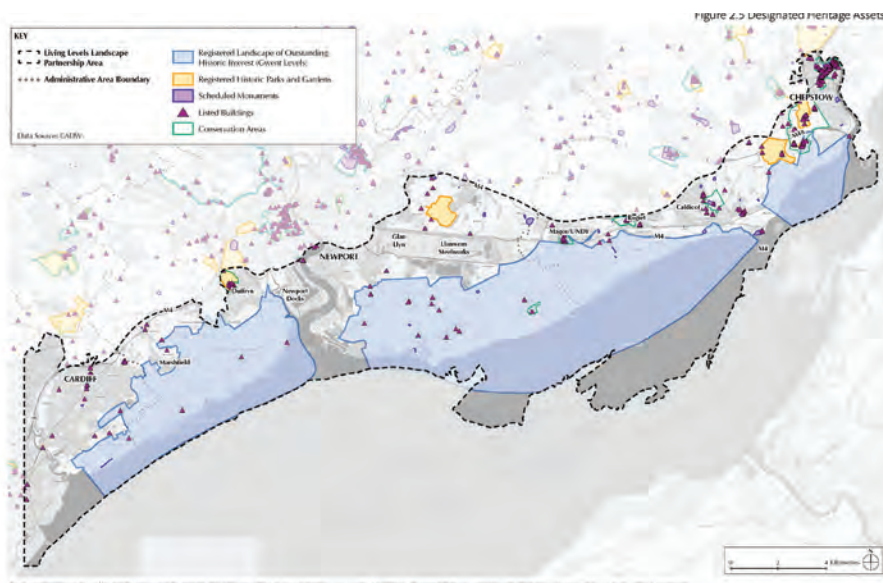


Figure 1 – Designated Heritage Assets

has little changed for centuries and has a striking visual impact. The unique 'Levels Lingo' and terminology still used today is testament to the importance placed locally on these structures, maintained by generations of local landowners for over 2,000 years.

The national importance of the Gwent Levels as an outstanding example of a landscape 'hand-crafted' by people, preserving clear evidence of distinctive patterns of settlement, enclosure and drainage systems, is recognised by its inclusion in 1998 on the Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales.

The Register describes the Levels as a landscape of extraordinarily diverse environmental and archaeological potential. Although they are an important wetland resource in their own right, archaeologically the area contains a variety of landscapes of different dates, and nowhere else is it possible to make the period distinctions so easily. People's past activities in the area have been governed by the vast tidal range within the Severn Estuary (15m between extreme low and high tides), which has seen major and minor fluctuations in the heights and range of tides since the last glaciation, caused by variations in both the land and sea level.

The Severn Estuary is designated as a Special Protection Area (for rare and vulnerable birds) and a Special Area of Conservation (for threatened habitats and other species). The unique character of the local communities living in these Levels reflects an ancient connection with the Severn Estuary. This is seen through the drainage system and sea defence, and also through lingering evidence of historic fisheries in the area, such as skeleton

putcher ranks just beyond the sea wall, and at Black Rock where fishermen still fish with traditional lave nets, a technique passed down through generations.

Precisely because of these gradual changes followed by centuries of stable maintenance of the watercourses, the Gwent Levels now has one of the best assemblages of aquatic invertebrates in the country. The grips, ditches, reens and main rivers provide a myriad of opportunities for different species, from the world's smallest flowering vascular plant *Wolffia arrizha*, to the top predators like grass snake, little egret and otter. Plants such as water plantain with its delicate white flower and arrowhead thrive in the clear waters. Submerged plants such as pondweeds and floating-leaf plants such as water starworts and frogbit, are also common throughout the drainage system. The assemblage of water beetles is unique in Wales and home to rarities, such as the great silver beetle, found nowhere else in Wales. The Gwent Levels are also one of few remaining strongholds for the Shrill Carder bee *Bombus*



Image Credit:  
Mike Boyes

*sylvia arvalis* - a UK priority species. Water vole and a wide variety of birds, particularly waders and waterfowl are also found. The drainage system of reens and ditches extends to 1,629km. Within this block, there are eight wetland SSSIs, covering 5,700ha. The Gwent Levels is also one of the largest blocks (10,500ha) of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh (a Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat) surviving in the UK.

The Levels reflect people's evolving and often precarious relationship with these circumstances over the last ten thousand years. The combination of local people managing a dynamic landscape, through systems developed over 2000 years with its associated history, vocabulary, unique wildlife and plantlife makes the heritage rare, special and a rich resource to be protected and preserved for future generations to enjoy. From the Living Levels community engagement process it is evident that scores of local people are extremely proud of, and value, their area.

However, this is a landscape of contrasts facing a challenging future. Processes and drivers of change continue to affect the area and the character. Land-use practices are threatened by uncertainty over the economics of farming, continuing industrial development and the impacts of climate change. There has been a progressive loss of areas of the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels to developments over the past 175 years. New infrastructure such as the railway, the steel works access road, and the M4 has provided access into the Levels and offered new boundaries for industrial development. The proposals for the M4 Relief Road and any landward infrastructure for the Cardiff and Newport Tidal Lagoons mark the next phase of potential loss to the historic landscape and the natural and built heritage within it.

This landscape includes the most populated and developed part of Wales. To the west is Cardiff, the capital city of Wales, and one of the fastest growing cities in the UK. To the north almost exactly in the middle of the coastal strip is the city of Newport and to the

East, Severnside settlements in Monmouthshire. The Cardiff-Newport metropolitan area has a population of 1,097,000 and within a one-hour drive from the central point in the landscape there is a population of 2 million people. The demographics of the Local Authority areas are complex - a mix of urban wards surrounded by rural wards on its outskirts and around its coastline. The rural wards are a mix of sought after, more affluent wards with unemployment figures below the Wales average and deprived communities disadvantaged by their location.

As industry declines and retreats from the Levels, the brownfield sites such as Llanwern steelworks are providing opportunities for large housing developments to form new communities on the Levels. With these new communities come new pressures and new opportunities that need to be considered if the incoming people are to benefit and contribute to this landscape. Extensive community engagement undertaken over the Development Phase has revealed that such communities have little or no





Image Credit:  
Nigel Pugh

connection to their landscape or heritage on their doorstep at present. Compounding this, access from the cities to the Gwent Levels is currently not easy by bike or public transport; there is a disparity and fragmentation with regard to promotion of the area and some of the areas closest to the cities suffer from anti-social issues such as fly-tipping and littering.

In contrast, there are also many older residents of the Gwent Levels whose knowledge is at risk of being lost. Those who knew of a very different time on the Levels and whose memories are vital to be captured. Many other aspects of local heritage are also at risk, including for example, orchards that used to be common alongside most farms on the Gwent Levels. The Gwent Levels is one of the last places where old local varieties of apples and pears can still be found including Early St Brides and Little Cross Huffcap. Without management they are at risk of disappearing completely.

Many of the species and habitats on the Levels are BAP priorities and require active management and interventions. The State of Nature 2016 report identified 'intensive management of agricultural land' as the main driver of negative trends in farmland wildlife. Like most of lowland Britain, in the last 50 years there has been a steady rise in the agricultural improvement of the grassland through under-drainage, ploughing, regular reseeding and the use of artificial fertiliser. Large areas have also been converted to arable production and intensive dairy farming. The designated SSSI features of the Levels landscape, in particular the field ditches, have been allowed to deteriorate through lack of management leading to a decline in the biodiversity value, and thereby negatively impacting on the potential recreational and tourist value of the landscape. The decline in ditch management also has implications for water quality, particularly in an area of intensive dairy farming. The Gwent Levels today are still an excellent place for wildlife, but will only remain so if managed carefully and they are vulnerable to change and neglect.

Due to a combination of these modern pressures, in little more than 100 years, two millennia of human intervention that created and then maintained the historic landscape of the Levels, has started to falter and erode.

These are challenging times and the landscape faces many threats but it is also time to seize new opportunities. The Environment (Wales) Act and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act together create an enabling framework for managing Wales' natural resources more sustainably, collaboratively and at scale. With the City Region approach and the funding mechanism of the City Deal agreed, the Living Levels area is located on a transport and development corridor seen as vital to Wales' growth aspirations. Major investments through Wales Coast Path and National Cycle Network routes have raised the potential of the area to serve an increasing number of leisure-seeking residents and visitors from the City Region and further afield.



Image Credit:  
Nigel Pugh

The Gwent Levels now needs to be actively managed to conserve its rare and special heritage and for its visitor experience, helping to attract inward investment, support local businesses and the economy as part of the wider Tourism Investment Plan for South East Wales. The Levels have a great deal to offer – but because it is not a conventional destination and because the story of the landscape is subtle and far from obvious - it is currently undersold and the unique story of its heritage and management is all but absent in local visitor destinations and museums. To appeal to visitors and residents alike creative interpretation which is both compelling and absorbing with a strong human dimension is needed to facilitate a greater sense of understanding and appreciation for the area's unique heritage.

With the right balance of leadership, investment and opportunities, the Gwent Levels could provide access to high-quality greenspace and become a 'Green Lung' for the residents of Cardiff and Newport and the wider "City Region". The project is therefore timely and

crucial in proving the greater added value of the area for the visitor economy, biodiversity, leisure and well-being. With these threats and opportunities in mind many people and organisations have come together to form the Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLLP), hoping to support the wildlife, people and historic landscape across this special place.

The LLLP brings together the collective expertise of a diverse range of people and raises the profile of the Gwent Levels. Consisting of twelve partners with a shared interest in the Gwent Levels and working across organisational, administrative and other boundaries, the Living Levels Partners have developed this Landscape Conservation Action Plan (LCAP). The plan has been modified and refined from the original concepts through input from local communities and organisations. It provides the fundamental background information, data and analysis to support the projects which will deliver the nine HLF heritage, environment and community outcomes.

Through active restoration and support for current sustainable activities, but also developing, promoting, encouraging and supporting different uses of the Levels, the LLLP aims are to protect the landscape and heritage and secure a future for local people through providing opportunities for alternative income generation and the infrastructure and the skills to realise them. As a result, Levels heritage will be promoted and celebrated by local people, those in the surrounding urban areas, and visitors from further afield.

The boundary of the scheme is largely contiguous with the Gwent Levels National Landscape Character Area boundary. As the Landscape Character Assessment states, there is a logic to this area which precludes drawing a more tightly defined area. Because the funding is intended to cover such a large area, the scheme will prioritise investment where the greatest added value can be achieved using a combination of key hubs and gateways and through targeted natural heritage restoration.



Image Credit:  
Nigel Pugh

**The core aim of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership scheme is to reconnect people and communities to their landscape to provide a sustainable future for this historic and unique area.**

**We will do this by:**

1. Forging a strong partnership, with the community at its heart
2. Recapturing and enhancing the natural and historic heritage
3. Celebrating its stories
4. Providing new opportunities for learning, developing skills, participation and investment
5. Encouraging and providing access for all
6. Building capacity and resilience for the long term

**As a result of this scheme:**

1. The Gwent Levels will be better understood by all those who live in, work on and choose to enjoy the area
2. The Living Levels Landscape will be better managed; in better condition and better recorded

3. People will have developed skills; learnt about the landscape and its heritage
4. A greater diversity and number of people will be participating
5. The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit

Four major pieces of externally commissioned work have contributed to underpin this LCAP and the development of the projects which are proposed including:

- A Landscape Character Assessment (appendix 1)
- A Regional Green Infrastructure Study (appendix 2),
- A Visitor Experience Destination Management Plan (appendix 3)
- A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (appendix 4).

Development funding has also been used to develop a Living Levels brand and website to facilitate communications with external audiences and communities (brand guidelines included as appendix 5).

Proposals for projects to realise these aims are presented in this LCAP in three core thematic areas:

- **Programme One: Conserving and Restoring** (LCAP pp-156—176)
- **Programme Two: Understanding and Appreciating** (LCAP pp-178—205)
- **Programme Three: Learning and Engaging** (LCAP pp-207—225)

The partnership is committed to continue supporting the landscape, heritage, wildlife and people of the Gwent Levels beyond the funding provided by HLF. Sustainable legacy plans are included for the projects and a detailed mid-term and final evaluation to identify detailed legacy proposals is supported by the core partners.



Image Credit:  
Newport CC



### Plan Authors

---

The plan has been written by Alison Boyes, the Living Levels Programme Development Manager with support from Gavin Jones, Community Engagement Officer and Sian Hawkins, Finance and Administration Officer.

The Project Partnership Development Group and wider partner officers have also dedicated a lot of time and given advice over the 18 month Development Phase helping to ensure that staff with specific sector expertise have contributed to relevant sections.

#### The Development Group members are:

---

**Lynne Richards and Jo Gossage**  
(Newport City Council)

---

**Matthew Lewis and Colette Bosley**  
(Monmouthshire County Council)

---

**Gemma Bodé**  
(Gwent Wildlife Trust)

---

**Catrin Grimstead**  
(Natural Resources Wales)

---

**Matthew Harris**  
(Cardiff Council)

---

**Rhiannon Phillips**  
(Gwent Archives)

---

**Carys Edwards and Reg Thorpe**  
(RSPB Cymru)

#### Partner officers:

---

**Gwyn Smith**  
(Sustrans)

---

**Sinead Lynch**  
(Bumblee Conservation Trust)

---

**Clare Dinham**  
(Buglife Cymru)

---

**Victoria Rogers**  
(Cardiff Story Museum)

---

**Rhiannon Gamble**  
(National Trust)

In addition a number of individuals have provided support and advice which has been invaluable, in particular:

---

**Richard Turner**  
Historic Landscape Consultant for the partnership during the Development Phase

---

**Gill Mackley**  
Landscape Architect

---

**Carys Howell**  
RSPB Advisory Committee for Wales

### Gaps and Limitations

---

The sheer scale of the Living Levels Scheme area and amount and diversity of the heritage within it means that it is impossible to address all of the issues through this scheme. However through the consultation work and strategic planning that has been carried out, the partners feel that the key priorities have been identified and that the projects thus developed reflect these. A significant amount of consultation has been carried out as part of the Development Phase and a good picture of the needs and values of local communities has evolved.

The Living Levels partners will continue to engage and gather data on the different values people place on heritage as the scheme builds and further priorities are likely to emerge during the Delivery Phase.

**Some key areas which do not fall within the scheme but which have been picked up by strategic documents commissioned during the Development Phase are detailed below:**

- The projects proposed in this LCAP will help demonstrate sustainable farming on a variety of farm types in the Levels, with the intention of helping to shape future policy and associated support mechanisms. However, an additional source of funding is being sought from Welsh Government's Sustainable Management Scheme in a bid lead by RSPB Cymru, alongside GWT and NRW, to undertake additional economic assessments of Gwent Levels farms and make recommendations for future action/management. These partners feel that a more in-depth policy study on the future of current land use policy in light of Brexit is needed to ensure that future policy is able to support resilient farm businesses that manage nature and natural resources sustainably. This additional work will cover specific studies on the potential impacts of
- under-drainage on the specific landscape and habitats of the Gwent Levels, an assessment of grassland productivity, forage quality and conversion efficiency and a study on the potential for renewable energy production.
- The Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy (RGIS) adopted by the partners during the Development Phase is designed to provide an over-arching framework to maximise the delivery of ecosystems services and green infrastructure assets in the Gwent Levels. It is a long-term strategic document intended to guide future work in a number of areas including access and recreation, climate change mitigation/adaptation, landscape resilience, and sustainable economic development. As such it provides an ambitious long-term vision and sets priorities to maximise the GI potential of future investments in the distinct landscape character areas. It is not feasible for the LLLP to pick up on all the recommendations in the strategy. Rather the LLLP is intended to tackle the most

urgent issues in light of shared HLF outcomes, organisational and community priorities. In particular, recommendations for some of the detailed agricultural improvement measures have been deemed better suited to other schemes, including the Sustainable Management Scheme proposal described above. The GI priorities and indicators will be reviewed during the mid-term and final evaluations to track progress against the Strategy and identify funding opportunities and local plans which can build on the work started during the LLLP.

- Condition audits carried out by Local Authority staff for two of the proposed routes in the Destination Management Plan highlighted the need for some major resurfacing and improvement works on the PROW network. These were not considered to be a priority for the HLF investment, however, it is intended for these to be addressed outside the Scheme using a combination of existing and new funding to be sourced by Local Authority partners.

- It has not been possible within the timescale of the Development Phase to contribute to the development of a final vision for the future of the 120 acre Lamby Way tip site which has now been closed. The final decisions on the future of the site and formal planning are ongoing, led by Cardiff Council. The site has an aftercare budget of £19m and the Living Levels team intends to continue to work closely with Cardiff Council to ensure that opportunities for recreation, ecological enhancement and access to the Gwent Levels for the local residents are maximised. A flexible budget of £30k has been included for access and interpretation linking the future site to the Living Levels branded Destination Management approach.

- The public body partners in the LLLP are required to publish well-being objectives and a well-being statement as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. By May 2018 the relevant Public Service Boards (Cardiff, Monmouthshire and Newport) will build on these

and the well-being assessments to prepare and publish a local well-being plan setting out their local objectives and the actions they will take to meet them. As these have only recently been adopted, the LLLP partners aim to carry out a 'health and well-being screening' of all of its projects prior to commencing the Delivery Phase to ensure the full potential of every project to deliver against the new well-being objectives is reached. Some opportunities have been highlighted near to the end of the Development Phase including the development of a pilot social prescribing scheme in to LLLP volunteer projects working with the support of Public Health Wales and its Cardiff East GP cluster. It is intended to pilot this in year one – if successful, this social prescribing pilot could be rolled out to Newport and Monmouthshire in later years.



- During the Development Phase, HLF funding has paid for architects plans for a future expansion of the Derek Upton Centre at Magor Marsh Nature Reserve (appended to the LCAP). The plans have been completed and once formally agreed by the GWT management team will be ready for formal planning permission. Due to the scale of funding required to develop a single gateway, GWT intends to pursue this outside the scope of the Living Levels project. GWT is currently looking for external funding for the extension in 2018 but currently car parking solutions need to be sought and the extension is dependent on solving this. In future years, the expansion of the centre will add value to the concept of visitor gateways developed by Living Levels Programme.

It is recognised that the LCAP is a long document. However, it is anticipated that the section which contains comprehensive details of each of the individual projects, will be used as a 'stand alone' publication by the Delivery Phase staff and the Partnership.

### State Aid clearance

Defra has been consulted to make sure that all the projects within the Scheme do not contravene State Aid regulations. HLF have managed the consultation process with Defra. At the time of submission the Partnership had not received a definitive answer from Defra regarding State Aid clearance, however, HLF had been informed by Defra that no issues with any of the proposals which they had received were raised. In light of this, the partners are not anticipating any issues with State Aid.

### Who's Who – The Partners

---

**Partners in the Living Levels partnership include:**

- RSPB Cymru  
(Lead organisation)
- Buglife Cymru
- Bumblebee Conservation Trust  
(BBCT)
- Cardiff Council (CC)
- Cardiff Story Museum
- Gwent Archives (GA)
- Gwent Wildlife Trust (GWT)
- Monmouthshire County Council  
(MCC)
- National Trust (NT)
- Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
- Newport City Council (NCC)
- Sustrans


Image Credit:  
Joanne Burgess











**"We have a Museum of Welsh Life (formerly the Welsh Folk Museum) being redeveloped at St Fagans but the history and many stories which abound on the Levels could very much be described as a Museum in themselves which the Living Levels project can hopefully also promote to wide audiences of visitors and residents."**

---

Anna Harris  
(4th generation) Goldcliff







### What matters about this landscape? Study Area: Justification of Boundary

---

In accordance with the HLF's Landscape Partnerships Application Guidance (2013), the Living Levels Landscape Partnership Area has been defined to focus on those areas associated with the Gwent Levels that have 'a distinctive landscape character, recognised and valued by local people' in terms of 'the built and natural heritage, management practices and the range of cultural heritage associated with the area'. The HLF's Guidance also advises that the scheme boundary area should normally not exceed 200km<sup>2</sup>, unless there is clear justification for doing so.

As shown in Figure 2, the Living Levels Landscape Partnership Area, which covers 225km<sup>2</sup>, generally reflects the Gwent Levels National Landscape Character Area boundary (c.195km<sup>2</sup>) - refined where appropriate. It falls within three different local authority areas: Monmouthshire County Council; Newport City Council; and Cardiff Council.

The boundary of the LLLP area has been defined with reference to the topography, geology and soils of the Gwent Levels, which in turn has influenced the distinctive historic patterns of settlement, field enclosure and drainage systems associated with successive periods of agricultural land use. The boundary also includes the inter-tidal foreshore exposed at low tide. The current foreshore was once land before sea level rises, and it forms part of the same continuum with the reclaimed Levels.

The historic Gwent Levels (also known as the Monmouthshire Moors) related to a once more extensive tract of drained agricultural land under the jurisdiction of the Commissioners of Sewers for Monmouthshire from the early 17th Century. This was effectively land below 8m AOD, which is approximately the interface between the 'back-fen' edge, where the alluvial Levels are generally at their lowest, and the solid geology and elevated rolling landscapes to the north. The Cardiff Moors lay outside the jurisdiction of the Monmouthshire Commissioners of Sewers but are contiguous with their western boundary. Three large-scale maps and associated apportionments of these moors dating from 1824 have been copied and made available to the LLLP. Glamorgan Archives have later maps that show the successive industrialisation of these moors by the construction of docks, railways and steelworks, a process which can be continued on the Landmark OS maps. The study of the Cardiff Moors and its loss to development provides an exciting and engaging research proposal for the residents of Cardiff. The western boundary of the study area has



## Part One – The Scheme Plan / What matters about this landscape?

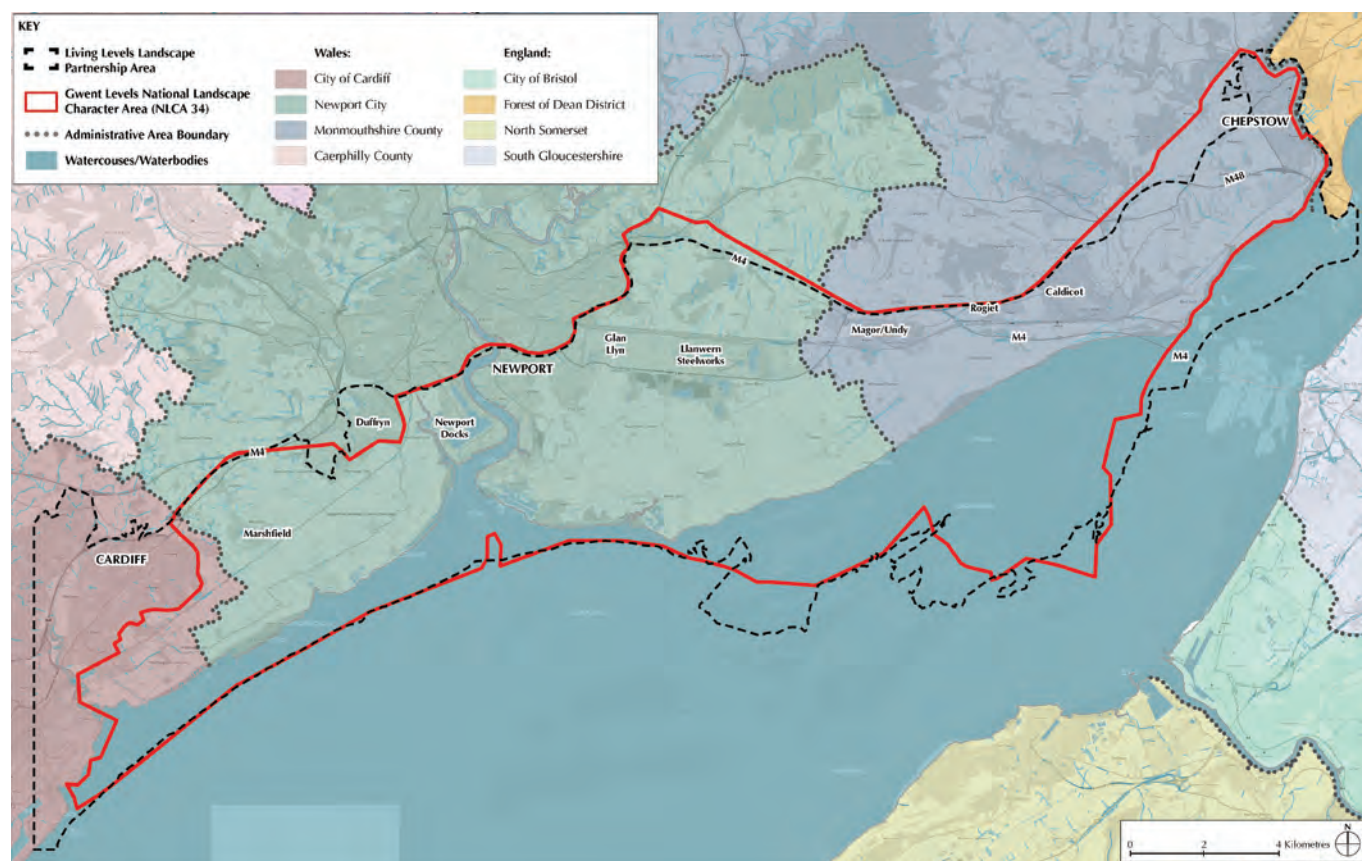


Figure 2 – LLLP Area Boundary

been expanded to include the historic Cardiff Moors with the aim of engaging and involving these residents, many of whom are from deprived communities.

The Gwent Levels comprise three discrete areas of reclaimed estuarine alluvium that collectively form a coastal plain up to 6km wide (see Figure 3).

Over the centuries, parts of the historic Gwent Levels around Newport have been lost to industrial development associated with the port and steelworks and development of infrastructure routes (rail and M4). In addition, there has been considerable encroachment of urban residential

development onto the Levels as Cardiff has expanded eastwards, at the Cardiff-Newport boundary and within Newport at Coedkernew and Llanwern. Around the edges of Chepstow and the Severnside settlements in Monmouthshire there has also been encroachment albeit to a lesser degree.

The currently undeveloped parts of the Gwent Levels comprise an extensive flat, low-lying area of largely agricultural land located on the north-side of the Severn Estuary in south-east Wales. The Levels extend from Cardiff and the River Rhymney in the west to Chepstow on the River Wye in Monmouthshire to the east.

Settlement within the undeveloped parts of the Gwent Levels is limited to small villages, isolated farmsteads and cottages dispersed throughout the landscape. The villages are concentrated on the higher land near the coast surrounded by arable fields and meadows, or in the 'back-fen' edge transition between the lower-lying Levels and the elevated rolling landscapes to the north.

## Part One – The Scheme Plan / What matters about this landscape?

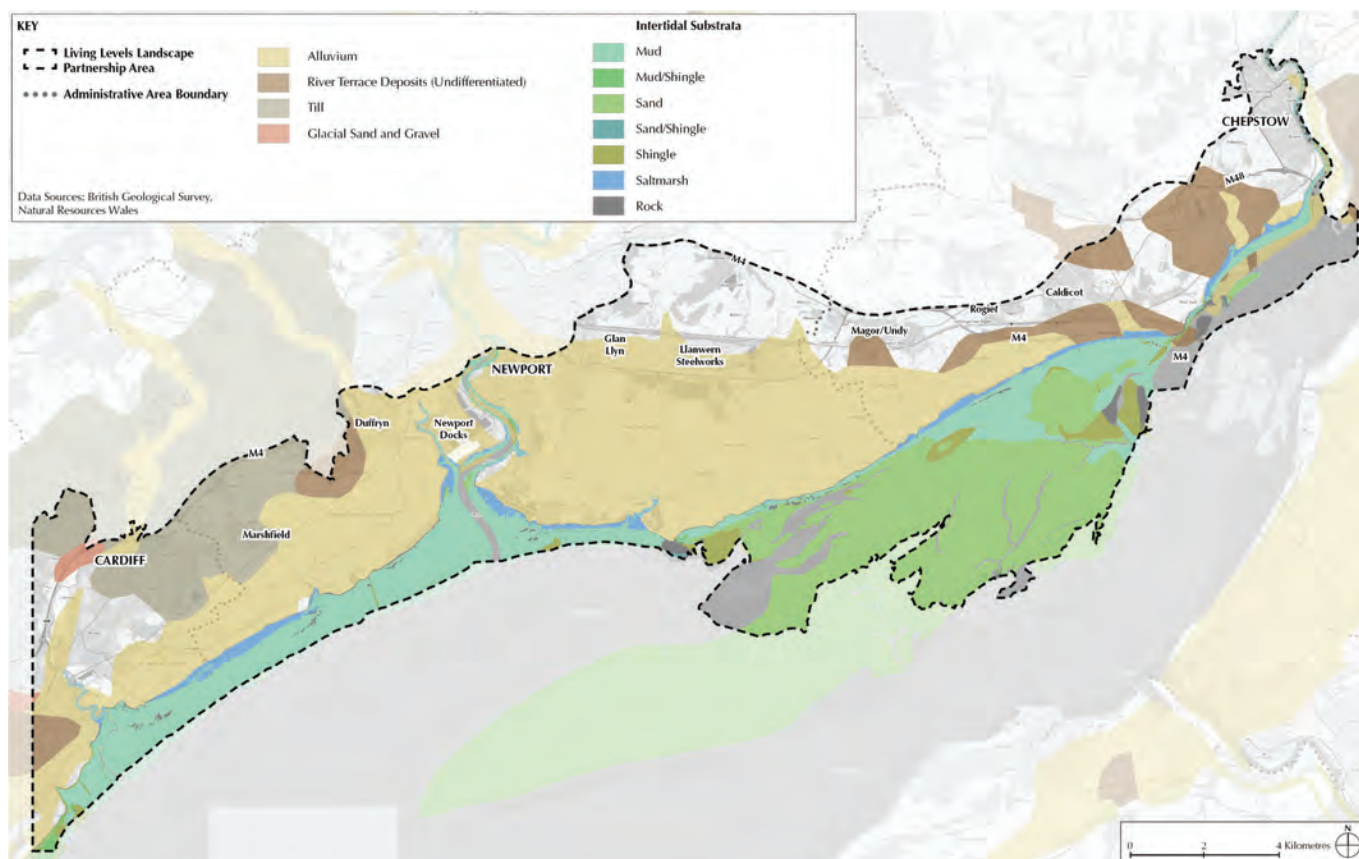


Figure 3 –  
Surface Geology

The LLLP area includes the town of Chepstow and the Severnside settlements in Monmouthshire (Caldicot, Rogiet and Magor/Undy); the southern and eastern edge of the City of Newport (including the neighbourhood of Duffryn, the Docks, Llanwern Steelworks and the adjacent Glan Llyn major residential and business site); and the eastern edge of the City of Cardiff (including Marshfield).

The historic relationship between the Gwent Levels and these settlements has been significantly disrupted by modern railways, motorways and urbanisation.

Despite the proximity of these major conurbations and large towns, today there are increasingly limited visual connections and cultural associations between these communities and the Levels, which help create a perception of the Gwent Levels as a somewhat 'hidden' landscape. Nonetheless, existing and new communities on the Gwent Levels remain connected to the area's landscape history through their shared vulnerability to flooding and inundation, especially if drainage systems are not maintained.

The story of the Gwent Levels is also inextricably linked to the vast tidal range of the Severn Estuary. The saltmarsh beyond the sea wall has traditionally provided summer grazing, and along with the intertidal mudflats and open water habitats are designated as being of International, European and National nature conservation importance for the wildlife they support. The LLLP area therefore includes the inter-tidal zone of saltmarshes, mudflats and sands that are revealed at low tide along the northern coastline of the Severn Estuary within Wales.



# **My view of the Gwent Levels!**



**@ourlivinglevels**



### Summary of Engagement to produce this plan Community engagement July 2016 – August 2017

---

#### Our plan of action - logical and methodical

The ideas that are now embodied in the LLLP were initially developed in response to the challenges and opportunities raised by local community groups, organisations and individuals during a community workshop in March 2014.

Since late July 2016 the LLLP team have been actively undertaking an extensive logical and methodical programme of Community Engagement across the Gwent Levels and wider catchment area, speaking with a wide variety of people including residents, visitors, AMs, historians, cyclists, walkers, birders, wildlife cameramen, newcomers and life-long 'Levellers', collating their views, opinions and ideas:

*"What we have on the Levels is unique and its stories need to be spread as widely as possible. Those of us living on the Levels whose families, like my own, go back generations, learnt of its history from our parents. Incomers and visitors need to be educated in its history which many know little of."*

—Anna Harris (4th generation) Goldcliff

**In total, the team have taken advantage of 120 community engagement opportunities resulting in 1029 individuals engaged face to face (plus 800 girl guides).**

Distinct themes around community priorities for the Landscape are emerging from the consultation responses generated through this work. For example, it is evident that a decreasing and ageing population identify with the Gwent Levels unique landscape qualities and history and a large number of especially younger audiences may be unaware of it altogether.

#### Engagement Plan

The engagement activities have specifically targeted those communities established on the landscape and communities on its edge, working to cover as much of the 30 mile linear landscape as possible from Rumney to Chepstow. The approach has taken advantage of engagement opportunities over evenings, weekends and online at a variety of community venues and locations including: village halls, family centres, pop-up shops, community litter picks, festivals, well-being events, cinema foyers, visitor centres, churches, community centres, pubs, radio stations, castles, supermarkets, leisure centres, housing association centres and the Seaman's Mission.

Creative and innovative approaches have been key to engage with as many communities as possible over such a large landscape and in a restricted time period. It is a challenge to engage effectively - especially with potentially dry consultation exercises - so the team have aimed to offer something provocative and fun but ultimately informative which would give the Partnership a flavour of the views, issues and perceptions that local people felt were important. These engagements have also led to opportunities for volunteer sourcing for the Delivery Phase and have

- The following sections explore what we have achieved relating to these objectives.





### Less about presentation, more about conversation - our engagement methodology

Consultation should promote interest, create a talking point and be a stimulating catalyst for shared experience. By using creative techniques to encourage people to actively express an opinion, the Community Engagement Officer has been able to provide a mixture of focused data collection exercises and also general 'gut reaction' perception exercises from the wider public.

#### i. Engaging our engagers - tapping into existing networks

Recognising the importance of engaging first with those groups and organisations with established networks and communication channels in the target communities, the team has presented to and engaged with a wide range of organisations including: six Communities First cluster teams - particularly important to Newport and Cardiff catchments; Public Health Wales; Housing Association tenant groups which have a presence across the Levels; South East Wales Regional Equality Council teams targeting hard to reach groups including

traveller, refugee and deprived communities where culture, language and circumstance can be a barrier; Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations, Neighbourhood Partnerships; and Community Connector teams. All of these have provided very useful opportunities for engagement, contacts and key insights which have been recorded, written up for reference and used to shape project proposals. These organisations are also seeking opportunities for their communities and volunteers and have asked to remain informed about local project activities which could involve these groups. These teams also have the ability to pass on information to friends and families, so the need to raise awareness of the project and the Levels landscape with them as individuals is just as important.

In addition, 40 different interest groups, organisations, associations and key individuals have been engaged including those with focuses on walking, wildlife, local fundraising, lake net fishing, wildfowling, cadets, tenants and residents groups, an entrepreneurial foundation, and a gardening group with members of refugee and

asylum seeker backgrounds. Finally, 14 heritage groups, institutions and projects from Shirenewton to Cardiff, including the Romani Cultural and Arts Company have been consulted.

#### ii. Keeping Council – The 21 Community and Town Councils

Often the first point of contact in the engagement chain within a community, Community and Town Councils are key to the dissemination of information across the Gwent Levels landscape. The team have so far engaged with 16 of these councils across the Levels from Marshfield to Usk and will meet with the others over the coming weeks and months. They have all been very different in their venues, approach and attendance but generally share the consensus view that raising the profile of the Gwent Levels will have a positive outcome for their communities.

There was a noticeable and interesting difference in terms of the level of knowledge and engagement with the Levels for those Councils located geographically on or very close to the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels and those lying adjacent to the Levels and further field. The



communities on the Levels in general are very knowledgeable and readily engage with the core purpose and objectives of the LLLP. Those further afield are generally far less well informed about the Levels and the Levels-based opportunities for communities that they represent. For example, although the Chair was previously unaware of the Gwent Levels, Caerwent were keen to discover historical links through the Roman connection as well as opportunities for schools engagement with traditional heritage and outdoor learning. Communities affected by the proposed M4 raised it as a key concern for their communities in terms of community cohesion as well as environmental and peace and tranquillity impacts. In discussion of the options, they were keen to see the LLLP do as much as possible to rally communities who would be impacted by the proposed M4 relief road.

### **iii. 'Loving and Unlocking' our Levels - engaging our residents on their doorstep**

Consulting with predominately rural communities has meant going out and 'pitching-up' at key community hubs such as Village Halls, Chapels and even a Pop-Up shop (in the lead-up to Christmas) to give residents the opportunity to share their views on their doorsteps. The attendees were shown a map of the landscape illustrating that the Levels are greater than 'your backyard' (a common perception) along with some facts and heritage including a 'Levels Lingo' game enabling local people to discover the unique local vernacular. In addition, a member of one of the consultant team for the Destination Management Plan attended some events to record stories that could feed into the overarching interpretative themes for the Interpretation Plan.

Leaving local people with a greater understanding than when they arrived and a keen willingness to find out more is the measure of successful engagement. In total, the team organised 8 'Loving your

Levels' pop-ins in the villages of Bishton, Peterstone, Magor, Caerwent, Goldcliff, Llanwern and Caldicot town plus one of our most deprived communities in Duffryn, with 217 people attending and engaging with Levels heritage activities and 82 leaving their details to find out more.

Local people were also given an opportunity to discover more about their Levels heritage and the LLLP at the 'Unlocking the Gwent Levels' pilot History Day attended by 211 people at Newport Wetlands in Nash, with visitors coming from as far as Usk, Magor and Chepstow despite very poor weather conditions. Live demonstrations with a flint knapper were very popular – particularly with families and young children. Displays of historical maps and village life attracted older audiences whose memories were captured by the maps and images which revealed the landscape "as they remembered it" before significant changes.





#### **iv. Farmers and landowners – engaging the custodians of the landscape**

A key target group for engagement has been the farming and landowner community. The team have interviewed representatives from Menter a Busnes (delivery agent of Farming Connect) and Farmers Union of Wales who have provided advice on some of the key issues for agriculture in the Gwent Levels and have offered to facilitate communications about LLLP projects to their members through their face to face and online networks during Delivery. The team was also offered a pitch at the Monmouthshire Livestock Centre in Bryngwyn, Raglan, currently the premier source of vending and buying livestock serving the Gwent Levels area. Here a team spent two days engaging directly about the work of the LLLP and were able to talk to farmers working on land from Rumney Great Wharf to Rogiet Moor about the challenges of farming on this unique landscape.

There was a general negative attitude expressed about the Welsh Government Glastir scheme which caused some to be wary about the

LLLp fearing it might involve more 'red tape and bureaucracy' with little reward for the farmers. As a result of this engagement it is clear that any restoration programmes would need to establish trust with the farming sector based on an ability to demonstrate good working knowledge of the landscape and the specific challenges posed by its features.

As well as being granted further use when needed of the Farmers Union of Wales stand, the exercise also proved useful for establishing further key engagement contacts who have a permanent presence at the market and who have kindly agreed to promote LLLP projects along with Farming Connect.

Individual landowners and farmers have been approached face to face by Gwent Wildlife Trust and NRW to sign a letter of commitment for the proposed restoration works. These letters are included in appendix 7 and details are included within the LLNH-1 project plan.

#### **v. Pop-Ups and Piggy-Backs - bringing the Gwent Levels to our wider community**

The team has taken advantage of pop-up opportunities to engage with the wider community by thinking carefully about the context of an event and the audience to achieve more meaningful engagement. Examples include a Family Cycling Festival, held jointly with Sustrans and the National Trust, a Family Health and Well-being Event, Gwent Glamorgan Annual Wildlife Recorder's Forum, Magor Marsh Summer Fun Day, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month 2017, a community litter pick in Pill, coffee mornings, a Tenant Information Sharing event and stands at high footfall locations including Tesco Extra and Cineworld at Spyty Park. These last two have a wide catchment area reaching all the way to Chepstow. Engagement has varied from specific and focused data collection for specific target groups such as at the Cycling Festival to more general project engagement with family groups at locations such as Tesco. The result being 479 people engaged over 16 pop-up opportunities. Furthermore, through negotiating



with Tesco, possible avenues for match-funding for specific LLLP projects have been flagged through the 'Bags of Help' scheme, as well as volunteer opportunities from their corporate schemes. Tesco has also offered a space for a temporary LLLP display during the Delivery period - a high footfall venue for engagement which is used by many LLLP target audiences from both urban and rural wards of Newport.

### **vi. Battling Bees, Beastly Bones and Postcards of Pylons - engaging our next generation 'Levellers'**

Being creative in the approach to community engagement has been no more important as when engaging with youngsters. During various engagement events activities for children included 'Postcards from the Levels'. This had two tangible outcomes in that the participant had to draw an image reflecting the Levels landscape and the recipient of the postcard immediately had a talking point - "What is this Gwent Levels?" Hooks such as a cow skull to compare with the size of an Auroch, a replica wolf skull and

even a 'talking skull' are popular engagement tools which are now part of a handling collection and display which the team is building to help engage youngsters and their parents at future Pop-Ups.

Engaging around 800 guides, brownies and rainbows from across Gwent as part of a Girl Guides Experience at Newport Wetlands, was a little more challenging but dressing them up as the rare Shril Carder bees and having them navigate obstacles helped simulate the daily 'battle for survival' faced by the bees found in the Gwent Levels landscape. This led to 'pledges' from the guides to help the bees and an improved understanding of its wider landscape context. This model has since been successfully adapted to other events such as Magor Marsh Summer Fun Day and 'Go Wild!' - all helping to raise awareness and support for the unique Gwent Levels wildlife. These positive experiences can be repeated during Delivery to engage more youth audiences.

A key demographic targeted was the 16 - 24 group – a large age group present in the wider catchment and traditionally a harder to reach group. The team have had recent positive discussions with Coleg Gwent, the leading academic body for this age group in the Gwent area, to discuss how the LLLP can formally involve their students with a range of projects including a photography project working with their media and photography students (see LLDM-4). In the longer term, the Coleg have expressed an interest in becoming involved formally with the partnership and could provide a way to engage with this age group in a meaningful way across a variety of the projects. Their letter of support is appended.

In addition to formal education bodies, the team have also had positive discussions with Monmouthshire Youth Enterprise who work with Year 6 students via a work-based learning programme and placements. Their objective is to prevent a slide into the NEETS bracket by encouraging them to 'engage with life' through volunteer opportunities to broaden their





sometimes narrow interests. 'Hot-spots' for youngsters to hang-out on the Levels include Black Rock for those with cars and just after the Severn Tunnel and onwards for younger kids to congregate and camp-out. Their team is interested in creating joint youth-focused events which give young people challenges.

### **vii. Surveys, Pop-up feedback stations, snap-shot questionnaires and community exhibitions**

Face to face community engagement can be labour intensive over such a large landscape area. The team therefore has taken advantage of engaging remotely through a variety of avenues.

A simple online survey monkey was pushed out through the Facebook and Twitter pages and also by partners using their networks. It was also included on the community crowd sourcing forum Monmouthshire Made Open - a platform very well used by communities in Monmouthshire to share ideas on policy initiatives.

The Survey was kept quite brief (10 questions) and contained a mix of open-ended and ranking style questions to assess awareness and knowledge of the Levels, attitudes towards the area, barriers to visiting the area, top destinations currently and preferred ways and methods to engage with heritage. There were 54 returns and the results have been used to inform this LCAP and projects – data is provided in appendix 8.

### **Newport Involve Survey 2017**

In early 2017, the Living Levels team submitted 10 questions to the Involve Newport Citizens' Panel Questionnaire which is open to use by all members of One Newport Public Services Board (PSB), currently made up of approximately 400-700 members. There were a total of 259 surveys completed, a response rate of 40.2%. The responses have fed into the perceptions data summarised in this LCAP and has been used to inform project choices reflecting community priorities (see later section).

In addition the team undertook 'snap-shot' survey exercises on the Wales Coast Path (32 people surveyed) at the Lighthouse Inn car park and, during a 'Battle of the Bees' session with 14 family groups asking specifically about their preferences for family activities. The Lighthouse Inn survey asked 'What do the Gwent Levels mean to you?' with visitors mostly reporting that the Levels represented wildlife, nature and good walking. Litter and anti-social behaviour were the main barriers to visiting and detractors, while restricted access and transport, particularly disabled access to the Sea Wall, were considered to be key difficulties with accessing the Levels. 'Events and Open Days' was a popular method for families to engage with heritage. Family groups indicated they would be willing to travel '15 miles plus' to an event but this was also a reflection of them being mostly private car owners. If events were not free, then families were willing to pay £1 - £2 per head and felt that 2 - 3 hours was long enough for a family group to spend at an event, especially with young children.



These were then developed into a visual design to reflect these co-developed aspirations for the programme and will continue to be developed over the coming weeks.



**ix. Lefelau Da/Lefelau Drwg - perceptions, views, strengths and weaknesses of the Gwent Levels**

One simple but effective pen and flip-chart exercise has been used regularly at the beginning or end of engagement activities with all ages. Called 'Lefelau Da/Lefelau Drwg - Good Levels/Bad Levels', this is an instant, 'gut-reaction' engagement tool which often leads to a more open discussion about perceptions of the Gwent Levels landscape, suggested improvements and even stories and ideas. It has served as a useful

tool to gauge opinions on strong themes such as Nature, Heritage, Landscape and Access under 'Good' and consistent messages about fly-tipping, lack of safe alternative routes/transport and access under 'Bad', from across the Gwent Levels.

Below is a summary of the key themes which have been established using this exercise –this format has enabled the collection of a rich data source based on gut reaction views which are totally unprompted or

led by the activity leader. While time consuming to collect and analyse, this allows a very 'honest' and unbiased set of views from a wide range of users on the key perceptions – good and bad – of the levels currently

Below are two word clouds formed from a summary of the comments which have been collected. A summary of all comments received along with a table of those engaged is appended to the LCAP.





### Stakeholder Engagement

---

#### Kick-off stakeholder workshop June 21st 2016

In addition to the extensive programme of community engagement, a series of stakeholder workshops attended by Community Councillors, Visit Wales, ENGOs, Local Authorities, Community and Interest Groups, Communities First and others has also helped feed in to the development of the programmes and core studies commissioned to underpin this LCAP (Landscape Character Assessment, Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy, and Visitor Destination Management Plan).

Kicking this process off, in June 2016, the Living Levels team hosted an initial workshop bringing together 55 stakeholders to discuss the priorities for the development of the programme.

The event used an 'open-space' methodology which meant there was no fixed agenda and the delegates were free to raise any issue they felt was relevant to any aspect of the project development work. In total 14 issues were raised and discussed which have helped inform approaches to programme governance, volunteering, project development and fundraising.

This event enabled all present to develop their understanding of the proposed programme as well as informing future decisions about the programme and the projects contained within it. Those present were invited to sign up to participate in LLLP working groups who then met informally throughout the development year to advise on the development of scheme projects.

Four other focused workshops on landscape character, green infrastructure, access and signage and business marketing were held over the course of the year. Workshop summaries and attendee lists are appended to the LCAP.