

Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership  
***The Community Profile***

A consultation document outlining  
How far we've come  
The issues that have been identified  
Our vision for the future

Draft - November 2004



communities *first* cymunedau yn gyntaf



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

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## 1. Executive Summary

This document attempts to outline our current position, as Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership and as members of the wider community. Its main aim is to tell the story from the start; how the Partnership formed, what has gone before, and what work we have been engaged in over the past two years. It presents information gathered from the various consultations with the wider community, collating this information with further research from publications such as Census 2001. The information highlights key findings across the themes of Employment, Education and Training, Community Safety, Housing, Health and Well-Being and the Environment.

The complete document attempts to paint a picture, a community profile, of the Upper Dulais Valley, as it currently is in terms of its social, cultural and environmental climate. It is hoped that the picture will be as accurate as it possibly can be; embracing rich subjective opinions, reinforced by statistical research.

The more explicit traits of the valley, as identified throughout our research, include:

- An ageing population base
- High proportion of elderly and retired people
- High level of long-term illness
- A tendency for outward migration of younger, better qualified people.
- Large number of pre-war housing

- Low number of social housing available
- Above average rate of unemployment
- Changing employment demographics
- A perception of the fear of crime
- Low number of formally educated people
- A rejuvenating environment
- Under-developed social facilities and a lack of fundamental amenities locally.

Evidently, these points outline key issues and themes that can be identified throughout our research. Many of the issues are linked, and have causes centred on the issue of self-image; peoples' perception of themselves and their community. The Community Profile details these issues, plus others, to give an account of the valley and how it is perceived. It also attempts to suggest some measures that could address the major issues, tackling them with a partnership approach.

## ***2. Introduction***

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### **2.1. Background**

The Welsh Assembly Government's Communities First Programme is aimed at tackling poverty and disadvantage in the 100 most deprived communities in Wales, as stated in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2000). The Electoral Divisions (wards) of Onllwyn and Seven Sisters sit in this index at 34<sup>th</sup> and 97<sup>th</sup> respectively. They are subsequently known as the Communities First area of the Upper Dulais Valley. During 2001/02, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC) implemented preliminary work around Communities First in the Upper Dulais Valley, in conjunction with local voluntary organisations. This work involved engaging with local residents to raise awareness of the Communities First Programme, forming ward Steering Groups and discussing with people how they would like to see the process developed.

In October 2002 a Partnership was formed from representatives of the ward Steering Groups, covering the sectors of Business, Voluntary, Community and Statutory, with each having equal representation (the community sector could outweigh the others). In addition, the Partnership also includes attendance from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's Communities First Team, Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Services (NPTCVS), Neath Port Talbot Local Health Board (NPTLHB) and New Learning Network (NLN). The Partnership has since adopted the title "Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership" (the Partnership). A breakdown of the Partnership and their contributions is included in section 2.3.

During the formation of the Partnership, several organisations across Neath Port Talbot, including NPTCBC, NPTCVS, NPTLHB and Dulais Valley Partnership (DVP), met to discuss the Grant Recipient Body's role and how, if possible, it could be provided locally. The

Grant Recipient Body is an organisation that receives the Communities First funding on behalf of the local Communities First Partnership. These organisations need to have structures and records that comply in accordance to Welsh Assembly Government Guidelines. After several meetings and discussions, it was agreed by all that the Dulais Valley Partnership would act as Grant Recipient Body for Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership.

Throughout the past two years, the Partnership has passed many developmental milestones including each partner signing up to a Partnership Agreement and protocol, and the endorsement of a service level agreement, or relationship document if you like, between Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership and Dulais Valley Partnership as Grant Recipient Body. The relationship remains the same today.

## 2.2. Community Involvement; consultation methodology

As part of its programme to research community needs and issues involved in the holistic regeneration of the Upper Dulais Valley, Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership designed and implemented a community questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed using a template from another area and asked questions around a range of issues. It gauged opinion on local services and facilities, education and training, housing, health, employment and quality of life indicators such as transport, the environment and community spirit.

It was decided that implementation be carried out by the Partnership and Steering Groups; every one involved would hand deliver a questionnaire to each house on their allotted streets. The method would be to door knock initially, to explain the questionnaire, and if no response the questionnaire be posted through. It was decided that two weeks be ample time to complete the questionnaire and collection duly proceeded. Needless to say, results varied from street to street, volunteer to volunteer. This can be attributed to the diverse demographics of areas within the Valley as well as the volunteers' commitment and effort. Individual response ranged from 10% to 90%, with the overall return closing at 51%. 450 households responded, with a total of 850 people being surveyed. This was felt by all to be an exceptional response and valuable evidence to base conclusions on the opinions of the wider community. The variation in house numbers between our survey and that of the Census (2001) can be attributed to a large housing estate in Seven Sisters being demolished at the time of questionnaire distribution.

From its early conception in the Upper Dulais Valley, its drivers have strove to promote participation within Communities First. All meetings have been advertised locally, from shop windows to official tourist boards. A two-way information and communication conduit has been developed in the shape of our community newsletter and

the free post response option offered. It is through this newsletter that we have been able to publicise and champion the work of Communities First locally, and relay back to the wider community the findings of our community consultation.

In addition to the questionnaire, two public meetings were held in the respective wards. One was held in Banwen Rugby Football Club and the other in Seven Sisters Rugby Football Club. There, some fifty different participants were able to view the information gleaned from the consultation through a presentation and comment on the various details. The consensus of opinion through the sessions was that of support for Communities First and an endorsement of our discoveries.

### **2.3. The Partnership; members and their contributions**

Below are descriptions of the individuals who make up Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership, including the organisation they work for and the sector they represent.

#### *Geraint Lewis, Call of the Wild, Business Sector*

Geraint is the Chair of the Partnership and has been for the duration. Geraint has a background in Business and is currently managing director running a very successful outdoor activities company. His business is located in Seven Sisters and is a key employer in the area. Geraint's acute business acumen and personal drive has been integral in the Partnership's development.

#### *Diane Keenan, Onllwyn YMCA, Voluntary Sector*

Diane is the secretary of Onllwyn YMCA, a position that she has held for many years. A renowned volunteer, she has been a key individual in the successes of Onllwyn Carnival for many years. Always active in the community, her expertise is in providing services to meet the needs of the children in the valley.

#### *Stuart Douglas, Dulais Valley Partnership, Voluntary Sector*

Stuart is the Project Manager of Dulais Valley Partnership. Dulais Valley Partnership has a duality of existence within Communities First, as an equal partner and as Grant Recipient Body. This dichotomy could have proven detrimental to the process, as identities become blurred. Stuart, though, has consistently spoken out for partnership working, highlighting the importance of relationship in partnerships.

#### *Julie Bibby/Lesley Smith, Dove Workshop, Voluntary Sector*

Julie and Lesley are joint coordinators of Dove Workshop and share a seat on the Partnership. Dove Workshop has been providing community education in Banwen for twenty years. Proponents of 'taking the learning to the learner', Dove Workshop, along with

several partners, launched the Community University of the Valleys in 1993. Julie and Lesley are experts in the field of Community Education, always keen to react to community needs and strong believers of organic development.

*Andrew Millard, NPTCVS, Voluntary Sector*

Andrew is Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Services' Communities First Networking Officer. This means that Andrew sits on all of the Communities First Partnerships in Neath Port Talbot. This level of information has paid dividends during the past two years, as Andrew has been able to share best practice and inform the Partnership of work happening across the County.

*Eira Roberts, Community Sector*

Eira is a resident of Onllwyn. A true community activist, Eira's voluntary work is legendary within her village. A champion of Children and Young People, she has helped provide support and facilities for youth as part of her role within Onllwyn YMCA. Just recently, Eira's hard work in the community has been formally recognised as she received the High Sheriff of Neath Port Talbot's Award, an accolade that we are most proud of her achieving.

*Desmond Williams, Community Sector*

Des is a resident of Seven Sisters and the secretary of Bryn Bedd Residents Association. Des has always taken an active part in life in Dulais Valley. He has been involved in many organisations over the years and represented the community in different arenas. His involvement in Seven Sisters ATC has led to the refurbishment of their hall, enabling them to open it for public use.

*David Lewis, Community Sector*

Dai is a resident of Seven Sisters has espoused the achievements of Communities First since the start. He has always believed in local accountability and is diligent in reporting back to the community, the work that Communities First engages with. He has also done an

excellent job promoting the Communities First Trust Fund to all that will listen.

*Cllr. Alun Thomas, Onllwyn, Statutory Sector*

Ali is the Elected Member for the Electoral Division of Onllwyn. With ten years experience as County Councillor for the area, Ali is very popular with his electorate. He has been a key figure in the regeneration of the valley over the past twenty years and has embraced Communities First, giving his utmost support to the process. Ali has recently been elected as Deputy Leader of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

*Com. Cllr. Dafydd Francis, Seven Sisters, Statutory Sector*

Dafydd is an elected Community Councillor for Seven Sisters. He is the newest member of Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership. That is no indicator of his knowledge or commitment, though, for he is a young and enthusiastic community activist. Dafydd is a Comprehensive School Teacher and for quite some time he has been involved in the development of Seven Sisters Rugby Club, currently having the responsibility of being Club Captain. He has worked hard for refurbishment and regeneration of the recreation ground in Seven Sisters, something that he no doubt will succeed in doing.

*Cllr. Peter Lloyd JP, Seven Sisters, Statutory Sector*

Peter is the elected Member for the Electoral Division of Seven Sisters and has represented his community for over twenty years. This is testament to his popularity and in 2003/04 he was honoured by being His Worship, Lord Mayor of Neath Port Talbot. Peter was very proud of this position and did a sterling job, representing, in his words 'not just Seven Sisters but the Dulais Valley'.

*Madeline Edwards, NPTLHB, Statutory Sector*

Maddy is the Communities First Planner Manager Neath Port Talbot's Local Health Board. She, like Andrew Millard, sits on all of

the Communities First Partnerships in Neath Port Talbot, promoting best practice within the field of Health and Well-Being. Maddy has been keen to identify existing Health Provision and the gaps in meeting the community's needs. Her work towards this has been excellent, and she is already interfacing on how services can be improved and promoted better within our communities.

*Com. Cllr. Thomas Marston, Onllwyn, Statutory Sector*

Tom is an elected Community Councillor for Onllwyn. A long-serving member of the Community Council, for many years he has been active in the campaigning for regeneration in the community. A great advocator of the environment, Tom has played an important part in the revitalising of community land that has been victim to opencast mining. He has achieved notable successes in this area; a simple walk around the valley will highlight this.

*Bill Jenkins, NPTCBC Communities First Team*

Bill is a Participation and Liaison Officer for the County Borough Council and acts as an advisor on the Partnership. His predominant role is to support the Local Councillors' involvement in Communities First but his worth extends far beyond this. The abilities and commitment of our Local Councillors allow Bill to research partnership structures, legal guidance and community development and his input during the Partnership's development has been invaluable.

## ***3. Community Profile***

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### **3.1. A Brief History**

The Electoral Divisions of Onllwyn and Seven Sisters are two of three scattered within the Dulais Valley, with Crynant being the third. All three are situated along the A4109, Onllwyn to the North of Seven Sisters and Crynant to the South. Crynant was not allocated Communities First Status, its Welsh IMD rank being 230, and for the purpose of this profile shall not be included. Both Onllwyn and Seven Sisters are typical ribbon developments characteristic of the South Wales valley region and an ex-coalfield area (although there is still a several private mines, opencast sites, and a Washery in operation). Seven Sisters (Electoral Division) is considered to be one village, albeit with Nant-y-Cafan having its own identity amongst residents. Onllwyn (Electoral Division), however, is made up of five villages; Camnant; Dyffryn Cellwen; Banwen; Onllwyn and Pant-y-Ffordd. Of these, there are three identifiable communities - Onllwyn, Pant-y-Ffordd and Banwen. Historically, village identity referred to the different coalmines in the area. In today's society this has its own implications that will be discussed later. It is worth highlighting that the predominant village identity is that of Banwen. Seven Sisters and Onllwyn (Electoral Divisions) exist at the head of the Dulais Valley, 12 miles distant of the town of Neath, in the County Borough of Neath Port Talbot (Pop. 134000). The area is situated near the Brecon Beacons National Park in a rural upland district, which runs along the River Dulais. The river itself runs from the hamlet of Camnant to Aberdulais.

The Upper Dulais Valley exists because of the development of the Coal Industry. Several pits were sunk in the area, around which houses were built and villages grew. The 1950s through the 1970s was a golden age for coal that was mirrored in the existence of Dulais Valley; cinemas, banks, bowling greens, swimming pools and a variety of shops were all commonplace amenities in every village,

amenities that flourished. However, the demise of the coal industry, climaxing at the end of the 1984 Miner's Strike, marked the demise of our valley. With over five hundred job losses in under a year, the late 1980s and early 1990s was a particularly dark time for the people of the valley. A lack of employment meant high levels of poverty and a lack of inward investment. With no money in the area, facilities, amenities and services disintegrated, collapsing with it the social infrastructure. We have always benefited from a strong volunteering culture, something that grew out of the mining community. The closure of these mines marked a new era; a time that was economically painful, soul destroying and a hugely detrimental to our volunteer culture.

Experiencing no infill growth, the valley was perceived to be dead. Paradoxically, however, the area has experienced redevelopment of its social facilities and infrastructure, this redevelopment being the product of the surviving volunteer culture. For during the Miners Strike and the years following, pockets of spirit and hope prevailed; primarily amongst the female community, many seizing the opportunity of a new role and 'image' within the community, a change that meant women having to seek paid employment. 1985 not only witnessed the demise of the Mining Industry but also the birth of Dove Workshop, or Dulais Opportunity for Voluntary Enterprise. *"Dove Workshop was established by women who were active in the Swansea, Neath and Dulais Miners Support Group during the Miners Strike 1984-85. Conscious of the need to support communities that were affected by a declining industry the voluntary women's group decided to establish a strategy to offer accessible education and training to women in the community. Their aims and objectives were agreed; to provide facilities and opportunity to teach women new skills, thus enabling them to seek employment; to provide childcare facilities for mothers of young children; to provide transport to enable women to participate in such activities as were available."* (Dove Workshop; A Brief History, Mair Francis, 1995). As Dove Workshop has grown and society has changed, so has their ability to

encourage and support both men and women to seek their full potential. At present, Dove Workshop is seen by many as the Community Education provider in Dulais Valley, working in partnership with Further and Higher education and training providers. In 1996, as a result of strong partnerships already in existence, Dulais Valley Partnership Ltd was established. A development trust with holistic aims to regenerate our valley, it brought together key partners such as Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Neath College, Swansea University, West Wales TEC, Dove Workshop, West Glamorgan Council for Voluntary Service Community Development Foundation, along with local residents to give the process a genuine sense of community ownership. With its 'Strategy for Regeneration' (1996), the Dulais Valley Partnership currently nurtures development in the areas of tourism and the environment, arts and culture, youth development and transport.

This picture of voluntary action is by no means comprehensive. Historically, coalmining villages tended to be insular and self-sustaining and the 1984 Miners Strike magnified the reciprocity of our communities. It is important, though, to recognise that the organisations discussed above gave voluntary action a formal guise. Not only have they supported, developed and promoted the work of other community groups but they also gave Dulais Valley a legitimate flag to fly nationally.

### **3.2. The Wider Community**

Our research into census data and the findings from our community consultation have helped paint a modern picture of the wider community within our valley. As with Wales and the UK, the average population is growing older. This can be explained as a result of several socio-economic climate changes; better health; smaller families; an absence of local employment leading to the outward migration of young people. We shall examine some of these factors further on.

The resident population of Onllwyn, as measured in the 2001 Census, was 1,214 of which 47% were male and 53% were female. Seven Sisters totalled 2,032 of which 48% were male and 52% were female. The age-group distribution across the population is presented as percentages in the table below:

Table 1: Population by age group, Resident population (percentage)

	<b>Onllwyn</b>	<b>Seven Sisters</b>	<b>Neath Port Talbot</b>	<b>England and Wales</b>
Under 16	19.7	20.2	19.6	20.2
16 - 19	6.4	5.3	4.9	4.9
20 - 29	9.6	10.8	10.5	12.6
30 - 59	41.5	40.6	41.3	41.5
60 - 74	14.8	15.2	14.9	13.3
75 and over	8.0	7.9	8.8	7.6
Average age	40.0	40.3	40.4	38.6

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

Different age categories were used for our community consultation in a bid to gain a more comprehensive picture of opinion in the different age groups. The age structure of those that engaged in our consultation is presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Population by age group, (percentage)

<b>Age Categories</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
0-4	1.3
5-10	13.4
11-15	3.1
16-17	1.7
18-24	8.5
25-44	18.9
45-59	23.2
60-64	5.8
65-74	18.2
75-84	5.8
85+	0.0

Source: 2003, Community Consultation, Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership

It is important to indicate that figures above represent the ages of the family members of the respondents and not necessarily the ages of the respondents. However, the questionnaire encouraged a response from all members of the household by including six spaces for answer entries. Not all household members answered, though, and this statistical variation is evident in the various responses. It is also important to acknowledge that no under 16 was permitted to respond although this omission of such a substantial age group has been met in form of our specific youth consultation (March 2004).

Within the wider community there is minimal ethnic diversity; 98.9% of Onllwyn residents and 99.6% of Seven Sisters residents describing themselves as being white. (Census, 2001)

Christianity is the predominant religious affiliation, (Onllwyn 58.9% and Seven Sisters 65.2%) with 26.4% from Onllwyn and 23.9 stating no religion. (Census, 2001)

### **3.3. Housing**

The housing in a community is consistently recognised as a major factor contributing towards quality of life. Dwellings in the Upper Dulais Valley tend to be pre-war, with 63.6% being built before 1950. The majority of these dwellings are houses (79.8%) as well as a scattering of bungalows (14.2%) and a small number of flats (4.7%). They have basic energy saving features such as double glazing (81.6%), loft insulation (81.6%) and lagged water tanks (57.1%). The choice of fuel in dwellings has a significance to our area; Oil is now the predominant fuel of choice (39.1%) whereas coal, which once powered the whole valley, is now second choice (35.3%). Gas is used by few homes (13.3%). This figure is linked to issues in the community around gas provision; no dwelling past Mary Street in Seven Sisters can access piped gas. A large percentage of dwellings (61.4%) do not have the amenity of a garage (Community Consultation, 2003).

Below is a table showing statistics of the housing tenure in the Upper Dulais Valley, in comparison to county and national figures (Census, 2001).

Table 3: Housing tenure

Number of households (percentages)

	Onllwyn	Seven Sisters	Neath Port Talbot	England and Wales
One person households	29.0	25.8	30.3	30.0
Pensioners living alone	16.6	17.3	16.4	14.4
Other pensioner households	9.3	10.2	10.1	9.4
Contained dependent children	30.1	31.5	30.0	29.5
Lone parent households with dependent children	7.7	8.4	7.9	6.5
Owner occupied	65.0	69.0	71.3	68.9
Rented from Council	17.2	22.9	16.6	13.2
Rented from Housing Association	10.2	1.2	3.7	6.0
Private rented or living rent free	7.6	6.8	8.4	11.9
Without central heating	3.7	2.9	4.0	8.5
Without sole use of bath, shower or toilet	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.5
Have no car or van	29.7	30.4	30.2	26.8
Have 2 or more cars or vans	22.1	24.2	23.2	29.4
Average household size (number)	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.4
Average number of rooms per household	5.3	5.6	5.5	5.3

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

Housing figures from the 1991 Census are unavailable, although it seems likely that the amount of privately owned homes has increased over the past decade. This assumption could be justified by changes in the socio-economic climate, such as mortgage criteria, inward

migration, and Council 'Right-to-buy' schemes. There is a clear deficit in social housing in our area. Affordable housing is repeatedly cited as a major issue in our communities. Rising house prices, inward migration and a general lack of housing are all factors in the problem. What this means locally is that young people are faced with difficulties when trying to remain in the valley. There is no 'transitional housing', where young people can rent for a period before buying or that caters for first-time buyers. Many young people work or study outside of the area and when faced with these difficulties simply move elsewhere. 85% of people questioned in our consultation felt that there is a need for housing of some kind. 30% stated that they had no opinion on what type of development, with 61% expressing the need for two to three bed-roomed flats or bungalows. These figures suggest that there is a need to cater for young, single people and first-time buyers.

### 3.4. Health

The 2001 Census asked people to describe their health, over the preceding 12 months as 'good', 'fairly good' or 'not good' (Census, 2001).

Table4: Personal Health

Resident population (percentage)

	Onllwyn	Seven Sisters	Neath Port Talbot	England and Wales
Good	55.8	57.8	59.7	68.6
Fairly Good	25.4	24.7	24.0	22.2
Not good	18.7	17.5	16.4	9.2

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

The above table highlights the issue of long-term illness in Neath Port Talbot, and the inflated nature of this issue within Upper Dulais Valley. This idea is reinforced by our findings, which says that over 95% of people have needed the doctor in the past year. Over the past decade, increasingly our communities have perceived healthcare as an issue. Fewer doctors, a diminishing out-of-hours service and

the distant nature of mainstream Accident and Emergency assistance have left residents feeling dismayed and unconfident in the National Health Service. These feelings are highlighted in our research. According to our consultation 93.2% of respondents felt that the hospital is very important to their community, yet 69.2% of these people have often or occasionally experienced difficulty getting to the hospital. A table outlining people's opinions on the various health services is displayed below.

Table 5: Respondent opinion of Health Services (percentage)

	Good	Reasonable	Poor	No opinion	Not used service
Doctor	52.8	32.1	10.1	1.3	3.0
District Nurse	16.3	4.5	1.3	7.8	35.7
Health Visitor	9.6	5.8	1.9	7.1	38.3
Home Help	3.6	1.5	1.2	7.7	45.8
Ambulance	14.8	4.7	1.5	6.7	37.1
Maternity care	5.1	3.2	1.2	7.7	43.4
Chiropody	9.1	3.0	1.8	7.1	41.2
Loan of medical equipment	4.5	2.6	1.0	7.4	44.2
Meals on wheels	1.3	1.4	1.0	8.2	47.6
Community Transport	6.8	2.1	1.0	7.4	43.5

Source: 2003 Community Consultation, Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership

The table indicates that the Doctor is the most used service. It is interesting to note the difference in the marked quality between the Doctor and other services used; almost 9% more people felt that the Doctor's Service was poor.

There are currently three GP Surgeries in the valley; they are located in the villages of Dyffryn Cellwen, Seven Sisters and Crynant. The Local Health Board has developed plans to discontinue the village surgeries and to create a purposed-built surgery in Seven Sisters that will be of a scale large enough to cater for the whole

valley. The plans have been authorised and building work is due to commence shortly. There are many obvious positives to the move; an increase in services provided locally, a new practice contract and a tailor-made facility are to name but a few. There is also the prospect of such a centre attracting new Doctors to the area. A local Health Centre will also help address the increased distance to the Hospital since its relocation in Baglan. Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership was presented this information, including other information on the out-of-hours service by a Local Health Board Representative. The Local Health Board has consulted with the wider community on the development plans, through public meetings in several villages. However, the concept has been met with mixed views from our communities, with some opposition aired by local residents.

Overall, there is a negative perception amongst community members of Health Services in the Upper Dulais Valley. One way to change this perception is the increased promotion of all services currently available. Services such as NHS Direct and The Community Pharmacist are exceptionally useful and reliable tools. They are, though, often unknown by many and as a result underused by the community. Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership is currently undertaking an assessment of all current health provision available to people within the communities. This information will then be published in the form of a directory and delivered to every household in the Upper Dulais Valley. The information will be updated regularly using our community newsletter.

### **3.5. Employment; Jobs and Business**

As cited in the brief history, employment within the valley has been a major issue since the demise of the mining industry. The issue has alleviated over the past two decades due to changes in the socio-economic climate; better infrastructure, the development of alternative industries and an ever growing will to survive. 1991

Census figures show that unemployment in Onllwyn stood at 13.3% and in Seven Sisters at 10.4%. Quite a dramatic change is indicated when these figures are compared to 2001 Census data. A picture of current economic activity is painted in the table below.

Table 6: Economic Activity

Resident population 16 to 74 (percentage)

	Onllwyn	Seven Sisters	Neath Port Talbot	England and Wales
Employed	44.1	46.3	50.6	60.6
Unemployed	5.1	5.1	3.9	3.4
Economically active students	0.8	1.2	1.7	2.6
Retired	13.3	15.7	15.6	13.6
Economically inactive students	4.9	3.6	3.6	4.7
Looking after home/family	7.1	7.4	6.8	6.5
Permanently sick or disabled	19.7	15.2	13.6	5.5
Other economically inactive	5.0	5.5	4.2	3.1

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

As you can see, although unemployment has dropped in both Onllwyn and Seven Sisters to 5.1%, it is still significantly higher than County and National averages. Over the past 10 years the number of people employed has also fallen, with current figures indicating that a large percentage of our working age population is now ex-colliers who are either wholly retired or permanently sick.

Evidently, the statistics tell a complex story relating to employment in our area; on the one hand, time has dealt with unemployment caused by the closure of local pits; however, the isolated, disparate nature of our valley coupled with poor transport links are factors which continue to make unemployment a real issue for many in our communities. 32% of people questioned stated that they travelled

between 20 and 60 miles to work (Community Consultation, 2003). The table below illustrates the present distribution of employment.

Table 7: Types of Employment (percentage)

	Number of people employed
Agriculture/Forestry	0.6
Mining/Quarrying	4.8
Manufacturing	16.3
Construction/Building/Repair	11.2
Shop/Café/Restaurant/Bar	8.5
Transport/Communications	3.6
Public Sector	29.9
Tourism/Leisure	3.3
Other	21.8

Source: 2003, Community Consultation, Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership

The figures above show that leisure and tourism employ almost an equal number of people as that of the mining and quarrying industries, a situation unimaginable a decade ago. Discussions around employment and such findings have allowed the Partnership to question what type of jobs should be sought for our area. Statistics call for increased support in the area of environment, leisure and tourism. These feelings have been reflected in some of the local developments led by Dulais Valley Partnership in the recent past; story sculptures, landmarks and community gardens have all been popular attractions recently. The newly opened Sarn Helen Café at Dove Workshop has reinforced these attractions (Sarn Helen is in itself an attraction; an actual Roman Road running across the hills above Dulais Valley and down through the village of Banwen). Discussions in the Partnership have also centred on the creation of community enterprises in a crosscutting bid to address a wide range of issues; increase the capacity of a community facility, such as a community centre, by employing a development manager, and at the same time create a job locally. It must be noted, though, that the Partnership recognises that employment is a large-scale, complex area and that the thoughts cited above are merely results of preliminary discussions around key themes and issues that have

arisen from our research. There are no concrete ideas at present and we are currently engaged in further research. Input from partners will be welcomed.

### 3.6. Community Safety

Perception of crime is an important contributor to how people feel about their community. Often, perceptions of crime have an emphasis on the fear factor; this fear of crime tends to differentiate amongst the community and bear little relevance to reported or actual crime levels. Reported crimes on a ward level are discussed monthly in the Community Councils. The table below illustrates levels of crime across Neath Port Talbot, rate per 1,000 people and its relativity on a National scale.

**Table 8: Levels of Crime**

Notifiable offences recorded by police. April 2000 to March 2001

	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Burglary from a dwelling	Theft of a motor vehicle	Theft from a motor vehicle
Total number of offences recorded, Neath Port Talbot	1,201	44	24	554	1,342	878
Rate per 1000 population, Neath Port Talbot	8.7	0.3	0.2	4.0	9.7	6.4
Rate per 1000 population, England and Wales	11.4	0.7	1.8	7.6	6.4	11.9

Source: Home Office, 2001

As figures show, Neath Port Talbot's rate per 1000 is significantly lower across all types of crime than the rate per 1000 in England and Wales. However, residents of the Upper Dulais Valley have a marked difference of opinion on the need for policing. 66.4% of people feel that the service provided by their community police officer is poor, and 87.9% felt that the overall police coverage is also poor. These opinions underline the assumption that perceptions of crime in the community are often negative. These impressions can be products of the media and general hearsay within the community. Opposing this stance, official crime statistics can be unreliable, as a large percent of crime is often unreported, especially when it concerns incidents of anti-social behaviour and not necessarily conventional criminal activity.

Altogether, our findings have highlighted that crime, and more pertinently the fear of crime, is a complex and contradictory issue. We must also value the majority public opinion that says policing is not of an acceptable level. Further discussion with the community is needed, perhaps with a participative approach that allows the wider community to challenge its perception of itself.

In terms of the wider issues around community safety, our Community Consultation (2003) sought opinion on road safety; 74.5% of respondents felt that street parking was a risk and 69.0% said that they thought there were major 'danger-spots' on roads throughout the valley. Road safety is an issue that is the responsibility of the many users of the road as well as the Local Authority. Discussions within the partnership drew support for traffic calming measures to be coupled with an information campaign to highlight dangers and raise awareness of being responsible road users. However, discussions have been of a preliminary nature and no development has yet taken place around a project of this kind.

### 3.7. Education and Training

It can be argued that education is the key to all success, that information is knowledge and that knowledge is power. Although there shall be no evidence cited to support these assumptions, Community Regeneration lends itself to this school of thought. For without welfare rights information, awareness raising campaigns and an opportunity to learn, many projects would fail. Without education, informal or otherwise, we could, quite possibly, create a dependent society as opposed to an active one.

In terms of formal education, Dulais Valley is the setting for a paradox. 51.5% and 47.9% of the population in Onllwyn and Seven Sisters, respectively, have no qualifications. Only 7.5% and 9.3% of people in Onllwyn and Seven Sisters, respectively, have qualified to degree level or higher (Census, 2001). These statistics can be juxtaposed with the reality of the opportunity for any resident to study for a degree, part-time, in Dove Workshop.

As previously stated, Dove Workshop is situated in the Upper Dulais Valley village of Banwen. We must not take for granted the significance, importance and value of such a service being delivered locally. Consideration must also be given to the barriers that prevent people from taking the opportunity to study locally; financial situation, transport, childcare and confidence issues all feature in reasons why people do not engage with any form of education and training. Let it be noted that Dove Workshop has endeavoured to remove these barriers, perpetually increasing their capacity to deliver. Discussions within the Partnership has questioned how Communities First can now add value to the work of Dove Workshop and New Learning Network, building their capacity locally to meet the broader needs of our communities. The table below presents census figures on students and schoolchildren.

**Table 9: Students and schoolchildren**

Students and schoolchildren aged 16-74

	Onllwyn	Seven Sisters	Neath Port Talbot	England and Wales
Total number of full-time students and schoolchildren 16-74	49	68	4,878	2,648,992
Percentage of total resident population	4.0	3.3	3.6	5.1
Total number aged 16-17	32	48	2,687	1,014,284
Total number aged 18-74	17	20	2,191	1,624,708

Note: Students and schoolchildren were counted at their term-time address.

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

Our Community Consultation (2003) also revealed that 83.3% of people questioned did not attend any evening classes, yet 48.5% of those respondents said they would be interested in attending a range of classes from IT to Keep Fit. Some of these issues are currently being addressed. Since the opening of the Community Hall in Seven Sisters, Dove Workshop has been able to provide a satellite service there, initially offering courses in IT, Tai Chi and improving Maths and English.

The figures above, coupled with the educational developments at Seven Sisters Community Hall, give greater credence to discussions around supporting Dove Workshop and New Learning Network to add value and increase the capacity of their work.

### **3.8. Environment**

Many people would consider our environment as our best tool for regeneration. Twenty years ago this would have been regarded as a contradiction in terms; drastic scars on the environment were physical reminders of the various inconsiderate mining operations. There has been much environmental revival, though, as the result of cooperative working between several partners including Neath Port Talbot Council, Onllwyn Community Council, British Coal and the Forestry Commission. This work has recreated much of the natural beauty of Dulais Valley; Banwen offers a unique vantage point to the

spectacular panoramic view of the Brecon Beacons and the surrounding countryside. It is a view of the Partnership and the wider community that we should capitalise on the resources available with the environment, developing the leisure and tourism industry within the area. This industry is already growing in Upper Dulais Valley, as previously outlined, but it may be a role of the Partnership to help organisations such as Dulais Valley Partnership, Call of the Wild, Dulais Valley Quads, Top Gun Paintball, Walters Arena and Seven Sisters Golf Range, adding value to the work already being implemented.

Our Community Consultation sought to gauge public opinion on the local environment, such as village streets. 77.2% of respondents felt there is a litter problem in their village. 72.6% stated a need for 'dog-mess' bins. These issues are fundamental to the local environment and how people feel about their communities. Litterbins exist in Upper Dulais Valley, so discussions have taken place in the Partnership around new litterbins being just one part of addressing the problem; awareness raising campaigns and informal education techniques to highlight the importance of using bins could play a major part in eradicating litter. 'Dog-mess' bins have already been installed by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and are being promoted locally.

### **3.9. Social Facilities**

Our consultations also attempted to assess public opinion of the social facilities in the area. There are a large number of social facilities in the area. Dove Workshop; Banwen Rugby Club; Onllwyn YMCA; Onllwyn Welfare Hall; Banwen and District Pony Club; Pant-y-Ffordd Hall; Dulais Valley Partnership; St. John's Ambulance Hall; Seven Sisters Community Hall; Dulais Valley Music Centre; Seven Sisters Rugby Club; and Nant-y-Cafan Social Club. These are to name but a few, not forgetting the churches, chapels, and makeshift community centres that exist. The issue it seems, though, is a lack

of appropriate social facilities of a good quality, with open access to all. This is a reflection of the age of many facilities, dating back to the 1950's coal mining communities. When questioned, 45.3% of people felt that good facilities were the highest contributing factor to a thriving community. This was second only to Community Spirit, which 51% of people thought to be the greatest factor (Community Consultation, 2003). The table below displays opinion of social facilities in the Upper Dulais Valley.

Table 10: Social Facilities

(percentage)

	Good	Reasonable	Poor	No opinion
Up to age of 11	3.3	10.9	62.3	16.7
12-16 year olds	2.2	7.3	68.9	15.2
17-25 year olds	1.4	9.0	65.7	15.8
People 26-60	2.5	14.9	56.5	16.9
People over 60	3.2	17.1	51.7	21.2

Source: 2003, Community Consultation, Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership

As you can see, there is an overwhelming opinion that facilities for all ages are generally poor. The situation lends itself to further research on why there is such a negative opinion of facilities, what are the needs of the wider community in terms of facilities, and how present facilities can be developed. A list of desired facilities was gleaned through our consultations. A priority at the time was a floodlit multi-purpose playing area, which the Partnership has already managed to address. Another priority was the development of a health centre, providing a gymnasium and changing facilities. This is a facility that is currently unavailable in the Upper Dulais Valley.

Altogether, the issues around social facilities highlights the need for further research into need, and how Communities First can develop capacity, support and add value to the existing facilities in the area.

The community profile has been an endeavour to cite our current situation; where we've been and where we are in terms of issues relating to the different themes. This section attempts to draw out the twelve major issues and areas of interest that have arisen during our consultations and research. They are not only influenced by statistical data, but also by the subjective opinions of residents, entered into the comments section of our questionnaire. These subjective free-verse views often gauge public opinion in a way data cannot. It's reassuring then, that the comments reinforce our findings and not contradict them. Below is a brief critique of the twelve major issues and areas of interest identified.

### *Self Image*

This refers to the school of thought that says 'if you feel good about your community, you feel good about yourself.' It encompasses all the major issues identified and a major factor in the success of regeneration projects. Dr. Hywel Francis, MP for Aberavon, in his speech entitled 'The Learning Journey: A journey of Hope from Banwen and Margam' said that "...Banwen is a special place". Our programmes, policies and projects should centre round the aim that one day, every citizen of Banwen (as well as the other villages in the Upper Dulais Valley) will think of their community in the same way that Dr. Francis does. This is not to say that no one believes that his or her village is 'a special place'. On the contrary, for Dr. Francis is himself a descendent of Dulais Valley. What we must do though, is give everyone the opportunity to believe that they're living in the same community that Dr. Francis knows exists and espouses.

### *Affordable Housing*

As presented in the Community Profile, there is a clear argument for the need for affordable housing in the area. This not only refers to housing catering for young people and first-time buyers, although

there is an emphasis placed on the need of this group, but for a cross-range of community members. The majority of housing in the Upper Dulais Valley is pre-war. Statistical evidence informs us that most housing is privately owned and anecdotal evidence reports that houses are currently selling at an average of £90,000. There is proven shortage of social housing in the area. Altogether, findings indicate a need for affordable, good quality, flexible housing in the Upper Dulais Valley. This would not only be a factor in retaining residents of the area, particularly young people, but also attract economically active people, contributing to a thriving, growing community. Housing projects also have multi-dimensional outcomes, possibly leading to job creation, a better environment, healthier living conditions and a safer community.

### *Social Facilities*

The issue of social facilities has been discussed within the Community Profile and highlights the importance of Communities First being able to support and develop the social facilities existing within the valley. It also presents findings to suggest the development of additional social facilities such as a healthy living centre. A whole host of statistics and anecdotal evidence supports such a centre and the Partnership believes that its existence would produce crosscutting outcomes, addressing issues around health and well-being, employment, education, the environment and active communities.

### *Police Coverage*

Community safety and the fear of crime are often attributed to a lack of Police coverage. Evidence suggests that this opinion is particularly pertinent to the people of Upper Dulais Valley. Understandably, crime statistics do not warrant a Police presence that might satisfy wants of people of our area. However, public opinion must be valued, and feeling safe features heavily in the opinions of many. To that end, we are researching how we can work with the wider community and South Wales Police to possibly provide

Police community support that will address the need for residents to feel safe.

### *Environment*

This area of interest is highlighted because of its multi-dimensional nature. The environment of Dulais Valley has undergone much restoration in the recent past and is recognised as an asset to be further capitalised on. The surrounding countryside and the Brecon Beacons is an opportunity for everyone to access, arguably, the best environment in the world, and is an important factor in helping people to feel good about their communities. The local environment is also vitally important and to that end must be preserved and improved as part of the holistic regeneration of the area. Our Community Consultation (2003) revealed that 52.1% of people didn't know where local footpaths are situated and that 91.4% of people felt a need for a map of these footpaths to be publicised locally. Through partnership working, Dulais Valley Partnership's Environment Scheme has managed to install several notice boards in the Upper Dulais Valley. The notice boards were made possible because of the Communities First Trust Fund. They have been erected in the more peripheral parts of the valley, complementing the tourist boards located in more centralised points and displaying information on the local footpaths. It is the view of the Partnership that we now build on these successes and identify further projects and actions that will improve, develop and enhance all aspects of the environment.

### *Employment*

Our history, as a victim of the demise of the coal industry and its consequences, dictates a need related to employment. This need is less explicit now than any other time in the past twenty years. The implicit nature, though, makes the issue more complex than ever. Statistical and anecdotal evidence suggests the need for further research into the area of employment. The Partnership recognises

the importance of the issue and value of the outcomes that could be attached to addressing such an intricate need.

### *Mobilizing Community Groups*

This is an area of interest that is a direct result of our Community Consultation (2003). All respondents said that they are involved in at least one organised social activity or club. The most interesting figure came in the shape of members of sporting clubs. 49.6% of people stated that they are a member of a Rugby, Football or Cricket Club. This level of community involvement is valuable, and has potential to be mobilized. The purpose for mobilizing such people will lead to greater participation in the regeneration process, which will ultimately benefit greatly from the involvement of the wider community, as well as benefiting the people getting involved.

### *Transport*

Due to the isolated nature of ribbon communities within the Upper Dulais Valley, transport, and public transport, has always been an issue for many people. Our Community Consultation (2003) identified that 55.2% of respondents thought that the bus service was either important or essential. A majority of people (29.2%) felt that the cost was too high, plus there was a general dissatisfaction of its route, timetable and reliability. It should also be noted that First Cymru operates a bus service that offers travel to Neath and beyond; Dulais Valley Partnership's Community Transport also offers a range of provision including a mini-bus service and a car service that meets the needs of the elderly and disabled. There is no public transport that travels between the Dulais, Neath and Swansea Valleys. It is for these reasons that the Partnership feels that public transport is an issue worthy of further research.

### *Health Provision*

Findings and consultations reveal a duality of thought concerning the health provision in the Upper Dulais Valley. While service providers see a new health centre as positive development and a way of

improving the service, it is not necessarily the same opinion as many community members. This highlights a distinct need to work with the local community to address their concerns and to insure that service providers have the appropriate information to deliver the service to its full potential i.e. transport issues, out-of-hours service, etc. In addition, there is a need to ensure that service users have the appropriate information on what services are actually available to them.

### *Road safety*

This issue features in a majority of smaller, semi-rural communities. Its importance in modern society is exacerbated by the increase in the amount of road traffic these communities experience. However, the issue is a difficult one to address; whether there is really a need for traffic calming measures on a road that has no recorded accidents is normally the question posed to community members. The answer is often "yes, or there'll be more than one recorded accident shortly!" This level of anecdotal evidence and public opinion give the Partnership impetus to research problem solving projects.

### *Gas provision*

This issue does not feature within the Community Profile, save for the breakdown of housing fuel. The decreasing use of coal means increasing costs to purchase it, along with its uneconomical nature. As stated in the house fuel profile earlier, mains piped gas is not available past Mary Street in Seven Sisters. Piped gas being made available past this point to the head of the Dulais Valley would address issues around health, environment and the economy. Further research is currently being undertaken into the possibility of extending gas provision to cater for the whole of the Dulais Valley.

### *Information*

The importance of information across a wide range issues features highly in the opinions of the Partnership. Information on the services available, advocacy, knowledge on life management topics

such as debt and benefits, and information leading to education are all vitally important elements to the success of holistic regeneration. Further impetus was gained through our Community Consultation (2003) when 89% of people questioned felt that the amount of information available about what's going on in the village was only reasonable to poor. The Partnership feels that much more emphasis should be given to the amount of information available to the wider community and, more important maybe, the opportunity they have to access it.

## 5. Conclusions

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Many conclusions can be drawn from the research that we have collected, cross-referenced with Census data and presented in this document. The Community Consultation (2003) has provided a valid perspective of public opinion in the Upper Dulais Valley. Whilst there is a positive picture painted concerning a strong and proactive volunteer culture, there are many deep-rooted issues relating to our post-industrial valley communities. Historically, Dulais Valley has been a relatively prosperous area, with a plethora of amenities and social facilities. These services were strengthened by the reciprocal and self-sustaining nature of coal-mining communities, known for having a strong sense of social responsibility. However, the communities have deteriorated over the past two decades, lacking in-fill growth, employment and an almost total departure of services and facilities.

The survival of the strong volunteer culture has led to a substantial effort to redevelop social infrastructure; the grass-roots growth of such organisations as Dove Workshop and Dulais Valley Partnership has meant an opportunity to address the needs of our communities. However, a prosperous history means high aspirations for some residents. Having experienced the delivery and implementation of a variety of services and facilities locally, many people consider the past to be a 'golden age'. This opinion is not necessarily wrong, but we must consider that times have changed; movements in the socio-economic climate, improvements to the infrastructure mean greater opportunity to access services elsewhere. Notwithstanding these changes, we must also consider the need for fundamental services to be provided locally, services that may have been neglected in our community. These issues of service delivery need to be addressed with a participative approach to consultation, involving the wider community to affect the way service providers work for a mutual gain.

We see Communities First as an opportunity to pull together all strands of community development and community regeneration working within Upper Dulais Valley in a bid for change in response to the needs of the wider community. We are striving to work together to address the more complex needs around employment, education, the environment, and the self-image of our Valley and the development of community spirit. The endeavour for partnership working sits firmly on the top of our agenda. We understand that partnership working is much more than a Partnership; it's about the relationship behind the partnership, it's about the everyday conversation that informs the monthly debate, it's everybody talking to each other.

Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership was two years young this past October. Much work had already been done before our inauguration, including preparation around the Communities First Programme. We value the portfolio of work that we have already completed and the milestones that we have passed, including research into the needs of the wider community, the promotion of the Communities First Trust Fund, and the small project successes that we have achieved. We also understand that our journey has only just begun. This document contains no "quick-fix" actions; we feel that we are producing a strategic document, of which 'action planning' is one part. We have identified the major issues and areas of interest that have developed from our research and consultations. We are researching what actions are needed for the best outcomes. This document is another part of the consultation cycle; researching and identifying what best meets the needs, perpetually 'bench-marking' strategies and actions against the views of the people who live in our communities. We welcome your input.

*Cwmdulais Uchaf Communities First Partnership  
Banwen Community Centre  
Roman Road  
Banwen  
Neath  
SA10 9LW  
01639 701169*