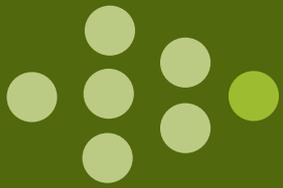


# ***Our Forest: Our Future***

## ***Sustainable Community Plan for the Forest of Dean District 2008 - 2020***







# Our Forest: Our Future



## Introduction

The Local Government Act 2000 places a duty on Local Authorities to prepare sustainable community plans for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. In order to achieve this, a sustainable community plan has to meet four objectives:

It must:

allow local communities (based on geography and interest) to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities

co-ordinate the actions of the council, and of the public, private, voluntary and community organisations that operate locally

focus and shape existing and future activity of those organisations so that they can effectively meet community needs and aspirations

contribute to the achievement of sustainable development both locally and more widely, with local goals and priorities relating, where appropriate, to regional, national and even global aims.

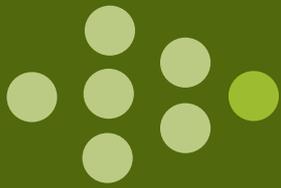
In April 2003 the Forest of Dean Partnership was established to begin the process of developing the first community plan for the Forest of Dean District.

The community plan 'Our Forest's Future' was agreed by the Forest of Dean Partnership in April 2004 which established nine aims taken forward by Partnership Theme Groups which has embedded the principle of partnership working in the district and delivered some significant positive benefits for our local communities. Building on this effective partnership working will lead to improved and more efficiently run services for local people

Since 2004 there have been a number of changes in the partnership arrangements for Gloucestershire, primarily as a result of new Local Area Agreement for the county which commenced in April 2007.

Whilst the existing community plan runs until March 2009 it has been decided that in order to reflect the Local Area Agreement, address sustainable development issues within the district and incorporate other changes locally including the linking of this sustainable community plan into the evolving Local Development Framework and the District Council's own corporate plan, this new community plan **Our Forest: Our Future** will supersede the existing community plan in March 2008.

**Our Forest: Our Future** now establishes the aims which set the framework for joint action over the next 12 years. This document sets out the strategy but will be supplemented by a delivery plan which will be updated every two years which focuses on making these aims a reality by setting out specific actions to be addressed.



# Our Forest: Our Future



The Forest of Dean Partnership Board will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating progress on these actions on a quarterly basis and will also make sure that progress is reported to the wider community.

In March each year we will review our progress and consider how aims and actions may need to be modified in order to remain responsive to the changing needs of the Forest of Dean.

## How has the Sustainable Community Plan been developed?

Good consultation has been critical to the successful development of *Our Forest: Our Future*. Government guidance obliges us to consult but more importantly, the success of this sustainable community plan depends on it presenting an accurate picture of the aspirations of the communities of the Forest of Dean district which then provides a real, achievable direction to the work of the Forest of Dean Partnership. The diagram below shows the consultation that has taken place to inform the development of *Our Forest: Our Future*.

### Activities undertaken to determine what the outcomes of the Sustainable Community Plan should be

Analysis of the Community Plan survey sent to 4,000 randomly selected Forest of Dean residents in Autumn 2006.

Analysis of the Forest of Dean District Council's Best Value User Satisfaction Survey results in Autumn/Winter 2006.

Feedback from all Year 9 students from the secondary schools in the Forest of Dean.

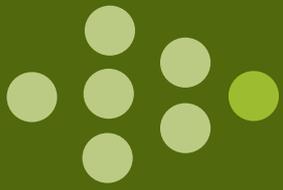
Feedback from the Forest of Dean District Council's Disability Forum.

Feedback from Parish Councils in the Forest of Dean district including an analysis of completed Parish Plans.

Feedback from workshop groups held at the Forest of Dean Partnership Conference in September 2006.

Analysis of statistical data from the MAIDeN Project and Audit Commission profiles.  
Links made to the emerging targets in the Local Area Agreement for Gloucestershire.

Links made to the emerging Local Development Framework documents being drafted by the Forest of Dean District Council.



# Our Forest: Our Future



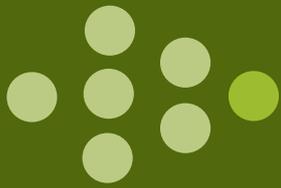
## Consultation on the proposed vision and outcomes

Two week pre-consultation period in March 2007 with District Councillors, Forest of Dean Partnership Board members and Theme Group Chairs.

Ten week consultation period from April – July 2007 which included a number of workshop events for the Forest of Dean Partnership, Youth Forum, local businesses, Parish Councils, older people's and disability fora, voluntary and community sector and other activities to engage the wider community including attending local events and town centre surveys.

Further eight week consultation period from August – October 2007 for final comments on the vision and outcomes and to seek project ideas for the first Delivery Plan document





# Our Forest: Our Future



## Welcome to the Forest of Dean

The Forest of Dean District has a population of 80,900 living in an area covering 526 square kilometers. Over 20,000 acres of this is woodland managed by the Forestry Commission.

This district has a dispersed settlement pattern with four main towns together with a “specialness” important to local people arising from its cultural identity and natural environment.

The four towns include Newent to the north which is an attractive, lively market town Coleford which is located at the southern end of the district and is the administrative centre, Cinderford which sits in the heart of the Forest and has a long industrial history which is currently the focus of a targeted programme of regeneration which is set to bring significant investment into the area and Lydney, situated on the banks of the River Severn is the largest town in the Forest of Dean and designated as the major growth area for the district. It is also the only one of the four towns in the Forest of Dean with access to a main line railway station.



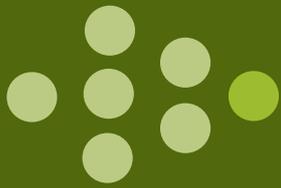
There are many smaller, very rural, scattered, individual settlements outside the town where the majority (approximately 58%) of the Forest of Dean's population live.

Since the last community plan was written back in 2004 the Forest of Dean has seen some significant improvements in the following areas:

Between 2002 and 2007 with the exception of one year employment levels in the Forest of Dean i.e. percentage of working age people in employment, were above or the same as national levels (*ONS Annual Population Survey*)

In 2002, the average weekly gross income in the district was £23.40 **below** the regional level and £49 below the national level. By 2006 this had risen to £46.70 above the regional level and £20.60 **above** the national level. (*ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*)

In December 2005 44.8% of the working population of the Forest of Dean had qualifications of NVQ 3 or higher – higher than the national average and a rise of 8% when compared to figures in February 2001. (*ONS Annual Population Survey*)



# Our Forest: Our Future



Between April 2003 and March 2007 crime levels in the Forest of Dean fell by 19% this includes a 61% reduction in theft from a vehicle and a 46% reduction in domestic burglary (*MAIDeN data – Gloucestershire CC*)

The average house price in the Forest of Dean was eight times the average gross annual wage of local residents. Whilst high in absolute terms, relatively this is lower than both the county and regional ratio of 9.3 (*Forest of Dean Story – Gloucestershire CC*)

The Forest of Dean has consistently performed very well in recycling since 2003. In 2004-5 the rate was over 8 percentage points higher than the county level at 32.7%. (*Forest of Dean Story – Gloucestershire CC*)

Some of these indicators below highlight the issues which remain to be addressed:

Between April 2002 and April 2007 long term unemployment rose by 17.4% and the rate amongst 18-24 year olds rose by 10% (*ONS Claimant Count*)

Local weekly gross incomes for women are falling and are nearly 19% below the national average (*ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*)

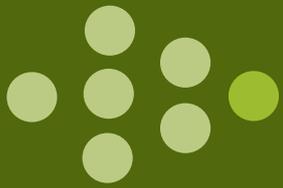
In education terms Key Stage performance has improved or remained the same between 2002-2004. The results for 2004 were the second lowest in the county after Gloucester. (*Forest of Dean Story – Gloucestershire CC*)

The proportion of the Forest of Dean population with no qualifications is higher than the county and national average in each age category (covering 16 – 74 year olds (*Forest of Dean Story – Gloucestershire CC*))

Despite overall reduction in crime, common assault has increased by 23% (*MAIDeN data – Gloucestershire CC*) and over a quarter of all Parish Councils in the Forest of Dean are reporting anti social behaviour as a problem within in their communities (*ASB Survey – FoDDC*)

Out-commuting remains an issue in the district with a net out commuting rate of 10,000 people per day (*Forest of Dean Story – Gloucestershire CC*)

In terms of housing need there are currently 2,150 households on the housing waiting list (*FoDDC Strategic Housing service*)



# *Our Forest: Our Future*



## **What have we achieved to date?**

The Forest of Dean Partnership has supported a number of initiatives over the past two years which have led to some positive benefits for people living in, working in and visiting the Forest of Dean. These include:

Supporting the Festival and Events Conference in March 2006 which focused on supporting events and festivals in the district to establish a year round programme, increase opportunities for young people to participate, increase training and development opportunities and bring about improved partnership working.

Funding the Work Related Learning Village Project run by the Forest Education Business Partnership. In 2006 alone they linked over 700 year 9 students with local businesses to support them in their career development.

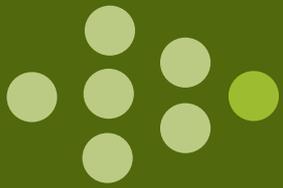
The production of an Adult Education Directory for the Forest of Dean

Supporting the undertaking of a Business Waste Audit by Dean Forest Environment and Resource Network

Funding to support the HEALTHWISE project which offers a user friendly, open door, free and confidential health information service for young people.

The setting up of Forest Online website for the Forest Market Town Partnerships

Holding an affordable housing event bringing together various interested parties to discuss issues facing people in the Forest of Dean



# Our Forest: Our Future



## What do we want to achieve for the Forest of Dean in the future?

Since September 2006 a range of different consultation activities have been undertaken to determine the key priorities of **Our Forest: Our Future**. Through this work the Forest of Dean Partnership has sought the views of approximately 7,000 people of all ages and linked this to a factual analysis of the issues facing the Forest of Dean now and in the future some of which are highlighted above together with other issues including:

- High proportion of jobs in the vulnerable manufacturing sector
- Economic underperformance (as defined by DEFRA Lagging Area status)
- Low levels of visitor spend even by staying visitors
- Significant loss of retail spend to neighbouring areas
- Worsening levels of personal debt

It is clear that the Forest of Dean is a great place to live, work and visit – endorsed by the fact that in June 2007 a Reader's Digest report stated that the Forest of Dean was the best place in England to bring up a family. It is important we build on that, address the issues we are facing over the next 12 years and keep the district's future challenges clearly in our sights.

The first phase of consultation on this sustainable community plan showed clearly that what matters to people in the Forest of Dean are:

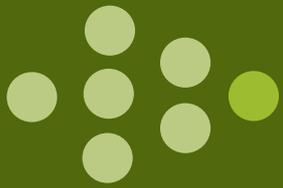
**Our communities** – that these are safe, vibrant, prosperous, clean and pleasant places to live work and visit with access to the facilities and services people need.

**Our environment** – that the beauty of our environment is maintained and enhanced both now and for future generations and that we do 'our bit' to address climate change.

**Our people** – that we build on the strong sense of pride in the Forest identity, harness community spirit, preserve the heritage and culture and give local people a real say in issues which affect them.

The long term vision and outcomes have been shaped around addressing these issues.





# Our Forest: Our Future



## Strategic Context

### Local Development Framework

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is a new more flexible 'folder' of policies and plans currently being developed to replace the existing Local Plan which forms the planning strategy for the Forest of Dean district. The LDF will determine when and how development is delivered and identify land for future development.

The vision and outcomes identified in *Our Forest: Our Future* are being taken forward in the preparation of the LDF to provide a joined up approach to the physical social, economic and environmental aspects of community planning. In effect, the LDF is the spatial expression of this sustainable community plan.

### Gloucestershire Strategic Partnership

*Our Forest: Our Future* has to have regard to Gloucestershire county-wide structures and strategies. These include the Gloucestershire Strategic Partnership (GSP) which is the overarching partnership within the county of which the Forest of Dean Partnership is a member. As members of this body, the Forest of Dean Partnership is able to influence the delivery of activities at a county level.

The Gloucestershire Strategic Partnership has its own sustainable community strategy – Our Place: Our Future which the Forest of Dean Partnership has used as a basis for developing this document for the communities of the Forest of Dean district.

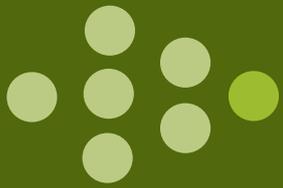
The Local Area Agreement for Gloucestershire is also delivered through the GSP which sets out how local partners will pool a number of government funding streams to deliver improved outcomes for people in Gloucestershire.

The Local Area Agreement is built around 5 'blocks' which include:

- Safer and Stronger Communities
- Economic Development and Enterprise
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Natural and Built Environment
- Children and Young People



*Our Forest: Our Future* picks up on the relevant Local Area Agreement themes for the Forest of Dean and sets them in a Forest of Dean context. Activity led by the Forest of Dean Partnership will contribute to targets in the Local Area Agreement across all five of the identified blocks.



# Our Forest: Our Future



## Our Vision

Our first community plan 'Our Forest's Future' set out a clear vision

'To make the Forest of Dean an even better place to live, work and visit'

**Our Forest: Our Future** builds on that vision and adds some detail to it, clearly setting a direction for the future:

By 2020 we want the Forest of Dean district to be a place with a great quality of life:

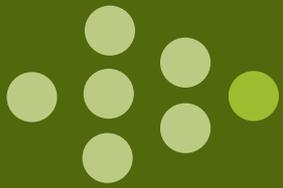
Where the high quality of our environment is valued and enhanced for future generations and the causes and effects of climate change are addressed

Where community life is strengthened and all individuals are confident, safe, feel part of their community and are proud of it

Where the economy is vibrant and strong and people can access the services they need

With a distinctive identity locally and nationally





# Our Forest: Our Future



## What we aim to deliver

### **OUTCOME 1 *A place where the future matters***

We will:

Raise the aspirations and confidence of local people by celebrating the Forest identity and by making sure that local people have a say in all the issues which affect them

Take action year on year to maintain, improve and monitor the quality of the natural and built environment

Support our communities to take positive action to address the causes and impact of climate change at a local level

Work to reduce our waste and manage it in a sustainable way

### **OUTCOME 2 *A place where communities feel safe and are safe***

We will:

Maintain the district's low crime levels

Address the fear of crime in the district

Promote community respect and reduce anti social behaviour

Address drug and alcohol related issues in our community

Promote and improve road safety

### **OUTCOME 3**

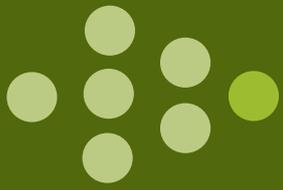
### ***A place that offers local people a quality home appropriate to their needs and lifestyle***

We will:

Provide decent, affordable homes for local people which make the best use of our resources

Promote creative and sustainable approaches to addressing the supply of affordable housing within the district and address the needs of first time buyers

Assist vulnerable owner occupiers to maintain their properties



# *Our Forest: Our Future*



## **OUTCOME 4 *A place with a strong, prosperous and diverse economy***

We will:

Attract and create more and better quality jobs for local people

Work creatively to make land available for high quality, environmentally sensitive economic development

Reduce out commuting, grow our existing businesses and encourage entrepreneurship and retain local expenditure to support local businesses

Raise educational attainment and skills levels and increase links with the community including business and education

Recognise the contribution of the voluntary and community sector to the economy

Realise the economic potential of sustainable tourism based around our high quality, distinctive natural environment

## **OUTCOME 5 *A place where everyone can access the services they need***

We will:

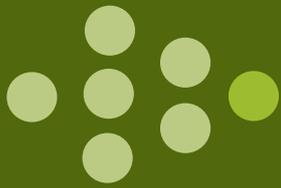
Develop our public and community transport services to meet the needs of local people

Ensure access to high quality, sustained, locally provided health services which meet the health and well-being needs of all people living in the district

Provide access to a range of activities for local people within the communities in which they live, focusing particularly on those activities which support the needs of young and older people

Develop locally provided education and training opportunities for all

There are many links between the five outcomes identified above and they should not be viewed in isolation from each other, for example broad ranging regeneration initiatives such as the existing activity in Cinderford cuts across all the above outcomes and is in integral part of this sustainable community plan. These links together with the links to the Local Development Framework will be explicit in the two year delivery plan which will be developed to be read alongside this document and will translate this strategy into reality.



# Our Forest: Our Future



## Thinking about the future

As part of this sustainable community plan and the long term vision for the Forest of Dean, the Forest of Dean Partnership recognises the key issues which will have an impact on the future of our area

**Our people** – We have a population which is forecast to grow by around 8% which equates to an additional 5,500 households by 2026 and is significantly above that of the county as a whole which is predicting a 5.3% growth. Within that growth we will see declining numbers of children, young people and adults aged 20-59 against an older population in the 65+ age group which is set to increase by 62% by 2026. Current trends also indicate increasing numbers of economic migrants from Eastern Europe settling in the district over the coming years.

**Our economy** – The impact of future policies which focus significant new development on urban centres in the county in Cheltenham and Gloucester must be recognised in terms of the impact on the Forest and its economy. We will continue to diversify our economy, including the retail and tourism sectors and reduce our historical dependence on manufacturing locally as well as address the problem of out-commuting. Pressures on housing and infrastructure are likely and there is a clear need to narrow the gap within the Forest between the more affluent and our most deprived communities.

**Our environment** – Protecting the natural and built environment of the Forest of Dean in the face of climate change will be a serious challenge now and for the future. The Forest of Dean district has the highest level of car ownership in the county. Improving public transport and reducing car journeys will be a key challenge for the future as will the way we manage our waste in the years to come.

## Making it happen

The outcomes the Forest of Dean Partnership has set down focus on making a real difference to people who live work and visit the Forest of Dean.

A delivery plan with a two year lifetime is being developed alongside this document which sets out how we are going to make this sustainable community plan happen.

This delivery plan will be the Partnership's 'plan of action' which will set out:

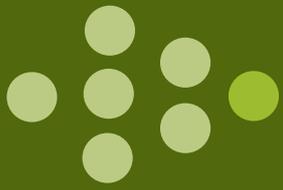
The outcomes

Actions – project activity that will contribute towards meeting the outcomes

Timescales – so that we can check that actions are happening on schedule

Performance indicators – so that we can measure progress

Reports of progress from the previous year



# Our Forest: Our Future



## Working together

Alongside the development of this document the Forest of Dean Partnership has also undergone a restructure of its Board and Theme Groups to make sure the right organisations are around the table working to deliver the activities to address the identified outcomes.

Members of the Forest of Dean Partnership are committed to developing their own strategies to align with this sustainable community plan. By bringing organisations together within the Forest of Dean Partnership we can address these issues which are difficult for individual agencies to address on their own. Working together in partnership towards the outcomes in this document will achieve better outcomes for our communities in the future.

The Forest of Dean Partnership will:

- Produce delivery plans covering a two year period which clearly set out a programme of action to address the outcomes identified

- Regularly monitor and review our progress and tell everyone how we're doing

- Work together with our communities and involve local people in the decisions which affect them

- Act as champions for the Forest of Dean district

## Keeping you informed

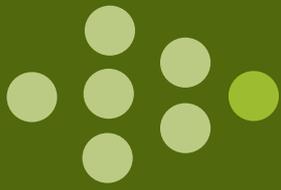
*Our Forest: Our Future* will be implemented from April 2008. We place great importance on making sure that the progress the Partnership is making towards delivering this sustainable community plan is communicated effectively and that those organisations wanting to get involved can do so. Some of the activities we will undertake to keep you informed include:

- The production of an annual report which sets out progress achieved against the five identified outcomes set out in *Our Forest: Our Future*

- An annual stakeholder conference to bring partners together to look at progress in the previous year and feed into future delivery plans

- The production of a quarterly newsletter

- The continued development of the Forest of Dean Partnership website which can be viewed at [www.forestofdeanpartnership.org.uk](http://www.forestofdeanpartnership.org.uk)



# Our Forest: Our Future



## Glossary of terms

**Sustainable Development** – Means ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. Achieving sustainable development means meeting four objectives at the same time

Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone

Effective protection of the environment

Prudent use of natural resources

Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment

**Forest of Dean Partnership** – Also referred to as the Local Strategic Partnership It is a non statutory partnership bringing together the public, private and voluntary / community sector to work together for the benefit of the Forest of Dean district.

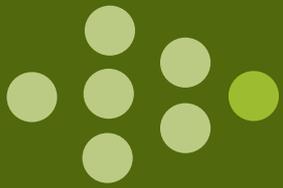
**Local Area Agreement** - The Gloucestershire Local Area Agreement is an agreement between the government and a partnership of local public and voluntary organisations, led by Gloucestershire County Council through the Gloucestershire Strategic Partnership. It sets out how local partners will use a range of government funding streams to deliver real improvements in outcomes for local people.

**Local Development Framework** - The Government has made some changes to the planning system through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, introduced in 2004. Under the new system, the Council is preparing a new style plan called a Local Development Framework (LDF), which will eventually replace the Local Plan. The LDF will comprise of a 'folder' of documents setting out how the Forest of Dean District.

**MAIDeN** – Multi Agency Information Database for Neighbourhoods. MAIDeN is partnership of the major public sector agencies in Gloucestershire. It exists to collect and share information about the communities and neighbourhoods of Gloucestershire. The MAIDeN database contains a wide range of social, economic and service indicators for each of Gloucestershire wards.

**Decent Homes** – A decent home meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing, is in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonably modern facilities and services and provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

**Affordable Housing** – Affordable housing includes social rented and intermediate housing provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Social rented housing is rented housing owned and managed by Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations) for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime. Intermediate housing is housing at prices and rents above those of social rent but below market price rents and includes shared equity/shared ownership housing where the purchaser buys an initial share in a home from a housing provider who retains the remainder and may charge a rent.



# *Our Forest: Our Future*



## **Contact Information**

For further information or details of how you can get involved please contact:

**Lena Maller – Forest of Dean Partnership Co-ordinator**

**C/o Forest of Dean District Council offices**

**High Street**

**Coleford**

**Gloucestershire**

**GL16 8HG**

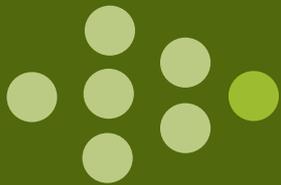
**Telephone: 01594 812609**

**Fax: 01594 812620**

**E-Mail: [Lena.Maller@fdean.gov.uk](mailto:Lena.Maller@fdean.gov.uk)**

**Or look for details on the Forest of Dean Partnership website at:**

**[www.forestofdeanpartnership.org.uk](http://www.forestofdeanpartnership.org.uk)**



# Our Forest: Our Future



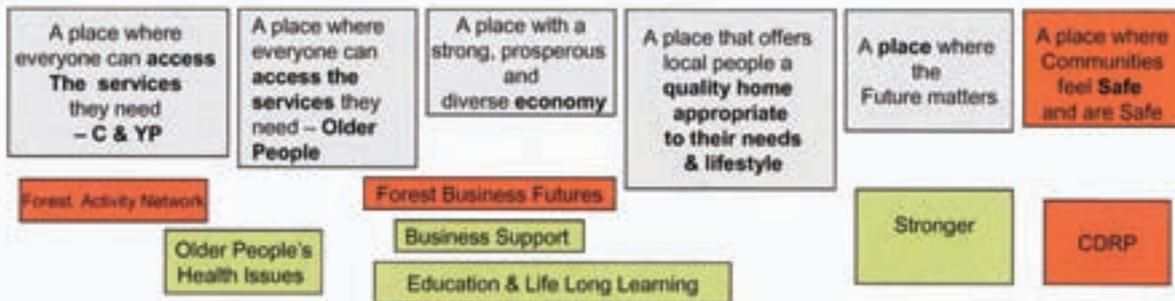
## Partnership Structure



•Existing 11 Theme Groups to be replaced by 6 Delivery Groups (mirroring the community plan priorities. With Access to Services split into two to focus on Children & Young People and Older People. (Some partners from existing theme groups will move go into the Delivery Groups. Some existing theme groups will evolve into project groups who actually DO things)

**Delivery Blocks to have link people connecting them into the County LAA blocks, ensuring 2 way communication**

- processes to ensure that everything the Partnership does links and works with the voluntary and community sector
- The pink blocks identify co-opted partnership groups working to address the community plan priorities but who have a separate governance structure)







Forest of Dean Partnership