

VALE OF USK RDP INTERIM REPORT

Programme Themes

- Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources
- Business development, facilitating pre-commercial development, short supply chains, business partnerships
- Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services
- Renewable energy at community level
- Exploitation of digital technology
- Co-operation projects

RDP Funding

Leader (2014-2020)

Date

October 2017

Funding Amount

£2.79 million

Purpose of Document

This report will enable the Vale of Usk LAG to evaluate the Programme and see how well it has contributed to the aim and objectives of the Local Development Strategy and whether the funding has been fairly distributed to sustainable projects that will form a legacy.

1. Background

The Vale of Usk LAG, covering a region made up of Monmouthshire and rural wards of Newport, successfully applied for RDP Leader funding with the following aims for the themes mentioned below.

Theme 1 - Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources – to support rural communities to maximise sustainable economic advantage and competitiveness from their cultural and natural assets whilst retaining sustainable heritage/culture objectives as a core value, as well as reflecting the regional and local Destination Strategies.

Theme 2 - Business development, facilitating pre-commercial development, short supply chains, business partnerships (including social enterprise) - make our rural areas a place for businesses to flourish through job creation, increased start-ups, growth of existing businesses, accessing opportunities for young people, encouragement of inward investment, improved earnings levels and by sustaining local farming communities through diversification.

Theme 3 - Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services - to improve service delivery by empowering communities through training and building networks and supporting existing community schemes to further achievements.

Theme 4 - Renewable energy at community level, - tap into existing groups and knowledge to better inform our communities, to increase up-take of renewable technologies through pro-active support and to identify and implement best practice.

Theme 5 -Exploitation of digital technology, to ensure all rural citizens in the Vale of Usk have access to digital literacy opportunities, developing accessible digital learning hubs in rural communities and provision of a digital infrastructure to those communities excluded from superfast broadband rollout.

Co-operation working with other LAGs from Wales and Europe to deliver joint projects that are mutually beneficial.

2. Key Objectives

Outline the key objectives the Programme aims to deliver.

- Support and involve all parts of Vale of Usk rural communities, involvement in local issues that will help to make the community empowered and sustainable.
- To help to deliver a prosperous and thriving rural economy in a pleasant environment whilst acknowledging sustainability both economically and environmentally.
- Tourism is a key contributor to the local economy, this can be built upon in a sustainable and co-ordinated way, using Monmouthshire, Newport and Caerleon Destination Plans as guidance. Support to enhance the competitiveness of Monmouthshire as a sustainable tourism destination by focussing on quality, distinctiveness and visitor satisfaction.
- Health and well-being is central to quality of life; support with improving education, training and employment outcomes.
- Broadband and digital performance is essential but reliable coverage in rural communities is poor. Rural solutions are urgent with better access and performance of broadband services and communications for both businesses and communities
- With high levels of families in social housing with the Vale of Usk, steps will be taken to address poverty.
- Work closely with community and Council transport groups and initiatives on rural transport and outreach projects to reduce rural isolation and deprivation

3. Project Achievements

Outline below what the Programme has achieved to date (referring back to the original objectives in the approved LDS, contribution to national strategies, & performance indicator final achievements).

Twenty five funding applications have been approved, totalling £601,704. The average project size is £24,000. The projects include nine studies and ten projects with community training/awareness raising.

Examples of current projects that are meeting the objectives of the LDS are:

Theme 1

- Tourism projects like the **Visitor Information Centre** project will integrate tourism product information and on-line resources. This project will also develop coach tourism in the area to increase visitor numbers and potential spend.
- Key strategic areas/trails in the Vale of Usk have been focus of tourism projects, e.g. Wales Coast Path, Gwent Levels and Wye Valley.
- Promoting cycling and activity tourism, e.g. Mountain Bike Guides project has offered training to improve qualifications and local knowledge.
- Local rural tourism providers and ambassadors have been supported with training opportunities, e.g. **Social Media Campaign** has provided filming, editing and social media training as well as familiarisation trips throughout the area and they are conducting their own tourism campaign on Facebook.
- Natural Assets are being safeguarded and managed, **Wye Valley Woodland** has supported local landowners and visitors with training and awareness raising.
- Developing BBNP as a tourism destination, e.g. a specialist **Mountain Bike Ambassador training course** has been developed to include local history, biodiversity and Mountain Biking in the region.

Theme 2

- Two studies – **Catering Education Study** and **Food Hub Study** have supported the LDS by highlighting the need to provide businesses with how and where to access information and in a straight-forward and informal way. The **BEES Cooperation Project** is an example that shows the value of informal networks and intergroup skills sharing, compared to formal, organised training.

Theme 3

- The LDS recognises the important contribution that volunteers make to the Vale of Usk region and the **Community Leadership Academy** project meets this well *‘to work with rural communities to enable and facilitate a self-help rural coaching network’*.
- The LDS highlights the importance of rural transport and **The Rural Transport Study** is expected to recommend cost effective solutions that will help integrate transport with local services and help combat rural isolation.
- The community consultation on **Magor Three Fields** has set some priorities and is informing the future development of the site whilst also providing valuable data into the feasibility of a walkway railway station, this has offered opportunities to apply community led planning.
- The **‘Creative Communities Toolkit’** will assist rural communities to become more resilient and sustainable, helping community groups set priorities for their areas and strengthening the traditional sense of community.
- The LDS highlighted the importance of community hubs and valuing local assets, the **Usk Campus study** is a good example of this, can the college campus facilities or services benefit Usk and surrounding area.

Theme 4

- The LDS promoted awareness raising of renewable energy initiatives and solutions amongst rural communities, in particular through Welsh woodlands as a response to climate change and to address local fuel poverty issues. Welsh and English version videos and leaflets have been produced do this and highlight the RDP funding opportunities.
- A separate project supported a series of renewable energy events, including reducing carbon footprint and electric vehicles.
- **The Monmouth RECS project** is working with communities around Monmouth to look at possible solutions to flooding using natural flood prevention measures and potential sites for community woodlands.

Theme 4 (Cont.)

- **The Monmouth RECS project** is establishing dialogue with farmers and other landowners with a view to alternative use of land to implement natural flood prevention measures and potentially renewable energy projects such as biomass and micro hydro. This is an example of an LDS objective - landowners to investigate likely supply and link to community led demand in terms of underused resources.
- Another objective of the LDS was to promote low energy approach to visitors to the area in terms of consumption and awareness of alternative energy generation being provided. **The Fully Charged (EV charging points) project** seeks to increase usage and encourage more visitors to use electric vehicles.
- Initiatives around electric vehicles - **The 'Fully Charged' project** aims to install around 20 EV charging points and monitor usage over a 12 month pilot period.

Theme 5

- A priority in the LDS was the need for better broadband and mobile phone coverage The **TV White Space Trial** is helping to address this by looking at digital technology that is suitable for rural areas. In addition there is also an RCDF capital application for £120k to support on-going work.
- The LDS highlighted the problem of poor connectivity limiting social and economic well-being in rural communities in terms of access to daily services, health, learning, communication, etc. The **Llanover Village Halls Cluster project** is attempting to address these issues, using digital technology to bring rural communities together, they outcome should be a replicable solution for other rural areas. Monmouthshire CC was successful in a bid for £92k from the RCDF fund to help support capital works in the four village halls that in turn supports the LEADER project.
- The LDS suggested that rural enterprises recognise the opportunity for shared facilities in terms of networking, shared solutions and retaining knowledge and expenditure. This issue is being addressed through the **Creative Co-working Space Study**, as one sector but the results will be available to all rural businesses.
- The LDS identified the opportunity for co-relationship between wider rural and market towns and urban centres with the need to integrate in terms of buy local and short supply chain integration. Opportunities also exist for farming cooperatives to supply to on-line local markets. The **Food Hubs Study** is addressing both of these issues.
- **Digital Open Badges Project** has supported the LDS by combining digital knowledge and upskilling and supporting youth with training within Coleg Gwent.

4. Project Performance – Financial & Indicator achievements

The table below shows all approved projects (June 17); their RDP committed sum and the actual spend at the end of June 2017. The projects have different time periods and anticipated spend dates, so many are not showing an actual spend yet. The average project is currently £24,000.

APPROVED PROJECTS	RDP COMMITTED	ACTUAL SPEND 06/17
CO001 BEES	£ 11,766	£ 3,694.74
T1001 Mountain Bike Guides Training	£ 9,009	£ 2,451.36
T1002 Wye Valley Woodlands	£ 9,827	
T1003 Social Media Campaign	£ 27,840	£ 3,686.67
T1005 Visitor Information Project	£ 44,053	
T1010 Abergavenny Castle Study	£ 8,000	
T2001 Catering Education Study	£ 19,984	£ 5,300.03
T2004 Venison Study	£ 4,800	
T2006 Food Hubs Study	£ 20,000	
T2009 Country Kitchen Eisteddfod	£ 25,512	£ 25,511.65
T2010 Nature Really IS Neat	£ 45,424	
T3001 Baseline Study	£ 9,600	£ 11,725.00
T3002 Magor 3 Fields	£ 3,601	£ 3,601.38
T3005 Usk Campus	£ 21,000	
T3006 Creative Communities Toolkit	£ 46,000	
T3007 Community Leadership academy	£ 128,000	
T4001 Energy Films Raising Awareness	£ 2,435	£ 309.00
T4002 Energy days	£ 609	£ 601.50
T4003 Monmouth RECS	£ 24,000	
T4007 Fully Charged (Electric Vehicles)	£ 20,000	
T5002 Digital Open Badges	£ 10,200	
T5004 TVWS Trial	£ 12,400	£ 80
T5006 Llanover Cluster	£ 40,644	
T5007 Monmouth Communication First	£ 32,000	
T5009 Rural Transport Study	£ 25,000	
	£ 601,704	

THEMATIC SUMMARY	RDP
	COMMITTED
Cooperation	£ 11,766
T1 Projects	£ 98,729
T2 Projects	£ 115,719
T3 Projects	£ 208,201
T4 Projects	£ 47,044
T5 projects	£ 120,244
	£ 601,704

Project Performance – Financial & Indicator achievements (cont.)

Project Description	RDP Value	Information promo activities		Participants supported		Feasibility Studies		Pilot activities		Stakeholders engaged		Community Hubs		Networks established		Jobs safeguarded		Jobs created	
		Proj'd	Actual	Proj'd	Actual	Proj'd	Actual	Proj'd	Actual	Proj'd	Actual	Proj'd	Actual	Proj'd	Actual	Proj'd	Actual	Proj'd	Actual
	£ 11,766	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	20	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
T1001 Mountain Bike Guides Training	£ 9,009	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	12	28	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
T1002 Wye Valley Woodlands	£ 9,827	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T1003 Social Media Campaign	£ 27,840	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	20	28	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
T1005 Visitor Information Project	£ 44,053	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	45	45	0	1	3	3	2	2	0
T1010 Abergavenny Castle Study	£ 8,000	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T2001 Catering Education Study	£ 19,984	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	30	4	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T2004 Venison Study	£ 4,800	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	20	4	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T2006 Food Hubs Study	£ 20,000	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	40	5	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T2009 Country Kitchen Eisteddfod	£ 25,512	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	40	40	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T2010 Nature Really IS Neat	£ 45,424	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	50	50	25	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
T3001 Baseline Study	£ 9,600	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	200	37	197	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T3002 Magor 3 Fields	£ 3,601	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	500	3	777	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T3005 Usk Campus	£ 21,000	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	150	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T3006 Creative Communities Toolkit	£ 46,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	35	35	0	10	0	10	0	0	0	0
T3007 Community Leadership academy	£ 128,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	200	200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T4001 Energy Films Raising Awareness	£ 2,435	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T4002 Energy days	£ 609	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T4003 Monmouth RECS	£ 24,000	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	100	9	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T4007 Fully Charged (Electric Vehicles)	£ 20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	25	25	25	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
T5002 Digital Open Badges	£ 10,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	15	15	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T5004 TWS Trial	£ 12,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	20	20	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T5006 Llanover Cluster	£ 40,644	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	75	100	100	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
T5007 Monmouth Communication First	£ 32,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	40	40	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
T5009 Rural Transport Study	£ 25,000	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	40	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

5. Project Performance relating to Welsh Government Cross-cutting Themes and Economic Benefits.

<p>Equal opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming</p>	<p>All projects respect equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming – feasibility studies have been published on the Sell 2 Wales website which promotes this expectation.</p>
<p>Make provision for the use of the Welsh Language</p>	<p>The application process is bilingual; promotional literature is bilingual and project beneficiaries can opt for information in the Welsh. Where training is provided through LAG projects, an offer of Welsh instruction is made, although at the mid-term point, this has not been required.</p>
<p>Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion</p>	<p>All projects are encouraged to be socially inclusive and remove any barriers that might exclude. All skill development, training and mentoring opportunities are inclusive and open to all.</p> <p>Monmouth Communication First is a project that supports a local group using digital technology to encourage communication where speech is difficult.</p> <p>We have other examples of pipeline projects that are addressing poverty and social exclusion in our area which will hopefully have funding approved shortly.</p>
<p>Sustainable Development</p>	<p>The environmental impact of a project is an important consideration. We have projects that raise awareness of renewable energy opportunities and one project is centred on flood prevention using environmental measures.</p> <p>In addition to environmental sustainability, it is a key consideration that all projects are self-sustaining past the end of the funding support.</p>
<p>Children’s Rights Impact Assessment</p>	<p>At the mid-term point we have two projects that involve children, they are both applications from local schools and colleges and not LAG projects. The professional staff that co-ordinate the project are well versed in the legal rights of Children and the CRIA.</p>

<p>Will your local economy benefit from the project?</p>	<p>Economic benefit to the rural area is of significant importance in both Theme 1 and 2. Tourism is a major contributor to our region's economy and local volunteers are involved with promoting tourism through a social media film campaign, as well as supporting at high profile events.</p> <p>Local food and drink is another sector important to this region's economy and there are a number of studies and projects that will have a beneficial impact on the economy, when implemented.</p>
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7. Conclusion

Key issues to be addressed at mid-term point:

- Good geographic spread of funding throughout Monmouthshire and rural Newport. Approximately 50% of projects are Vale of Usk-wide and regional project represent a good spread.
- Average project size is £24,000 – larger projects have been approved by the LAG where the beneficiaries of the funding is wide.
- At the half-way stage, 48% of funding has been committed, so on-track.
- Theme 4 (renewables) projects have been less than originally expected, largely because of reduced Government subsidies. Funding allocated to Theme 4 can be reallocated if need be.
- Digital projects tend to be through all themes, so the statistic for Theme 5 are not representative. Theme 5 could be incorporated into the other themes if required.
- Future pipeline projects may slow down as initial demand for project funding has been met – a mid-term marketing campaign, with the benefit of practical examples of approved projects should raise awareness and invite new community-led projects.
- All funded studies should be put on the Vale of Usk website; shared with LAG members and with other LAG regions – the findings need to be implemented where possible utilising the appropriate theme group and their recommendations.
- The number of projects being considered will need to be increased before the end of 2017. All funding should be committed within 12 months of programme end so that there is no risk of funds being returned.
- It is expected that some will struggle to complete their project spend by the end of the programme. To ensure no underspend, an approach of deliberate overspend should be considered within the last year as a commitment safety measure.
- Further considerations must be given to the recording of 'Soft Outputs' as a means to demonstrate real value of the LEADER programme as a whole.

Mid-Term lessons learned

What has gone well?

- Approximately 50% of funding has been allocated at the mid-term point and considering the initial period of animation, this is a good position to be in.
- Projects currently show around 25% of funding for rural Newport which is more than the approximate 20% stake required.
- The LAG is engaged and have embraced the on-line assessment and voting of projects which has meant that on-going approval of projects is possible.

What hasn't gone well?

- Theme 4 has seen a setback that Government incentives were reduced shortly after the Programme began, making projects less appealing to community groups.
- State Aid guidelines have made it difficult to consider projects relating to individual businesses that might have an economic advantage from the Leader funding. Potential projects are addressing working with business sectors rather than individual businesses.
- There is no project that addresses joint working and contracting /bidding to support the SME sector. The RDP team is currently looking at cooperative working /growing/ shared facilities, in the food sector in particular.
- There are no current projects that offer business support for women in enterprise through mentoring and coaching, although support for both genders has been identified.
- There are no projects that directly relate to mobility in young people and how local transport can overcome these barriers, which was identified in the LDS. However, the Rural Transport Study should cover all aspect of community transport.
- There is no current project which offers support for producers and land based businesses in relation to ICT support, diversification and signposting to process and marketing advice. However, there has been considerable discussion with businesses and pipeline projects are evolving.