

Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 07-10 (p1) Annex B: 11 March 2010

Inquiry - Structural Funds: implementation of the 2007-2013 programmes

Valleys Regional Park: A Case Study

Project Background

1. Over forty partners led by the Welsh Assembly Government have collaborated to form a Valleys Partnership. The Partnership aims to plan and deliver activities related to the environment, heritage and tourism across the valleys of South Wales in a co-ordinated, effective and efficient way, both cross-sector and cross-boundary towards a regional vision. The overall objective is to enhance and promote the Valleys' outstanding environmental and cultural heritage assets thereby helping to regenerate the area and promote the Valleys as a highly-desirable place to live, work and visit.

2. The Partnership's activities cover the area that was essentially the former South Wales coalfield, defined as the Valleys Regional Park in the Wales Spatial Plan. The area stretches from the western borders of Monmouthshire in the east to the former anthracite-mining valleys of Carmarthenshire in the west, and bounded by the Brecon Beacons National Park to the north and the major cities of Cardiff, Swansea, and Newport to the south. It covers an area of over 200,000 hectares and is home to over 1 million people (approximately a third of the Welsh population).

3. The Valleys Regional Park Convergence funded project has secured a £9.7 million European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grant towards the total project cost of £21.75 million. Over three years the project aims to increase tourism visits by 100,000 by improving 80 km of access to the countryside and creating 200 additional jobs in the wider economy. It will deliver these outputs through a number of interventions including:

Prioritised investments into existing visitor centres including country parks, nature reserves and heritage facilities to create a more enhanced and consistent offer;

A series of visitor destination projects;

A loops and links project that will invest in existing and new walking, cycling and horse riding links between the visitor destination facilities;

The establishment of a community based tourism initiative to support guide visitors to build confidence and create local tourism ambassadors;

A co-ordinated events programme as part of the Valleys Heart and Soul campaign; and

A targeted campaign to remove and prevent litter and fly tipping that detracts visitors from returning.

4. Twenty partner organisations were written into the project business plan as joint sponsors. This has enabled funding to be allocated directly to those partners through a robust well established application procedure. This has helped project partners to receive funding more quickly than would otherwise have been the case.

A Sustainable Approach

5. The Valleys Regional Park Project fully embraces the concept of sustainable development as a key theme in all parts of the programme. Each project is required to provide a detailed appraisal which considers its impact on the environment, the economy and the local community (in terms of health/social issues). The appraisal will also address the long term management of the facilities or activity programmes being funded.

6. A technical environmental specialist has been employed within the project to monitor the successful delivery of the individual projects.

Match Funding

7. Existing Welsh Assembly Government budget provision for environment and tourism infrastructure improvements has been aligned with the priorities of the project to maximise the opportunities presented by the ERDF grant. In addition to ERDF and Welsh Assembly Government funds, joint project sponsor organisations have secured additional resources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, and grant aid from other non European programmes.

A Collaborative Approach

8. The Valleys Partnership structure provides a cross sector and cross boundary approach to the development and delivery of the project. In these respects it conforms to the aspirations of Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries. Working to a Board of partner representatives, the following six themed cross boundary sub groups oversee the activities to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits:

Access and Health;
Tourism;
Environment;
Outdoor Activities (including Water Recreation);
Education; and
Community Initiatives.

9. A further group is being established to work on sustainable transport planning.

Project Monitoring and Evaluation

10. A single contract has been procured and let to Cardiff Business School within Cardiff University, to manage the monitoring and evaluation of outputs from the seven strategic Environment for Growth Convergence funded projects. This is providing an efficient cost effective and consistent approach in terms of measuring and evaluating the economic impact of visitors across Wales.

Project Progress

11. To date, ERDF support has been agreed in principle for 26 projects, with a value of £4.6 million. Projects supported include:

Valleys Cycle Network;
Valleys Heart and Soul, Capital Region Tourism;
Presenting a Clean and Pleasant Environment for visitors;
Sirhowy Valley Landscape Partnership;
Crossing the Mountain;
Cwmcarn Forest Development;
Cwmdu Glen Urban Woodland, Pontardawe;
Cyd Terrace, Neath Canal Clyne and Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct;
Cynon Valley River Park;
Dare Valley Country Park Phase II;
Ebbw Fach Trail - Hafod Arch;
Ebbw Fach Trail;
Garth Farm - M4 West VRP Gateway;
Gnoll Estate Country Park Accessibility Project;
Lower Rhondda Valley Green Corridor;
Margam Country Park Access and Interpretation;
Parc Cwm Darran Enhancement;
Parc Taff Bargoed Southern Gateway;
Penallta Community Park New Entrance;
Penyfan Access Improvements;
Cwmbran Riverside Park;
Blaenavon Forgotten Landscape Project;
Greenmeadow Community Farm;
Theatr Tymaen;
Environmental Resource Centre, The works Ebbw Vale; and
VCN Project Management.