



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board

17/09/2021

Report of the Head of Education & Development – Chris Millis

Matter for Information

Wards Affected:

All Rural Wards of Neath Port Talbot:

1. Aberdulais
2. Blaengwrach
3. Bryn & Cwmavon
4. Brynamman (Lower)
5. Bryncoch North
6. Coedffranc West
7. Crynant
8. Cwmllynfell
9. Cymmer
10. Dyffryn
11. Glynorrwg

12. Glynneath
13. Godrergraig
14. Gwaun Cae Gurwen
15. Gwynfi
16. Margam
17. Onllwyn
18. Pelenna
19. Pontardawe
20. Resolven
21. Rhos
22. Seven Sisters
23. Taibach
24. Ystalyfera

Rural Development Plan 2014 - 2020

Purpose of the Report:

To update Members and to give an overview of the Rural Development Plan 2014-2020 and describe what has been achieved in Neath Port Talbot during the current Programme.

Executive Summary:

The Rural Community Development team manages delivery of the Welsh Government and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) funded LEADER scheme and the former Rural Community Development Scheme (RCDF), and ensures that

the Authority meets duties in relation to the compliance, administration and promotion of the schemes.

Since the LEADER Programme began in July 2015 Regenerate NPT has made great strides towards the achievement of targets outlined in our Local Development Strategy (LDS), supporting the growth of our rural areas through a host of innovative and community led projects.

To date, 33 projects have been allocated funding, and over 4849 participants from across rural Neath Port Talbot have been supported.

The LEADER funding secured by NPT is £2,156,000. The running and animation costs for the programme are under 25% of the total RDP funds available in NPT.

Through a re-profiling exercise we have been able to extend the LEADER project from December 2021 to March 22, utilising previous underspend.

UK Government future funding for a successor programme to EU funded 'LEADER' programme activities is not confirmed.

Background:

LEADER

LEADER funding can be used to fund innovative new projects that are primarily focussed in rural wards. There are five key themes that all prospective projects must fit under:

- Adding Value to Local Identity and natural and cultural resources
- Facilitating pre-commercial development and short supply chains
- Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services

- Renewable energy at community level
- Exploitation of digital technology

In order to be able to draw down funding, each area has set up a decision-making body called a Local Action Group (LAG). In Neath Port Talbot the LAG is called 'Regenerate NPT' and is currently made up of 18 members from the Public, Private, and Third sectors. Membership reflects both the area's geographical extent and its sectoral composition. Members must live in or work in the area of benefit, namely the rural wards of Neath Port Talbot. Organisations working across the area but located outside it may also join Regenerate NPT.

The LAG meet quarterly as a minimum, and it is their responsibility to take an active role in championing the LEADER programme, using their networks to raise awareness and encourage diverse and innovative applications. LAG members are responsible for objectively and robustly appraising and scoring each funding application.

The administration of the programme on behalf of the LAG is carried out by the Rural Community Development team. This team is made up of 4 members of staff, all of whom are fully funded by the scheme. As well as administering the LAG, they are responsible for promoting the Programme, engaging prospective applicants, supporting current projects, carrying out research studies identified by the LAG, monitoring projects and reporting on outcomes, and dealing with financial claims both from applicants, and to Welsh Government.

Funding

In May 2015, following the submission of the Local Development Strategy, the Local Authority were successful in applying for £2,156,000 of LEADER funding. The new Programme officially started on 1st July 2015 and will run until 31st March 2022.

Achieving value for money is fundamental to the LAG's approach, to maximise benefit for the community. To support this, when invited to

re-profile in June 2020 a request was made to increase the value allocated to projects in NPT, and extend the LEADER programme by 3 months to March 22. This was achieved by moving funds to utilise underspend, to increase available funds to support more/new projects, post COVID 19 recovery. This increase acknowledged a reduction in staff costs and less travel than anticipated due to 'lockdown restrictions' and is an example of how the LAG and Rural Community Development team are working to ensure the best use of available funds.

LEADER projects are funded on a minimum 80/20 basis whereby applicants must have secured at least 20% of the total project cost in order to apply for up to 80%.

Since the previous report in July 2020 the LAG has approved 14 new projects, taking the total projects to date to 33. Two of the 33 projects are 'Co-operation' projects working across Wales RDP regions to deliver specific projects e.g. the most recently approved Co-operation project is '*Prescribing Woodlands for Wellbeing*' delivered by Coed Lleol (Small Woods Association).

To date, total project costs committed to the 33 projects is £1,307,685 (80% RDP & 20% Match).

Welsh Government has announced it will be launching a successor RDP programme post Brexit in 2024, with a value of £106 million pounds. However, to date the allocated spend does not include LEADER. RDP teams across Wales are lobbying for a review of the announced spending package.

The Shared prosperity & Levelling up fund expected to launch in 2022 is being published in autumn 2021 and may hold opportunities for NPT to continue to support 'LEADER' activity in the interim period, with direct funds from UK replacing EU funds.

Progress to date

It is a requirement to report to Welsh Government on a number of Key Performance Indicators. Projects are continually monitored by the Rural Community Development team to ensure that sufficient progress is being made. To date projects are making excellent progress and performance is on track to meet WG targets.

Of the 9 WG targets, 6 have already been exceeded e.g. 4869 participants have been supported to learn new skills, attend events, take part in volunteering opportunities and enrol for formal training opportunities (exceeding the target of 2200 by 221%).

1075 stakeholders have been engaged by our projects to ensure that the work that is being implemented through the Programme synergises with other schemes, has an impact, and that the benefits are widely shared.

Indicator targets and achievements to date-

Indicator Name	Final Target Amount	Achieved & evidenced to date
R.24 - Jobs Created through Supported projects (LEADER)	7	6
LD-CL.001 - Number of Feasibility Studies	11	6
LD-CL.002 - Number of Networks Established	10	6
LD-CL.003 - Number of Jobs Safeguarded through Support Projects	3	4.8
LD-CL.004 - Number of Pilot Activities undertaken/supported	14	14
LD-CL.005 - Number of Community Hubs	8	18
LD-CL.006 - Number of Information Dissemination Actions	300	540
LD-CL.007 - Number of Stakeholders	740	1075
LD-CL.008 - Number of Participants Supported	2200	4869

Following on from our Mid-Term Evaluation in 2020, the LAG have supported a revised strategy to underpin our work which better reflected the changed context in which we are working and lessons learned along the way. The application process has been streamlined and a smaller grant application introduced has proved successful, attracting applications that were previously deterred by a time consuming bureaucratic process for the value requested.

In 2020-2021 the team has increased promotion and publicity activities and hosted a number of workshops and engagement activities to promote LEADER funding to ensure we could respond to, and support changing needs in NPT's rural communities.

This exercise has enabled us to update the 2014-2017 Local Development Strategy (LDS) to be more reflective of the current landscape in which there has been unprecedented changes e.g. Brexit and pandemic impact. The updated LDS now contains a broadened scope of projects and aligns with the most recent local strategic policies e.g. NPT Well-being Plan 2018-2023, corporate plan 'Shaping NPT' 2019-2022, 2019's declaration of a Climate Emergency.

Case studies and reports have been introduced to share success, lessons learned and to provide an ongoing update of, project achievement, delivery, and the impact the project has had on the communities. A number of NPT case studies have been featured in Welsh Government (WG) 'Wales Rural Network' newsletters e.g. in June's 2021 edition 6 NPT projects were featured.

https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/news-events-and-case-studies/case_study?page=0

NPT also features in WG's first Sharing Success 'Celebrating Rural' newsletter in August 2021 demonstrating a small sample of the support that LEADER has provided in rural areas and the difference it has, and continues to make to Rural Communities.

Financial Impacts:

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for information purposes.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

There are no Valleys Communities implications associated with this report.

Workforce Impacts:

There are no Workforce implications associated with this report.

Legal Impacts:

There no Legal implications associated with this report.

Risk Management Impacts:

There are no Risk Management implications associated with this report.

Consultation:

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations:

For information

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

N/A

Implementation of Decision:

N/A

Appendices:

Leader Project NPT – update

List of Background Papers:

N/A

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