

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY PANEL - 17TH JANUARY 2013

**SUBJECT: ACTIVITIES BEING DELIVERED BY LOCAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT
PLAN (RDP) PROJECTS**

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide Members of the Sustainable Development Advisory Panel with the background to the activities that are being delivered through projects funded by the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-13, with particular focus on sustainable rural development through Axis 4. This report precedes a presentation that will be given at the panel meeting.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 The current RDP programme period is the first time that Caerphilly has been eligible for this stream of European and Welsh Government funding, which aims to support the rural economy and the quality of life of people living and working in rural areas.

2.2 From 2008 to 2013 the RDP is directly worth over £7.5m to Caerphilly with 10 projects currently being delivered across 20 'rural' wards. CCBC is leading on the development, management and monitoring of the programme in Caerphilly, supported by a Partnership of local rural stakeholders.

2.3 The RDP works at a local level encouraging and, in some cases requiring, significant engagement of local people. Projects are currently being delivered that support rural enterprises and the local economy, help people and businesses to make positive economic, environmental and community impacts and take action to address key issues such as climate change.

2.4 The RDP has been a valuable source of funding both in terms of the type of projects it is able to fund and the level of grant that it offers. Like most funding streams the RDP comes with significant financial controls and requirements and projects must also achieve, evidence and report on agreed outcomes.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

3.1 The RDP programme and projects support the following strategies:

- Caerphilly RDP Local Development Strategy 2007-13
- Caerphilly Community Strategy
- Caerphilly Regeneration Strategy
- Sustainable Development Strategy, 2008
- CCBC Corporate Improvement Plan, 2009 – 2012
- Caerphilly Climate Change Strategy, 2009

4. THE REPORT

The Rural Development Plan (RDP) 2007-2013

- 4.1 The Rural Development Plan (RDP) 2007-2013 is the mechanism by which the Welsh Government (WG) funds activities which support the countryside and rural communities. It is jointly funded by the European Union (EU) as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and WG.
- 4.2 The RDP for Wales aims to:
Strengthen the farming and forestry industries in Wales
Maintain and protect the environment and rural heritage
Improve economic competitiveness of rural communities and areas
- 4.3 These aims are delivered by funding projects and activities through 4 Axes:
Axis 1 – Improving the Competitiveness of the Agricultural and Forestry Sector
Axis 2 – Improving the Environment and the Countryside
Axis 3 – The Quality of Life in Rural Areas and Diversification of the Rural Economy
Axis 4 – LEADER
- 4.4 Axis 1 predominantly funds projects that are led by WG and are aimed directly at farming and associated industries, e.g. Farming Connect, the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme and the Supply Chain Efficiency Scheme.
- 4.5 Axis 2 is run by WG and is the provision of the Glastir agri environment scheme for farmers.
- 4.6 Axis 3 aims to improve the rural economy by providing support to farming families to diversify into non agricultural activities, support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises and support for the encouragement of tourism activities. It also aims to improve the quality of life in rural communities by supporting basic services for the rural economy and population, village renewal, conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage and training for rural economic actors.
- 4.7 Axis 4 supports sustainable rural development in Wales in the longer term through an approach called LEADER, which seeks to generate new ideas and ways of working through grassroots and stakeholder engagement and involvement.

The RDP in Caerphilly

- 4.8 It is Axes 3 and 4 that provide the means for local projects in Caerphilly and the current RDP (2007-13) is the first time that Caerphilly has been eligible for this type of funding. Eligibility for Axes 3 and 4 is determined down to a ward level. In Caerphilly 20 wards are eligible, covering a population of 100,000 and over 80% of the area (see map at appendix 1).
- 4.9 In order to apply for funding under the RDP a Partnership of public, private, voluntary and community representatives had to be established to develop a local rural development strategy and oversee project development, management and delivery. A sub-group of this Partnership, called a Local Action Group (LAG), also had to be established to have a more direct input into Axis 4, as this requires a higher degree of community engagement. CCBC has acted as the lead body for the RDP in Caerphilly and the Partnership is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development.
- 4.10 The RDP has been a valuable source of funding both in terms of the type of projects it is able to fund and the level of grant that it offers. Projects are funded to 80% of the costs, leaving the applicant to find only 20%. The programme also provides 100% of the funding for the lead body role, although this is capped at a rate determined by the value of all projects. Like most funding streams the RDP comes with significant financial controls and requirements and projects must also achieve, evidence and report on agreed outcomes.

- 4.11 The programme funding period was split by WG into two halves, termed Business Plans. Under Business Plan 1, which ran until February 2011, Caerphilly was successful in bidding for 12 projects with a total value of £3.45m together with lead body funding of £540k for the overall programme management, administration and monitoring role undertaken by CCBC. Projects included grant schemes for businesses and communities, land management and improvements, rural tourism, community transport and training through rural skills. Projects were delivered by CCBC, Groundwork Caerphilly, GAVO and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Current Projects

- 4.12 The programme is now in Business Plan 2 of the RDP and Caerphilly was successful in bidding for 10 projects with a total value of £3.33m, accompanied by lead body funding of £478k. Projects are currently running until the end of 2013 but a number have recently applied for extensions and possible funding enhancements until the end of 2014. A summary of the Axis 3 projects is provided below, followed by more detail on the Axis 4 project.

Axis 3 Activity

- 4.13 There are 9 Axis 3 projects with a total value of £2.39m.

Rural Green Doctor – Groundwork Caerphilly

The Rural Green Doctor project is providing energy and carbon reduction advice to Caerphilly's rural communities and helping to treat the symptoms of fuel poverty. One aim of the project is that community venues will benefit from energy saving measures and become more sustainable. Qualified Rural Green Doctors are offering free specialised advice not only to community venues but also promoting long-term behaviour change among the rural community as a whole, within the County Borough.

- 4.14 **Basic Services Community Key Fund – CCBC Business Enterprise Support**

This grant scheme promotes and enables greater access to services and amenities for communities in rural areas and enables community and voluntary sector organisations in the county borough to bid for funding to take forward initiatives they have developed as part of the community planning processes.

- 4.15 **Homeless Prevention Project - Llamau**

Llamau's Rural Outreach provides support to women and children in particular in Caerphilly County Borough who are at risk of homelessness through domestic abuse. An experienced domestic abuse support worker is available to offer support, advice and guidance about any issue relating to domestic abuse. This may involve help with finding housing, personal safety, keeping healthy, managing money, finding work or training, or negotiating the Criminal Justice system. The support worker will provide specific advice and information for a woman's individual circumstances and is able to advocate and liaise with other agencies on her behalf. Discrete drop-in Advice Surgeries are held at Community Resource Centres across Caerphilly County Borough providing women with a safe environment in which to meet a worker.

- 4.16 **Village Renewal and Development Key Fund – CCBC Business Enterprise Support**

This grant scheme is concerned with improving the physical environment of villages and communities, and to conserve the rural heritage of Caerphilly county borough and bid for funding to take forward initiatives they have developed as part of the community planning processes.

- 4.17 **Healthy Villages – Groundwork Caerphilly**

The 'Healthy Village' concept is aiming to develop community participation and engagement in a wide variety of healthy initiatives. The term 'Healthy' is interpreted to support the needs of individual communities. Making use of the County Borough's 75% countryside, activities range from healthy walking, increasing access to open space by supporting community route-ways and developing other ideas from local people, to help achieve a vibrant and healthy community.

- 4.18 **Budding Businesses – CCBC Countryside & Landscape**
This is a grant scheme for rural micro-enterprises to stimulate projects within the rural wards of Caerphilly County Borough. It funds capital and revenue projects up to £30,000, with applicants required to contribute a portion of the project's cost. So far the project has supported local hospitality providers, wood-using businesses, craft and food enterprises to deliver projects that contribute to the local economy.
- 4.19 **Routes 2 Life – Groundwork Caerphilly**
Routes 2 Life offers horticultural, agricultural, carpentry and traditional rural skills training to improve people's lives. Beneficiaries joining the programme gain a wide variety of practical work experience. This programme supports disengaged individuals both on a 1.5 acre field site and a carpentry workshop, in a variety of activities to gain hands-on experience and training, while developing their employment prospects, self-esteem and well being.
- 4.20 **Chwarae Cwm a Mynydd Play Project - Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs**
This project aims to provide a more qualified and better skilled childcare and playwork workforce and increased play opportunities for children in the rural areas of Caerphilly County Borough. The project provides free training for people who are thinking about or who would like to work with children in a play setting or playworkers/volunteers who already work with children in 'out of school' childcare clubs in the eligible wards of Caerphilly.
- 4.21 **Training Support Grant – delivery organisation to be confirmed**
This is a key fund to provide practical and financial support to eligible individuals and organisations wishing to undertake training aimed at improving skills or knowledge. Delivery of the project has been out to tender and a delivery organisation is about to be appointed.

Axis 4 Activity

- 4.22 **Axis 4 activity is all delivered through one project (Vibrant Villages & Healthy Harvests) with a value of £945k and is led by a team in the CCBC Countryside & Landscape Service. It follows the LEADER approach, which is prescribed by the EU, in that project delivery must be determined from the bottom up, with meaningful engagement with local people to make lasting improvements. In doing so the project works across all three themes of the Caerphilly RDP strategy, being rural industry and produce, tourism and recreation and villages and communities.**
- 4.23 **In order to engage with appropriate stakeholders officers have recently established four informal interest groups, termed networks, that are open to anyone to discuss relevant issues and develop ideas. The networks are timber and craft, farming and agriculture, hospitality and food. Meetings are held to encourage co-operation within the local economy and identify projects, e.g. timber and craft network members have undertaken more direct selling locally and are planning to create a new co-operative between local businesses, officers are helping local farmers to create a buying group for fuel and other supplies, and local food businesses are now buying directly from one another as a direct result of officer support.**
- 4.24 **Officers also work to directly support local rural communities with projects relating to the three themes. One flagship project is the development of pop-up restaurants at community venues, using local produce. Officers have worked with community groups and local food businesses to turn community venues into ad hoc restaurants, serving quality local food in areas where this is not accessible. It has been developed as a model for income generation for community groups. Elsewhere, the project helped local people to put on an art exhibition at Babel Chapel, attended by nearly 400 people, and further, similar use of the building is being investigated.**

- 4.25 The project also funds the work of the timber yard, which collects timber that is felled locally, usually through management works, and recovers it to a site where it can be milled. Bi-products, such as woodchip and sawdust, are also collected and as much timber as possible is put to productive use by providing it to local community groups, charities and public sector organisations, including CCBC services. The timber yard includes a small workshop that Groundwork Caerphilly use to train clients and a lot of the timber is supplied to trainees to make products and learn skills.
- 4.26 Two Sustainable Energy Officers are also funded through this RDP project to engage with farm households and rural businesses to reduce energy use and promote the uptake of renewable energy. Through promoting sustainable energy solutions they aim to increase the profitability of farms and rural businesses and to reduce their impact on the environment. Three levels of support are offered covering information and advice, surveys and support and mentoring and exemplar projects. Examples include an energy challenge for farm households, numerous energy surveys that directly assist local businesses and comprehensive support and advice that led to the development of the off-grid farmhouse at Maes Yr Onn.
- 4.27 A key element of the project is the promotion of Caerphilly's rural areas, businesses and people, both within the county borough and beyond. To promote the area as being green, in terms of environmental sustainability and rural, benefits everyone. The team attends all the main local events, as well as some specific smaller ones, and has promoted the area at the Royal Welsh Show for the last four years.
- 4.28 All these activities are not undertaken in isolation as a key principle of the project is to add value and drive sustainable rural development wherever possible. The project seeks to engage as many people as possible, work with other projects and encourage networking to build capacity and generate sustainable local benefits beyond the direct impact of the project. There are many examples of how this work has created additional benefits by linking businesses, communities and projects. This should help to further strengthen the local economic base, improve resilience and build confidence and sense of place that is inherently sustainable.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's Equality process does not need to be applied.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report, as it is for information purposes.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 See list below.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That the valuable contribution of the local RDP programme to sustainable development in Caerphilly be noted.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 For the reasons set out in the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 There are no statutory powers.

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Appendices:
Appendix 1: Map of eligible areas