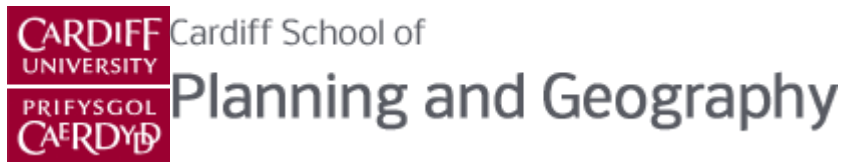


VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK

INTERIM PROGRESS AND EVALUATION REPORT

March 2013

Cardiff University



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Y Cymoedd
Calon ac Enaid Cymru
The Valleys
Heart and Soul of Wales



Executive Summary

Following the decline of the coal mining sector in the latter half of the 20th Century, efforts at regeneration in the South Welsh Valleys have often lacked a holistic perspective: initially focusing on immediate safety concerns and environmental aesthetics, but in separation from socioeconomic policies and initiatives. However, amid the growing integration of social, economic and environmental interventions, the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) has explicitly aimed to promote socioeconomic regeneration through the specific investment in a high-quality network of green spaces and post industrial heritage assets. Through a holistic partnership approach, the VRP seeks to develop the green economy, encourage healthy lifestyles, offer outstanding outdoor recreation and learning opportunities and provide a quality visitor destination, thereby changing perceptions of the region and making the Valleys a prime location to live, work and visit. As such the VRP is a flagship component of the Welsh Government's sustainable development programme (Welsh Government 2012a; 2012b, p. 20) and a key focus of regeneration activity. The VRP covers the former South Wales coalfield stretching from the western borders of Monmouthshire in the East, to the former anthracite-mining valleys of Carmarthenshire in the West. It spans an area of over 200,000 hectares and is home to over 1 million people, roughly one-third of the Welsh population.

The VRP Programme is being delivered by a partnership of over 40 organisations, led by the Welsh Government and involving local authorities, representatives from private companies and the Third Sectors, academia and a range of local community organisations. The programme has run in conjunction with the Welsh Government's Heads of the Valleys and Western Valleys Regeneration Programmes.

The major infrastructure development project for the VRP Partnership is its ERDF Convergence 'Environment for Growth' (E4G) Valleys Regional Park project with a gross value of approximately £20 million, with match funding coming through Welsh Government, project sponsors, and other partners.

A separate, but related, EU project is funded from the Interreg IVB European Transnational Cooperation programme; WECAN (Working together for Economically-prosperous Communities through Assets of Natural Heritage) seeks to evaluate and maximise the socio-economic value of the natural environment, particularly in post-industrial areas such as the Valleys, and how to engage better with businesses and communities in order to stimulate enterprise related to the natural environment.

Overall, by December 2012, of the 40 infrastructure and landscape projects committed for delivery, 34 (or 85%) were completed: five projects were ongoing and one was decommitted. Overall over 130 kilometres of managed access to the countryside had been created. Of 42 events and interpretation projects funded under the ERDF scheme, nine out of 12 events (75%) and 15 of 30 interpretation activities (or 50%) had been completed or undertaken. In total VRP documentation reports that it had: created 25 jobs; promoted well over an additional 400,000 visits to the South East Valleys region; engaged almost 700 community groups and 16,000 individuals; and trained over 400 people.

Purpose of Report

Ongoing monitoring and progress evaluation have been a fundamental part of the VRP programme (VRP 2011); and specific other efforts have sought to understand its contribution to other wider initiatives (Welsh Economy Research Unit 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013b). In order to follow on from the internal VRP report produced in May 2011, a team from the School of Planning and Geography and the PLACE Institute, Cardiff University, were asked to provide an external interim report on the progress and impact of the VRP programme from the beginning of its delivery in April 2009 to December 2012. The team was requested to focus on outcomes of the programme: including job creation, training and skills; visitors to the area and routes and sites improved, as well as providing a contextual analysis of the programme with respect to other aspects of regeneration in the Valleys and Wales, the proposed City Region developments, and the use of green infrastructure in sustainable economic development. Data used in this report has been largely drawn from documents supplied by the VRP project team; although research has been based on public facing websites and available documents. Although no original empirical research has been undertaken as part of the progress and impact evaluation, an email survey was conducted with key stakeholders working in partner organisations (identified by the VRP project team) in order to help evaluate the partnership model that the VRP has utilised.

Overall, the report outlines the background to the VRP project and reports on its collective achievements. The main body of the report discusses three areas of investment for the VRP. The first two are major investments funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) focusing on tourism, coupled with the Heart & Soul marketing and promotion campaign, and WECAN focusing on the socio-economic benefits of green infrastructure. The other investment is a Knowledge Economy Skills Sector (KESS) studentship focusing on the health benefits derived from using the natural environment. The report is also interspersed with 5 focus area studies which address aspects of the work that has been undertaken to date in a more holistic fashion, concentrating on the following areas: 1 Cwmbran, 2 Aberdare, 3 Ebbw Fach, 4 Kidwelly, and 5 Afan-Llynfi ¹.

¹ Although this report was not intended to provide an evaluation of VRP operations, it should be noted that due to a loss of a key member of the VRP team, the project has, at times, lacked sufficient capacity to maintain an appropriate record of impact and progress. Although this is now being addressed, the available data on which this report was to be based has not been as cohesive as anticipated. For example, where data have been collated (for example on the project website), it has often been inconsistently recorded in terms of the timeframes (events or over specific years) and units of measurement (such as mixing a record of the numbers of community groups and/or individuals involved in project components). More importantly, the data available for evaluation is from a mixture of methodologies. In some cases statistics have reported direct empirical research, although in others, these have been estimated. Therefore, evaluation should be understood as tentative, both given the stage of the VRP project itself, and the data that has been available to represent its progress. With this in mind it is strongly recommended that the efforts to recover from a reduced monitoring and evaluation capacity are continued in order to provide more robust data for future evaluations.

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1. Introduction:

The South Wales Valleys: From industrial decline to green prosperity?

“The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) vision is of a high-quality sustainable network of green spaces offering outstanding opportunities for economic, social and environmental regeneration. Through a holistic partnership approach, it seeks to support and develop the green economy, encourage healthy lifestyles, offer outstanding outdoor recreation and learning opportunities and provide a quality visitor destination, thereby changing perceptions of the region and making the Valleys a prime location to live, work and visit”.

(VRP Framework 2014-2020)

At the peak of its economic productivity in 1913, the natural environment of the South Wales Valleys was heavily exploited by major collieries, which employed over 232,800 people and produced 56 million tonnes of coal accounting for over 30% of the world’s coal exports.



Juxtaposition of Industry and Nature in Blaenrhondda, 1947

However, demand for UK and Welsh coal declined significantly between the 1940s and the 1980s, and the dissolution of the coal and related industries in Wales resulted in significant dereliction characterised by scarred natural landscapes and unemployment levels well above the British average (Davies 1988, p. 479). Further dangers of South Wales’ industrial legacy were poignantly highlighted

in the terrible disaster at Aberfan on 21st October 1966, when 144 people died, including 116 children, as a coal tip slipped to engulf part of the village including its school (Davies 1988, p. 479). This tragic event was a turning point for physical regeneration in the valleys. The Derelict Land Unit of first the Welsh Office, and then later specifically the Welsh Development Agency, was tasked with amelioration of immediate risk to life and property, and began to regenerate thousands of acres of land by removing mining infrastructure, capping mines and seeding 500 million tons of colliery spoils.



Blaenrhondda, 2010

Significantly, this regeneration programme was primarily focused on safety and aesthetics, and despite the significant investment in physical remediation the socio-economic legacy of decline in the South Welsh Valleys has remained. The loss of the mining and other heavy industries has resulted in continuing economic stagnation for some of the most highly disadvantaged communities in the United Kingdom. A report commissioned by the Rowntree Foundation into conditions in British coalfields concluded that many areas of the South Wales Valleys are characterised by a duality of deprivation; social problems associated with decaying urban areas, combined with the isolation of rural communities, unable to access the facilities that city dwellers take for granted (Bennett et al. 2000).

As a result, financial exclusion is a major problem in the South Wales Valleys with average household incomes below the national Welsh average (Winckler 2009). The local authorities wholly within the South Wales Valleys, together with Newport and Bridgend, have the highest proportion of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2009). There are also significant social problems (Tanner 2002, pp. 13-14). The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation highlights acute health problems including high levels of smoking, poor diet, obesity, excess alcohol consumption and respiratory disease. In recent decades, a large number of single use housing developments have further heightened both social deprivation and isolation of some communities and the recent global

recession has had further, disproportionately negative impacts on Valleys communities (Welsh Government 2010, p. 6). In Blaenau Gwent, for example, the rate of unemployment claims increased to a peak of 8.0% at the start of 2009 and remained the highest in Wales in 2011 at 6.8%. These pervasive challenges are only heightened by the UK Government Spending Review and welfare reforms which have cut the level of resources allocated for supporting such disadvantaged communities (Welsh Government 2010, p. 6).

Despite the natural assets of the South Wales Valleys, their image is often still overshadowed in wider popular imagination by its industrial legacy, highlighted by the low demand for housing in some locations: with more than a quarter of houses worth less than £45,000 in almost half of the local authority wards (in 2004). Awareness of South East Wales as a tourism destination has been traditionally low with considerably less interest in the Heads of the Valleys area than in other more rural destinations in the region. To date, the dominant form of tourism has been day-visits, followed by visitors staying with friends and relatives in the area; but with much lower levels of longer-stay visitors. In this respect, there has been an iterative agenda of a more holistic approach to regeneration in more recent years. The Heads of the Valleys programme identified the possibility to use the natural and cultural heritage as a driver for regeneration through leisure and tourism.

Its strategic goals were to develop:

- An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment
- A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities
- A well-educated, skilled and healthier population
- An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience
- Public confidence in a shared bright future

This focus of bringing together environmental and socio-economic regeneration was also subsequently adopted by the Western Valleys regeneration programme. However, the main focus for this type of approach in the valleys has been the Valleys Regional Park initiative, the development of which was supported and proposed by the Heads of the Valleys programme. Indeed, the VRP is recognised as a flagship component of the Welsh Government's (2012a; 2012b, p. 20) sustainable development programme and one of seven Regeneration Areas (Welsh Government 2013).

2. The environment and heritage as economic and social drivers for regeneration: the role of regional parks

2.1. Regional Parks

A Regional Park is based upon the definition of a distinctive and extensive geographical area. They tend to encompass areas of land with natural, heritage, recreational or other interest. In some cases they are managed by state institutions with statutory powers (such as the example in Stuttgart: Basten 2011), whilst in others by a non-statutory partnership of local authorities and other stakeholders (as in the example of the Valleys Regional Park discussed below). In most cases however, a largely unique and arguably key feature of Regional Parks is that they are not restricted to existing administrative jurisdictions. Apart from being territorially fixed, Regional Parks in the UK have a relatively loose definition. Unlike a National Park, land within a Regional Park is not provided with statutory protection and proposed developments remain subject to usual planning procedures. Whilst Regional Parks in the UK tend to lack explicit planning safeguarding, the flexibility of the concept does facilitate an ability to tailor objectives to the specific assets and social, cultural, environmental, and economic opportunities contained within the landscapes of the specific region. Indeed, each example of a Regional Park has a unique set of objectives to provide varying combinations of environmental, social and economic benefits.

One example in the UK is Lee Valley Regional Park established in 1967 to meet the recreational and natural conservation needs of parts of London, Hertfordshire and Essex, and comprising 10,000 acres of land within a socially deprived area. Administered by a partnership of private and public organisations, the Regional Park aims to increase, improve, extend and interconnect access to green space both for local communities and visitors, whilst also acting as a 'green lung' for the city and a thriving environment for its wildlife. According to its 2010 Framework, the flexibility of what constitutes the Regional Park is stated as key (Lee Valley Park 2010, p. 17). For example, a primary focus is the development of a 'zone of sporting excellence' which includes existing venues of the park, as well as three sites inherited from the London 2012 legacy.

Another example in London is the Wandle Valley Regional Park, which spans the four boroughs along the River Wandle. The project was initiated by the Regional Park Trust in 2011 and over the next decade plans on extending, developing and interlinking green spaces leading to healthier, enhanced and more interconnected local communities and ecologies. According to the trust, the Wandle Valley Regional Park seeks to be "an innovative, sustainable and high quality Regional Park in the Wandle Valley that is easily accessible, with a rich and thriving biodiversity, offering recreational, landscape, heritage, cultural and resource management benefits in which local people and businesses can take pride and ownership" (Wandle Valley Regional Park 2007). Here, as urban Regional Parks, there is an emphasis upon extending, developing and interconnecting green spaces within the city and its peri-urban edges.

Regional Parks in Scotland offer a more extensive view that has a greater emphasis on the relationship between environmental assets and human livelihoods and sustainable socio-economic development. According to the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, section 48A, Regional Parks are defined as “large areas of countryside, parts of which are available for informal countryside recreation.” Whilst the three Regional Parks of Scotland lie close to Scotland’s larger towns and cities, one of the guiding principles of Scottish Regional Parks is that they should “all refer to the wider wish to facilitate both the appropriate understandings and enjoyment of the countryside and the integration of this with the other uses of the area, such as farming, forestry and other development, with the context of maintaining and enhancing a quality natural heritage setting”.

In this context, Regional Parks are recognised as part of an ‘integrated’ approach to countryside management, combining recreation alongside farming and forestry. For example, the Lomond Regional Park is run as a partnership of landowners, estate managers, farmers, public sector agencies and other interested individuals and organisations, indicative of different priorities which encompass rural livelihoods such as farming. Pentland Regional Park, formed in 1986, is managed by local authorities that the region encompasses. Its 2007-2017 vision is “to guide and assist all stakeholders in the sustainable management of the Pentland Hills Regional Park’s changing environment in a way which supports communities living and working within the Pentland Hills Regional Park, promotes responsible access for all, develops public understanding of the mixed land use resource and conserves and enhances the Pentland Hills Regional Park’s landscape, cultural and natural heritage features.”

Whilst England and Scotland have a well-established history of Regional Parks, the situation in Wales is quite different. The Valleys Regional Park programme is the first Regional Park concept in Wales, which arguably places greater emphasis on investment in environmental and cultural heritage assets as a means for socio-economic regeneration and therefore, represents a significant break from planning that has simply sought to generate access to upgraded green space. In this sense, the VRP sits more coherently with examples from the wider European continent. Indeed the WECAN Interreg IVB-funded project, led in Wales by the Valleys Regional Park, is more formally concerned with a specific focus on socio-economic regeneration. The partners in the WECAN project, which include Regional Natural Parks in France and Belgium’s first National Park, are located in regions characterised by the juxtaposition of post-industrial, densely populated urban areas - with high levels of social deprivation and economic inactivity - and large natural areas. Consequently, WECAN aims to understand how it might be possible to stimulate economic growth in the post-industrial regions of North-West Europe, by maximising the potential of the natural heritage whilst encouraging sustainable and responsible use of natural areas (WECAN 2011:4).

3. Valleys Regional Park Concept and Development

The concept of a Valleys Regional Park, or rather parks in this case, was first suggested by Lloyd and Jackson in their 1949 'South Wales Outline Plan'. They urged that the natural environment 'should be allowed a more prominent place in the planning of this region' including the valleys, stating that 'while each town and district should 'possess its "character", it is still necessary to put in a plea for the more studied aid of the natural environment.' Four discrete areas were proposed as regional parks and it was stressed that the chosen areas 'should have good pathway systems, with adequately planned bus stations, car parks, shelters and restaurants.' Importantly, it was also suggested that the funds for securing these parks should be shared between the different authorities, with grants from national sources as were available.

Further to the reclamation activities of the previous decades, recognition of the environmental potential of the valleys was reignited in 1998 by the 'Greening the Valleys', a partnership of public, private and voluntary organisations, which offered "a new environmental vision" for the valleys, based upon the priorities of working with nature and people; conserving local identity and committing to design innovation. The idea of investing in environmental resources to catalyse regeneration was further developed in the 'City of the Valleys' paper (Tanner 2002).

Consequently, emanating from the Greening the Valleys initiative and supported by the Heads of the Valleys Programme, *The Valleys Regional Park Vision: Visioning Review and Development Exercise* was prepared by Ian Parkin and Chris Ledbury (2006) to provide a clear vision as to what a Valleys Regional Park could be as well as its potential benefits. Following this, a *Valleys Regional Park Strategic Framework* was developed in 2007 by a consortium of consultants led by Parkin Heritage and Tourism, funded by the Heads of the Valleys Programme, comprising a Master Plan and Business Plan.

As a result, the VRP concept was established, signifying an important shift in focus from the aesthetic and environmental regeneration of the area towards one more directly concerned with socio-economic regeneration using the natural and cultural heritage as drivers. The subsequent VRP development involved more than two years research and collaborative planning with over 30 organisations, including local authorities and the third sector; as well as a wider stakeholder group of 550 people through workshops, focus groups and one-to-one development meetings.

The aim of the VRP is to maximise the environmental, social and economic potential of the Valleys' outstanding natural and cultural heritage assets, thereby helping change the reality and perceptions of the Valleys as a highly-desirable place to live, work, invest and visit. As such, the VRP seeks to co-ordinate, drive and promote activities related to the environment and heritage across the valleys. Over forty partners have united to move beyond isolated activities and instead deliver a more effective, collaborative, both cross-sector and cross-boundary approach to fulfilling a regional vision.

In this sense, the VRP is similar to other initiatives that aim to unify development activity around natural resources in a defined area. The Mersey Forest is the largest of England's 12 Community Forests, where collective efforts have been delivering interventions including tree planting and

woodland management, land reclamation, creating access to green space and recreational facilities, and strongly embedded in community engagement.

Specifically, Valleys Regional Park aims to create a high-quality, sustainable network of green space that will:

- Enhance and promote the Valleys’ outstanding environmental and cultural assets
- Offer high-quality recreational opportunities which will change the image and perception of the Valleys for ever
- Improve the quality of life and health for valleys citizens
- Create an environment that becomes an attractive destination for visitors and stimulates indigenous enterprise and inward investment
- Generate jobs and business based on the environment, culture and sustainable tourism
- Increase training opportunities and help improve education standards
- Develop strong, cohesive communities

The activities of the VRP partnership span the former south Wales coalfield (See Figure 1). Defined in the Wales Spatial Plan, the VRP area stretches from the western borders of Monmouthshire in the east to the Valleys of Carmarthenshire in the west; the Brecon Beacons National Park in the north; and the major cities of Cardiff, Swansea, and Newport to the south. It covers an area of over 200,000 hectares (570 sq. miles) and is home to over 1 million people, approximately one-third of the Welsh population (VRP 2011, p. 4). Given this physical spread, the park initiative operates within the local authorities of Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen and therefore provides a concrete example of regeneration practice that looks beyond existing administrative boundaries. The VRP is also intended to be more than just the existing parks, forests, open spaces and amenity areas and also includes settlements, heritage sites, industrial sites, derelict land and Brownfield sites.



Figure 1: Map showing location and boundaries of the Valleys Regional Park area

4. Valleys Regional Park Implementation

Following the development of the VRP Framework (VRP 2007), a number of key partners produced a joint Action Plan for proposed projects to deliver the original VRP framework while at the same time complementing the activities and programmes of the Heads of the Valleys and Western Valleys Regeneration Areas.

This report focuses on three areas of investment that have been carried out at part of the VRP programme; primarily two major projects, the ERDF Valleys Regional Park project and the Interreg IVB WECAN project, as well as a KESS studentship.

4.1. ERDF Valleys Regional Park (VRP) Project

Development of the *Valleys Regional Park Action Plan 2008-2013 (VRP)*, supported by the HoV programme, led to the submission of a funding bid to the European Regional Development Fund Convergence Programme in February 2009 under Priority 4 – Creating and attractive business environment, Measure 3 – Environment For Growth. The *Valleys Regional Park Environment for Growth Phase 1 Business Plan (VRP 2009)* was successfully approved by the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) in April 2009 as one of a suite of strategic Environment for Growth projects to deliver the Convergence Programme in Wales.

The VRP is led by the Welsh Government on behalf of the 20 Joint Project Sponsors (see Appendix 1) who operationalise the action plan's initiatives. This ERDF component of the VRP focuses on the promotion of tourism activities based in the natural environment and centred on countryside/wildlife and heritage centres, community based tourism initiatives and events. It also seeks to create an environment that encourages entrepreneurship as a result of the new outdoor recreational opportunities created, and the collective positive marketing and promotion of these. With this 'joined up' approach it is considered that the VRP will facilitate a far more cohesive tourism offer and regeneration approach than was previously in place, and as a direct result, can create permanent new jobs and self-employment (2009, pp. 26-27).

The majority of the funding available through VRP was allocated to capital improvement schemes delivered by joint project sponsors for the purposes of:

- Infrastructure improvements to visitor centres at country parks, nature reserves, heritage centres and other visitor facilities;
- Landscape-scale improvements that can be promoted as visitor destinations but are not necessarily focused on one location or visitor centre; and
- Improving existing and creating new walking, cycling and horse riding routes to provide a sustainable network of trails that enables the visitor to access and explore the countryside.

In addition to capital investments, the VRP allocated funding opportunities to be administered by Capital Region Tourism on their behalf, for the purposes of:

- Interpretation schemes: to interpret the local heritage and landscapes in order to increase the visitors' understanding and enjoyment of the VRP.
- Events: to focus on the environment and/or heritage of the area and that attract visitors and contribute to a coordinated programme of events.

Running alongside these initiatives, the ESF Cross Fund Flexibility element of funding was developed to support a programme of training for Community Tourism Ambassadors.

Finally, the *Community Pride Total Focus Area Campaign: Presenting a Clean and Pleasant Environment for Visitors* programme was envisaged to address environmental blight such as litter, fly-tipping and burnt out cars.

As a whole it was anticipated that the VRP ERDF project would achieve the following outputs:

- 80 Km of managed access to the countryside
- 100,000 extra tourism visits
- 200 new jobs
- 200 participants trained
- 150 participants gaining recognised tourism qualifications

The Joint Project Sponsors were given an opportunity to bid for funding in three separate application windows in August 2009, February 2010 and October 2010 for the implementation of initiatives. As a result, 44 capital projects were “Approved in Principle” across the VRP area and operationalise many of the initial aims of the VRP concept.

4.2. Interreg IVB WECAN Project

In addition to the VRP ERDF project, the Valleys Regional Park programme has developed other projects and initiatives to deliver its objectives. The other major project is the Interreg IVB WECAN project (Working together for Economically-prosperous Communities through Assets of Natural heritage). WECAN was developed by partners within post-industrial, densely populated regions in Belgium, France and Wales (Valleys Regional Park) that have suffered significant decline in heavy industry, more specifically the closure of coalmines and related activities that today are experiencing high levels of economic inactivity and often suffer with problems of social exclusion.

Worth €4.13M in total across the partnership, WECAN project seeks to help deliver a well-planned effective green infrastructure to boost businesses and communities to help create economic and social prosperity and protect the natural environment assets vital to that. The WECAN project comprises four interlinked work packages:

- **Work package 1:** To develop and test transferable techniques to assess the economic potential of the natural environment in densely-populated post-industrial areas.
- **Work package 2:** To develop, promote, establish and evaluate innovative exemplars of responsible corporate sector interaction with the natural environment.
- **Work package 3:** To evaluate ‘visitor payback’-mechanisms for the natural environment to develop appropriate schemes for post-industrial regions and test their effectiveness in order to create guidelines for implementation in other regions.

- **Work package 4:** To identify those conditions and factors that enhance community participation in the natural heritage to boost employability and create opportunities for employment, thereby stimulating the social economy.

In March 2010, the WECAN project approved a €1.28M contribution to the VRP, with an agreed intervention rate of 50%, under the Interreg IVB Strong and Prosperous Communities theme, to run until at least the end of 2013 (VRP 2011, p. 22). VRP is leading the partnership on developing and enhancing opportunities for community engagement and involvement and social enterprise based on the natural environment. Groundwork Wales is currently the partner managing the project on behalf of Valleys Regional Park with match funding coming through a variety of sources including Welsh Government, the Countryside Council for Wales, and Forestry Commission Wales.

4.3. Knowledge Economy Skills Sector (KESS)

Working with Cardiff Metropolitan University (formerly UWIC), VRP was successful in obtaining the award of a Knowledge Economy Skills Sector (KESS) PhD studentship investigating the health benefits of getting communities actively involved in the outdoor environment. Entitled “Green Exercise: translating exercise-derived health benefits from the laboratory to the community”, the major aim of the project is to obtain a more robust health-based evidence base for developing projects and initiatives that lead to greater community activity in the natural environment. More specifically, the project aims to gain greater understanding of the mechanisms for physiological and psychological benefits of being active in the natural environment, which can help combat mental ill-health, obesity, and Type II Diabetes, amongst other condition. Groundwork Wales is the business sponsor on behalf of VRP for the project providing financial support and in-kind match funding between 2010 and 2014.

5. Interim Evaluation of VRP Progress and Outputs

“Despite some failings, the VRP in our opinion has been hugely successful to date. Many innovative capital projects have been delivered, huge levels of investment drawn down from EU structural funds (which levered in domestic match), collaborative projects developed, innovative pan European research complete via the WECAN project, economic analysis with academic institutions, and many opportunities/relationships developed for future partnership working”.

(Comment from representative of VRP partner)

As noted above, the VRP has been delivered through two major areas of investment. The following section discusses the interim progress and outputs of each programme component in turn.

5.1. ERDF VRP Project

The ERDF project of VRP partnership has focused on the promotion of tourism activities based in the natural environment and centred on countryside, wildlife and heritage centres, as well as community based tourism initiatives and events. It also seeks to create an environment that encourages entrepreneurship as a result of the new outdoor recreational opportunities as well as the collective marketing and promotion of these.

This section describes and discusses: 1) infrastructure landscape projects, 2) events and interpretation projects, 3) the Community Tourism Project, 4) the Presenting a Clean and Tidy Environment initiative, and finally 5) The Valleys ‘Heart & Soul’ marketing campaign, drawing information from internal VRP Progress Status documentation (VRP 2013) and the public facing website (VRP 2012b).

5.1.1. Infrastructure Projects

Overview of Progress to Date

Originally 44 infrastructure and landscape projects were approved in principle as a result of the funding calls to joint project sponsors: with 40 eventually being given formal authority to commit. By December 2012, 34 of these projects had been completed, a completion rate of over 85%. Of the others, five projects are ongoing due to finish by October 2013 whilst one has been decommitted (VRP 2013).

A very brief overview of just some of the infrastructure projects follows here, whilst other specific examples are given in the ‘focus area studies’ where projects are considered more widely in the context of VRP and other activities in the areas in question. More in-depth analysis of all the projects in that context will be undertaken in a final report once all the projects have been completed and more data is available concerning their impact.

One of the earliest completed infrastructure projects was the construction of the Environmental Resource Centre at the former Steelworks site being regenerated in Ebbw Vale, in conjunction with Blaenau Gwent CBC and the Gwent Wildlife Trust. Built from locally sourced and sustainable materials using the 'Ty Unnos' system, the centre is located on an ecologically-rich site next to the Pumphouse cooling ponds, which have become a haven for wildlife since the closure of the steelworks, and provides locals and visitors with the opportunity to explore and learn more about the area. It is hoped that this will eventually connect with the Ebbw Fach Trail in the adjacent valley to the east (see the focus area study).

Community involvement has been a key element in infrastructure projects and amongst the projects completed to date, good examples being the Ebbw Fach Trail, Blaen Bran Woodlands (see the focus area studies) and Amman Valley Trotting Club.

One of the many regeneration projects and initiatives that are helping to transform the Merthyr area is that at Cyfarthfa Park and Castle, restoring the old Tramway, and the historic Leat which supplied water to the famous Cyfarthfa ironworks. This project is currently in progress and a new walkway will form part of a heritage trail between Cyfarthfa and the Taf Fechan Nature Reserve, which forms part of the Cwm Taf Fechan Woodland where the fast-flowing Taf Fechan River cuts through close to limestone cliffs.

Compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was a vital element for projects. Gnoll Estate Country Park in Neath, voted as the Best Picnic spot in Wales in 2010 contains a beautiful 18th-century landscaped garden which retains many of its original features, including impressive water cascades. Here disabled access has been improved by resurfacing existing paths, and providing off-road disabled scooters to visitors enabling them to access more of the country park.

Environmental sensitivity has also been a key consideration throughout. Craig-y-Ddinas near Pontneddfechan situated at the top of the Vale of Neath in what is often termed 'Waterfall Country' is hugely popular with visitors and especially rock climbing enthusiasts. Work with Forestry Commission Wales to improve access and signage has been sensitive to the ecological and environmental features of the area.

North of Swansea, the visitor centre and fishery at the lower Lliw reservoir has been improved in conjunction with the City Council and the Mawr Development Trust. The centre provides a great base for exploring the characteristic mountains of the Mawr, which boast a tremendous variety of flora and fauna.

One of the key ERDF infrastructure projects has been the development and extension of the Valleys Cycle Network in partnership with Sustrans as the joint project sponsor together with the relevant local authorities. Targets for length of route and area developed have been exceeded by 14km (over the aims of 71 km) and 8.5ha (more than the 35.5ha target), whilst twelve intermodal facilities have been developed surpassing the original VRP target.

Outputs to Date

Overall, the total output from the projects supported by ERDF funding, and completed by December 2012, has been the creation or improvement of over 118 km of managed access to the countryside. In addition, improvements have been made to 16789 ha of land and 21 jobs have been created. It is

Cwmbran

Gateway to the VRP



Cwmbran at the south of the Afon Lwyd (Eastern) valley was envisaged as a south-eastern gateway to the Valleys Regional Park area in the 2007 VRP framework. It was established as the first new town in Wales following the designation of an area of 12,500 hectares around the village of Cwmbran in 1949 and the subsequent outline plan to create a town of around 35,000 people to take advantage of employment opportunities in the district.

The environment has always played an important and integral part in Cwmbran and its planning. In the Cwmbran New Town outline plan of 1951, seven easily accessible parks with a total area of 131 hectares were proposed, varying in size and character, with a principle to make every to link them together with gardens, playing fields, the river, canal, woods, and other open spaces to facilitate the planning of greenways and cycle tracks in a comprehensive landscape system covering the whole town to which a central green parkway was crucial.

Since then the town has grown with a current population of around 50,000 inhabitants. In recent years, a 15-year strategy has been set out to regenerate and develop the town through various public and private partnerships, including the Cwmbran Operations Group, a partnership set up with Cwmbran, and Croesyceiliog and Llanyrafon Community Councils to deliver a programme of local regeneration projects and environmental improvements that assist in the delivery of the Torfaen Regeneration Strategy, which seeks to secure good jobs, tackle social exclusion, revitalise community life, and restore man-made and natural environments.

As a key Valleys Regional Park partner, Torfaen CBC has delivered a number of key linked projects in the wider Cwmbran area which will act as attractions for both visitors and local residents. The redevelopment of the boating lake area at the south of the town to create **Cwmbran Riverside Park** has been an key development. New and improved links throughout the park have provided access for all to the new facilities, the surrounding open space and the river corridor as well as adjacent key attractions. The improvements have included the creation of a wet woodland and island habitat, upgrading of the surfacing around the lake, and repair works to the lake edge, as well as the new boat house with catering and toilet facilities.

Greenmeadow Community Farm has been a working farm for over 250 years. Set in over 150 acres, it has a wide range of pedigree and rare animals. Nestled in the heart of Cwmbran, it is a Community Farm in every sense of the word, working closely with and serving the local community and welcoming visitors from far and wide. A number of key projects have been carried out at the farm through the Valleys Regional Park programme. The 'Eye Paddock' which was previously of very poor quality and little used by visitors has been revamped to create a vibrant arena for regular events and an added attraction to increase visitors to the farm.

Footpaths have been upgraded to improve access to the area and adjacent ponds and woodland, signage installed, whilst a new shelter provides protection to make the area useable for much of the year.





The visitor experience has also been enhanced through the improvement of the Haybarn. This has included; ground floor accommodation for the Gwent Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers allowing them to make a greater contribution to special event days and access to crafts for visitors, a hatchery and small animal unit, and an integrated demonstration of sustainable energy technology with information panels adding a new element to the visitor experience. In addition, links to the adjacent Springvale and Church Woods have permitted farm staff to expand their offer and lead guided walks and school visits to the area.

An ancient pilgrims' trail that once linked medieval monasteries across Wales runs close to and along the mountain ridge between Cwmbran towards the Hill Fort at Twmbarlwm overlooking the Afon Lwyd and Ebbw valleys. The **Ancient Heritage project** has implemented a range of environmental and access improvements to open up and develop links between key sites in the currently 'untapped' ancient heritage and landscape history along the South Torfaen-Caerphilly border to develop and expand the area's tourism and visitor offer.

This area is linked closely to the **Blaen Bran Community Woodland** located above Cwmbran in an upland valley. The woodland was already popular with local people for recreation and relaxation and the work undertaken has made it easier for visitors to access the outdoors safely, whether on foot, by car or on horseback. New waymarkers have created links to the Pilgrim's route and Green-meadow Farm such that visitors can

easily learn more about the heritage of this area. The active Blaen Bran Community Woodland group is looking at opportunities for firewood processing, horse logging, milling timber, forest school activity and green wood working.

Other projects in the area are creating a critical mass of attractions for residents and visitors. **Llanyrafon Manor**, one of the oldest, non-religious buildings in Torfaen, was officially reopened as a Rural Heritage Centre in June 2012. The Grade-II listed building was transformed, thanks to funding from the Rural Development Plan, Welsh Government, CADW, the Cwmbran Operations Group and Torfaen council. Visitors to the imposing building, which was restored to CADW guidelines, can learn about the history of the manor, enjoy refreshments in the café and even observe bats that have set up home in the grounds.

These environment and heritage attractions will help make Cwmbran a better place to live and visit and link well with the planned urban regeneration. Recently Torfaen County Borough Council commissioned The Urbanists to produce a masterplan vision for the sustainable regeneration of a key site in Cwmbran, located to the north-west of the town centre and focused around the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal. The masterplan proposes an exciting development framework and mix of uses around a proposed new canal basin which will form an important destination point on the canal corridor, create a new 'quarter' to the town centre and improve the link between the town centre and the west of Cwmbran.



estimated that 156,900 new visitors have come to the area as a result of ERDF infrastructure investments.

The ongoing secondment of a CCW project officer is intended to maintain quality standards for the valleys' country parks and nature reserves. The post supports the appropriate grading of walking and cycling routes, and advises on signage, interpretation and management across VRP sites, in order to achieve consistency and coherence. As a result, ten Country Parks across the valleys were awarded Green Flag status (the national standard for parks and green spaces in England and Wales) in 2012 through a joint VRP submission procedure.

5.1.2. Interpretation & Events

Overview of Progress

Overall, the VRP ERDF project has funded 42 events and interpretation projects with the aim of engaging and informing visitors and local communities about the natural and cultural environment of the valleys. By December 2012 nine of the 12 approved VRP-ERDF events and activities were completed, a 75% completion rate to date. One was decommitted, another remains ongoing, with the final yet to provide feedback. In terms of the 30 interpretation activities approved, fifteen have been completed, a 50% completion rate to date. Twelve remain ongoing, all of which are due to finish by March 2013, whilst one was decommitted and one has been carried out through another funding route.

The brown and white tourism signage scheme which seeks a consistent approach to signage across the valleys has committed £250,000 to date. The scheme has been extended not only to those VRP sites with ERDF grant funding but also to those where VRP community ambassadors are operating. In the third round of applications for tourism signing across the valleys, it was recognised that many applications were small scale. Therefore, a joined-up approach was recognised as key in order to achieve value. The schemes have therefore been redirected to a local authority level so that highway departments can select the means of procurement and delivery best suited to their operations. At this stage, it is not possible to identify how many signs have been established as a result of this funding since this aspect of the project is ongoing.

Outputs to Date

Overall, as of December 2012, the interpretation and events have attracted over 244,639 visitors and involved over 664 community groups and 5,552 individuals. They have enabled the creation of four jobs and have safeguarded another 3.3 whilst over 400 participants received training as a result of the programmes in this package. The full extent of impact remains open until all of the projects are completed and those projects who have not returned feedback do so (this includes two ongoing projects and one that is completed but yet to provide feedback).

Gross Value Added and Employment from the ERDF VRP Project

According to the data reported by the VRP documentation, the ERDF funding has facilitated the direct creation of 23 jobs overall (See

Appendix 3). However, as part of ongoing monitoring and output evaluation carried out by the Welsh Economy Research Unit at Cardiff Business School (2010, 2011), there was further analysis of the ongoing progress of the ERDF Environment for Growth funding invested across Wales (2012, 2013a, 2013b). The overall objective of research was to better understand the economic effects levered by both improvements to E4G sites, and visitation to E4G sponsored events. Specifically, analysis focused on the Gross Value Added (GVA – or locally earned income and profits) and employment (the number of person years of full time equivalent employment supported by visits to sites or events).

Overall it is estimated that for four selected events (Six Bells 2010, Cordell Event 2010, Welsh Waterways 2011, and Cwmbran Big Event 2011) £57,300 GVA was generated with 2.8 years of employment. This aggregate impact is broken down to an equivalent of £14,325 per event thus supporting 0.7 years of employment (Welsh Economy Research Unit 2013b, p. 5). In addition, when estimates were made for the wider impact of 3 VRP sites (Dare Valley 2010, Pen Y Fan 2010 and Pen Y Fan 2011) over a year (assuming one night's stay but factoring in any other spend directly linked to their trip), it is estimated that these VRP events have generated £353,300 GVA and 19 years of employment (or £117,767 GVA and 6 years of employment per site) (Welsh Economy Research Unit 2013a, pp. 5-6). Where this estimation process is further extrapolated to the whole of trips of which visits to E4G sites were *a part*, impact suggested to be in the region of £5,316,900 and 231 employment years (Welsh Economy Research Unit 2013a, p. 6).

A full breakdown by event and site can be found in Appendix 4. However, in summary, it is estimated that the Dare Valley received 142,000 visitors between October 2009 and September 2010 (Welsh Economy Research Unit 2012, p. 33). The GVA supported by trips of which Dare Valley was a part was around £4.4m and with linked tourism spending supporting an estimated 190 FTE jobs. In this case, on-site effects were a small proportion of total trip effects. Just £0.28m of GVA was supported by the on-site spending and 15 FTE jobs. The remaining site is Pen y Fan where survey results were available for 2010 and 2011. For the two years there are similarities in the GVA and employment supported by trips of which visits to Pen y Fan were a part. In 2010 an estimated £0.51m of GVA was supported and 22 FTE jobs. However, economic activity supported by on site spending differed markedly between 2010 and 2011. It is noted that in the case of Pen y Fan survey returns represent a small element of the visitor population and with results here possibly sensitive to just a few returns (Welsh Economy Research Unit 2012, p. 33).

5.2. Community Tourism Programme

Overview of Progress

The major thrust of the ERDF VRP Community Tourism Programme was to encourage individuals from within local communities to become 'ambassadors' in order to promote local community engagement and support and enhance the visitor offer and experience in the valleys. Through the completion of appropriate training, it was expected that these individuals would become visitor guides; a role that could eventually provide them with opportunities to develop enterprises relating to the environment, tourism service activities and the wider sustainability agenda. It was also stated in the VRP 2009 Business Plan (2009, p. 22) that any training provided to staff and volunteers would include 'sustainability awareness raising, and promotion of the project's environmental policies'

Aberdare and the Cynon Valley



The Aberdare Town Centre regeneration strategy (Powell Dobson/RCT, 2010) emphasised the need to maximise tourism opportunities and strengthen the links with the surrounding countryside as a key part of the town's regeneration. This was further recognised in associated stakeholder engagement events which highlighted the town's heritage and natural environment as strengths, providing opportunities to be exploited.

In particular, Dare Valley Country Park was identified as a key opportunity. Opened in December 1973 on land reclaimed from over a century of coal-mining in the area over a two year period, it was first country park in Britain to be developed on reclaimed former industrial land. The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) framework (2007) recognised it as a key gateway and linking it better to Aberdare town centre was designated as a priority in the resultant VRP Action Plan. Valleys Regional Park has subsequently supported a mix of infrastructure and interpretation projects in Aberdare and the wider Cynon Valley area as well as community tourism training and events.

Economic analysis by the Welsh Economy Research Unit at Cardiff Business School in 2011 on behalf of VRP assessed the economic impact associated with visitation to Dare Valley Country Park over a year. Specifically it analysed visitor-type breakdown through self-completed questionnaires distributed by VRP to adults at the park. The largest number of visits was leisure day trips, typically associated with relatively lower levels of spending compared to stays. Combined with information from the Visit Wales Tourism Impact Planning Model it

provided an estimate of the gross value added (GVA) and employment connected with different types of trips.

Importantly, the analysis looked at the activity supported on-site by visitor spending compared to off-site, so whilst £0.28m of GVA was supported by spending at Dare Valley itself, equating to 15 FTE jobs supported, it indicated the activity supported in the wider Welsh economy by visitors staying at Dare Valley Country Park was around £4.4m of GVA was supported by this spending in Wales and some 190 FTE job opportunities.

Since then, the Welsh Government's HoV regeneration programme has funded improvements to the visitor centre and to increase the park's accommodation offer whilst VRP funding developed much-improved pedestrian access between Aberdare town centre and the park, especially via the new Gadlys Bridge, which was officially opened in March 2012. In addition, VRP helped fund a new coach parking area so creating greater opportunities for the coach tourism market, as well as the acquisition of a new climbing wall as a visitor attraction.

Marketed through the Valleys 'Heart & Soul' campaign as one of the 'Top 50 Valleys Essentials', under the 'Action and Adventure' theme, a new Geocaching trail has opened at the park, one of a new series of themed trails that aims to attract some of the estimated five million geocaching enthusiasts in the world to the valleys. Dare Valley Country Park is also in the first tranche of valleys Country Parks that achieved Green Flag status in 2012 as part of the VRP vision to obtain recognition of high standards across the area.





In addition to Dare Valley Country Park itself, the adjacent wider environment provides new economic opportunities for the town and the surrounding settlements throughout the Cynon valley. The idea of the Cynon Valley River Park was drawn from the Cynon Valley Local Plan adopted by Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC in 2004, with the preparation of a draft strategy supported by HoV funding.

The main focus was on the strategic importance of the flood plain environment and the implementation of projects to encourage positive use and management to provide space for natural processes, for wildlife, and for people, bringing together all the relevant green-space projects in the area into a coherent framework.

Valleys Regional Park has now supported the development of this important asset connecting the wider valley environment and the settlements between Aberdare and Mountain Ash. The series of projects under the Cynon Valley River Park scheme have drastically upgraded 4 km of route coupled with the surrounding land improved which it is projected will attract a further 40,000 visitors to the area.

The environment has also proved to be a focus for regeneration for some years at Cwmaman just to the southwest of Aberdare where the Communities First partnership has been heavily involved in the development of a community woodland, funded through Cydcoed, with a sculpture trail which has proved to be a great attraction. Valleys Regional Park support has since helped create a sculptural play area at the trail that reflects the wildlife and heritage of Cwmaman as well as upgrading a central

area on the trail to improve visitor numbers. St. Joseph's Church adjacent to the trail has hosted a VRP-supported Environment Festival and a popular event in the 2011 Valleys Discovery Festival funded through the WECAN project whilst Cwmaman Institute had the prestige of holding the first-ever VRP Valleys Community Tourism Conference in 2011, attracting over a 100 participants from across the valleys, which was a boost to the hugely successful, Community Tourism Ambassador scheme that VRP has initiated.

In Aberdare town centre itself, VRP funding has enabled RCT to produce one of its five new audio heritage trails. The trail allows visitors and locals to discover where the first National Eisteddfod took place, where a pioneer of cinema first showed his films, and why Aberdare was once known as the 'Athens of Wales'. A similar new audio trail has been developed at Hirwaun, further up the Cynon valley.

In total, the funding through VRP into the Aberdare and immediate Cynon Valley area has been worth more than £600,000 with a gross value of well over £1M.



within local communities. In order to facilitate this, providers were commissioned to train at least 200 community tourism ambassadors, starting in February 2011 (VRP 2012a).

Outputs to Date

As of December 2012, a total of 301 people had completed at least one of the Ambassador workshops ('WorldHost' or 'Our Place') (VRP 2012a). The map below identifies that the geographical spread of this training has been good with trained ambassadors now covering most parts of the VRP area (VRP, 2012a). Within this overall number of trained Ambassadors, 219 people have completed the WorldHost Principles of Customer Service course, and 187 have completed both the World Host and Our Place courses to become recognised as fully trained by the VRP administration (VRP 2012a).

All participants in these training courses have gained an NQF Level 2 BTEC qualification (VRP 2012a). In terms of social impact, while 60% of participants are otherwise employed and 3% are in full time education, 8% are unemployed and 31% economically inactive or retired (VRP 2012a). In order to make the representatives accessible to users of the area, four local 'embassies' have been established as hubs for local information and Ambassadors can be booked through the website established under the Community Tourism initiative.



Distribution of Community Tourism Ambassadors in the Valleys

5.3. Presenting a Clean and Pleasant Environment

Progress to Date

Despite existing initiatives to reduce the level of Fly-tipping (such as the Heads of the Valleys *Cleaner Valleys Task Force* and Keep Wales Tidy activities), VRP consultations identified partner organisations, particularly the local authorities, were concerned about the effect of 'environmental blight' (litter, fly-tipping, burnt out cars, and illegal off road motorcycling) on the prospects of promoting tourism activity (VRP 2011, p. 9).

Therefore, £632,000 was allocated within the VRP project to support the Environment Agency Wales to coordinate a "Community Pride Total Focus Area Campaign". Commencing in March 2011, focus has been at the level of local authorities and has concentrated on problem areas with the greatest potential for increased visitor numbers (Fly-tipping Action Wales). Emphasis has been on Enforcement, Engagement, and Education.

The VRP project has operationalised the above through a number of activities (VRP 2011, pp. 18-19):

- A range of pilot activities, including innovative use of GPS;
- A media campaign linked to Valleys Heart & Soul involving a wide range of partners across the VRP area;
- Sophisticated and ongoing educational interventions with schools, households and businesses;
- High profile 'clean-up' campaigns, and additional waste collection resources, which demonstrate the value and easiness of avoiding fly-tipping behaviour.

Outputs to Date

To date, the Registered Waste Carrier messages have been heard by 1,115,000 radio listeners. The initiative has also been featured on the UK-wide, Channel 5 programme, The Wright Stuff, and therefore seen by some 700,000 viewers; with other TV exposure coming from the Filthy Rotten Scoundrels programme viewed by 1.5 million people across the UK.

More locally, the campaign has been publicised on 152,000 beer mats used in 153 pubs; bus adverts passed by 256 buses on 19 routes; and in the Go Green magazine currently circulated to 409,000 readers. The Fly-tipping Campaign has also sought to mobilise social media resources. As an outcome, the campaign now has 287 Follows on Twitter and has registered 106 Likes on Facebook; the overall result of which is a 61% increase in traffic since the start of the project. The campaign has also delivered presentations to 720 students: the outcome of which has been that the 84% of construction students previously unaware of 'duty of care' have now been exposed to the concept and its value for the Valleys region.

In the same vein, the 'Total Focus' Community Events held under the direction of the programme have led to 2.5 million opportunities to see. As part of this, 1,500 members of the public have been engaged with, 42% of which were previously unaware of 'duty of care'. The project has also linked with over 877 construction businesses and 65 Local Authority Officers over 12 days, members of which have been trained with relevant fly-tipping information. Overall, the number of 'Waste Carrier Stop Checks' and surveillance operations have increased. As a result it is suggested that a reduction of fly-tipping across VRP in 2012 has amounted to a financial saving of around £232,508 (based on the assumption that investigation and clean-up costs of fly-tipping is an estimated £148.00 per small transit van-load).

5.4. The Valleys 'Heart & Soul' Campaign

Specific Aims

The Valleys 'Heart & Soul' campaign was jointly developed by the Valleys Regional Park partnership in conjunction with the Heads of the Valleys and Western Valleys Regeneration programmes in order to develop and maintain a consistent high-quality approach to tourism. The campaign has led to the development and rolling out of The Valleys as a brand to both internal and external markets, development of a Valleys events strategy, creation of a destination management system, and adoption of best practice principles across the region.



The Ebbw Fach valley has a considerable number of community groups working on a range of environmental and heritage projects in conjunction with the local Communities First partnerships and Blaenau Gwent CBC. Consequently, the natural environment and heritage have been an important focus for successful community-led regeneration in the area.

An important centre for the iron and coal industries, the landscapes of the Ebbw Fach valley have undergone remarkable changes over the last forty years through land reclamation schemes and environmental improvements. The concept of an Ebbw Fach Trail was developed by community groups working on individual projects throughout the valley coming together to create a coherent trail of almost 16 kilometres that links fourteen green spaces from Beaufort Hill Woodlands in the north to Llanhilleth in the south. A detailed strategy and masterplan, which was drawn up by Blaenau Gwent CBC with the assistance of the Ebbw Fach Trail group, has been implemented through the Valleys Regional Park programme. In conjunction with preservation of historic Hafod Arch in the stunning Clydach Gorge, 1 km of access improvements have created links to the Ebbw Fach Trail and Blaenafon World Heritage Site.

Along the trail, 5 km of new access route has been created along with landscape works, new picnic areas, viewing and fishing platforms, improved information and interpretation signage and enhanced DDA-compliant access. Three sites along the trail have now been designated as local nature reserves; Beaufort Hill Woodlands, Parc Nant-Y-

Waun, and Cwmtillery Lakes. Working through the VRP WECAN Community Spaces initiative, a number of the sites, including Cwmcelyn Lakes, are seeking Community Green Flag status while some are being designated as Community Dark Sky Discovery Sites. The trail is accessible from Llanhilleth railway station in the south through the creation of a VRP-funded route to Aberbeeg by Sustrans as part of the Valleys Cycle Network.

The now-iconic Guardian memorial at Six Bells, near Abertillery, has become an important tourism attraction in the area bringing in visitors from all over the world and providing a much-needed economic boost. Commissioned to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1960 Six Bells Colliery disaster which killed 45 men, it was designed and constructed renowned artist, Sebastian Boyesen. Standing around 20 metres tall, its plinth was funded through VRP, whilst the statue was funded by the Heads of the Valleys programme. Its opening ceremony on June 28th 2010, conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, attracted over 7000 people. Monitoring and evaluation data from the Welsh Economy Research Unit (WERU) for VRP showed that gross spending by event attendees was estimated at £45,900 with an estimated total economic impact of £56,500 of additional output in Wales. The estimated impact on Gross Value Added (GVA), showing how much real additional worth accrues to the area in terms of additions to wages and profits, was £32,000. Modelling also provided an indicative figure of 1.5 person-years equivalent for the employment required to service this additional economic demand.





The Ebbw Fach Trail and Guardian have stimulated a growing tourism industry in the area. Ty Ebbw Fach is one of the VRP Community Tourism Ambassador ‘embassies’. Created by refurbishment of the former derelict pub, it is run by a social enterprise formed by the Six Bells Communities First partnership. Its heritage room, funded through VRP, allows visitors to discover more about the nearby Guardian memorial and the Ebbw Fach Trail as well as the heritage of the area. Its cafe/bistro has provided a much-needed venue for locals and visitors, and together with its conference suite, has created training opportunities for waiting staff, catering staff, administration assistants, tour guides, and marketing assistants. Demand for the VRP Community Tourism Ambassador programme has been high in the area with courses held at Ty Ebbw Fach.

Economic opportunities provided by the environment and heritage are helping to breathe new life into the town centres in the valley. In Blaina, Salem Chapel was refurbished through HoV and Welsh Government’s CFAP to create a Chartism Visitor Centre which has been enhanced by centre’s exhibition opened in 2012 funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The centre of Abertillery, the main town and commercial centre of the valley, is currently undergoing major regeneration worth £13 million. The Met community arts and culture centre and Abertillery and District Museum are already key attractions whilst the town is also home to Wales’ second oldest Victorian shopping arcade and St Michael’s Church where artist John Selway’s ‘Station of the Cross’ works provide a stunning backdrop.

The Ebbw Fach valley has been a focus for the VRP WECAN project due to the environmental opportunities for community-led regeneration. Its overall aim is to develop a holistic ‘green infrastructure’ plan to assist economic, social and environmental regeneration. WECAN has supported the development of the HoV woodland plan, devised by FCW, in the area. Stakeholders including landowners, third sector enterprises, community representatives, and the local authority were approached to ascertain how the local environment can be developed as an asset for local residents and tourists. High priority woodland sites were identified along with ‘green spoke’ opportunities to achieve an ‘all-encompassing and long-term vision where stakeholders are working together in a shared direction’.

A new Native Tree Nursery run as a social enterprise has been proposed with land for its establishment promised by the local RSL, Tai Calon, based at Blaina. Nine separate opportunities have been identified for using the woodlands for woodfuel generation, recreation and potential timber product production. WECAN has also identified opportunities for micro-hydro energy along watercourses. This approach has highlighted the opportunities for the involvement of the local Communities First partnerships and social enterprises such as ‘Tillery Action for Youth’ (TAFY), which is about to commence work with its apprentices on harvesting wood for fuel from one of the priority woodlands at Penrhiwgarreg.

The projects in the Ebbw Fach valley are showing the vital role that the natural and cultural heritage of an area can play in its socio-economic regeneration.



In accordance with one of the 2007 VRP Framework objectives, a valleys brand and marketing strategy, was developed by the WG and Visit Wales: the Valleys 'Heart & Soul' campaign. The campaign seeks to connect with local residents as well as potential visitors beyond the region itself.

Phase 1 of the 'Heart & Soul' campaign took place between 2009 and 2011 with a distinct focus on an internal campaign within the Valleys and Wales. Since 2012, Phase 2 has been in operation with a focus on marketing the valleys to potential visitors from adjacent areas of England with a newly redesigned tourism website – www.thevalleys.co.uk.

Outputs to Date

Outputs from phase 1 of this campaign included:

- A website with over 175,000 visitors since the launch in January 2010, making it comparable with other key tourist regions websites (Equinox 2012, p. 12). The website includes a section dedicated to the 'Top 50 Valleys Essentials', which presents the top ten action and adventure, castles and sights, mining and museums, sites to 'sip and scoff' and 'walks and drives', as voted by 4,500 people living in the valleys. The list was originally presented in the 'Rough Guide to Wales' by Mike Parker.
- Development of an iPhone app and twitter, YouTube and Facebook sites.
- A new Geocaching trail has been promoted by 'Heart & Soul' as a 'Top Valleys Essential' which connects enthusiasts to a global network of geocaching.
- A PR strategy which has achieved coverage across print and broadcast media including The Guardian, The Express, Radio 4, Radio 1, Sunday Mirror, Western Mail, Echo, BBC News, Wedi 7 and all Valleys local papers with over 248 pieces of print coverage, 135 online articles and 44 broadcast pieces (Equinox Communications, 2012, p. 12).
- Development of relationships with local and national businesses including the Principality Bank, Only Men Aloud, Cardiff and Swansea City FC, Sustrans, Capital and Real Radio.
- National recognition for the 'Heart & Soul' campaign, and eight independent PR and marketing awards including a Chartered Institute of Marketing Award for Wales and seven Chartered Institute of Public Relations Awards (Equinox Communications, 2012, p. 5).

5.5. Interreg IVB WECAN Project

At the European level, the WECAN partners have been seeking to develop a greater theoretical and practical understanding of how the natural environment can contribute to sustainable economic growth and social justice in regions where the now largely-gone heavy industries such as coal mining have left a legacy of degraded landscapes and socio-economic deprivation. The contribution of this to the VRP has specifically aimed to "stimulate the involvement of the private sector, visitors and local communities to encourage and support responsible and sustainable use of the natural environment for mutual benefit" (VRP 2012c). However, it must be emphasised that the learning and benefits of the actions of all partners will be shared amongst them. There are four work packages within the WECAN project, the aims and outcomes to date from which are discussed below.

WP1: Assessing the Economic Potential of the Environment

The aim of this work package is to develop and, where appropriate, enhance instruments to evaluate the (socio-) economic value of the natural environment, particularly in post-industrial regions such

as the Valleys. The major practical pilot selected by VRP was to demonstrate and evaluate how a Sustainable Drainage Scheme (SUDS) could be used to regenerate a disused 1.4 ha brownfield site in the Llynfi Valley to create and develop the Caerau and Brynglas Market Garden, the implementation of which was primarily led by Groundwork Bridgend Neath Port Talbot with financial support through WECAN and the Western Valleys Regeneration Programme. Opened in July 2012, it has transformed the site into a community market garden with employment and volunteering possibilities. Community involvement with the market garden has the potential to promote local food growing as well as improve diets and alleviate flooding. The project has also involved the creation of a woodland area to promote biodiversity as well as engaging and connecting the area and the local community to the wider natural environment. A linked community-food growing project based at Maesteg Comprehensive School has also involved a SUDS-like approach and provided connectivity with the Caerau project with wider links throughout the valley. An enhanced Green Infrastructure (GI) toolkit is being used amongst other methods for evaluation of the Caerau and Brynglas Market Garden project and the wider WECAN and related projects in the Western Valleys area.

In addition, a feasibility study looking at the creation and development of a Native Tree Nursery (and potential timber centre of excellence) was carried out by Coed Cymru as part of the community engagement work undertaken in the Ebbw Fach valley. A business model for this is now being developed in order to create a sustainable social enterprise supporting jobs and skills. The results of these studies will further inform the social aspects of the enhanced GI toolkit, and so help towards developing the WECAN evaluation hub being established – which will feed back into international knowledge.

Working with TCV, the community engagement work in the Ebbw Fach valley also looked at development of a Community Food Network in the area which has now been established. The business opportunities for developing community food enterprises have also been taken forward by WECAN through support for the initial study into the feasibility of establishing a regional commercial enterprise.

WP2: Engaging the Private Sector in the Natural Environment for Mutual Benefit

The second aim of the WECAN package seeks to “develop, promote, test and evaluate innovative exemplars of responsible corporate sector interaction with the natural environment”). Mindful of the declining public funds available to support sites of environmental and heritage interest, WECAN has sought to develop more economically sustainable links with companies whilst also exploring how the natural environment might support the growth and development of the businesses involved.

Amongst progress that has been made to date are the following:

- The **‘Blue Green Gym’** (BGG) concept seeks to stimulate and enable “business to utilise opportunities and undertake activities within the natural environment to support their business aims and increase their knowledge and appreciation of the outdoors...in the area bounded by the VRP”. It specifically aims to work with, support and develop the facilities, skills and provisioning of the outdoor provider sector and community projects operating within the VRP. This would include activities for businesses to participate in practical environmental projects and develop corporate social responsibility, enhance leadership,



At the western extremities of the Valleys, Kidwelly situated at the mouth of the Gwendraeth Fawr and Fach rivers in Carmarthenshire offers a distinct sense of place with an intriguing and fascinating mix of industrial heritage and environmental attractions, which provide great opportunities to develop sustainable tourism to support the local economy further.

Imposing Kidwelly Castle, founded by the Normans as an earth and timber stronghold in 1106 and the scene of a famous siege by Owain Glyndŵr's forces in 1403, is one of Wales's best-kept secrets. In 2011, Rough Guides' author Mike Parker nominated the castle as a candidate for the top 10 Valleys Essentials out of 50 venues as part of The Valleys 'Heart & Soul' campaign. Overlooking the river, the castle offers outstanding views across to Gower and Worm's Head to the east and Caldey Island to the west.

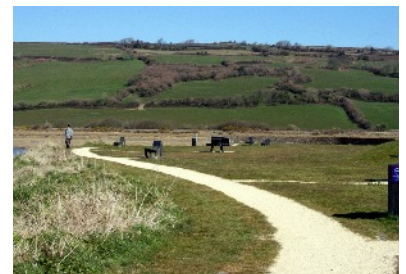
In terms of the area's industrial heritage, Kymer's Canal, originally built in 1766 to carry coal for onward travel by sea, is the oldest canal in Wales whilst Kidwelly Museum is the site of the second oldest recorded tinplate works in the UK where some of the remains of this works can still be seen today and is unique as the only museum dedicated to the interpretation of the tinplate industry. The natural heritage of the Kidwelly area is outstanding. The area is extraordinarily rich in bird life, especially waders, which can be viewed from the quay, and bird watchers sometimes flock to the area to catch a glimpse of rare visitors such as the *Long-billed Dowitcher*. A feasibility study carried out by Carmarthenshire County Council in 2007 highlighted that the bracing

outdoors and rich wildlife in the Kidwelly quay area, together with the neighbouring historic town, offered a compelling package to visitors, but the "hidden gem" was in need of reinvention to add to the other attractions in Kidwelly.

Through its VRP ERDF project, the Valleys Regional Park programme has supported and helped to fund three major projects in Kidwelly to help develop sustainable tourism in the area.

The most significant of these involved a two-stage project around the quay area. Carmarthenshire County Council joined forces with Kidwelly Town Council, and RSPB for a £260,000 infrastructure scheme to deliver improved accessibility, better land management, and low-impact shelters for wildlife tourism with funding from Valleys Regional Park and the Welsh Government's Western Valleys Strategic Regeneration Area Programme which has been predicted to have the potential to draw in an extra 30,000 visitors. Existing footpaths have been enhanced and new ones created to offer a more varied series of walks from the quay and around Kymer's Canal, whilst the car park has been reconstructed.

The project has proved a key one for developing the area and providing an economic and environmental boost to the area building on previous projects such as that to create the Glan-yr-Afon Nature Reserve where Kidwelly Town Council and the Countryside Council for Wales started to work together in 2006 on a project that recognised and identified as an area of outstanding beauty and of considerable benefit to the local wildlife.





RSPB Cymru entered an agreement with Kidwelly Town Council in September 2012 to become a gateway for the Three Rivers Futurescape project in the area which will create a showcase on how local communities and towns can be involved and benefit from landscape-scale conservation projects.

RSPB Cymru has planned number of wildlife projects, including the construction of an otter holt and managing and improving habitats for waders, and will work with partners to introduce innovative education and visitor services.

Very recent work by Kidwelly Town Council in partnership with RSPB using an amphibious machine on Kymer's Canal has created a corridor to encourage and sustain the wildlife and enhance its aesthetic appearance. Leading up to 2015, Kidwelly's 900-year anniversary, they will run a number of events to engage with local people and visitors about the area's wildlife and the conservation work taking place.

The VRP WECAN Communities Spaces project, based out of Groundwork Wales, is supporting Kidwelly Town Council and RSPB with its volunteer work programme and environmental awareness week with a view to getting a Community Green Flag award in the future once the works have been completed.

The Valleys Regional Park Programme has also funded an interpretation project entitled Heritage and Biodiversity of Kidwelly Quay and 'Loops and Links' of the Amman and Gwendraeth Valleys which will bring to life the history, cultural and natural environment of this area using a range of digital techno-

logical approaches including pre-loaded memory sticks, 'turning pages' software, MP3 audio files, online blogs, SMS texts interactive touch screen terminals to interpret the information with TV footage with voiceovers by professional "heroes".

As stated earlier, the area's cultural and industrial heritage are also crucial components in its tourism offer. Valleys Regional Park has funded "The Kidwelly Industrial Museum: Bringing the industry of the past to life" project based on the Kidwelly Museum Interpretation Action Plan, which has focused on the restoration and preservation of the remaining buildings and machinery of the Kidwelly Tinsplate Works with displays and interpretation to enhance education and enjoyment for visitors.

The newly created Wales Coastal Path runs past Kidwelly and Kidwelly Town Council have been working with Ramblers Cymru and others to create circular walking routes that tie in with the coast path. With a train station on the line between Swansea and Carmarthen, situated just to the southwest of the town near the coast, there is an opportunity for visitors to arrive at Kidwelly by public transport and walk and explore the town and its attractions.

Further up the Gwendraeth valley, past the new Ffos Las Racecourse, which incredibly is the former site of the largest open cast coalmine in Europe, Valleys Regional Park has worked with Carmarthenshire County Council on the Crwydro'r Cymoedd project to improve connections between and to three country parks in the Gwendraeth and Aman valleys.



communication and people development, team building and to support transformation initiatives; as well as providing participants with a memorable and educational experience. It is also suggested that business engagement through the BGG can also further regenerate the community, potentially offering health and wellbeing benefits, extending environmental awareness and providing economic opportunities. To date, there has been a commercial pilot composed of a 6-month test trading phase which is now being analysed.

- The **wefundthevalleys.com** website, which promotes and develops environmental opportunities for businesses to support and invest in the economic, social and environmental regeneration of the valleys. VRP emphasises the term ‘investment’ rather than ‘sponsorship’ in reflection of the mutually beneficial relationships it is seeking to develop. ‘We Fund the Valleys’ is recognised as a potentially powerful platform to enable business engagement to sustain and enhance VRP projects and activities. Businesses can for example sponsor apprenticeships and provide funding for maintenance of VRP sites. It is further recognised as a potential means of stimulating promotion, sales and achieving training opportunities for businesses in an ethical and sustainable manner. The website was launched in September 2012 and thus substantive impact is difficult to evaluate at present.
- **Big Pitch 2011** was a partnership with some valleys FE colleges involving 256 students in generating possibilities for the future of the valleys based upon the idea of engaging students with a strategic and ‘live’ business challenge (Rock UK at Merthyr) to stimulate fresh approaches to business challenges and develop employability and enterprise skills. Sponsors event included UHOVI and the Welsh Government.

WP3: Pilot Visitor Payback Schemes

The third aim of WECAN was to evaluate and test ‘visitor payback’. These schemes are recognised as potential mechanisms through which visitors can help develop projects that sustain the natural environment and tourism projects. Boondoggle, a company in Belgium and the Netherlands was commissioned by RLKM on behalf of WECAN partners to carry out a study on digital visitor payback schemes, a pilot of which is currently under evaluation.

VRP has designed a pilot ‘Green Loyalty Card’ scheme aiming to benefit businesses, visitors and communities in the area. It aims to offer payback initiatives in tourism, retail and transport whilst proceeds generated from the card will fund further marketing of the scheme and support for flagship environmental projects within the VRP.

WP4: Enhance Community Enterprise and Engagement

The fourth WECAN work package seeks to encourage involvement and engagement of local communities with the natural environment, assisting where appropriate with initiatives to stimulate and sustain the development of relevant social enterprises.

Initially, the VRP WECAN project officers worked with partners in two focus areas (primarily the Ebbw Fach valley and upper Afan/Llynfi/Garw valleys) to evaluate current business and community enterprise activities based on the natural environment to identify opportunities for support and development. As a result, the WECAN project was commissioned to carry out the community engagement phases for the HoV and Western Valleys woodland plans in the Ebbw Fach valley and upper Afan/Llynfi valleys respectively. As part of the ‘Ebbw Fach Priority Woodlands Consultation’,

VRP approached landowners, third sector enterprises, community representatives of various initiatives, local authorities and housing associations to develop an understanding of their opinions on how the local environment might be improved and developed as an asset for local residents and tourists. Such community engagement and enterprise development work will now be used for holistic green infrastructure plans for each of the WECAN focus areas and which can be used as exemplars for others.

The prospect to create jobs and apprenticeships, as well as volunteering opportunities, through an environmental rangers/guardians programme across the VRP area has also been investigated through an extensive scoping study. As a result, working with VRP partners, an apprenticeship and volunteer programme is in development.

The final element of work package 4 has investigated new ways of engaging communities in the natural environment. The WECAN project has supported a range of community-based events and festivals, most notably two successful Valleys Discovery Festivals, with a third being planned. The first held in May 2011, with a focus on the valleys heritage in science and technology, had over 40 associated events. The second in November 2012 was run in conjunction with Dark Sky Wales concentrated on holding events at or near to proposed Community Dark Sky Discovery sites across the valleys to designate the world's first network of community Dark Sky Discovery Sites. A total of fourteen events planned across country parks and community venues. Despite difficult weather conditions, eleven events went ahead, with feedback indicating were adjudged as very successful by those who attended.

Summary Assessment of WECAN

The impact of the work undertaken by WECAN work packages remains largely inconclusive at this stage since the project is very much about understanding how the natural environment can stimulate socio-economic regeneration and evaluation of the schemes and pilots supported is now ongoing. However, the schemes implemented to date including the Blue Green Gym and SUDS regeneration scheme are suggestive of potentially potent forces if they are sustained by continued business, community and stakeholder investment and engagement and effective promotion within and beyond the valleys. As such WECAN is supporting the next stages of the VRP initiative through its new framework.

5.6. KESS Project

Specific aims

Through one of its partners, Groundwork Wales, the VRP partnership has sponsored a KESS PhD studentship with Cardiff Metropolitan University (UWIC). The project aims to gain greater understanding of the mechanisms for physiological and psychological benefits of being active in the natural environment, which can help combat mental ill-health, obesity, and Type II Diabetes, amongst other conditions.

Outputs

Early results of some pilot studies working with walking groups have shown that vascular age and blood pressure improved amongst subjects. Overall, the research to date suggests that regular participation in a green-exercise programme is beneficial in improving systemic health. Mental

Upper Llynfi and Afan Valleys



Primarily as one of the focus areas of the WECAN project and through FCW's Western Valleys Woodland Plan, the Valleys Regional Park programme has focused on maximising the economic and social potential of the natural environment in the upper Llynfi and Afan valleys.

The Caerau ward, near Maesteg in the upper Llynfi Valley is one of the most socially and economically deprived wards in Wales. The Caerau & Brynglas Market Garden Project is helping to create a social enterprise based around a sustainable market garden business at a 1.4 ha brownfield site in Caerau which will impact positively upon the health, education and prosperity of the local community as well as improving the physical environment.

Previously, this derelict area of land, formerly part of a demolished housing estate, was well known locally as an area for crime and anti-social behaviour, with drug abuse a particular problem. As a project, it shows the power of local environmentally-based schemes to address those issues that contribute to poverty. The lead partner for this project has been Groundwork Bridgend & Neath Port Talbot working in conjunction with the local Caerau Development Trust and supported by the Valleys Regional Park WECAN project, the Western Valleys Regeneration Area, Valleys to Coast Housing Association and Bridgend County Borough Council.

The development of the site was undertaken by Groundwork Bridgend & Neath Port Talbot's Intermediate labour Market (ILM) scheme which aims to improve young people's employability skills and opportunities. Through this scheme eight local unemployed

landscape trainees delivered the capital works enhancing their skill set through construction, landscaping and planting. Local trainees and volunteers from a range of partner organisations including Caerau Construction Company, Community Payback Bridgend, Youth Offending Bridgend also supported site development and the in kind funding support contributed to the project by trainees and volunteers totalled over £50,000. This project has impacted positively on those involved. As Shane Lee-Trott, ILM Trainee stated. *"The ILM programme has given me excellent experience and confidence in the workplace; working on the Market Garden has given me the chance to improve my skills"*

The site has continued to provide a base for local training projects and fifteen local residents have recently completed an OCN accredited course in Community Gardening, through a project funded by Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations.

In addition to sustainability through the Market Garden produce, the Caerau Development Trust is looking at further opportunities for community enterprise provided by the Market Garden site to generate income including bee keeping, aquaculture and Forest Gardening. This is a long term project which has support and commitment from a number of partners and local community groups. As it develops, the project aims to link in with tourism networks in the nearby Afan Forest, local schools, local employment and vocational training initiatives and the network of community based horticultural enterprises that are developing across Wales.





The weekly gardening club at the Market Garden, funded through a Health and Wellbeing Grant from Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations, now has around 20 local people who are improving their health and wellbeing through a programme of activities including gardening and cookery.

The scheme has been funded and delivered through a multiagency, cross-sector approach including support from the private sector; Marks and Spencer supported the community open day last year and has now agreed to fund the creation of a natural play area on the site.

The Sustainable Drainage Scheme used to develop the site has helped prevent flooding in the adjacent streets which has impacted on the area previously and was commended by the Environment Agency. A SUDS-like scheme was also utilised by the Maesteg Community Growing Project to develop the land it needed. The WECAN project is now working with the CAG consortium to evaluate the impact of the WECAN-funded initiatives in the Western Valleys area including the SUDS scheme at the Market Garden and the community engagement work associated with the Western Valleys Woodland Plan.

The Market Garden has created links into the wider environment and forms part of Bridgend Eco-connectivity project, which is working with local communities to improve biodiversity. The Eco-connectivity project run by Bridgend County Borough Council in conjunction with CCW is aimed at developing a local understanding of eco-connectivity and the actions that individuals, institutions and groups can take to develop it in everyday life with two main objectives: prac-

tical action for ecosystems and biodiversity, and projects that support ecological connectivity. Demonstration projects have included planting 100m² of new hedge at Caerau Market Garden by the Groundwork Trust, as well as in conjunction with Hyder, the creation of drainage swales and ponds at Maesteg Welfare Park with a further planned project to create a shelter belt at Caerau Park Estate.

Greater connectivity between the upper Llynfi and Afan valleys has been created by the VRP-funded Valleys Cycle Network route between Maesteg and Croeserw developed by Sustrans. These areas have also been a shared focus for the WECAN project for community engagement and delivery of the Western Valleys Woodland Strategic Plan, which was developed by FCW through their VRP-seconded project officer.

The Cognation project has greatly improved mountain biking in the Afan Valley as well as other areas in the valleys. The Afan Valley trails start and finish from Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre and Glyncorrwg Mountain Bike Centre. The creation of world-class mountain bike trails has provided an economic boost to the Afan. Part of the task now is to complement these activities. The WECAN project was commissioned by FCW to carry out the community engagement of the plan in the upper Llynfi and Afan valleys where one of the WECAN project officers has led a novel active consultation process with local communities in order to devise a delivery plan, now being overseen by a newly-established steering group.



wellbeing, a strong predictor of good physical health, was improved. Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) risk was reduced through reductions in both arterial stiffness and total blood cholesterol levels.

This means that for the first time, direct evidence has been provided to support the implementation of community-based green-exercise programmes as a method of addressing some of the important health and economic issues observed in the south Wales valleys. Moreover, the multi-disciplinary nature of this research provides evidence concerning the complex interactions underpinning the diverse health benefits observed as a result of green-exercise. On the basis of this research, three abstracts for journals have been produced and the research student responsible has delivered a presentation for the 8th annual meeting and symposium of the European Network for the Promotion of Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA Europe) held in Cardiff during September 2012.

6. Analysis of the VRP Partnership Model

“In the past these have been piecemeal and tackled single issues. The VRP approach is the first aimed at a *holistic approach* with a realistic understanding of the key assets and how they can best be optimised”.

(Comment from representative of VRP partner)

One of the key features of the VRP is that it has expressly sought to unify otherwise disparate organisations working in separate sectors in order to deliver the overall project (VRP 2011, p. 27). As noted above, the Valleys Regional Park partnership comprises more than 40 organisations ranging from the Welsh Government and local authorities in the valleys through to third and community sector organisations. In order to coordinate the delivery of the project a three tier governance framework has been adopted. Following a governance review, conducted subsequent to the commencement of the VRP ERDF project, the activities of partner organisations are now coordinated through a governance structure that comprises:

1. A Strategic Group - Chaired by Chris Warner, Head of Regeneration Policy within the Welsh Government, and comprised of senior figures from VRP partner organisations. The Group is responsible for the overall direction of VRP, ensuring effective policy integration, and developing and determining its future strategy.
2. An Implementation Group – formerly chaired by Louise Fradd, Communities Directorate, Bridgend CBC, and comprised of representatives from the VRP joint sponsors. The group is responsible for monitoring and ensuring timely and successful delivery of VRP projects, sharing and promotion of best practice, and more effective collaborative working within and across organisations
3. Sub-groups – These are comprised of representative from organisations working across the valleys, including the private sector. The aim of these groups is to influence delivery in order to maximise the value of VRP activities and to ensure co-operation and collaboration. The initial themed groups suggested were:
 - Access and Health
 - Community Engagement and Initiatives
 - Education and Training
 - Environment
 - Outdoor Activities and Water Recreation
 - Heritage and Tourism Development

Following an internal review of the sub-groups in 2011 the VRP partnership co-ordinator produced a series of recommendations coupled with an action plan to develop the effectiveness and contribution of subgroups. Consequently, two of the groups were put into abeyance. Community engagement, a key underpinning element of the VRP programme, was being dealt

with through the ambassador training initiative with regard to tourism, whilst the WECAN project was dealing with aspects of community engagement in the natural environment, albeit within the focus areas. Education and training was also temporarily suspended as there was no potential through the current funding streams to support specific activities.

Overall, the delivery of the VRP by many organisations in partnership, working across geographical, organisational and sector boundaries has been praised by the Welsh Government in their *Vibrant and Viable Places: New Regeneration Framework* (2013, p. 10). In order to develop understanding of these issues however, research for the interim progress review and output analysis conducted a survey with representatives of certain prominent VRP partner organisations – the findings of which are discussed below.

Given that the delivery of the VRP is being undertaken by a broad range of partnership organisations, a communications strategy was devised to: ensure effective partnership working; disseminate information about VRP projects; and activities and gain greater involvement from organisations and groups across the valleys. The strategy was to develop:

- 1) A dedicated VRP partnership website (www.thevalleys.org.uk). The site is designed to disseminate information to partners and other interested external audiences, and promote the aims, principles and practices of the VRP. The site is updated regularly and contains action notes, presentations and other documents, as well as a list of constituent VRP projects. For example, the approved infrastructural and umbrella projects are geographically identifiable via an interactive map, from which links take users to the latest project progress and information.



Figure 2: Screenshot of VRP Website

- 2) A VRP e-newsletter. This was distributed to all partners and other groups and organisations across the valleys to provide an informative update on the programme including project progress. It was intended that the publication is made available once every four months to coincide with the meetings of the implementation group. However more recently it has been superseded to a certain extent through the use of a social media approach such as a dedicated Twitter account (@VRPvalleys)
- 3) A presentations programme (VRP 2011, p. 28). Presentations have been given to more than 40 groups and organisations, primarily by the VRP coordinator both within and outside the valleys in order to keep partners and other organisations abreast of the VRP programme

Analysis of Partnership Approach by Internal Stakeholders

As part of the interim progress and report evaluation, the Cardiff University Team conducted an email survey with various internal stakeholders in order to solicit their opinions on the partnership model employed by the VRP. A list of the questions asked can be found in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 provides a list of the stakeholder that participated. Out of the 13 individuals invited to contribute, seven were able to respond.

Overall, stakeholder tended to agree with the *Vibrant and Viable Places* publication, that the VRP provides a good working example of a Cross-Sector, Cross-Boundary approach to economic development through investment in natural resources and cultural heritage. Table 1 below shows the most common themes that stakeholders referenced when asked to provide their understanding of what the VRP project aimed to achieve. Here the theme of a coordinated approach to invest in environmental assets was most frequently provided; with references to other investments in tourism and heritage for the purposes of regeneration and the promotion of tourism also being made.

Theme/element	Number of responses that reference
Investment in environmental assets	6
Coordinated/partner approach	5
Investment in tourism	4
Investment in heritage	4
Regeneration	3
Promote extra regional tourism	3
Cultivate local pride	2
Attract business investment	2

Table 1: Analysis of Stakeholder Representation of VRP

In support of partnership approach, when asked to comment on the three most significant achievements of the VRP, 6 out of 7 stakeholders highlighted the opportunities to work across sectors and administrative jurisdictions. Other notable achievements mentioned included

investments in key, and often exemplar, sites and projects; raising the perceptions of the valleys and its assets within and outside the region; and the integration of the communities themselves into tourist promotions.

When asked directly, how successful they felt the VRP has been in bringing together different organisations in the delivery of a common project, stakeholders responded in an overwhelmingly positive way: commenting that the project had been “successful” in this regard. One response suggested that the partnership “has been one of the main successes” and another highlighted the significance of this achievement given the novel involvement of so many local authorities and organisations. Beyond this however, it was noted that success in partnership varied across areas and was sometimes lost in the execution of individual projects. One stakeholder felt that partnership would only last as long as the funding was available and had not become culturally embedded.

When asked to name a specific concrete example of where the partnership model has been beneficial to the delivery of a particular output, a wide range of examples were provided. The Ebbw Fach trail was flagged for bringing together more than 13 different communities to work together with the common interest of enhancing their local green spaces and ensuring that they not only link one another but that all of the local communities have access to Natural Green Open Space. The Cistercian project is reported to have involved the exchange of ideas and experience in design and development between multiple partners. Even despite a slow start, the ‘Heart and Soul’ Marketing campaign was mentioned by two stakeholders as a successful example of bringing together multiple partners. The Valleys Ambassador programme and Green Flag Accreditation were also noted, as the latter “would not have been feasible without the partnership approach and support of the VRP core team”. Those surveyed also felt that the VRP had been successful in facilitating work across traditional geographically defined jurisdictions: examples included, local authorities working together and across the physical geography of valleys; organisations working across areas of focus, for example, cycle-ways, land management and other infrastructure projects; and in the coordination of tourism projects;

Stakeholders from local councils and other institutions identified that involvement in the VRP contributes to their regeneration activities as well as other strategic aims such as:

1. Supporting initiatives which generate employment and work opportunities
2. Encouraging social inclusion and supporting deprived communities
3. Developing infrastructure
4. Promoting effective waste management and recycling
5. Marketing the area as a destination for tourism and business investment (in line with the regional and national strategies)

Partnership between stakeholder institutions in the VRP is seen by numerous organisations to have allowed them to promote their core working principles (such as Sustainable Development and Ecosystem Approach thinking) within other organisations. This has been particularly prominent in the case of Natural Resources Wales (NRW - previously Countryside Council for Wales), and a representative commented that:

“The new NRW body are by their very nature strong advocates of a resource based economy centred on green infrastructure and built on sound principles of sustainable

development (environment, economy, and communities), therefore VRP is very strongly aligned with our work...The VRP partnership approach has allowed us to spread our environmental message across many different stakeholder groups and engage in a way that was not previously possible. Things like the partnerships with UWIC, Cardiff University, SWOAPG, Community Tourism spring to mind, as well as the ability to influence the likes of Visit Wales, Capital Regional Tourism and various private sector partners”.

Turning to elements of the project that partners feel have been problematic, it is noted that the level of funding has been limiting. This has led to the slow delivery of some elements of the project, and in requiring prioritisation has left some worthy projects without support. Development to date were also reported to have included some ‘false starts’ whilst important learning was being undertaken. For example, some of those consulted considered the Heart and Soul marketing campaign to have been unsatisfactory for the first two years (due to initially inappropriate distributions of responsibility and a lack of technical skills): although, it should be noted that VRP was not responsible for the direction or delivery of the campaign during that period, playing a supporting role rather than a direct supervisory one. There is renewed confidence that things have improved, however, there is also concern that this will change once involvement of current support can no longer be funded. The restricted scope of the funding, and the position of delivery teams within some stakeholders are seen to have reduced the linkup between projects in some cases. There is also the sentiment that “funding perhaps was allocated too soon and not strategically enough, despite the best of intentions and a huge amount of preparatory work”.

One informant felt that there has been only slow political buy in from the Welsh Government; and that this has resulted in the continued misalignment of some funding streams. The level of ‘buy in’ from partnerships is also seen to be differential across the project, and some are seen to have “failed to make the best use of the collaborative network that has been established and [instead] viewed VRP very much as a funding pot”. Other representatives feel that this has been reflected in a more widespread lack of coherence – and that the fulfilment of potential offered by the Regional Park concept “would need a lot more resource and political support”. This view resonates with the perception that the rhetoric of collaboration has not been fully matched in reality: as once project grants were agreed, organisations “retreated back to the silo mentality of project management/deliver”.

In addition, there is a concern that the partnership has been less easy outside the strict geographical boundaries of the park, but more significantly, has a limited time horizon and does not currently offer longer term partnership opportunities. One stakeholder feels that there has been a lack of appreciation that Convergence funding only provides a single opportunity for the delivery of the VRP concept. A combination of these perceptions are also arguably reflected in the concern that “After 4 years the approach is starting to bear fruit” and that therefore a long term approach is required to prevent the existing gains from being lost. This is particularly true given the sheer number of projects and “angles” involved in the VRP.

Reflecting on how their own organisations might have enhanced/improved the delivery of the VRP, some stakeholders felt that they could have collaborated better internally, or worked closer with partners on some projects – for example to make better use of limited financial resources. Planning

was a key area with the reflection that investments should have been prioritised by potential impact (as opposed to geographical area) and that planning should have extended beyond the initial funding. A Welsh Government-sponsored agency representative acknowledged that continued support and funding would no doubt be useful. Commenting on how other partners might improve their contribution, it was noted that there could be reform of WG/WEFO rules and regulations covering funding and procurement: which can be daunting, particularly to smaller organisations. It was suggested that that a more unified approach across Welsh Government departments and agencies would be an advantage. Also, impetus to continue partnerships was identified: and one stakeholder raised the point that it would be unrealistic to assume the issues tackled by the VRP could be addressed in one Assembly term or EU funding cycle.

Asked to comment on how the coordination of the VRP partnership could be improved it was suggested that a long term plan should be developed, perhaps with a re-definition of the vision and renewed political and partner support for the programme. A number of comments suggested that as well as higher level political 'buy in', it would be useful to devolve more resources to subgroup activity and the secondary tier of key staff members. Other improvements suggested by stakeholders were to establish a strong relationship with city region structures in South East and South West Wales (discussed below), obtain more political 'buy in' and focus investments in fewer, more strategic and cross-cutting initiatives.

7. Conclusions & Wider Analysis

Conclusions and Limitations

This Interim Progress and Evaluation Report confirms the view expressed elsewhere (For example see: Welsh Economy Research Unit 2013a, p. 15), that the VRP is well on the way to meeting and exceeding many of the output targets set for the project; for example under ERDF funding. As of December 2012, 34 (or 85%) out of 40 infrastructure and landscape projects committed for delivery were completed: five projects were ongoing and one project was de-committed. Overall just over 130 kilometres of managed access to the countryside have been created. From 42 events and interpretation projects funded under the ERDF scheme, nine of 12 events (75%), and 15 of 30 interpretation activities (or 50%) were undertaken. In total VRP documentation reports that it has created 25 jobs; promoted well over an additional 400,000 visits to the region; engaged almost 700 community groups and 16,000 individuals; and trained 410 people. More importantly, the project provides a concrete example of how cross-boundary, and cross-sectoral partnerships can be coordinated by a non-state administration, in order to provide a vehicle for investment in environmental infrastructure and industrial heritage.

Wider Analysis

Looking beyond the specific components of the VRP project, it is pertinent to consider wider implications of this analysis for regeneration policy and practice. To begin with the national context, the work of VRP supports almost every Cabinet portfolio in the Welsh Government: be it education (through community capacity building), health (via improved access to, and encouragement to use green spaces for exercise), economic development (via community revenue generation), environment (natural resource investment and protection) and transport (logistical infrastructure). More importantly however, the core focus of the project offers a significant working example of how Sustainable Development can be taken to the heart of regeneration work – and therefore exhibits great coherence with importance of the concept within Welsh Government (where the consideration and promotion of economic, social and environmental capital has been taken as a constitutional objective under the *One Wales: One Planet* framework), the UK Government (for example in, *One Future - Different Paths, The UK's Shared Framework for Sustainable Development* 2005) and the European Union. Indeed, the VRP project simultaneously considers the importance of sustainable economic growth, via the enhancement of environmental resources; and in a manner that contributes to social outcomes in the generation of social capital (through participatory and community organisation) and with a strong concern for social justice.

Moreover, although the VRP is currently being delivered through a framework produced in 2007 (spanning until 2013), which positions the project within the tourism and recreation agenda, a new framework (in preparation) will focus the future direction of the VRP partnership within the context of the Welsh Government's Natural Environment Framework – a Living Wales. This Framework adopts an ecosystems approach to service planning, and furthermore, the principles of sustainable development. This will provide a delivery component of the wider Vibrant and Viable Places Regeneration strategy for Wales (Welsh Government 2013). Here there is a significant focus on

“integrated activities” that reverse the ‘silo-ing’ of issues in favour of addressing social, economic and environmental decline as the interwoven issues that they are in reality. In this respect the VRP’s approach to tackle economic and social decline through investment in the natural environment offers an example of how such an approach might be operationalised – and in following such practices, a contribution is made towards the Welsh Government’s Green Jobs Strategy. The Vibrant and Viable Places (V&VC) perspective also expresses that private, public and third sectors should work together in facilitating the development of strong and diverse local economies – and the partnership analysis undertaken by this report again suggests that VRP offers an important example of how such an approach might be operationalised. Furthermore, key outcomes envisioned by the V&VC document include many of those where the VRP has focused its impact, for example: economically prosperous, healthy and cohesive communities that are well-connected; successful town centres; and a well-managed historic and natural environment that contribute to a distinctive regional identity.

Focusing on town centre regeneration, the National Assembly for Wales (2012) has highlighted this as an important area for development, and identified that footfall is promoted by a number of variables, including the wider integration of town centres into transport networks. In this regard the VRP has aimed to augment the offering of town centres through the development of heritage resources, as well as better linking these to the adjacent natural environment. The report also called highlighted that addressing the issues affecting the viability of the town centre was best undertaken through genuine engagement with communities, public sector institutions, the third sector and the private sector (National Assembly for Wales 2012, p. 37). Furthermore, it was suggested that “Visit Wales should encourage town partnerships to market their unique selling points such as architectural heritage and environmental quality, local produce and local culture, perhaps involving groups of towns within a region so that their different offers can complement each other” (National Assembly for Wales 2012, p. 49). Here, the VRP offers a framework which aims to integrate a wide range of stakeholders to invest in the environmental and heritage resources of the Valleys region in order to attract more visitors to the area – including its town centres. Such a focus on the regeneration of town centres is also again backed in the V&VP position (Welsh Government 2013).

A further consideration of the Welsh Government has been to focus on ‘City Regions’ in driving the future sustainable economic development and prosperity of Wales (Task and Finish Group on City Regions 2012). More specifically, it was “strongly recommended” by a task force to the Government that “A city region be recognised in south east Wales on the basis of existing patterns of movement and the potential for increased interconnectivity, together with the tradition of both social and economic interdependence” (8). This approach echoes the already established City Regions of Manchester and Leeds in the UK (Leeds City Region Partnership 2006; Manchester Enterprises 2006) and also Stuttgart in Germany, considered one of the first to give the idea of a City Region meaningful expression and institutional form. Indeed, city-regional experience in Stuttgart has proved to be an instructive experience for urban planners worldwide because the city-region concept has been articulated as part of an integrated vision of spatial development in which the three themes of green infrastructure, regional planning and sustainable mobility loom large (Frank and Morgan 2012). Green infrastructure, in the form of a regional landscape park, has been used to fashion a new links between local municipalities, creating a regional park that is more than the sum of its municipal parts and this “greening” exercise has been used to construct a new city-region identity in the Greater Stuttgart area. Public transport plays a large role in the sustainable mobility

strategy, with more than 90% of the city-region's budget devoted to public transport networks like the S-Bahn, a highly efficient suburban railway network that transports 333,000 passengers a day. The 190km S-Bahn network provides the corridors along which commercial development sites have been approved in the regional plan and no municipality is allowed to issue planning permission for developments that are outside these agreed transport corridors, ensuring that development sites are calibrated with public transport to ensure sustainable mobility (Frank and Morgan 2012).

The example of Stuttgart therefore, contains many lessons for the City Region strategy that is emerging in South East Wales: and suggests that integration of the VRP within this wider framework offers many of the key features considered central to success of such a development model. The potential contribution of the VRP would be even stronger if the plans for more integrated transport between Cardiff and Valleys' communities is to materialise as anticipated under government plans for the electrification of existing railway lines (Butcher 2012): and especially if the more ambitious vision of the private sector was to be realised, for a *Metro for Wales* (Barry 2011) or a *Cardiff City Region Metro* as it has more recently been referred (Barry 2013)². Indeed, the connecting of the VRP through such an investment in transport infrastructure could have the transformative potential to help fashion an integrated city-region in place of a highly fragmented metropolitan region which has been unable or unwilling to forge a sense of shared destiny (Morgan 2006). Furthermore, under such future developments, the south Welsh example might provide a best practice example as a more separated spatial division of land use could overcome conflict, such as that which has arisen in Stuttgart between the use of land for green infrastructure and residential/business development (Basten 2011). The potential interlinking of the VRP and the Cardiff City Region offers potential to "embed sustainability as a positive factor in attracting investment" (9): for example, as demonstrated by the existing WECAN initiative.

Finally, at the wider level, the approach of the VRP integrates with the wider policy discourse of 'Green Growth' - now supported and promoted by both the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank (WB) and the Global Green Growth Institute (GGI), who have collectively formed the Green Growth Knowledge Platform (2012). At the current time, much of the attention here is focused on high technology industries, and academics have highlighted the importance of also considering the necessity of planning for lower skilled green livelihoods: such as those supported by forest management and organic agriculture (Vazquez-Brust and Sarkis 2012). Here, the promotion of the VRP in the context of Wales's historical and contemporary socio-economic situation might well offer a pertinent case study of how community based initiatives can produce vibrant and diverse economies, while simultaneously adding value to the natural environment. On this basis, the VRP could also offer significant insights into how Green Growth can offer more concrete and robust contributions to the social justice agenda that it claims as one of its most significant core principles.

² Also see the role of regional light railway in the success of the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area (Cotugno and Seltzer 2011)

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of VRP Partner Organisations

Welsh Government (Lead Sponsor)	Groundwork Bridgend Neath Port Talbot (GWk BNPT)*
Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)*	Groundwork Caerphilly*
Environment Agency Wales (EAW)*	Groundwork Merthyr RCT*
Forestry Commission Wales (FCW)*	Blaenau Gwent CBC*
Visit Wales	Bridgend CBC (BCBC)*
Capital Regional Tourism (CRT)*	Caerphilly CBC (CCBC)*
South West Wales Tourism Partnership	Cardiff CC
Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water*	Carmarthenshire CC (CCC) *
British Waterways	Monmouthshire CC
Sports Council for Wales	Merthyr Tydfil CBC (MTCBC)*
BTCV Cymru	Neath Port Talbot CBC (NPTCBC)*
Keep Wales Tidy	Newport City Council
CADW	Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC (RCTCBC)*
National Museums and Galleries of Wales*	City and County of Swansea (CCS)*
Cynnal Cymru/Sustain Wales	Torfaen CBC (TCBC)*
Ramblers Cymru	Brecon Beacons NPA
SEWTA	Gwent Wildlife Trust
SWWITCH	Wildlife Trusts of South & West Wales (WTSWW)*
Federation of City Gardens and Community Farms	RSPB
Groundwork Wales (GWk Wales)*	Sustrans*

Appendix 2: ERDF Outputs from Site Developments

Infrastructural Projects	Project Code	Current Output									
		Access to Country	Land Improved	Jobs Created	New Visits	Community Groups Engaged	Individuals Engaged	Groups or Individuals	Participants Trained	Qualifications Awarded	
Valleys Cycle Network	EP001011	71	35.5								
Valleys Heart & Soul	EP001012										
Presenting a Clean & Pleasant Environment for visitors	EP001013										
Sirhowy Valley Landscape Partnership	EP001035	5	100		300		70		10		
Crossing the Mountain	EP001014	5	0.5		7500						
Cwmcarn Forest Development	EP001040		14000	9.5	25000						
Cwmdu Glen Urban Woodland, Pontardawe	EP001038										
Cyd Tce, Neath Canal Clyne & Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct	EP001015	1	2500				10000				
Cyfarthfa Heritage Area – Cyfarthfa Heritage Unearthed	EP001027		1.4		10000	3					
Cynon Valley River Park	EP001028	4	50		40000						
Dare Valley Country Park Ph II	EP001029		0.5		16,567						

Ebbw Fach Trail – Hafod Arch	EP001016																		
Ebbw Fach Trail	EP001017	5				500													
Garth Farm – M4 West VRP Gateway	EP001030	does not outline details of trail km																	
Gnoll Estate Country Park Accessibility Project	EP001031	2																	
Lower Rhondda Valley Green Corridor	EP001032	4	50			15000													
Parc Cwm Darran Enhancement	EP001041	0.5	1	3	8000														
Parc Taff Bargoed Southern Gateway	EP001033	0.18	2.2		500	15													
Penallta Community Park New Entrance	EP001019	1	13.6	3	10000														
Penyfan Access Improvements	EP001020	0.6	0.25	2	8000	5													
Cwmbran Riverside Park	EP001021	2.8	0.25		1000	2													
Blaenafon Forgotten Landscapes	EP001022																		
Greenmeadow Community Farm	EP001036	0.46																	
Environmental Resource Centre, The Works, Ebbw Vale	EP001042		0.25	2	5300														
Blaen Bran Community Wood – Access and Environmental	EP001043																		

Improvements																			
Pontymoel Basin Environmental Improvements	EP001044																		
Parc Taf Bargoed - Treharris Gateway	EP001032	0.18	2.2			500	5												
Aberdulais Falls - your heritage	EP001046		1	1	750														
Development of the Café and Fishery at Lower Lliw Reservoir	EP001049																		
Enhancing the Valleys Regional Park Experience for Visitors							1												
Craig-y-Ddinas Recreation Area improvement:	EP001050	1.7	0.5																
Crwvdro'r Cymoedd	EP001048	3	15			8000													
Garth Farm- M4 West Valleys Regional Park Gateways	EP001051																		
Kidwelly Quay	EP001052																		
M4 South West Valleys Regional Park Gateways	EP001053																		
Penllergare Valley Woods	EP001054																		
Bridgend Community Route Enhancement Scheme	EP001047																		

Garw Valley Environmental Improvements/ Cwm Garw Fechan Environmental Enhancements	EP001048												
Amman Valley Trotting Club	EP001035		14.1										
Bryngarw Country Park Environmental Enhancements	To be confirmed												
Kidwelly Quay and Kymr's Canal – Phase 2	To be confirmed	11.5				3							
Parc Slip Visitor Centre Renovation	To be confirmed												
Ancient Heritage – Access and Management Improvements	To be confirmed												
Hidden Landscapes of Forgeside	To be confirmed												
Parc Tondu – Heritage Connections	To be confirmed		1										
Total for Core Projects		118.92	16789.25	21.5	156917	33	10070	0	10	0			

Appendix 3: ERDF Outputs To Date from Events & Interpretations

Events and Interpretations		Access to Country	Land Improved	Jobs Created	New Visits	Community Groups Engaged	Individuals Engaged	Groups or Individuals	Participants Trained	Qualifications Awarded
Aberbargoed Grasslands 'Mystery' Nature Trail	1	15				3				
Aberdulais Falls – your heritage	2		1	1	750		750			
Parc Afan Forest Cycle Route Arts	3					51				
Ancient Heritage – Visitor Promotion	4				1000	4				
Connecting the Heritage (Merthyr Tydfil)	5					10				
Craig-y-Ddinas Recreation Area Improvement	6		220			145				
Cwmbran Water Festival	7				6000	5				
Forgotten Landscapes Interpretation and Visitor Information at the Blaenafon World Heritage Centre	8				3000					
Fulfilling the Visitor Experience – Caerphilly	9				1000	3				
Gnoll Estate Country Park	10				4000					

Accessibility Project																			
Go Wild	11					3000						50							
Valleys Discovery Festival	12																		
'Heart & Soul' Landscape Lectures	13					515				300		14							
RCT Heritage Audio Trails & Interpretation	14					5000													
Kidwelly Industrial Museum: Bringing the Industry of the past to life.	15					4228													
Heritage and Biodiversity of Kidwelly Quay and 'Loops and Links' of the Amman and Gwendraeth Valleys	16					10000						10							
Merthyr Tydfil Museum Events (including Turner Exhibition)	17					147582						835							
Merthyr Tydfil Heritage Trails Interpretation Project	18					3000					35								
Parc Slip Nature Reserve Visitor Centre Interpretation	19					5000				11		120							
Parc Tondu – Heritage Connections	20					300				2		50							
Pontypool Walking Tall (PWT)	21																		
Richard Burton Interpretation	22																		

Project																			
Six Bells Miners Memorial - 'Guardian' opening	23					7000			3000										
Valleys Cycle Network Interpretation	24																		
Tonypandy 2010 & Cordell Festival	25					250													
Torfaen Community Workshop Programme	26					6508			660			300							
Welsh Waterways Festival 2011 incorporating the IWA National Trail Boat Festival	27					1,676													
Blaenafon World Heritage Site - a 10 year celebration	28					10000		6				100							
Spirit of Bevan – Sirhowy Sculpture	29																		
M4 Valleys Regional Park south-western Gateway (Coed Gwilym)	30					10000		5											
Green Valley Sustainability Centre Interpretation and Promotion Scheme	31					10000		25	475										
Dyffryn Llynfi Porthcawl Railway (DLPR) Digital Interpretation Project	32					1000		3	25										
Community e-Trails	33					500		9	90										

Enhanced Community and Visitor Facilities in the Upper Amman Valley	34				480	10	58			
Parc Taf Bargoed Signage and Interpretation	35									
Cwmaman Sculptural Area	36				150	3				
Discover Blaenau Gwent	37									
Caerphilly Miners Making History Project	38			1	1200	2	24	300		
Ebbw Fach Trail - Signage and Interpretation	39				500	15				
Gren Way	40				1000	2				
Sub-Total for Events and Interpretations		15	221	2	244639	664	5552	1209	400	0
Totals of all VRP (core + events)		133.92	17010.25	23.5	401556	697	15622	1209	410	0

Appendix 4: E4G Economic Impact Analysis of E4G Funding for VRP

	<i>Dare Valley 2010</i>	<i>Pen Y Fan 2010</i>	<i>Pen Y Fan 2011</i>	<i>Six Bells Event 2010</i>	<i>Cordell Event 2010</i>	<i>Welsh Waterways 2011</i>	<i>Cwmbran Big Event 2011</i>	<i>Event Average</i>
Type	Site	Site	Site	Event	Event	Event	Event	Event
Visitor Numbers	142,000	80,000	81,000	7,500	1,568	1,676	7,000	4,436
Date	Oct'09-Sep'10	Jan'10-Dec'10	Nov'10-Oct'11	28th Jun'10	18/19th Sep'10	28-30th May'11	16th Jul'11	
Questionnaires completed	100	100	100	138	102	121	107	117
Number in respondents' parties	332	261	244	424	502	355	405	422
Staying away from home in Wales	33.0%	1.0%	1.0%	13.5%	4.9%	14.0%	1.9%	8.6%
Economic Impact								
Total Trip								
Gross Value Added	£4,367,000	£435,900	£514,000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Supported employment - FTE	190	19	22	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
GVA to create each job	£22,984	£22,942	£23,364	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Trips to create job	747	4,211	3,682	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total trip GVA per visitor	£30.75	£5.45	£6.35	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Directly attributable to event								
Gross Value Added	£280,000	£54,500	£18,800	£32,000	£3,350	£5,950	£16,000	£14,325
Employment FTEs	15	3	1	1.5	0.16	0.27	0.9	0.7
GVA to create each job	£18,667	£18,167	£18,800	£21,333	£20,938	£22,037	£17,778	£20,521
Visits to create job	9,467	26,667	81,000	5,000	9,800	6,207	7,778	7,196
On-site GVA per visitor	£1.97	£0.68	£0.23	£4.27	£2.14	£3.55	£2.29	£3.06
GVA per visitor: total trip: on-site	15.60	8.00	27.34	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
GVA to create job: total trip: on-site	1.23	1.26	1.24	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Adapted from: Welsh Economy Research Unit 2013a, p. 12)

Appendix 5: Stakeholder Survey for the Valleys Regional Park

1. What organisation are you a representative of within the VRP partnership?
2. What is your job title?

For the following questions please answer in notes or bullet form, and provide as much detail as possible:

1. Please summarise what you understand of the VRP and its aims.
2. Briefly, to date, what participation has your organisation had in the delivery of the VRP?
3. In what way has the VRP programme complemented the aims and objectives of your organisation?
4. What would you describe as the three most significant achievements of the VRP to date (either within an area you are directly concerned or from the project in general)?
5. What would you say are the three most significant areas of underachievement or problems within the VRP project to date? Please also indicate if these are resolved or still ongoing.
6. How successful do you feel the VRP has been in bringing together different organisations in the delivery of a common project?
 - 6.1. Can you provide a concrete example of where the partnership model has been beneficial to the delivery of a specific output in your area of work (or elsewhere within the project if not applicable)?
7. How successful do you feel the approach to link organisations across traditional geographically defined administrative boundaries has been?
 - 7.1. Can you provide a concrete example of where this approach has been beneficial to the delivery of a specific output in your area of work (or elsewhere within the project if not applicable)?
8. In what ways could the delivery of the VRP be enhanced/improved through changes to:
 - 8.1. The role played by your own organisation:
 - 8.2. The role played by specific other organisations:
 - 8.3. The way that the VRP partnership is coordinated:
 - 8.4. Any other means:
9. Do you have any other comment to make in regard to your experience of involvement in the VRP project?

Appendix 6: Internal Stakeholders Surveyed

Gareth Phillips	Torfaen CBC
Chris Engel	Blaenau Gwent CBC
John Harrison	RCT CBC
Gary Evans	Environment Agency Wales
Peter Cole	Capital Region Tourism
Steve Spode	Welsh Government
Sue Maberley	CCW
Aaron Fortt	FCW
Russell De'ath	CCW/Living Wales
Calum Macintosh	TCV
Richard Webb	Cardiff Metropolitan University
Jane Layzell	Public Health Wales
Ruth Coulthard	Brecon Beacons NPA
Andrew Osborne	Welsh Government
Andrew Burke	Welsh Government
Denise Fletcher	Capital Region Tourism