



# Bridgend LEADER Programme

# Final Evaluation

For Bridgend County Borough Council

## Final Report

Gareth Kiddie Associates - March 2023



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## Executive summary

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The Bridgend LEADER Programme has its roots in consultation activities that took place as far back as June 2010, when a meeting of Bridgend's Rural Food Steering Group was held at Bryngarw House. Many other such engagement activities followed, culminating in the formation of the Bridgend Local Action Group (LAG), approval by Welsh Government of the Bridgend Local Development Strategy, and confirmation of Bridgend County Borough Council as the Administrative Body, in August 2015.

In the intervening (almost) eight years, a total of 44 projects have been completed, and this Final Evaluation focusses on the portfolio of project work produced, together with a review of the impact of the Programme as a whole. Section 5 sets out the results of the primary research. The seven Case Studies within this section take a deeper dive into the projects, and provide the best evidence of the relative success of the Programme, together with some of the typical challenges faced and the learning gained. The conclusions of the Evaluation are set out in Section 6 at the end of this report. They relate to the specific questions set within the brief. A brief summary of these main findings is as follows:

- The Programme largely met its output targets, and exceeded its targets for publicity, stakeholders engaged and participants supported, but fell short in allocating all of its Implementation budget by some £230K (14%). Whilst this is disappointing, there were extenuating circumstances, including the impact of the pandemic and the reduction in the delivery staff team prior to the end of the project programme. (These issues are dealt with more fully on page 15).
- The Bridgend Local Development Strategy provided a good framework for project development at the outset to the Programme, but over the Programme period its relevance became diminished. There were both internal and external factors why this was the case, but despite its flaws some exemplar projects emerged.
- The integration of the five LEADER themes caused tensions within the Programme design throughout, and whilst the Strategic Objectives provided a truer reflection of the wants and needs of Bridgend's rural communities, they remained poorly understood at a grass roots level.
- The Bridgend LAG did a great job. It was well run, achieved transparency in project selection, supported projects coming through, and provided the context for strong networking and partnership development. The Programme's extension due to the pandemic, and uncertainty as to what might follow on from LEADER, however, were two factors that caused commitment and enthusiasm to wane towards the end of the Programme.
- The Bridgend Reach Team at the sharp end of project delivery did a great job too. Adopting a 'conceive and commission' approach the Rural Development Officers spearheaded a community development approach that focussed on developing 'networks of expertise' to support project development. This shift from a 'grant culture'

sits well within the LEADER approach and there were some notable examples of where this worked well.

- The projects themselves were highly diverse in nature, and acted as the focus for the mobilisation of an equally wide range of people and organisations. Within the Programme as a whole there was a strong engagement of volunteers, a good level of additional investment levered in, and excellent examples of innovative use of the natural & heritage assets of the County Borough for conservation and informal recreation.
- The Bridgend LAG looked to develop a range of Cooperation initiatives with other LAGs in the South East Wales area, and whilst some of these did not materialise as well as they might, the one project that did went on to spawn the £600K+ Agora initiative (See Case Study 2), developed initially out of study funded through a contribution of just £700 from each of the seven participating LAGs.
- The Programme clearly had a good strategic fit at its inception, but this appeared to get a little lost along the way, not helped perhaps by there being no formal review of the LDS. Despite this, the projects themselves were generally responsive to the strategies that concerned them, and the response to the pandemic was exemplified by the establishment of the 'Community Pantries' (see Case Study 4) one of the real highlights of the Programme as a whole.

In general the consultant has concluded that the Bridgend LEADER Programme adopted and adapted the LEADER approach very well to the particular circumstances of the Bridgend area, with particularly good evidence that the projects were centred on local strengths, and to some large degree were in line with the identified needs of Bridgend's rural communities.

Critically, there have been some excellent projects that have been undertaken, and credit should go to the members of the Bridgend LAG and the Reach Team who have battled through some significant challenges (and a pandemic!) to reach the end of the LEADER Programme. I commend this evaluation report to you with a hope that some of the key learning points, and the recommendations contained in the final section, may at least inform the thinking on future Programme design.

With many thanks to all those that have contributed.

*Gareth Kiddie*

Gareth Kiddie – Evaluation Consultant

28<sup>th</sup> March 2023

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Report structure

This evaluation of the Bridgend LEADER Project has been conducted by Gareth Kiddie, the Director and Senior Consultant of GKA Community Regeneration Consultancy.

The following is a brief summary of what each section of the report covers:

- **Section 1** – provides an introduction to the Bridgend LEADER project and a summary of the nature and scope of this evaluation.
- **Section 2** - establishes the baseline for the evaluation. It summarises: how the Bridgend LEADER Project came about, and it defines the project area, the project's aims, objectives, outputs and targets, as well as its delivery model.
- **Section 3** – describes the evaluation methodology, which was based on a desk top study of project documentation and key stakeholder consultations.
- **Section 4** – looks at the financial management of the programme, project spend and performance against budgetary targets.
- **Section 5** – sets out the results of the primary research and uses case studies to provide a more in-depth analysis of project activities.
- **Section 6** – draws together the primary conclusions and puts forward the main recommendations, taking into account programme specific and national strategy objectives.

## 1.2 Nature and scope of the evaluation

The evaluation has been conducted in accordance with a brief issued by Bridgend County Borough Council. The evaluation is summative in nature and aims to assess the following:

- Reached stated goals / objectives;
- Impact on the target group;
- Unintended consequences / lessons for the future;
- What worked well / what could be improved;
- Decide on the ultimate value, merit, worth of the programme.

In addition to the above the evaluation sets out to:

- Make recommendations that can inform future projects and policy locally;
  - Surface examples of good practice for dissemination and knowledge transfer;
  - Comment on how the project has contributed to community regeneration in Bridgend.
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## 2. Context

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### 2.1 Brief context to the Bridgend LEADER Programme

The LEADER approach to rural development is based on seven principles:

- **An area-based strategy** - Centred on local strengths, distinctiveness and opportunities, as well as the social and physical assets within rural communities.
- **A bottom-up approach** - Communities set their own priorities and are supported by a team to develop projects that will meet their objectives.
- **Local Action Groups (LAGs)** - Strategies are developed and delivered on the ground, with partnerships consisting of public, private and third sector members.
- **Innovation** - The flexibility for communities to test new ideas and approaches based around the assets and opportunities within their communities.
- **Integration** - Bringing people together to work jointly on community projects and share their knowledge, experience and ideas.
- **Networks** - Sharing success and learnings with other communities and building on pilot projects.
- **Cooperation** - individual projects are encouraged to work together across regions and countries.

The LEADER Programme for Bridgend was supported by European Union (EU) structural funds for the period (2014-20). The approach taken was set out in the **Bridgend Local Development Strategy** which was submitted for approval in September 2014, and was approved to proceed in August 2015.

Bridgend County Borough Council was the administrative Body for the LEADER Programme in Bridgend. To deliver the Programme the **Bridgend Local Action Group** was established and a team of six people was employed as part of Reach, an initiative that had already been established to deliver previous rural development programmes. The **Reach Team** delivered LEADER through the **Thriving Rural Communities Scheme**.

### 2.2 Summary description of Programme implementation

#### **Bridgend Local Action Group (LAG)**

The Bridgend LAG was set up under terms of reference provided by Welsh Government. The ToR allowed for a composition made up of both 'LAG Members' and 'LAG Advisors'. The minimum number of LAG Members on the LAG at any one time was to be 18, ensuring that a balance is maintained between public, private and voluntary sector representation. At the time the LAG was established there were 21 members, with a good representation across all three sectors. LAG Advisors were to be specialists in their area, and their role was to advise LAG Members based on their expertise and their engagement with rural networks. LAG Advisors did not have voting rights.

The Reach Team provided officer support to the LAG and meetings were convened on a quarterly basis throughout the duration of the Programme. The primary functions of the LAG included:

- Overseeing the preparation and delivery of activity of the Local Development Strategy and Action Plan.
- Making decisions as to the projects to be supported by the Programme, ensuring that the process was transparent and fair. This was undertaken through the Thriving Rural Communities Scheme (See below).
- Raising awareness of the programme, its aims and objectives and the allocation of its funds through regular publications, social media, press articles, events and talks in line with the Reach Communications Strategy and its objectives.
- Encouraging good partnership working between public, community and voluntary organisations/groups to ensure co-ordination/collaboration of efforts within the programme area.
- Developing co-operative projects with other Local Action Groups in both the UK and in Europe, including the sharing of experiences and good practice.

### **Bridgend Local Development Strategy (LDS)**

The LDS was written up as a document that was presented as the Bridgend LAG's submission for funding support to Welsh Government in September 2014. The strategy document (which runs to some 91 pages) included responses to Welsh Government's questions concerning: Strategic fit, Finance and compliance, Delivery, Management of operations, Value for money, Indicators and outcomes, Suitability of investment, Cross-cutting themes, and Long-term sustainability.

Running alongside the LDS was an 'Intervention Logic Table', which showed in overview the cross-linkages between the identified needs (drawn from a county-wide SWOT analysis), the strategic objectives (See below), the strategic fit, the actions to be supported, the outputs expected, contribution to the cross-cutting themes, the people & organisations involved in delivery, and, the timeframes.

Critically, at the heart of the LDS was a series of Strategic Objectives set within a vision for the Programme as a whole. This vision was one that set out to achieve:

### **'Self-sustaining, diverse and vibrant rural communities'**

In order to achieve this vision, the Local Action Group aimed to deliver all of its activity in line with the following three strategic objectives:

- **Strategic Objective 1: A place to live - Creating self-sustaining rural communities.**
- **Strategic Objective 2: A place to visit - Developing diversified rural enterprises**
- **Strategic Objective 3: A place to work - Supporting vibrant rural economies**

The Delivery Objectives that followed on from these Strategic Objectives are set out in full overleaf and were as follows:

### **Strategic Objective 1: A place to live - Creating self-sustaining rural communities**

SO1.1: To facilitate the identification and prioritisation of rural community needs and aspirations focused on sustainable futures and innovation in economic rural development.

SO1.2: To implement a pilot suite of innovative projects in rural communities, based on identified needs and aspirations, with the aim of developing sustainable rural services, exploring new ways of providing non-statutory services, and strengthening economic rural development.

SO1.3: To implement a pilot package of rural heritage activities that use an integrated community development approach to research, interpretation, upskilling, upgrading, conservation and co-operation, in order to contribute to rural Bridgend's 'sense of place' and to increase the business and employment potential of the heritage economy.

SO1.4: To implement a pilot package of 'Our Green Spaces' projects, working with community groups, volunteers and agencies to strengthen the potential economic benefit between the area's natural assets and community wellbeing, tourism and environmental sustainability.

### **Strategic Objective 2: A place to visit - Developing diversified rural enterprises**

SO2.1: To implement a pilot package of innovative activities that facilitate access to, and demand for, rural products and experiences that link producers with the hospitality sector to contribute to an integrated visitor economy.

SO2.2: To implement joint-marketing initiatives with rural enterprises, communities and partners that promote a coherent offer of rural Bridgend and maximise the potential to tap into business, family, cultural and heritage visitor economy markets.

SO2.3: To facilitate activities that lead to the development of, and sustainability of, a range of visitor accommodation and attractions that exceed customer expectations and cement a perception of rural Bridgend as a 'great place to visit'.

### **Strategic Objective 3: A place to work - Supporting vibrant rural economies**

SO3.1: To facilitate activities that identify the extent and effects of outward commuting and migration from Bridgend's rural communities, and pilot innovative interventions that create opportunities for community-based earning.

SO3.2: To identify options for renewable energy opportunities and work with stakeholders to develop a green economy for rural Bridgend.

SO3.3: To facilitate activities that identify diversification and entrepreneurship options in rural communities, and pilot innovative interventions that create opportunities for non-agricultural sustainable development.

SO3.4: To increase the use of digital technology among rural businesses and communities to maximise productivity, sales and marketing profile.

The Vision, Strategic and Delivery Objectives shown above were drawn up as part of process that drew heavily on the results of the extensive community engagement process described in the LDS (See pages 57-65), SWOT analysis undertaken through rural Thematic Groups. However, the LDS was also required to respond to the five themes contained within the Rural Development Programme for Wales (RDPW). These themes were as follows:

- Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources;
- Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains;
- Exploring new ways of providing non statutory local services;
- Renewable energy at community level;
- Exploiting digital technology.

The RDPW also requires LAGs to respond to a 'Co-operation' theme under which they are encouraged to work together and share their experiences through joint projects. It is the Intervention Logic Table (described above) that shows how the three Strategic Objectives and 11 Delivery Objectives were intended to mesh with the five RDPW Themes.

### **The Reach Team and the Thriving Rural Communities (TRC) Scheme**

The Reach Team was hosted by Bridgend County Borough Council. In the LEADER Programme immediately prior to this, the team was much larger, comprising some 19 members of staff that delivering a range of both capital and revenue funded projects.

At the commencement to the Programme the Reach Team consisted of a Programme Manager, Programme Monitoring Officer and a team of four Rural Coordinators, some of whom worked on the Programme on a part-time basis.

The Thriving Rural Communities (TRC) Scheme had two main elements. A **Preparatory Support Scheme** (PSS) which was able to support direct project costs up to £7,500, and a smaller number of larger-scale **Pilot Projects** supported with funding for direct project costs up to £100,000. The PSS was designed to support the following types of activities in the process of developing a project idea:

- Training, mentoring, facilitation and consultation;
- Large and small-scale research, feasibility studies and development plans;
- User-friendly toolkits and innovative resource packs;
- Trialling pilot projects for new ways of delivering services in the community;
- Developing community hubs and networks, such as a volunteering group.

### **The 'Conceive and Commission' approach**

Under the TRC Scheme the LAG operated an approach under which those people and organisations with project ideas are encouraged to work with officers of the Reach Team, and others, to develop a brief for a piece of work that is then commissioned to be undertaken by consultants employed via a competitive tender process. A critical aspect of the approach is the formation of a local **Steering Group** or **Network of Expertise** at the outset to each project's development.

## 2.3 Results of the Mid-term Evaluation

A Mid-Term Evaluation of the Bridgend LEADER Programme was undertaken by Ash Futures in August 2017. The main recommendations that were made by the consultants for developing the delivery of the LDS during the remainder of the Programme period were drawn up on pages 47 - 48 under the headings – Effectiveness, Efficiency and Impact. The recommendations have been repeated below:

### **Effectiveness:**

- Explore different ways to develop larger pilot projects;
- Develop the knowledge and understanding of project participants of the LDS context;
- Network across projects that have already been supported for added value and greater synergies, to share experience and to develop networks from projects;
- Open up co-operation projects to more fully engage the LAG.

### **Efficiency:**

- More proactive work by Reach to promote TRC opportunities making more use of communications and publicity;
- Seek to engage more private sector representation on the LAG (within the balance of its overall make up);
- Ensure project applications: Clearly set out proposed output targets; How relevant cross cutting themes are being addressed; What aspect of innovation is being explored.
- Monitoring includes gaining qualitative feedback from activities, events and not just a focus on the numbers;
- Final reports: Draw out the qualitative elements e.g. progress with key LEADER principles such as innovation, networking, community engagement; Draw out the learning for the future; Set out the paths for ongoing sustainability of the project activity begun with TRC.
- Make use of output monitoring information to inform project development and appraisal and keep LAG members and others up to date on progress;
- Continue to monitor relationship between Reach staff implementation costs and project costs in order to check progress on overall spend and commitments;
- Take time at LAG meetings to reflect on project activities, experience and future potential.

### **Impact:**

- Specifically seek to bring forward some projects that are more focused on rural enterprise development;
- Where possible, maintain contact with projects progressing beyond TRC as this is where the greater impact will arise.

The extent to which these recommendations were taken up and/or addressed by the Bridgend LAG are considered within this report.

## 3. Evaluation methodology

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### 3.1 Evaluation design and approach

In the process of tendering to undertake the commission the consultant put forward an outline process for the evaluation. At the inception meeting with the client team held on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2021, the consultant's approach was discussed and refinements were made. A revised Evaluation Plan was then submitted together with an outline of the scope of the Evaluation Report to be produced. The Evaluation Plan set out in detail the design of the evaluation, the key features of which were as follows:

- A Focus Group with LAG members;
- Semi-structured interviews with a representative selection of key stakeholders;
- Snapshot online surveys;
- Case studies.

### 3.2 Sources of data and indicators

The evaluation consultant set out to establish a baseline from which to make an informed assessment. This involved:

- Desk-top study of documents supplied by the client. The following key documents were reviewed in depth:
  - The Bridgend Local Development Strategy (LDS);
  - Bridgend LEADER Programme Logic Table;
  - Bridgend LEADER Programme Mid-Term Evaluation.
- Undertaking further desk to study to ensure the context to the project was well understood. This included a review of:
  - Local Action Group (LAG) Meeting Minutes and Reports;
  - Performance indicator and financial data;
  - Individual Project Files;
  - Publicity and promotional materials.

### 3.3 Limitations of the approach

Assessing a Programme of projects as large as this, in retrospect, and within the timeframe available has been a challenge. The main limitations of the approach are as follows:

- It has been difficult to gather hard evidence from some of the earliest projects because the people involved have either moved on or are no longer involved.

- Despite its clear successes, the enthusiasm for the LEADER Programme as it drew to a close clearly waned, most especially because of the uncertainty of what any replacement/follow-on might look like. This impacted on the consultant's ability to talk to some target consultees.
- The evidence gathered from consultations has largely been anecdotal. To combat this the consultant has sought to ascertain second and third opinions, wherever possible.
- Due to the time constraints and the extensive nature of the Programme, the consultant has sought to sample some projects in greater depth, whilst trying to gain an overview of the rest.

Despite the above limitations the consultant has succeeded in gaining a good overview of the whole Programme (See Section 5.1), enable answers to the core questions of the evaluation (See Section 5.3), and the Case Studies (See Section 5.2) have enabled the consultant to drill down and explore particular lines of enquiry that only became apparent when the consultations got underway.

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## 4. Monitoring and indicator information

### 4.1 Review of monitoring data

The monitoring data at the end of the Bridgend LEADER Programme is shown below:

| Implementation                                               | Profile | Achieved |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| • Number of Feasibility Studies                              | 40      | 40       |
| • Number of Networks established                             | 5       | 5        |
| • Number of pilot activities undertaken/supported            | 12      | 7        |
| • Number of Community Hubs                                   | 18      | 24       |
| • Number of information dissemination actions                | 140     | 192      |
| • Number of stakeholders engaged                             | 271     | 289      |
| • Number of participants supported                           | 1300    | 1675     |
| • Number of Preparatory technical support projects supported | 5       | 5        |
| Cooperation                                                  | Profile | Achieved |
| • Number of Networks established                             | 1       | 1        |
| • Number of pilot activities undertaken/supported            | 1       | 1        |
| • Number of Community Hubs                                   | 5       | 5        |
| • Number of information dissemination actions                | 9       | 9        |
| • Number of stakeholders engaged                             | 47      | 47       |
| • Number of participants supported                           | 430     | 430      |
| • Number of Preparatory technical support projects supported | 1       | 1        |
| Animation                                                    | Profile | Achieved |
| • Number of information dissemination actions                | 9       | 9        |
| Running                                                      | Profile | Achieved |
| • Number of information dissemination actions                | 2       | 2        |

**Figure 1. Bridgend LEADER Programme Indicators 2014-2023**

The table indicates that the Bridgend LAG met, and in some instances exceeded, all of its performance indicator targets except one, that being for '*Number of pilot activities undertaken/supported*'. The consultant has undertaken a review of these achievements, looking at the data supplied by the Programme Monitoring Officer. The results of this review are as follows:

#### Number of Feasibility Studies

- Just over half of the studies undertaken (21/40) were undertaken as part of TRC-28 Community Asset Transfer Programme, and comprised a mix of business plans, diagnostic investigations, condition surveys etc. The remaining 19 were specifically related to the range of other projects supported through the Thriving Rural Communities Scheme and were a highly diverse mix of reports and plans, reflective of the diversity of the Programme as a whole. It is difficult to draw any firm conclusion

from the statistics, but there are good examples of how these studies have guided the further development of projects in the Case Studies (See Section 5.2).

#### **Number of Networks established**

- There were six Networks established. As far as the consultant can ascertain, two of these Networks are still active/growing (Community Pantries and Bridgend Local Nature Partnership), two remain in place but are not active (Community Energy Group and Community Centre Network), and the remaining two (Tourism Ambassadors and the Bridgend Craft Network) have fallen into abeyance.
- From experience of other programmes of this nature, our view is that two of the key success factors in running successful networks is firstly that participants continue to get something back from their engagement, and secondly that there are the resources in place to drive them – a friendly face that brings the network together and organises network activities. There is a concern that as the Bridgend LEADER Programme comes to a close some of the value that has been derived from the establishment of these networks may be lost.

#### **Number of pilot activities undertaken/supported**

- This is the one PI where the Programme target has not been met. However, there is good evidence to show that a further three Pilot Project activities may in fact be counted towards the final total (TRC-58 Aberkenfig Community Hall, TRC-61 Heol-y-Cyw Digital Hub, and TRC-62 Empty Commercial Properties), and amongst the other Pilot Project activities there are good exemplars some of which are looked at in the Case Studies (See Section 5.2).

#### **Number of Community Hubs**

- The statistics show that 24 new community hubs were established. It has been difficult for the consultant to ascertain how many of these hubs are still operating as hubs, but some of them have clearly been newly established as a direct result of project activities (e.g. The Garw Youth Hub, The Nest at Heol-y-Cyw), whilst others have probably been developed anew by building on and/or revitalising previous initiatives (e.g. Bettws Forum, Garw Railway and Heritage Hub).

#### **Number of information dissemination actions**

- This was an area where the Programme was active and strong. The consultant has undertaken a more detailed look at the evidence behind the results. This is presented in Section 5.3.5 below.

#### **Number of stakeholders engaged / participants supported**

- These PI's are taken together. Both targets were exceeded and a cursory review of the data reveals the many and diverse range of organisations and individuals engaged in and supported by the programme. Once again some of the evidence for the quality of the engagement/support is to be found in the Case Studies (See Section 5.2).

## Number of Preparatory technical support projects supported

- The six projects supported were understandably undertaken early on in the Programme period (2015-16), and covered a range of themes. One of the projects, The Review of Sustainable Community Venues and Assets in Bridgend County Borough, is referenced in Case Study 1 concerning the genesis of the CAT Toolkit and CAT Programme.

## 4.2 Budget spend and breakdown

The final financial profile for the Bridgend LEADER Programme is shown below:

| Project        | Profile       | Actual        |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Implementation | £1,639,448.97 | £1,408,341.00 |
| Cooperation    | £128,677.00   | £128,677.00   |
| Animation      | £282,900.00   | £282,900.00   |
| Running        | £188,600.00   | £188,600.00   |

**Figure 2. Bridgend LEADER Programme final Financial Profile**

The profile shows that spend on three of the four Projects was fully committed and claimed, but that there was an under spend on the Implementation Project of £231,107.97.

Discussions with the Programme Manager and Rural Programme Coordinator revealed the following reasons for the under spend:

- In 2019 the whole programme was re-evaluated. There was a long period of uncertainty prior to the re-evaluation. The subsequent extension of the Programme mid-way through, with no additional resource for staff, meant that the Programme delivery team was cut from six officers to three, this consequently reduced the capacity of the Reach team to deliver new project work whilst managing their existing portfolio.
- Throughout the latter stages of the Programme there has been difficulty in commissioning contractors to undertake the work required. The officers cited several occasions where project briefs had been advertised but no tenders received, requiring a re-tender and significant additional time to process the paperwork.
- The pandemic also had a significant impact. Whilst the LAG were proactive in approving modifications to existing projects to allow for COVID relief (for example, the Sustainable Community Venues project developed 12 community pantries at community centres to distribute food), there was nevertheless a significant decline in project applications.
- The Programme Manager also reported encountering delays due to the changes in Welsh Government processes around competitive tendering and project expenditure records, as well as the introduction of approval panels for contracts where less than three quotes were received, and where the authority scored tenders on best value rather than cheapest quote. Approvals were needed before appointments in these cases and these took many weeks in some cases.

## 5. Results of primary research

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### 5.1 Results of consultations

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a representative selection of:

- Members of the LAG x 6;
- Administration and project staff x 4;
- Project beneficiaries x 7;
- Delivery contractors x 4;
- Partner organisations x 5;
- Organisations representing the local community x 3.

At the core of the Evaluation Plan a logic matrix (See **Appendix 1**) set out the line of questioning for each target consultee group, and this was used as the basis for the design of a series of tailored questionnaires (See example provided in **Appendix 2**), which were in turn used to guide each semi-structured interview undertaken.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, more in-depth discussions were held with those people involved in sampled projects put forward for case study development.

### 5.2 Case studies

At the outset to the commission the evaluation consultant worked with the Programme Manager and Rural Development Coordinator to identify a long-list of potential projects for case study development and from this the consultant selected a final short-list of seven projects as follows:

- TRC-02 & 28 CAT Toolkit and CAT Programme
- TRC-04 Resilient Economy – Local Supply Chains
- TRC-13 Tondu Wesley & Trinity Care Support
- TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues
- TRC-44 Digital Shepherd Pilot
- TRC-52 & 54 Ogmores Washeries Appraisal & Ogmores Valley Strategy
- TRC-61 Heol-y-Cyw Digital Hub

The projects were chosen to both to give a good idea of the relative strengths of the Programme and are reflective of the Programme emphasis on LEADER themes 1 and 3. Critically, the case studies point the way to some of the key points of learning that can be derived from each one.

## Case Study 1: CAT Toolkit and CAT Programme

### Introduction and scope

This Case Study focuses on the project activity undertaken to deliver **TRC-02 CAT Toolkit** (project value = £16,000) and **TRC-28 Community Asset Transfer Programme** the second largest of Thriving Rural Communities Scheme's Pilot Projects (project value = £80,000).

### Project aims and activities undertaken

The **CAT Toolkit** project was delivered in two parts. An initial scoping study, undertaken by the Wales Cooperative Centre in 2016, which looked at the barriers to access for community organisations looking to take on a CAT project. A Toolkit produced by the Ethical Property Foundation, designed to guide community organisations through the CAT process, with useful templates and signposting to other useful resources.



Extracted pages from CAT Toolkit compiled by the Ethical Property Foundation

The **Community Asset Transfer Programme** was delivered by Bridgend County Borough Council in two phases over four years and provided a large proportion of the match funding for the Bridgend LEADER Programme. The aim of the Programme has been to provide advice and guidance to community-led organisations looking to take on an asset.

### Project results and outcomes

Discussions with BCBC's CAT Officer and Members of the LAG revealed the following:

- The CAT Toolkit was widely distributed and uploaded to the BCBC website.
- A large Steering Group for CAT applications was established in the very earliest phase of the project, comprising expertise in property, legal issues and financial planning.

- In the initial phase the CAT programme became a focus of support for the large number of sports clubs in the area, and was said to be a great way to engage with them.
- The CAT Programme has helped to draw in a range of other support organisations including those that can provide business support e.g. Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT) and the Wales Cooperative Centre (now Cwmpas), as well as sectoral bodies such as the Welsh Rugby Union and Cymru Football Foundation representing sporting interests.
- There have been some notable successes, for example, Bryncethin Rugby Club:
  - Awarded a 35 year lease in October 2018;
  - Transformed their dilapidated pavilion into a community hub;
  - New building includes better changing rooms, and community facilities including a kitchen, an IT suite, a meeting room, a large hall and patio doors onto a balcony;
  - The building now houses a nursery five days a week, as well as fitness classes, IT classes, a community café and a youth club;
  - Total project cost = £550K, with £110K coming from BCBC's CAT fund and the remainder from a range of sources including: Section 106, WG Community Facilities Programme, National Lottery (People & Places), Rural Community Development Fund, Welsh Church Acts Fund and Welsh Rugby Union.



**Bryncethin Rugby Club Pavilion – Before and after completion of CAT (Photo courtesy BCBC)**

- Other CAT Projects that have supported through the Bridgend LEADER Programme have included:
  - Heol y Cyw pavillion and playing fields - Condition survey report;
  - Llangeinor Playing Fields – Business Plan and technical support;
  - Pontycymer Bowls & Garw Valley Tennis Club - draft business plan and drawings;
  - Carn Rovers (Garw) - Business Plan;
  - Bryntirion Laleston Community Centre Condition Survey Report;
  - Pencoed Athletic Boys and Girls Club - Feasibility Study;
  - Evanstown playing fields and Pavilion - Condition Survey Report;
  - Nantymoel RFC - Diagnostic assessment;
  - Pontycymer RFC - Feasibility Study and diagnostic report;
  - Pandy Park, Tondu - building fabric condition survey.

## Contribution to the Programme and LEADER approach

The Toolkit and Pilot Project contributed strongly to the RDPW Themes 1 and 3 and the following Strategic Objectives within the Bridgend LDS:

- **SO1.1:** To facilitate the identification and prioritisation of rural community needs and aspirations focused on sustainable futures and innovation in economic rural development.
- **SO1.2:** To implement a pilot suite of innovative projects in rural communities, based on identified needs and aspirations, with the aim of developing sustainable rural services, exploring new ways of providing non-statutory services, and strengthening economic rural development.

There was also evidence to show that the projects:

- Focussed on community social and physical assets of using an *area-based* approach;
- Successfully guided and supported the aspirations of the community coming from a *bottom up* perspective;
- Assisted communities to come up with their own creative and *innovative* ideas for transforming often run-down community buildings;
- Brought a wide range of people and organisations together in an *integrated* way, and with a common concern to help these project succeed.

### Added value...

- The Bridgend LEADER Programme helped establish the CAT Programme in the Bridgend area and provided it with the research and tools to get going. The Bryncethin example alone provides good evidence of the scale of additional funding that can be brought in as a result of CAT Projects.

### Some learning points?

- The cross-linkages that were made possible through the CAT Programme, between; community organisations interested in acquiring assets, LAG Members, Reach Team Officers, BCBC's CAT Officer and BCBC Officers in other Council departments were very positive. They helped to break down the perception that the CAT Programme was solely an in-house BCBC initiative, and have also fostered good and continuing working relationships inside and outside of the Council.
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# Case Study 2: Resilient Economy – Local Supply Chains

## Introduction and scope

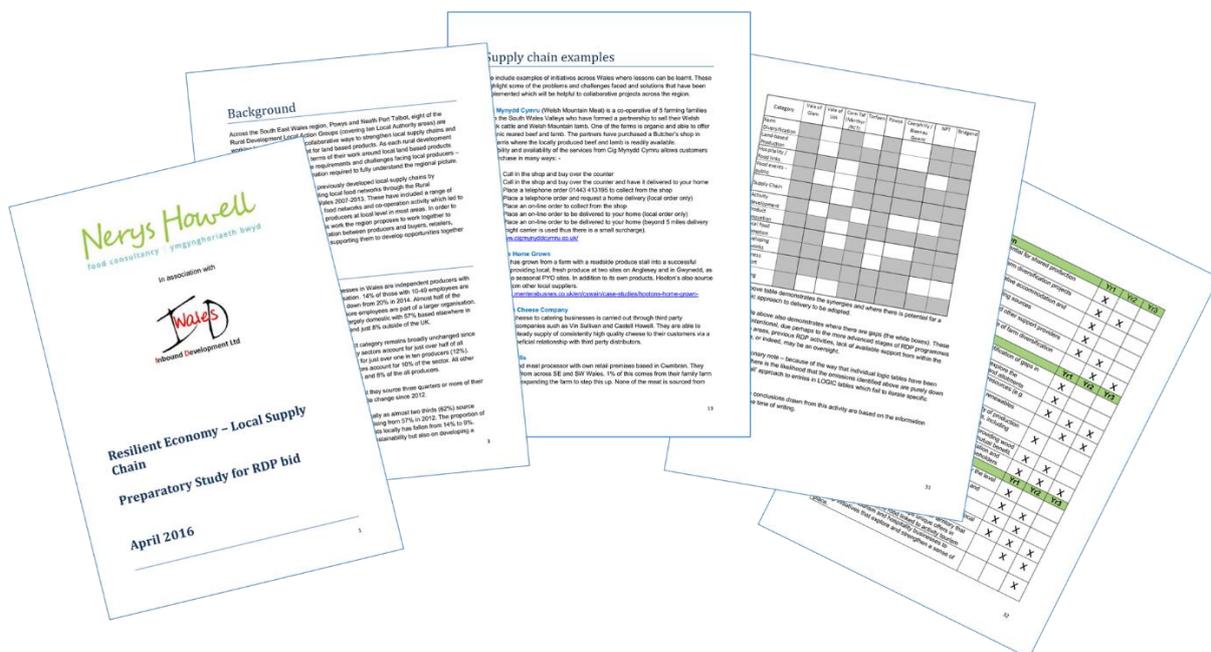
This Case Study focuses on the project activity undertaken to deliver **TRC-04 Resilient Economy – Local Supply Chains** a project that was developed under the Bridgend LEADER Programme’s Cooperation strand (project value = £700/£4,900).

## Project aims and activities undertaken

This Cooperation project initiated by the Bridgend LAG brought together Seven Rural Development Local Action Groups from across South East Wales region, Neath Port Talbot and Powys (covering nine Local Authority Areas). The ultimate aim of the project was for the LAGs to work together to identify collaborative ways to strengthen local supply chains and develop new routes to market for land-based products.

Bridgend had been recognised for its work in developing its local food economy under the previous Rural Development Programme (2011-14). What was identified as a significant future development opportunity was to encourage collaboration over a much wider area and across a range of supply chains concerned not just with food, but with other land-based produce including local crafts and timber products. Each of the LAGs was asked to contribute £700 towards the costs of commissioning a Feasibility Study to draw together all of the existing research and data from each LAG area. The brief for the commission was to:

- Analyse all current research, and look at the challenges & barriers in each LAG area;
- Conduct a policy review to identify strategic fit and opportunities for development;
- Put forward a strategic action plan for a three programme of follow on work.



Extracts from the Final Report produced by Nerys Howell working in association with IDWales

## Project results and outcomes

Discussions with Members of the LAG and Reach Team revealed the following:

- The project implementation worked very well including regular meetings and open lines of communication with other RDP areas.
- A strong working relationship was also created with Cywain and FUW leading to joint local producer events.
- The findings of the report informed a successful £630K bid to the RDP Co-operation & Supply Chains Development Scheme via Welsh Government. The funding was used to develop a new scheme called 'Agora' a two-year project led by Bridgend County Borough Council and delivered by Menter a Busnes to help producers of goods '*grown, grazed or made*' across 11 local authority areas in mid and south-west Wales (See below).

## Contribution to the Programme and LEADER approach

This project contributed to the Cooperation strand of the Bridgend LEADER Programme and to RDPW Theme 2. The project also contributed strongly to the following Strategic Objectives within the LDS:

- **SO2.1:** To implement a pilot package of innovative activities that facilitate access to, and demand for, rural products and experiences that link producers with the hospitality sector to contribute to an integrated visitor economy.
- **SO2.2:** To implement joint-marketing initiatives with rural enterprises, communities and partners that promote a coherent offer of rural Bridgend and maximise the potential to tap into business, family, cultural and heritage visitor economy markets.
- **SO3.3:** To facilitate activities that identify diversification and entrepreneurship options in rural communities, and pilot innovative interventions that create opportunities for non-agricultural sustainable development.

There was also evidence to show that the project:

- Took an *area-based* approach by focussing on the strengths and distinctiveness of the South East Wales region.
- Sought to find *innovative* ways to work with producers not often engaged, building their capacity and confidence to participate in future joint-working initiatives.
- Helped build new *networks* to share success and learning across communities.

## Added value...

- Agora, which came directly out of the LEADER funded Resilient Economy – Local Supply Chains project – started in September 2017 with the aim to help land based producers – growers and grazers to develop routes to market.
- Successful applicants to the Scheme were provided with: 1-2-1 support from expert advisers in helping to develop income streams from their products, a chance to meet

and learn from producers that had already diversified, and, opportunities to participate actively in 'meet the buyer' type events.



**Agora Project Marketing Materials produced by Menter a Busnes and a launch photo.**



### Some learning points?

- Sometimes a lot can come very little investment and from working together!

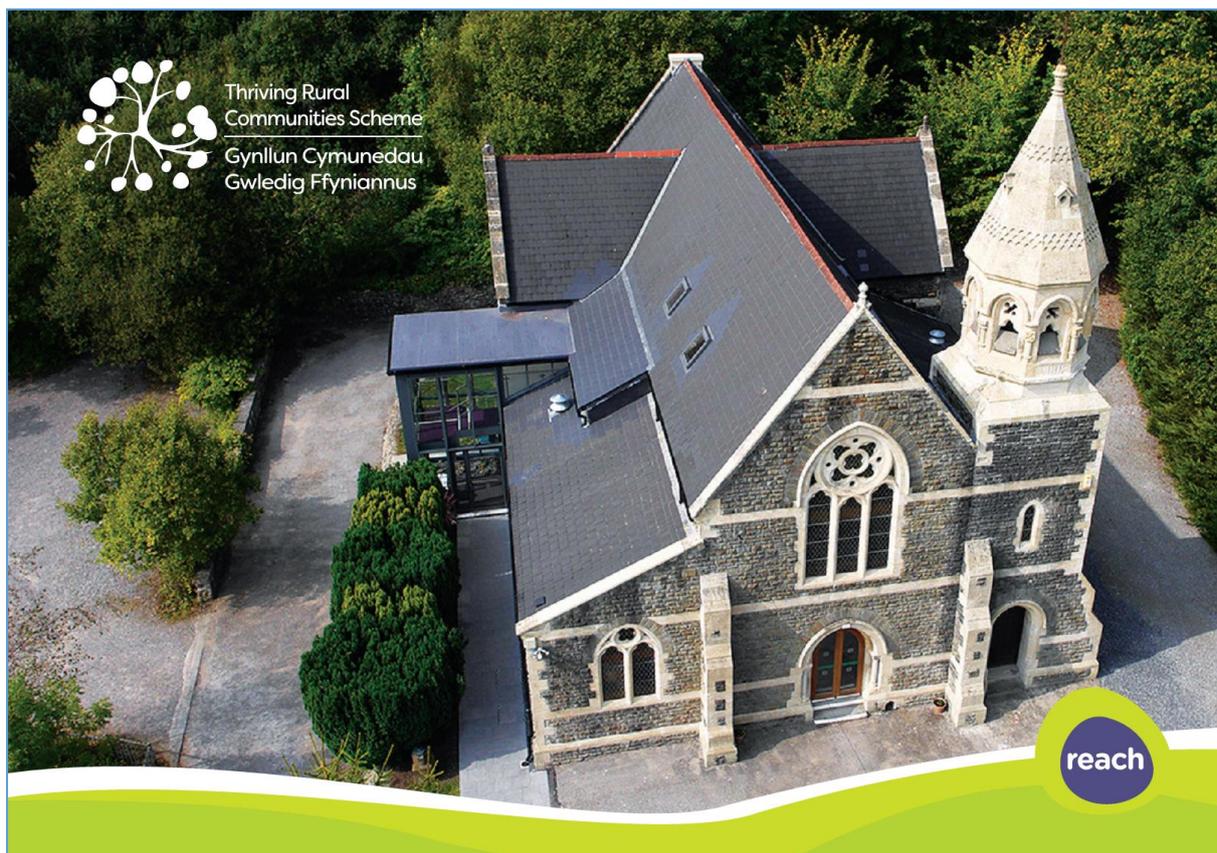
## Case Study 3: Tondu Wesley & Trinity Care Support

### Introduction and scope

This Case Study focuses on the project activity undertaken to deliver **TRC-13 Tondu Wesley & Trinity Care Support** a project that was supported under the Thriving Rural Communities Preparatory Support Scheme (project value = £2,850).

### Project aims and activities undertaken

Tondu Methodist Church today provides a social, cultural and educational hub for a village in a rural area of Bridgend, which is rapidly growing after a period of decline. Under the previous Rural Development Programme for Wales 2013-14, just under £40K of capital funding was secured by the church via Reach. This was used to draw in a further £500K that enabled a major refurbishment project to proceed. The Wesley Centre at the church was opened by First Minister Carwyn Jones on 22 March 2014.



#### The Wesley Centre at Tondu Methodist Church as featured in Reach publicity material

The church's redevelopment was a great success. The Centre is able to host a greater range of much needed community activities, and in doing so is able attract new audiences. However, this success is limited by issues that remain in the church grounds concerned with: disabled access, parking, signage, lighting and the lack of a welcoming gateway from the

road access immediately in front of the church. A Steering Group was formed and it worked with the LAG to commission a small-scale study to address these issues and re-align the entrance and exit routes and parking area.

The Study was undertaken by local firm Whittington Landscape Architecture. Wesley Centre user groups were consulted, and a set of drawings and costings were produced.



Extracted pages from the Feasibility Study undertaken by Whittington Landscape Architecture

## Project results and outcomes

Discussions with a Bridgend LAG Member and Coordinator of the Tondy Wesley Centre project revealed the following:

- The Feasibility Study was well received by the church and was said to have provided a set of excellent, costed proposals, which will form the basis of future funding bids.
- The project had been significantly delayed, however, because the proposed parking area at the rear (a key aspect of the design) is set to be established on a small parcel of land currently not owned by the church. Negotiations are ongoing with the landowner (Merthyr Mawr Estates) and a housing developer contracted by the landowner, so that the land can be freed up for use, but until the land is secured the project will remain in abeyance.
- Ironically, the land in question is being developed to accommodate 450 new homes. A development that will significantly increase the demand for the kind of local community facilities and activities that the Tondy Wesley Centre is able to offer.

## Contribution to the Programme and LEADER approach

The Wesley Centre Feasibility Study contributed to the RDPW Theme 1 and the following Strategic Objective within the Bridgend LDS:

- **SO1.2:** To implement a pilot suite of innovative projects in rural communities, based on identified needs and aspirations, with the aim of developing sustainable rural services, exploring new ways of providing non-statutory services, and strengthening economic rural development.

There was also evidence to show that the project:

- Built on the strengths and distinctiveness of a much treasured community asset as part of an *area-based* strategy.
- Came from the expressed needs of the local community via a *bottom-up* approach.

### **Added value...**

- The church's ability to draw in additional funding was ably demonstrated in the previous phase of the RDPW programme, when £500K from 12 different sources of funding were skilfully pulled together to enable the Wesley Centre to be established at Tondu Methodist Church.
- There is confidence that a further £120K required to undertake the landscaping works outlined in the Study will be attained once the project is freed up to proceed.

### **Some learning points?**

- This project in particular demonstrates the potential impact that relatively small sums of funding can have at a local level.
  - The availability of capital funding in the earlier rounds of RDPW funding was highlighted as being important by the project beneficiary.
  - The fragility of small-scale community-led initiatives like this also became apparent from the discussions. The pandemic impacted heavily on the Centre and there was a concern that it might close as the income from user groups dried up and some activities failed to return. Again small grants have helped ensure that the Centre has remained open. One such grant of just £420 from BAVO has recently helped to establish a 'warm hub' which has in turn drawn people back in. As a result, new activities are once again being developed at the Centre. In this context the ongoing support of Reach is to be commended. The 'risk' in this instance was in providing more funding for project funded under the previous round. The reward has yet to be realised, but it is surely a case of watch this space...
-

## Case Study 4: Sustainable Community Venues

### Introduction and scope

This Case Study focuses on the project activity undertaken to deliver **TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues** the largest of Thriving Rural Communities Scheme's Pilot Projects (project value = £95,950).

### Project aims and activities undertaken

In the previous programme of rural development support (RDPW 2013-14), Reach Officers had identified that a major barrier to the development of rural services at a community level, was the lack of support for community venues. Often solely managed by volunteers these venues were found to be struggling with the same issues around finances and keeping their much needed community facilities open and accessible. The primary purpose of this flagship Pilot Project was therefore established to identify and deliver activities that helped to make significant improvements to the financial viability and sustainability of community venues located within rural communities in Bridgend.

A Steering Group comprising four community venues - Nantymoel Boys and Girls Club and Community Centre, Bryncethin Rugby Club and Community Centre, Bryntiron Community Centre and Glyn Ogwr Church Community Centre – was formed and coordinated by the Reach team. Together a brief was produced to commission a suitably qualified organisation to develop models and way of working in the following areas:

- Community & stakeholder engagement and marketing;
- Sharing good practice through the establishment of a 'Community Venue Network';
- Collective purchasing of e.g. Energy, supplies, maintenance;
- Joint bids for funding to support e.g. capital investments, peripatetic caretaker etc;
- On-site improvements relating to energy efficiency, digital provision and recycling;
- The development of a Sustainable Venues Toolkit.

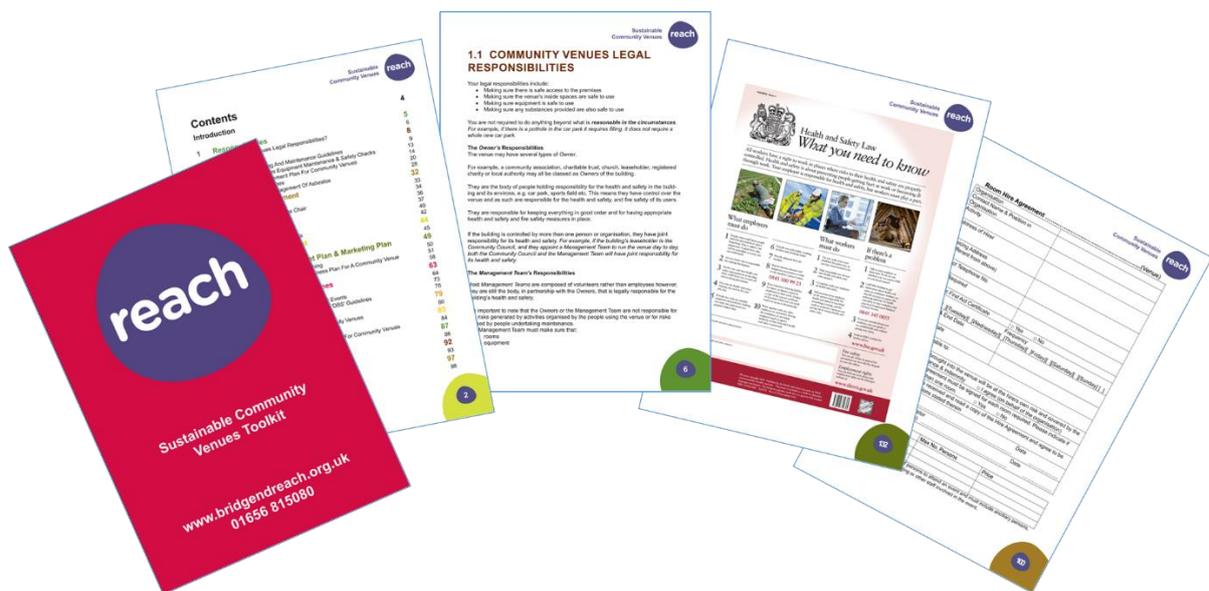
Consultancy firm Eclipse Wales were commissioned to deliver the pilot project.

### Project results and outcomes

Discussions with the consultants, LAG members and Reach Officers revealed the following:

- The consultants worked strongly with the venues, helping to establish over 60 new connections with local stakeholder organisations in the first phase of the project;
- The Community Venues Network was established, but the pandemic had a significant impact on attendance, and it became clear that bringing management committee members together on anything more than a quarterly basis was going to prove to be a big challenge.

- Some of the key aspirations expressed in the brief regarding joint purchasing and shared services proved to be either too difficult to implement or totally unfeasible.
- The consultants were highly successful in supporting the participating community venues in applying for funding, with a diverse range of bids going in and a significant amount of additional investment into the venues being drawn down (See below)
- A significant amount of research was undertaken to support on-site improvements in key areas such as energy efficiency, digital provision and recycling, with some progress made but many barriers encountered;
- A comprehensive 185 page Toolkit was produced, but frustratingly software compatibility issues with Bridgend County Borough Council's IT has prevented this very valuable resource being easily accessible online.



**Extracted pages from the Sustainable Community Venues Toolkit produced by Eclipse Wales**

The key outcome to the pilot project, however, arose from the establishment by the consultants of **Community Food Pantries** as a spin-off to the main Sustainable Community Venues programme of work. Initially piloted as a response to the pandemic, the first pantries were launched at three of the four participating community venues.

The concept of the pantries is concerned with the following:

- Local provision of affordable food – a £5 bag with 15+ items including fresh produce and free recipe cards tailored to the items provided;
- The opportunity for people to come into a safe & warm space to enjoy a cuppa and a chat in a ‘Wellbeing Café’ run by friendly volunteers;
- Sign-posting to other community support services, some of which (such as Bridgend Employability) use the pantries as an appropriate place to engage with their target audiences;
- The diversion of surplus food that might otherwise go to waste through engagement in national initiatives such as FareShare Cymru.

Since the launch of the first pantries in 2020 the project has gone from strength to strength and is now being driven forward by the same consultancy team, but newly constituted as a social enterprise called BaoBab Bach CIC. There are now 13 pantries in the Bridgend area and in 2022 the social business distributed 10,858 bags of food to households locally.



**Above: Volunteers at the Nantymoel Pantry February 2023**

**Below: Alison and John Westwood Founders of Boabab Bach CIC (Photos. courtesy Boabab Bach)**



## Contribution to the Programme and LEADER approach

The Pilot Project contributed strongly to the RDPW Themes 1 and 3 and the following Strategic Objectives within the Bridgend LDS:

- **SO1.1:** To facilitate the identification and prioritisation of rural community needs and aspirations focused on sustainable futures and innovation in economic rural development.
- **SO1.2:** To implement a pilot suite of innovative projects in rural communities, based on identified needs and aspirations, with the aim of developing sustainable rural services, exploring new ways of providing non-statutory services, and strengthening economic rural development.

There was also evidence to show that the pilot project:

- Focussed in on the needs of each of the four communities participating in the pilot, and therefore took an approach that was *area-based*;
- Came directly from the expressed needs of the community venues involved as part of a *bottom-up* process;
- Identified new and *innovative* ways of working to support community venues by focussing in on building the capacity and skills of the management committees. The 'community pantry' concept came out of the pilot as a *creative and innovative* response to the pandemic.

### Added value...

- The consultants supported the four community venues in the pilot project helping them to submit over 20 applications for funding, helping to secure over £50K in grants.
- Over 70 volunteers have been engaged in running the community pantries and they have all been trained in food hygiene. Two volunteers have taken on the roles of driving the (Tesco donated) van and making food deliveries. The consultants reported how the individuals concerned had been on their own personal journeys, and just how much their volunteering and 'their' van meant to them!
- Boabab Bach CIC is in itself a direct result of the Pilot Project. A new and growing social enterprise based in the Bridgend area, which is providing full-time employment for 2.5 fte personnel. The most recently created post, a part-time 'Growing Food Project Officer', was the person who had previously established the Edible Food Forest initiative at Nantymoel Boys and Girls Club and Community Centre (The Mem) as a volunteer.
- The pantries have become the platform for a wide variety of other support organisations to deliver their services to the local community. Employability Bridgend, for example, continue to work closely with Baobab Bach CIC, dovetailing their delivery so that people coming to the pantries have a more accessible entry point to activities such as job support.
- The pantries are helping the community venues to become more sustainable as more people are coming through the doors, more local residents are meeting up, and there is a growing sense that they are becoming true 'community hubs' as a result.

## Some learning points?

- The simplest ideas can sometimes be the best! The Sustainable Community Venues Pilot Project started out with good intent and an earnest desire address some of the key issues and barriers to sustainability for community venues in rural areas in Bridgend. However, it was the focus on food, which ultimately led to a model that worked and had the capacity to grow.
- Build in the ability to be flexible. No one predicted the pandemic, nor the devastating impact it had on all of our communities. In the case of the development of the community food pantries in Bridgend, they arose as a direct creative response to the immediate need to ensure supplies of low-cost, fresh and healthy foodstuffs reached those people that needed them the most. It was the foresight provided by the consultants combined, with the flexible approach of the LAG and Welsh Government, which enabled the project to progress to everyone’s benefit.
- The importance of being able to take a risk. The LEADER Programme is designed to promote innovation and creativity, and in doing so enable informed risks to be taken. The Bridgend LAG need to be given credit for investing in this project, and for recognising the skills and abilities of the people behind driving it forward – consultants turn social entrepreneurs.



**The Edible Food Forest being established at the back of ‘The Mem’ at Nantymoel**

## Case Study 5: Digital Shepherd Pilot

### Introduction and scope

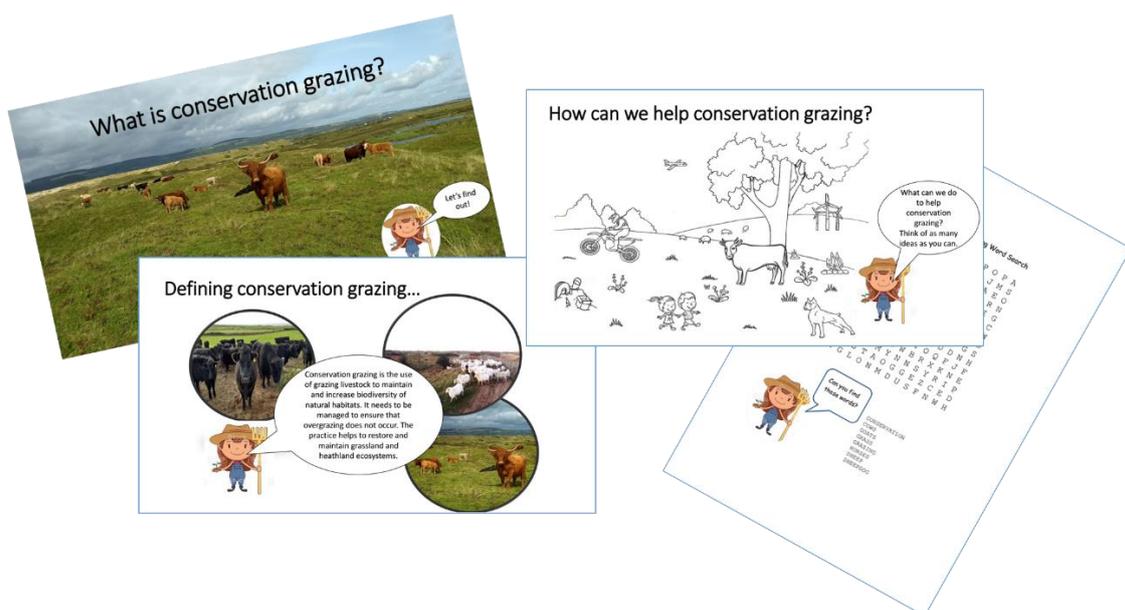
This Case Study focuses on the project activity undertaken to deliver **TRC-44 Digital Shepherd Pilot** a project that was supported under the Thriving Rural Communities Preparatory Support Scheme (project value = £11,586).

### Project aims and activities undertaken

This project tackled one of the main priorities of the Rural Development Plan for Wales, that is, to *restore, preserve and enhance ecosystems*. Further, in Bridgend County Borough, it was identified that ‘managed conservation grazing’ is one of the best mechanisms for addressing this challenge. However, it was also clear that residents and visitors alike were largely unaware of this conservation activity taking place, and equally unaware of its importance. The Digital Shepherd Project therefore set out to raise awareness of managed conservation grazing, and it did this through a range of innovative project activities including:

- Free educational resources hosted on the website of PONT (Pori Natur A Threftadaeth) a Wales based conservation grazing charity;
- A portal where the movement of a sheep flock can be watched in real time;
- A campaign to address the issue of dog attacks on livestock, which remains one of the major concerns of graziers and farmers across Wales.

The project was developed by a Steering Group comprised of a local farmer (Rob Williams), PONT, Natural Resources Wales, Swansea University and a Rural Development Officer from the Reach team. The education resources were developed by South Wales based education consultants – Think, Learn, Challenge! (TLC).

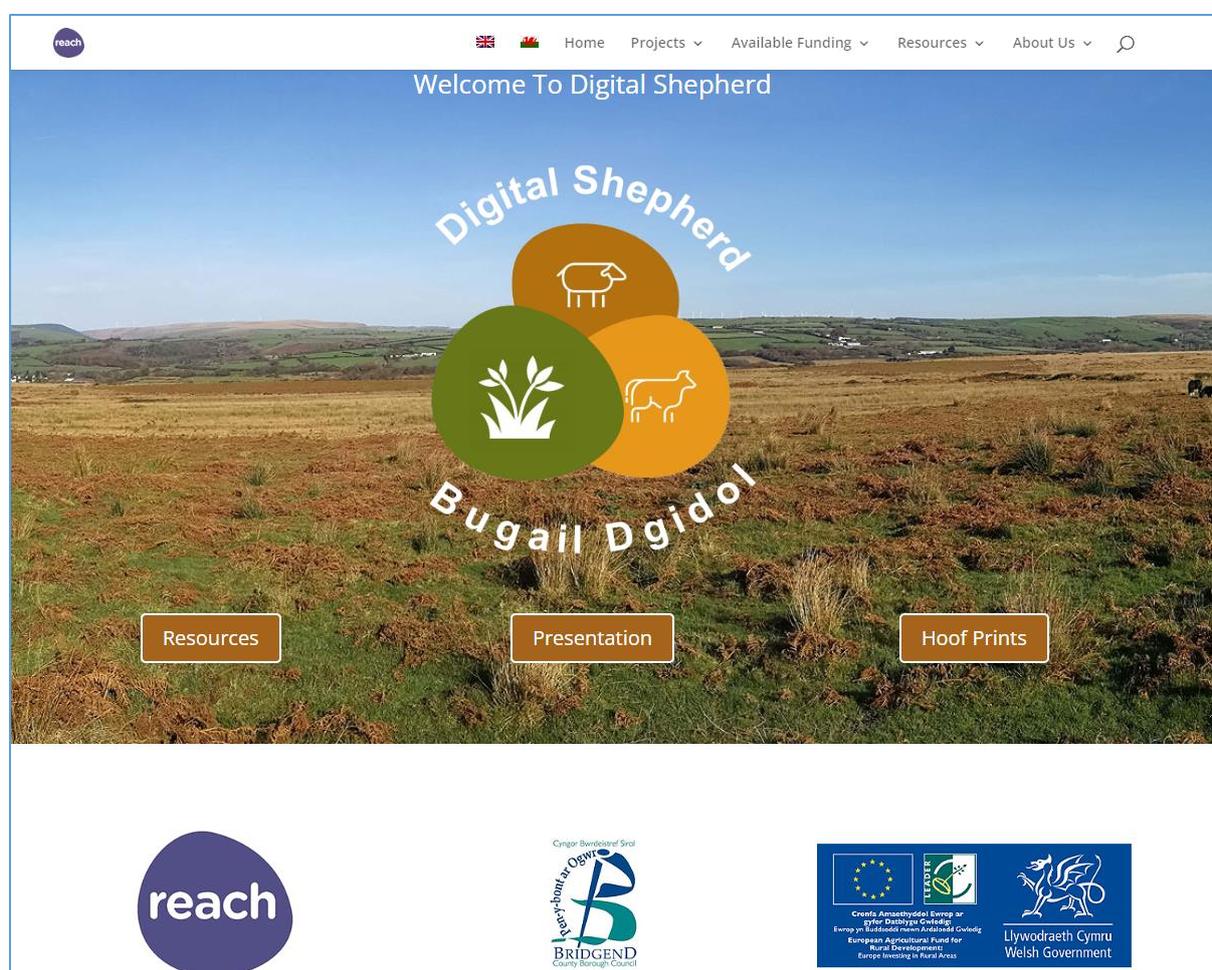


Extracts from the educational resource materials developed by TLC

## Project results and outcomes

Discussions with representatives of the consultancy team (TLC), the grazing charity (PONT) and the Reach Team Officer involved in the project revealed the following:

- The project was rolled out in three phases:
  - Phase 1 worked with SHEP (Schools Healthy Eating Project) in the summer holidays by visiting schools and working with the pupils to inform them about the project. Activities included bringing a live sheep into the school, making posters about grazing and '*painting our feet and walking down long sheets of paper to think about the tracks animals make*';
  - Phase 2 involved setting up the Digital Shepherd website (see below).
  - Phase 3 worked with NRW who providing the livestock tracking collars. The collars did not work very well initially and needed repositioning with counter weights to improve the signal!



Homepage of the Digital Shepherd website

- A Professional Dog Walkers Forum was held at Kenfig National Nature Reserve to raise awareness of conservation grazing. The project was reported as having communicated proactively with the public.

## Contribution to the Programme and LEADER approach

This project contributed to the RDPW Themes 1 and 5 and the following Strategic Objectives within the Bridgend LDS:

- **SO1.4:** To implement a pilot package of 'Our Green Spaces' projects, working with community groups, volunteers and agencies to strengthen the potential economic benefit between the area's natural assets and community wellbeing, tourism and environmental sustainability.
- **SO3.3:** To facilitate activities that identify diversification and entrepreneurship options in rural communities, and pilot innovative interventions that create opportunities for non-agricultural sustainable development.
- **SO3.4:** To increase the use of digital technology among rural businesses and communities to maximise productivity, sales and marketing profile.

There was also evidence to show that the project:

- Took a highly *innovative* approach to raise awareness of a traditionally very low tech conservation technique.
- Helped to bring people and organisations together to work jointly on a project, and to share their knowledge, experience and ideas in an *integrated* way.

### Some learning points?

- As an innovative Pilot Project there was a lot that was learnt from the process of tracking livestock and it was reported that this had been useful in building PONT's knowledge of the availability of this kind of technology for use in future projects. The awareness raising element with school pupils and the dog walking community was also said to have been impactful. However, now that the LEADER Programme has come to an end there is no one to keep the website live, nor to continue to drive the campaign. The long-term sustainability of these kinds of projects is always challenging. In this instance it seems a shame that there is to be no follow up.
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## Case Study 6: Ogmores Washeries & Ogmores Valley Strategy

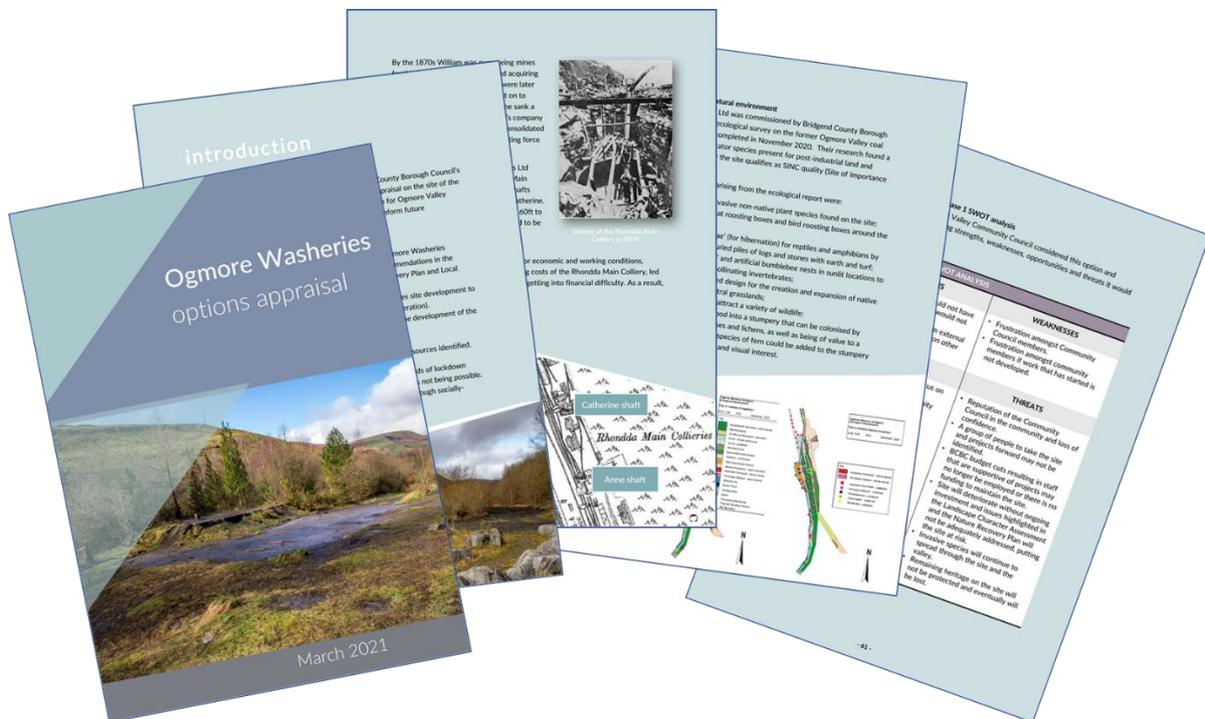
### Introduction and scope

The project activity considered in this Case Study looks at two separate but inter-linked projects that were supported under the Thriving Rural Communities Preparatory Support Scheme, they were: **TRC-52 Ogmores Washeries Options Appraisal** (project value = £7,500) and **TRC54 Ogmores Community Council Strategy** (project value = £4,975).

### Project aims and activities undertaken

Undertaken by NCompass Consultants Sept 2020 – March 2021, the **Ogmores Washeries Options Appraisal** (a feasibility study) sought to build on the work of previous studies, and help to identify a range of solutions for this high profile derelict site, that were in line with the needs of the local community – improving the site for nature and amenity, bringing it back into regular use, and mobilising local people to look after the site and acts as its guardians. Critically the aspiration for the Study was to unlock the potential for additional funding to be drawn in to support the implementation of its key recommendations.

During the course of the Study a community consultation exercise drew in 134 responses, (despite being hampered by the pandemic), and these were used to inform a phased programme for the conservation and development of the site, starting with the proposal to employ a site Warden.



### Extracted pages from Ogmores Washeries Options Appraisal undertaken by NCompass Consultants

Shortly after the above, Community Regeneration Consultancy GKA was commissioned to assist Ogmores Valley Community Council (OVCC) in the development of a **Five Year Strategy**

**and Action Plan** for the Ogmore Valley area based on community consultations. Budget cuts at County Borough Council level had led to greater pressure on local community councils to find alternative ways to deliver community services and manage community assets, the Strategy was to help the Community Council build its capacity and work smarter in channelling the resources available to it, most especially the not insubstantial funding (£100K pa for 25 years) flowing into the area via the Pant-Y-Wal Windfarm Community Benefit Fund, over which OVCC has some influence.



**Ogmore Valley Community Council Strategy and Action Plan Parts 1-3 undertaken by GKA**

As with the Washeries Study the consultants undertook their consultations during the pandemic, but still managed to attain 597 responses. The research additionally included a review of the existing services & facilities in the area, as well as the other strategies with which OVCC would need to dovetail their actions. The Strategy & Action Plan was presented to OVCC for adoption in April 2021.

**Project results and outcomes**

Discussions with the consultants and The Clerk of OVCC revealed the following:

- As a direct result of the project work new part-time (15hrs/week) Community Warden post has been created by OVCC. The person employed has a strong focus on working with the local community at the Washeries site, but is working with a range of other community based volunteer-led organisations across the Ogmore Valley area.
- The Strategy has been fully adopted by the Council and several of its key recommended actions have been undertaken including:
  - The initiation of ‘The Ogmore Valley Awards’ to celebrate local community volunteer achievements, leading to much stronger links with local people and communities;
  - A revamp of the OVCC website to include signposting to local services;
  - Much better links developed with the Pant-Y-Wal Windfarm Community Benefit Fund, leading to more projects that are in line with the OVCC Strategy;
  - More events enabling face-to-face communication between OVCC and local people.

## Contribution to the Programme and LEADER approach

The Options Appraisal and Strategy contributed strongly to the RDPW Themes 1 and 3 and the following Strategic Objectives within the Bridgend LDS:

- **SO1.1:** To facilitate the identification and prioritisation of rural community needs and aspirations focused on sustainable futures and innovation in economic rural development.
- **SO1.4:** To implement a pilot package of 'Our Green Spaces' projects, working with community groups, volunteers and agencies to strengthen the potential economic benefit between the area's natural assets and community wellbeing, tourism and environmental sustainability.

There was also evidence to show that the projects:

- Were well rooted in a *bottom-up approach* that helped the views of the local community to be identified through effective community consultation activities;
- Cascaded the idea of *area-based strategies* to a local level;
- Enabled better *integration* of projects, and brought people and organisations together locally to *network* and share their experiences and ideas.

### Added value...

- The projects have clearly led to a greater mobilisation of local resources, evident in the number of volunteering activities that are now being led by the newly appointed Warden and encouraged through the Volunteer Award Scheme.
- The capacity of the Council has been built through the actions of the Clerk in particular, who has worked strongly with the Reach Team, both to integrate existing projects and to develop new initiatives, for example, the Council has just completed a new LEADER funded PSS project that looked at taking on a Community Centre in Evanstown, on an asset transfer basis.
- The projects have helped to streamline existing funding (from the Windfarm), and have started to draw in new funding - a small Covid grant of circa £5K and another grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the development of a new heritage trail at the Washery site.

### Some learning points?

- The success of both projects can be attributed to some large degree on the efforts of the Reach Team and the Clerk at OVCC. It has been more difficult to ensure that capacity is built amongst local councillors, who are all volunteers and subject to being elected to continue in their role.

## Case Study 7: Heol-y-Cyw Digital Hub

### Introduction and scope

This Case Study focuses on the project activity undertaken to deliver **TRC-61 Heol-y-Cyw Digital Hub** one of the Thriving Rural Communities Scheme's Pilot Projects (project value = £27,000).

### Project aims and activities undertaken

A 'digital hub' for Heol-y-Cyw was a long-standing idea of a local community councillor, who had identified the local Welfare Hall as an ideal venue. However, the Hall had no broadband connection. Through a connection with local social housing provider, Valleys to Coast (V2C), it was identified that the idea might fit for support through Thriving Rural Communities, and a Steering Group was established to develop a project. The primary aim of the project, as submitted to TRC, was to increase digital skills amongst the residents of Heol-y-Cyw. The need for increased digital inclusion within the village, a small isolated rural community, was then brought into sharp focus by the pandemic, which highlighted the challenges, for older people in particular, in arranging things like online shopping.

Two contractors were appointed. Comcen Ltd installed broadband in the Welfare Hall and fitted a projector & screen. Bound Creative were appointed to animate the project and deliver a pilot programme of ICT based training activities.



**'The Nest' launch publicity and digital workshop activities underway with local residents**

Bound Creative's activities included:

- Conducting further community consultation to identify specific needs re ICT locally including barriers to accessing digital services;
- Branding the new digital hub at the Welfare Hall as 'The Nest' and launching it through a social media campaign;

- Delivering a programme of 36 workshops with 105 attendees;
- Bringing in creative approaches to researching local history digitally through the compilation of photographs of the Village into an artwork;
- Evaluating the training programme and the approach to the development of the digital hub to identify the scope for replication elsewhere.



**The digital artwork created using photos of Heol-y-Cyw by Welsh digital artist Nathan Wyburn**

## **Project results and outcomes**

Discussions with the consultants, members of the Project Steering Group and Coychurch Higher Community Council revealed the following:

- The Steering Group played a key role in the development of the project, helping to share the responsibilities and enabling a pooling of ideas.
- The consultants were flexible in their delivery of the training workshops and, for example, responded positively to a scam that circulated in the village by putting on a digital security themed workshop at short notice.
- The establishment of the Digital Hub has been valued by the local community. Members of the Community Council indicated the following successes:
  - The installation of the broadband and other equipment had helped attract new hirers e.g. BCBC's Employability Team now regularly use the Hall.
  - The IT facilities had helped bring the community together in creative ways e.g. watching national events together, line-dancing via YouTube!
  - The Hall Committee are also now looking to bring in the WEA to deliver new courses.
- The model is being looked at by staff within BCBC for replication in other communities across the County Borough.

## Contribution to the Programme and LEADER approach

The Heol-y-Cyw Digital Hub Pilot Project contributed strongly to the RDPW Themes 3 and 5 and the following Strategic Objectives within the Bridgend LDS:

- **SO1.1:** To facilitate the identification and prioritisation of rural community needs and aspirations focused on sustainable futures and innovation in economic rural development.
- **SO1.2:** To implement a pilot suite of innovative projects in rural communities, based on identified needs and aspirations, with the aim of developing sustainable rural services, exploring new ways of providing non-statutory services, and strengthening economic rural development.

There was also evidence to show that the project:

- Was *area-based*, focussing in on meeting the ‘hyper-local’ needs of Heol-y-Cyw one of the most isolated rural communities within the Bridgend County Borough.
- Came from the expressed needs of key individuals within the community, as part of a *bottom-up* approach.
- Promoted *innovation* and creativity, and a model that is being looked at for further replication elsewhere in the Bridgend County Borough.
- Brought people together locally, but also from the wider area, helping with *integration* and joint-working between key support organisations.

## Some learning points?

- The Steering Group played a key role in the development of the project, helping to share the responsibilities and enabling a pooling of ideas at the outset.
- Despite being generally pleased with the end result in terms of the new ICT facilities, there were some misperceptions of the relative success of the project in terms of its delivery held between the delivery consultants Bound Creative, The Reach Team, and the project beneficiary, Coychurch Higher Community Council. Concerns expressed by the Council at the end of the project centred on the way in which the training courses were designed, promoted and delivered, and whilst there were clearly positive highlights, the underlying feeling was that there could have been much more input and engagement of the community in course design in particular. If the project is indeed to be rolled out elsewhere, it might be that the project evaluation results are revisited and a deeper conversation is held with all stakeholders to ensure that the underlying issues are better understood.
- There is always a fine balance in engaging with, and supporting community projects. Too much direction can take away ownership and hence responsibility, too little and community projects can flounder. This project is perhaps a good example just how difficult it can be to get the balance right, despite the very best efforts of all concerned!

## 5.3 Responses to the evaluation questions

The evaluation questions contained within the brief provided the main focus of the consultant's consultation activities. Each of the questions is listed below, followed by a summary answer and then a fuller discursive response based on the results of consultations and desk top study of key documents.

### 5.3.1 The Local Development Strategy (LDS)

- **Whether and to what extent the Local Development Strategy was relevant to the socio-economic circumstances of the area?**

#### **Summary response:**

The baseline data gathered at the time when the Bridgend LDS was being formulated indicated a range of both challenges and opportunities for rural communities in the Bridgend area. To some large degree the issues are well known and are not dissimilar to rural areas elsewhere – the following in particular are highlighted: rural deprivation, physical access to services, economic inactivity, changing patterns of employment, health issues and the knock-on impacts for those people that act as carers.

The approach taken by the Bridgend LDS to these challenges is encapsulated in the three overarching Strategic Objectives (SO's), which were concerned with:

1. A place to live - Creating self-sustaining rural communities
2. A place to visit - Developing diversified rural enterprises
3. A place to work - Supporting vibrant rural economies.

There is evidence to suggest that these SO's were well understood by Local Action Group (LAG) members and strategic partners alike. The SO's also provided a robust and useful framework for the Delivery Objectives that described in outline what the Strategy was setting out to achieve.

The evidence to support the relevance (or otherwise) of the LDS to the socio-economic circumstances of the area is, however, far more difficult to ascertain and would undoubtedly require a level of investigation of much greater depth than the resources of this evaluation will allow.

The consultant's qualified conclusion is that the LDS contains within it, a good level of understanding of the challenges faced by rural communities in the Bridgend area at that time, but that this picture was made more complicated by the various competing, and sometimes conflicting, push-pull pressures that existed at the time of the strategy's inception (e.g. results of bottom-up consultations v requirements to set the strategy with top-down themes).

### Consultant's interpretation and approach:

The consultant has interpreted this question as specifically asking whether the LDS was relevant, both at the time of its publication in July 2015, and across the duration of the Programme, through to its end in March 2023.

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review and ascertain the focus of the Bridgend Local Development Strategy;
- Establish the baseline data that supported the design and formulation of the LDS;
- Review the additional evidence provided in the Mid-term Evaluation 2017;
- Identify what forces of change have operated in the intervening period up to and including 2023.

### Results of research:

#### The focus of the Bridgend LDS

The strategy itself is set out in Section 3.1 of the LDS (pages 26-29). The key elements of the strategy are the Strategic and Delivery Objectives (which are included in full in this evaluation – see Section 2.5 above). In the introduction to the objectives there is evidence to suggest the contextual thinking of the author.

*'This document is prepared at a time when the economy and jobs are foremost in many people's minds and aims to address this pragmatically, looking at where the assets of the rural County Borough can be maximised with the resources available, and where rural funding can make the biggest impact' (LDS p.26)*

...and also...

*'Resources will be directed at supporting communities to design and deliver the services they want to see in their communities, ensuring that the right support structures are in place to enable and empower them to do so.'*

Further, a clear focus of the Bridgend LDS was to build on the strengths and opportunities afforded by the 'people and places' of the area, and on maximising opportunities in key rural sectors including food, forestry, tourism, heritage and renewable energy – with a central tenet being *'...the guardianship of [the area's] places and spaces, and the preservation and celebration of the area's diverse heritage.'*

#### Baseline data

The perceived socio-economic circumstances of the Bridgend rural area at the outset of the Programme are set out in a range of baseline datasets contained within the LDS Section 1.1 (See pages 3-11). The data has been summarised by the consultant below:

- 21 of 39 wards classified as rural containing 45% of the total population of Bridgend (140,480).

- A lower population of residents aged 65+ and a higher population of residents under 15 as compared with elsewhere in Wales.
- A higher proportion of people claiming Employment Support Allowance and incapacity benefits.
- A higher proportion of carers and registered disabled people.
- A trend which appears to indicate that economic inactivity amongst the population within rural Bridgend is growing.
- Evidence, however, that skills levels and qualifications are increasing.
- Continuing problems with deprivation. Eight of the county's eligible rural wards falling within the highest ranking areas of deprivation in Wales according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD).
- A shift away from employment within large manufacturing businesses towards service industries and professional services in small or micro businesses.
- Tourism as a key service sector within the rural economy.
- A Welsh speaking population of just under 10% in rural areas as compared with a Wales-wide average of 19%.

#### **Additional evidence from the Mid-term Evaluation**

Additional baseline data is provided in the Mid-Term Evaluation undertaken by Ash Futures (Section 3.1 pages 16-17) together with qualitative data (Section 3.3 pages 18-19). The consultant has extracted below some of the most relevant data:

The Mid-Term Evaluation provides a deeper look at the evidence contained within the WIMD (in 2017) and highlights the following broad conclusions:

- Rural Bridgend is not more, or less, deprived than elsewhere in Bridgend.
- However, rural areas in the county do perform relatively poorly in specific measurements of 'health' and 'education', but relatively well on measurements of 'income', 'employment' 'access to services', 'community safety' and 'housing'.

The Evaluation also references the National Survey for Wales which highlighted:

- Only 60% of Bridgend residents of non-pension age felt that they are able to fully keep up with bill payment without any struggle, the remainder experiencing difficulties either constantly or from time to time.

The Evaluation also undertook some primary research and the following comments worthy of note were received<sup>1</sup>:

- A lack of focus on poverty and back to work projects;
- Too much focus on environmental activities;

#### **Changes in the socio-economic circumstances of the area**

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<sup>1</sup> Although it should be borne in mind that these were 'one off comments from a small selection of interviewees.

It perhaps doesn't go without saying that socio-economic circumstances worldwide have radically changed as a result of the pandemic, and there have been major European-wide impacts as a consequence of Brexit and the war in Ukraine that have combined to cause energy and cost of living crises across all communities, let alone those of rural areas. Add into the mix the ever growing climate crisis, and it is clear that even in the relatively short-term period of the implementation of the LDS, that the circumstances for most people living in rural areas in Bridgend have radically changed.

#### **Evidence of projects delivering on local needs identified in the LDS**

The consultant has undertaken a summary review of all of the projects delivered under the LEADER Programme and a further, more detailed, look at specific 'Case Study' projects all set out in Section 5.3 below. Some broad conclusions drawn from this exercise indicate that the following projects have delivered directly on:

- **The effectiveness of the Local Development Strategy as an enabler of a strategic approach to LEADER delivery?**

#### **Summary response:**

The Bridgend Local Development Strategy (LDS) contained within it a set of coherent Strategic and Delivery Objectives that have provided a robust but flexible framework for the delivery of LEADER funded projects in the Bridgend rural area. Interpretation of the LDS by the Programme delivery team to LAG Members and project applicants was clearly effectively undertaken throughout the Programme delivery period, but there is evidence to suggest that whilst the LDS may have been well understood at its inception, it was poorly understood by the time of this final evaluation. The LDS itself is a long and unwieldy document, driven by quite onerous requirements emanating from both the Welsh Government and the European Union. The result is a strategy that is so dense and complex that it mitigates strongly against the spirit and purpose of a bottom-up LEADER approach which is intended to be guided by a truly co-designed and community-led strategy.

To be more effective, it is recommended that any future such projects adopting LEADER principles, reduce the potential for conflict from imposed top-down requirements and strive to create strategies that are slim, easy to read and jargon free from the outset. This it is suggested, will make them more effective in their delivery by being better understood and more widely adopted at a community level.

#### **Consultant's approach:**

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review all of the strategy documentation including the LDS itself and the accompanying SWOT Analysis and Logistical Framework;

- Review how the LDS has been interpreted by the Project Delivery Team through TRC documents including the project application guidelines, application forms and project publicity materials;
- Ask all consultees (LAG Members, Strategic Partners, Project Beneficiaries and Contractors) as to their understanding of what the Bridgend LDS set out to achieve;
- Identify what contextual factors may have impacted on the LDS and its delivery.

#### **Results of research:**

##### **The Bridgend Local Development Strategy (LDS)**

Whilst the consultants are unable to verify the effectiveness of the community engagement that took place when the LDS was being drawn up, there is good evidence of extensive consultation having taken place (LDS pages 62-65) and of the results being fed into a comprehensive SWOT Analysis (LDS pages 66-73), that in turn directly informed both the Strategic and Delivery Objectives.

The Strategic and Delivery Objectives are strong and provided a good basis for the LAG to make sound decisions around the kinds of projects it decided to support. The objectives are clear and well-written, but have a degree of flexibility that has evidently supported innovation and creativity in project design, whilst generally falling in with the spirit and purpose of what the Bridgend LEADER Programme was trying to achieve as a whole. No better example of this being the development of the ‘Community Pantries’ project, which arose out of *TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues*, and a creative response to the pandemic (see **Case Study 4** below).

Another, clear challenge that existed at the conception of the LDS was the requirement for LAGs to follow what were in effect a set of pre-prescribed ‘top-down’ themes, whilst following the principles and practice of the LEADER approach at the heart of which is the encouragement of a ‘bottom up’ approach. However, when the results of the consultations, the SWOT analysis, and the Strategic Objectives are factored into the Intervention Logic Table (which was intended to sit as a key document alongside the LDS), it is clear that the integration of the five LEADER themes and five cross-cutting themes have spawned a level of complexity that makes the LDS appear confusing. The LDS documents are certainly a difficult read for those experienced in the field, let alone people from the communities the LDS is intended to serve.

##### **Interpretation of the LDS by the Programme delivery team**

There is good evidence to show that the Programme’s delivery team sought to interpret the LDS to LAG Members and to those involved in putting project applications together. For example, it was indicated by those LAG members consulted, that the Programme Manager had undertaken to distil the LDS down into a more manageable presentation (See Appendix ?) and that this was consistently used at LAG meetings to track progress. There is also evidence of effective interpretation of the LDS to project applicants, both through the TRC application form and the interpretation of the LDS by the Reach team. This together with

the compilation of a series of 'Case Study' examples promoted through TRC publicity material and the TRC website, is to be commended.

### **Understanding of what the LDS was setting out to achieve**

Evidence from consultations with LAG members, programme partners, project beneficiaries and delivery contractors has revealed, however, that the LDS remains as being poorly understood. The consultant has concluded that the primary reason for this is that the strategy document itself, which follows WG and EU guidelines, remains in 'application form' format, and is therefore very-dense, long-winded and full of jargon.

The guidance to the LAG, and indeed its own intention, was to periodically review the LDS and re-align it with changing circumstances. This did not happen and possibly not least because of the unwieldy nature of the document itself, and the significant effort required with limited resources, for an uncertain benefit.

### **• The extent to which the Local Development Strategy promoted collaboration in project development?**

#### **Summary response:**

Collaboration in project development was at the heart of the design of the Bridgend LEADER Programme. At the macro level, with and between LAGs, there was some collaboration, and one stand out project that looked at supply chains across seven LAG areas. However, the general feeling was that there had been opportunities missed to develop inter-LAG cooperation. At the county-wide level the two main projects where collaboration in project development may have taken place were largely driven by Bridgend County Borough Council, and as a result their development was more of a 'top down' rather than a 'bottom up' approach. At the community level there is good evidence of collaboration in project development having taken place, but more often than not this was driven by Reach Team development officers. There were, nevertheless, some projects that were clearly community-led, and where people and organisations came together to form project 'Steering Groups' and/or 'Networks of Expertise'. Where this happened there were some notable successes (these are explored in the Case Studies in Section 5.3 below).

#### **Consultant's interpretation and approach:**

The consultant has interpreted 'collaboration in project development' as meaning the extent to which people and organisations have come together to design and develop projects that best fit with the objectives of the LDS, as well as how far the LDS has in itself facilitated collaboration.

The Bridgend LEADER Programme was designed around the seven LEADER principles, three of which: Integration, Networks and Cooperation, put an emphasis on collaboration in one form or another. However, there are clearly both benefits and potential risks of

collaboration. Collaboration can also of course be multi-faceted and happen at very different levels, i.e. across regions and between LAGs, across rural areas within the County, between (physical) communities, and also between communities of interest. Each of these has been explored below.

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review the project files for sampled projects;
- Ask all consultees (LAG Members, Strategic Partners, Project Beneficiaries and Contractors) to identify examples of collaboration in project design taking place;
- Consult with members of the Programme delivery team.

### Results of research:

#### Collaboration between the Bridgend LAG and other LAGs

At an early stage in the delivery of the Bridgend LEADER Programme, Welsh Government decided that LEADER LAGs across Wales should dedicate 10% of their funding to a 'Cooperation' strand of activity, the purpose of which was to encourage inter-LAG collaboration on project design and activity. The Bridgend LAG supported the development of a number of projects that facilitated projects collaboration between itself and other LAGs as follows:

- **TRC-04 Resilient Economy – Local Supply Chains** that paved the way for the *Agora Project* (See Case Study 2)
- **TRC-33 Bridgend Craft Collective Pilot** developed in conjunction with Neath Port Talbot LAG.
- **TRC -27 Urdd Ambassadors** developed by Bridgend Tourism Association in conjunction with the Vale of Glamorgan LAG.

Whilst the PI's for the Cooperation strand were met in full, it was felt by members of the LAG as well as member of the Programme delivery team that more might have been achieved under this strand of activity. This is explored more fully in Section 5.2.6 'Cooperation' below.

#### Collaboration at the county level

There were two county-wide Pilot Projects that had the potential for collaboration in project development **TRC-28 Community Asset Transfer Programme** and **TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues**. However, there is evidence to show that to some large degree the development and design of both of these initiatives was more 'top-down' than 'bottom-up' in nature, both projects have been strongly driven by Bridgend County Borough Council.

#### Collaboration at the community level

There is evidence to show that some collaboration in project development was facilitated at the community level, but that this was often initiated by members of the Reach Team. Whilst the intention was to establish project Steering Groups and/or Networks of Expertise for all projects, there appear to be quite a number where this didn't materialise, the most

often cited reason for which was in trying to manage and maintain what were often very disparate stakeholder interests on projects that were small-scale in nature. Where collaboration at the community level did occur, the process could clearly be quite dynamic and energising. The work undertaken by the Steering Groups set up to develop **TRC-01 Kenfig Natura 2000 Pilot** and **TRC-11/22 Garw Valley Community Sports Hubs** were cited as being an exemplars.

- **The extent to which the LAG implemented and delivered activities which delivering against the five LEADER themes?**

### Summary response:

The Bridgend LAG and Programme delivery team have implemented and delivered projects and associated activities across all five of the LEADER themes albeit with substantially more activity concentrated in two themes (*Theme 1: Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources* and *Theme 3: Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services*). One of the major reasons for this was quite simply because these themes covered activities that were most in demand by community stakeholders. Within the context of community-led Programme, a proactive response to this demand was always going to be a sensible course to follow.

It was also indicated that the LEADER Themes, whilst having the potential to cause tension between a ‘top down’ requirement and a ‘bottom up’ approach, actually provided a good framework to work within in the early stages of the Programme, and the relaxed attitude of Welsh Government officers in not pushing for some sort of ‘even split’ of activities across the themes, helped in this respect.

There were two clear factors outside of the control of the LAG that impacted on the development of activities in two of the other themes (*Theme 2: Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains* and *Theme 4: Renewable energy at community level*). The first relating to the restrictions in providing revenue or capital support direct to businesses under State Aid rules, and the second relating to the withdrawal by Central Government of the feed-in tariff. The LAG being able to keep pace with the nature and pace of digital technology, was also cited as a reason why there was less project activity under *Theme 5: Exploitation of Digital Technology*.

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review the evidence provided in the Reach project monitoring data;
- Review the project files for sampled projects;
- Consult with LAG and Programme delivery team members.

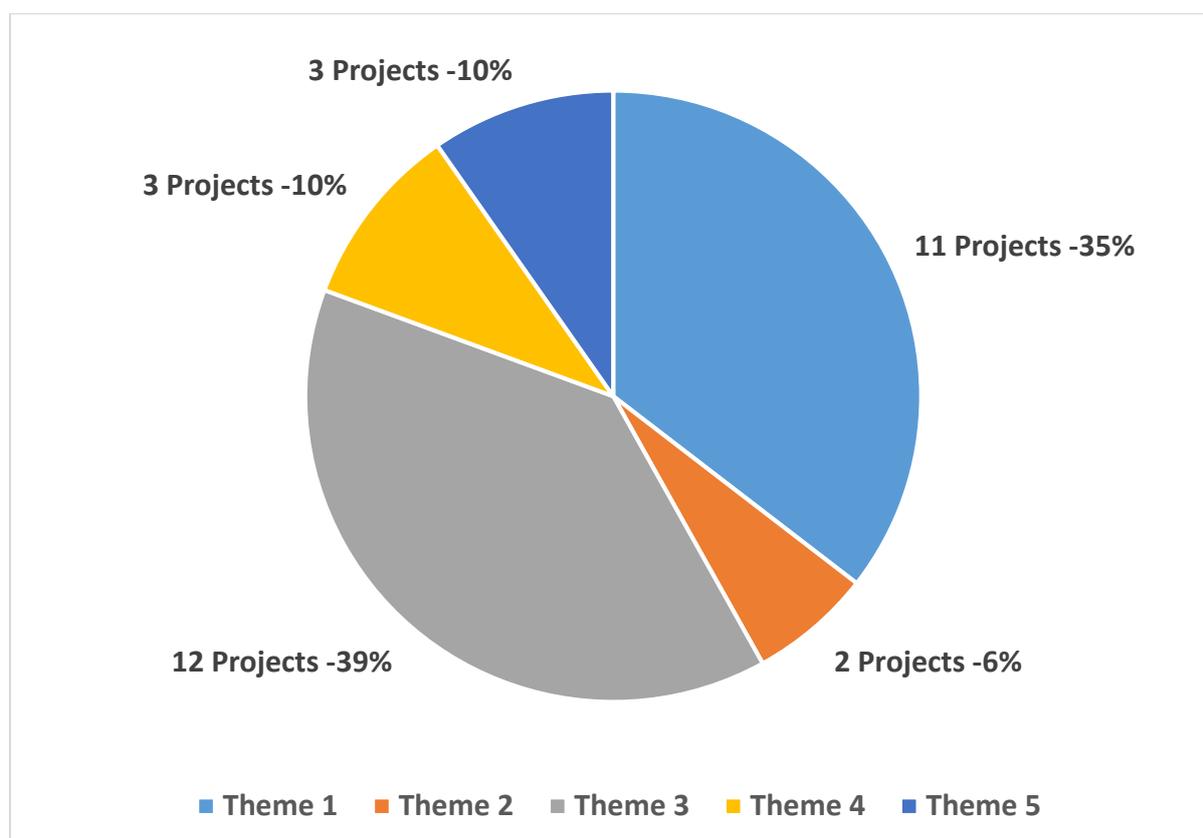
### Results of research:

#### Evidence from Reach project monitoring data

The five LEADER Themes are as follows:

- **Theme 1:** Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources
- **Theme 2:** Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains
- **Theme 3:** Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services
- **Theme 4:** Renewable energy at community level
- **Theme 5:** Exploitation of digital technology

From the most recent project list supplied to the consultant<sup>2</sup>, the relative split of projects against themes has been ascertained and is shown diagrammatically below.



**Figure 3. Relative split of LEADER Projects against the five Programme Themes**

#### Interpretation of the data

The diagram shows that the Bridgend LEADER Programme supported projects across all of the five themes, and that Themes 1 and 3 were addressed strongly, as compared with Themes 2, 4 and 5. It was clear from discussions with Programme delivery team members that in the early stages of Programme delivery, efforts were made to initiate and support projects across all five themes. However, as the Programme was rolled out it started to become clear that the 'bottom up' demand for projects within Themes 1 and 3 was going to be much stronger than for the other themes.

<sup>2</sup> Reach Project Summary @ March 2022

The potential for conflicting push-pull factors to arise from this situation at the project selection stage is clear. However, it was indicated that as the Programme progressed there was less onus placed by Welsh Government on achieving an even split. Indeed, Programme delivery team members commented that they felt the themes provided a *'helpful framework'* in the early stages, and were pleased to be able to respond more in line with demand as the Programme progressed.

There were other factors and useful insights provided regarding the relative split of projects across the themes and these are briefly looked at theme-by-theme below.

### **Theme 1: Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources**

This theme was clearly well addressed through a good mix of LEADER projects including **TRC-01 – Kenfig Natura 2000** the earliest and second largest of the Pilot Projects (value £82,649) and **TRC-45 – Ogmere Valley Heritage Trail** (value £30,509). Under this theme there were also two projects that supported the promotion of the Welsh language – **TRC-27 – Urdd Ambassadors** and **TRC-31 Welsh Place Names**, as well as strong projects supporting heritage and environment initiatives in the Ogmere and Garw Valley areas. It is of note that projects developed under this theme were a good mix of truly bottom-up community-led initiatives, and those conceived by the LAGs strategic partners.

### **Theme 2: Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains**

It was reported that one of the most challenging aspects of supporting the development of projects under this theme was the inability to provide any kind of revenue support direct to any business undertaking or economic operator<sup>3</sup>. Despite the challenges here there was one project under this theme **TRC-04 Resilient Economy – Local Supply Chains** that paved the way for the **Agora Project** (See Section 5.2.6 'Cooperation' below).

### **Theme 3: Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services**

This was the theme that was most strongly supported with both LAG and Programme delivery members reporting a consistent demand for projects that actually increased as a result of the pandemic and its aftermath. Two large-scale Pilot Project initiatives **TRC-28 The Community Asset Transfer Programme** and **TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues** underpinned the project work under this themes, together with a range of Pre-Pilot Feasibility Studies including some very successful small-scale initiatives such as **TRC-13 Tondy Wesley Chapel** and **TRC-54 Ogmere Community Council Strategy**. The theme clearly lends itself to the development of bottom-up community-led initiatives, and the majority of projects developed under this theme could be considered to have been successful in some way. Critically the theme has enabled the development of some highly creative & innovative

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<sup>3</sup>The Mid-term Evaluation highlights this and indicates the definition as being 'any undertaking engaged in economic activity regardless of legal status and can therefore include social and community businesses' further that 'Our understanding is that the Welsh Government chose not to apply for/use De Minimus cover, which would have allowed small grants to go to businesses and others. We understand this was as a result of evaluation recommendations emerging from the previous programming period.'

projects (e.g. the ‘Community Pantries’ as a spin-off from TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues) and has led to a good spread of project work right across the rural areas of Bridgend.

#### **Theme 4: Renewable energy at community level**

This was the theme that the LAG and LEADER Programme delivery team struggled with the most, primarily it was indicated, because of Central Government’s withdrawal of the feed-in tariff for renewable energy projects effectively causing a dis-incentive to project development in this area. Two projects that were successfully developed under this theme were **TRC-37 Off Gas** project and **TRC-47 Green Bus Newton**.

#### **Theme 5: Exploitation of digital technology**

This was another of the themes where there was a low-level of demand for projects and challenges for potential project sponsors. One of the issues cited here, was that the pace of development of technology outstripped the ability of the LAG and Programme delivery team to respond. There were nevertheless some notable projects developed. **TRC-61 Heol-y-Cyw Digital Hub** a very successful Pilot Project that is set to be rolled out elsewhere in the county, and **TRC-44 Digital Shepherd** another highly creative and innovative Pilot Project that stands out as the kind of project that may not have been developed under more conservative programmes.

### **5.3.2 Programme implementation**

- **The quality and effectiveness of the Local Action Group’s implementation and management of LEADER?**

#### **Summary response:**

The Bridgend Local Action Group was clearly well established at the Programme’s inception and well run throughout. There is good evidence to suggest that it did an excellent job in establishing a transparent selection procedure, that enabled the selection of good range of projects that were coherent and in line with the objectives and targets set within the Bridgend Local Development Strategy. The LAG clearly acted as a team, and provided good support to project sponsors by acting as a ‘critical friend’. The LAG was also the context for excellent networking and partnership work developed amongst its members, as well as with and between the wide-ranging organisations that were at the shaper-end of project delivery.

The biggest challenge for the Bridgend Local Action Group was in maintaining the enthusiasm, commitment and hence the engagement of its members. This was adversely affected by: the pandemic, the consequent extension of the Programme (shifting the goalposts), and the uncertainty as to what might replace LEADER that arose towards the end of the Programme delivery period. All of these factors appeared to reduce the incentive to remain engaged amongst existing LAG members, and made it more difficult to recruit new

LAG members. The ongoing impact of this, on the LAG and the delivery team, remains significant, and the opportunity to secure a more positive Programme sign-off appears to have been lost as a result. This is disappointing for all of those that have remained enthusiastic and committed to the end.

### **Consultant's interpretation and approach:**

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review a range of LAG documentation including its terms of reference, sampling of meeting minutes and progress reports;
- Consult with LAG members, members of the Programme delivery team, strategic partner organisations, project beneficiaries and delivery contractors;
- Identify what contextual factors may have impacted on the quality and effectiveness of Programme implementation.

### **Results of research:**

#### **What worked well...**

There is good evidence to suggest that the LAG Meetings were well run and well received by all of those attending. Consultations revealed that an induction was provided for new members of the LAG, that an appropriate amount of information was provided in a timely manner before LAG meetings, and that reporting back following meetings via minutes and updates was always good. One consultee commented '*Sandra and team were really committed.*'

Several LAG Members commented on the efficiency and effectiveness of the scoring and decision-making process around project approval. There was a sense that the LAG was well chaired, worked well as a team, and that there was a 'fair-minded' approach to decisions around the selection of successful projects, and good positive feedback to those sponsoring project proposals that were unsuccessful.

Almost all of the LAG Members consulted commented on the networking opportunities that the LAG meetings afforded. Some appreciated the diversity of the membership and the fact that LAG Members came with a wide range of different perspectives, creating a real sense that the LEADER Programme was in fact being led by a team that had sufficient and wide-ranging knowledge to make sound decisions on Programme implementation. Several LAG Members specifically commented on how the LAG meetings afforded them excellent opportunities to dovetail their own work to that being rolled out by the LEADER Programme, to break down 'silo working' and share good practice, and in some instances to help them reconnect with their own local communities (see examples cited in Section 5.2.6 below).

One of the LAG Members commented on how the Local Action Group, working with the delivery team, were prepared to take on a 'critical friend' role in their assessment of project

applications, helping to give good projects ‘a gentle nudge over the line’ by providing positive and constructive feedback rather than a more hard-nosed approach.

#### What didn’t work so well...

The engagement of the LAG dropped off over time despite evidence that there were concerted efforts by the Programme Managers to keep the attendance both diverse and quorate. The pandemic clearly had a significant and long-lasting impact on attendance, but equally impactful in the latter half of the delivery period would appear to have been the decision to extend the Programme, which had the effect of ‘moving the goalposts’ and reducing the incentive to carry on attending. Uncertainty surrounding the continuation of LEADER, and what if anything might act to build on / replace the Bridgend LEADER Programme was also cited by two LAG Members as a disincentive to attend.

The consultant has experienced at first hand the challenges faced by the delivery team in trying to engage with LAG Members. A planned Focus Group that was to be integrated into the final LAG Meeting had to be postponed at the last minute because of a poor response to the meeting invite. In fact, it is possibly the case that some of the remaining active members of the LAG who were consulted online by the consultant in the run up to the meeting, perhaps felt that by engaging ahead of the meeting there was less of a need to attend! There was in any case a strong sense, even from those that had remained engaged, that the Programme had run its course and that their effort and time might be better spent elsewhere.

- **Provide an assessment of the appropriateness of the delivery model(s) for working in Welsh/local contexts.**

#### Summary response:

From the feedback received by a good range of stakeholders, it is clear that the LEADER model and Thriving Rural Communities Scheme had some aspects to them that worked well and were appropriate, but that there were other aspects that didn’t fit so well within the Bridgend context.

Of the aspects of the delivery model that appeared to fit and work well, the work undertaken to develop *networks* and promote *integration* at a community (‘hyper-local’ level) came to the fore and were hailed as being success factors. Also, the flexibility, skill and experience of the Reach Team was highlighted as a key reason why *innovation* and creativity in project design and development flourished within the Bridgend LEADER Programme.

There was a sense, however, the delivery model with its focus on a *bottom-up* approach, didn’t sit as easily within some contexts, most especially where the expectations were more rooted in a top-down ‘grant’ culture. Also, that expectations around successful *cooperation* between geographically distinct and diverse communities were perhaps a little unrealistic.

### Consultant's interpretation and approach:

The consultant has interpreted this question as referring to both the adoption of the LEADER approach in general, and more specifically the way in which the Thriving Rural Communities Programme adapted the approach for delivery within the Bridgend area.

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Consult with members of the LAG, Programme delivery team and representatives from partner organisations

### Results of research:

#### The LEADER approach

A more comprehensive overview of how well the LEADER Programme has been delivered across its seven aspects is presented in Section 5.2.6 below. However, there were some interesting insights into the experience of delivering the LEADER approach provided by the range of consultees, coming from their different perspectives.

The geographic nature of the South Wales Valleys in particular was cited as setting up 'barriers' to *cooperation* with and between communities and the experience appears to have been no different for the Bridgend LEADER Programme. Under **TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues**, for example, the consultants commissioned to deliver the contract struggled to establish joint-working relationships between community venues which was a key aspiration for the project. This might be compared with other similar initiatives such as the 'Halls Together' project established by the Vale of Usk LEADER Programme in Monmouthshire, where cooperation between community venues has been achieved across rural areas in Monmouthshire and Newport. It could be concluded that differing geography and demographics contributed to the very different experiences of LEADER delivery in this respect.

Despite the above, it was also reported that the *networking* and *integration* aspects of LEADER worked well within the Bridgend context. One LAG member in particular valued the opportunities that the Programme offered for opening up opportunities for connecting with other organisations targeting the same audiences, and in particular enabling stronger connections with local communities. This was evident in **TRC-48 Garw Youth Pilot** through which an alternative means of delivering much needed and valued youth services within a particular community was explored.

#### Thriving Rural Communities

The Thriving Rural Communities (TRC) Scheme effectively acted as the 'public face' of LEADER for rural communities in the Bridgend area, and as such helped translate some of its key aspects into a model that was intended to work at grassroots level. The flexibility of the Scheme, which was underpinned to some large degree by the experience and skill of the rural development officers within the Bridgend Reach Team, was one of main reasons stated by project beneficiaries for the successful development of innovation and creative

responses to the problems communities were trying to address. This was perhaps no more apparent than in the development of **TRC-44 Digital Shepherd Pilot** project.

Another, theme that presented itself, however, was the sense that organisations operating in Bridgend communities were more used to being supported through (top-down) grants, rather than playing a more proactive role as part of (bottom-up) initiatives. There was a sense, for example, from some project beneficiaries that more could have been done by the Reach Team and commissioned consultants, to deliver project activities beyond the limitations of their brief. This was evident, for example, to a greater or lesser degree in the feedback from organisations involved in **TRC-30 Garw Valley Railway and Heritage Centre**, **TRC-54 Ogmere Valley Community Council Action Plan**, and, **TRC-61 Heol-y-Cyw Digital Hub**.

### 5.3.3 The Cross Cutting Themes

- **The extent to which projects integrated the Cross Cutting Themes into their delivery of activities? And, the extent to which projects took actions to promote and facilitate the Welsh language?**

#### **Summary response:**

The importance of integrating the four cross-cutting themes into the delivery of the Bridgend LEADER Programme was clearly looked at in detail in the LDS, and there is good evidence to show that the themes were promoted through the TRC project application process. It is also clear, however, that the understanding of the themes amongst project applicants was limited, and that the emphasis placed on meeting the themes may have diminished during the course of each individual project.

However, where there was a natural alignment between a cross-cutting theme and the core objectives of a particular project, there is good evidence of the theme being integrated into the design of project activities. As a result, when taken across the portfolio of LEADER projects, there are good examples of the cross-cutting themes having been addressed.

This is particularly apparent with regard to the themes concerning *'Alleviating poverty and social exclusion'* and *'Achieving sustainable development'*. There were two stand-out projects that directly addressed the theme concerning *'Using the Welsh language'*, but fewer examples of projects that directly or indirectly addressed the theme concerned with *'Equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming.'*

#### **Consultant's interpretation and approach:**

There are four cross-cutting themes are as follows:

- Equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming;
- Alleviating poverty and social exclusion;

- Achieving sustainable development;
- Using the Welsh language.

The Welsh Government's guidance indicates that projects should address one or more of the cross-cutting themes, but there are no specific targets set.

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review the relevant section of the LDS;
- Review a sample of project proposal forms and project reports;
- Consult with members of the Programme delivery team and project beneficiaries from sampled projects;

### **Results of research:**

#### **Cross-cutting themes**

It is clear that the cross-cutting themes were considered in some depth in the Bridgend LDS. Examples of how the cross-cutting themes might be incorporated into projects in relation to the Strategic Objectives are comprehensively provided (pages 74-81) and they also feature strongly in the Intervention Logic Table.

The cross-cutting themes were promoted to project applicants via the TRC Scheme Guidance Document, in the project application process (via inclusion in the Proposal Form), and in the scoring criteria for projects (LAG Project Assessment Scoresheet).

However, the extent to which the cross-cutting themes have been actively adopted and integrated into the project design and development process is unclear. Review of project applications reveals a patchy response to the themes. Evidence from project final reports shows that where the themes were in line with the project's objectives there was (unsurprisingly) good evidence of incorporation. However, consultations with the sponsors of sample projects, revealed a poor understanding of the themes. This may be in part due to the lack of specific targets, but is also likely to be due to the following factors:

- Information overload! The multi-layered challenges faced by project sponsors in understanding and interpreting the LDS, its Strategic and Delivery Objectives, as well as its cross-cutting themes.
- The emphasis placed on the themes by the LAG and Programme Delivery team members themselves. Whilst the cross-cutting themes appear in project documentation, the relative weighted score attached to them is incorporated with the score for how far the applicant project meets the Strategic Objectives of the LDS.
- The lack of any need for a review of how far the cross-cutting themes were addressed in project reports.

Despite the above, there remains good evidence to show that the cross-cutting themes have been tackled, albeit mostly occurring where the nature of the project was already in line with one or other of the cross-cutting themes. The best examples of this are as follows:

- **TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues** – Community Food Pantries – set up to tackle food poverty in particular but acting as a catalyst for other activities around social exclusion.
- **TRC-47 Green Newton Bus** – innovative approach to achieving sustainable development at a local level.
- **TRC-27 Urdd Ambassadors** and **TRC- 31 Welsh Place Names** – both projects focussing on increased use of the Welsh language.

### 5.3.4 Communications

- **The effectiveness of the Local Action Group and projects’ publicity and the consistency of message throughout publicity and information material?**

#### Summary response:

There is clear evidence to show that Local Action Group’s publicity of the Bridgend LEADER Programme was undertaken across a wide range of communication channels and that the initial pitch was tailored to the different audiences and key stakeholder groups. Indeed, the performance indicators for publicity at Programme end show that the ‘number of actions’ far exceeded the target set, and that there was a positive response to the suggestions made by the evaluators in the Mid-Term Evaluation to address some of the perceived deficiencies at a time when the Programme was still getting going.

The consultant’s review of the key documents that were used to promote and guide applicants to the Thriving Rural Communities Scheme, revealed that there was a good consistency of message across the publications. However, consultations with project beneficiary organisations and members of the Reach Team revealed there were still challenges, most especially in presenting the LDS to a lay audience and in explaining the ‘conceive and commission’ approach to people and organisations more used to the familiarity of making grant applications.

Central to overcoming these hurdles were the Reach Officers themselves. The deployment of experienced and skilled community development professionals, and their ability to work on the ground and face-to-face, was clearly a key success factor in ensuring that the Programme engaged with its target audiences effectively.

#### Consultant’s approach:

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review the content of the Reach Communication Strategy;
- Review samples of the publicity produced both to market the programme, and at the project level;
- Consult with members of the LAG, the Programme delivery team and project beneficiaries from sampled projects.

## Results of research:

### Programme publicity

The evidence in the PI Monitoring data at Programme end indicates that the Bridgend LEADER Programme has met and exceeded its targets for publicity:

- Number of information dissemination actions/promotional and/or marketing activities to raise awareness of the LDS and/or its projects = 192 (Target 140)

A review of the list of activities reveals the following kinds of publicity initiated by the LAG and Programme delivery team:

- Programme and project launch events;
- Press releases;
- Posts on all of the main social media platforms;
- Advertising leaflets, posters & banners;
- Case studies included in hard-copy leaflets and on Reach website;
- Published and disseminated project reports;
- Presentations and workshop activities;
- Educational & interpretive leaflets;
- Radio interviews;
- Videos available on the Reach website and on Youtube;
- Features in various newsletters;
- Postcards and interpretation panels;
- On-site signage.

The range of different forms of publicity and promotional activities indicates a good level of proactivity on the part of the Reach Team in particular.

The Mid-term Evaluation undertaken in 2017 put forward several suggestions regarding publicity, based on a concern that there was a *'risk of disengagement, reputational loss and missed opportunities.'* These included:

- Better use of the Reach website;
- More events including celebration events for completed projects;
- A LAG away-day;
- Better feedback on completed projects.

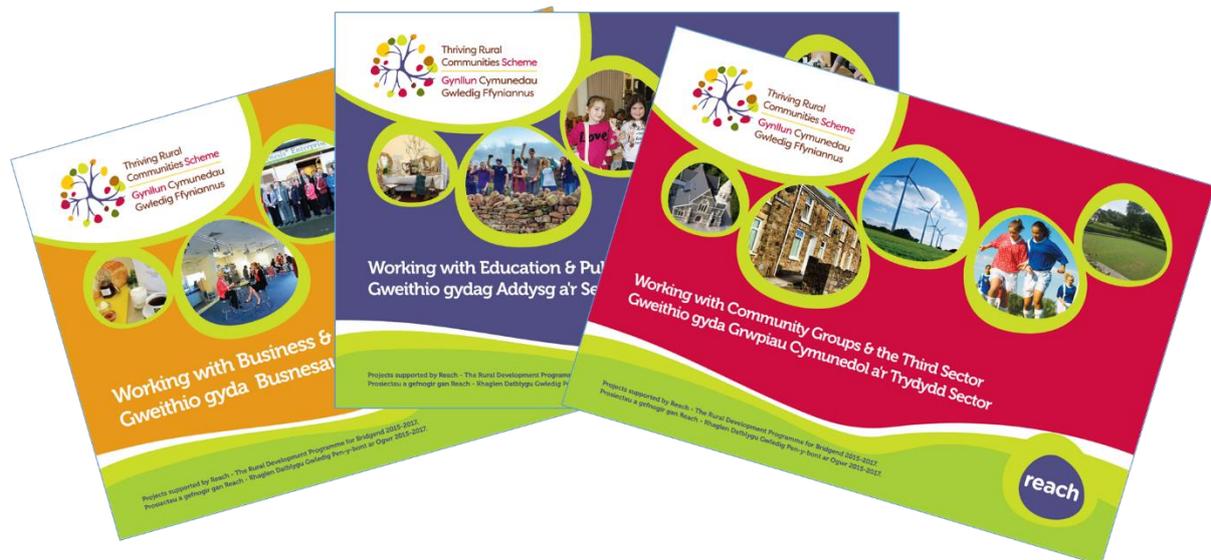
Evidence would suggest that all four of these points were enacted. The Reach website, for example, became the host for a significant number of case studies and project reports in both written and video form. There were a significant number of launch & celebration events held for completed projects, good recent examples being the launch of the Community Food Pantries, the launch of the Heol-y-Cyw Digital Hub and several events to mark successful Community Asset Transfer projects. There were also LAG tours and guided visits, such as their guided tour of Cenin Renewables as part of Green Newton Bus project.

### Effectiveness of publicity produced and consistency of message

Evidence suggests that in the early stages of the new Programme members of the Reach Team looked to review the relative success of the earlier programmes undertaken in the 2007-2013 Structural Fund period, and this work culminated in the production of a comprehensive Communications Strategy, put in place to guide the development of all the publicity produced by Reach going forward.

The Strategy recognised that the work of a much smaller team would need to be more focussed and it indicated that the focus of communications in the new Programme would be through the Thriving Communities Scheme.

The Thriving Communities Scheme Guidance leaflet, first published March 2016 (and thereafter going through several iterations), was one of the key publications that first interpreted the LDS to potential project sponsors. As the TRC Scheme progressed an introductory video was produced together with a series of three explanatory booklets, featuring case studies, and pitched at different key stakeholder groups – Community Groups and the Third Sector, Business & Enterprise, Education & Public Sector.



**Figure 4. Thriving Rural Communities publicity booklets**

In discussions with project beneficiaries it was clear that both the guidance and leaflets proved useful, but that further interpretation by Reach Officers remained important, if not essential to a clear understanding of what the Bridgend LEADER Programme was setting out to achieve, and critically how people and organisations might become engaged. One of the Reach Officers too, commented *‘people on the ground just aren’t interested in Strategic Objectives or Programme Themes, they just want opportunities undertake projects that meet the needs of their community.’* These sentiments from both project beneficiaries and members of the Programme delivery team simply serve to emphasise the importance of face-to-face communications, and of drawing out the essence of what the LEADER Programme was trying to achieve, making it accessible and engaging for people.

- **The extent to which local communities and people have been engaged by the LAG?**

**Summary response:**

There is good evidence of the engagement of both individuals and communities by the Bridgend LAG. Individuals have been engaged directly in a variety of roles, ranging from participation in the LAG itself, being part of Project Steering Groups and/or Networks of Expertise (e.g. the Bridgend Craft Network), or volunteering to take part in project activities (e.g. the Urdd Ambassadors). Communities have been engaged directly via the establishment of a number of Community Hubs and Forums (e.g. Betws Community Forum) or indirectly through a significant number of consultation activities (e.g. Ogmere Valley Community Survey).

The real value of the community engagement that has come out of the Bridgend LEADER Programme, is only really evident when the results of these activities are looked at in greater depth (See Case Studies in Section 5.2)

**Consultant's approach:**

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review the content of the LDS with respect to community engagement;
- Review the full list of projects and look in greater detail at evidence within sampled projects;
- Consult with members of the Programme delivery team and project beneficiaries from sampled projects.

**Results of research:**

**Community engagement**

The Bridgend Local Development Strategy undoubtedly drove the design and delivery of the Bridgend LEADER Programme, and at its conception was underpinned by significant work undertaken to consult with community stakeholders (evident in the LDS Section 7.1 pages 57-65). The LDS also established the principles under which the Programme was to be rolled out and promoted to rural communities in the Bridgend area and a key element of this was the engagement of people in supporting delivery through their engagement in 'networks of expertise', not the least of which was the LAG itself.

At the end of the Programme the monitoring data provides strong evidence of the extent to which the Bridgend LAG has sought to continue to engage with local communities. Four of the performance indicators, shown below (with outputs in brackets), are focussed either directly or indirectly on engagement activities:

- Number of Networks established (6);

- Number of information dissemination actions (212);
- Number of stakeholders engaged (336);
- Number of participants supported (2,105).

Further, the consultant's review of the projects undertaken within the Bridgend LEADER Programme has revealed that 25/28 of projects under the Preparatory Support Scheme, and 5/7 of the Pilot Projects, had some sort of community engagement element built into them.

Of course, it is not necessarily the numbers that will tell the story of the extent to which communities have been engaged. The quality and depth of the engagement is key and this only really surfaces within the projects themselves. Of the sampled projects there are some really good examples of successful community engagement activities that were undertaken as a direct result of support from the Programme. The best examples of these are as follows:

- **TRC-27 Urdd Ambassadors** – engagement of local people in establishing a team of Welsh-speaking Bridgend tourism ambassadors that were able to provide a Welsh welcome to visitors to the Urdd Eisteddfod in Pencoed in May 2017.
- **TRC-30 Garw Valley Railway and Heritage Centre** – a range of community engagement activities and events and activities staged by the Garw Valley Railway and their project partner the Garw Heritage Society.
- **TRC-36 Sustainable Community Venues** – extensive and ongoing community engagement being undertaken through the development of community-based food pantries.
- **TRC-54 Ogmore Community Council Strategy** – featuring a highly successful community survey that drew in over 550 responses from local people that helped inform the development of the Strategy.

### 5.3.5 Delivery & the LEADER Approach

- **Establish how the portfolio of projects have contributed to achieving the objectives set out in the Local Development Strategy?**

To answer this question the consultant has sought to:

- Review and ascertain the focus of the Bridgend Local Development Strategy;
- Identify what evidence there is of projects delivering on the Strategic and Delivery Objectives set out in the LDS.

#### Focus of the Bridgend LDS

The strategy itself is set out in Section 3.1 of the LDS (pages 26-29). The key elements of the strategy are the Strategic and Delivery Objectives (which are included in full in this evaluation – see Section 2.5 above). In the introduction to the objectives there is evidence to suggest the contextual thinking of the author.

*'This document is prepared at a time when the economy and jobs are foremost in many people's minds and aims to address this pragmatically, looking at where the assets of the rural County Borough can be maximised with the resources available, and where rural funding can make the biggest impact' (LDS p.26)*

...and also...

*'Resources will be directed at supporting communities to design and deliver the services they want to see in their communities, ensuring that the right support structures are in place to enable and empower them to do so.'*

A review of the contextual information to the Strategic Objectives themselves, (written as a preamble to each of the three objectives) also reveals the thinking at the time.

The preamble to ***Strategic Objective 1 (SO1) A place to live - Creating self-sustaining rural communities*** – talks about:

- Developing confidence and skills;
- Bringing back lost services where there are genuine service gaps, sustaining existing Services, and delivering non-statutory services in different ways;
- Supporting rural areas to identify the services, places and spaces that are important to them and will be supported to enhance and access them.

The preamble to ***Strategic Objective 2 (SO2) A place to visit - Developing diversified rural enterprises*** – talks about:

- Giving businesses the confidence and support they need to try new approaches, reach new markets and maximise their growth potential by integrating vertically and horizontally;
- A focus on hospitality and tourism;
- Improving awareness of local products in and outside the Bridgend rural area.

The preamble to ***Strategic Objective 3 (SO3) A place to work - Supporting vibrant rural economies*** talks about:

- Facilitating the development of a rural network that connects businesses and seed entrepreneurs;
- Supporting equality of opportunity for all rural people and realising the potential of every individual to be enterprising;
- Being able to find and access satisfying employment, including self-employment;
- Energising the local economy through innovation. Creating a culture of creativity and entrepreneurship;
- Enabling rural areas to adopt entrepreneurial approaches to become owners and custodians of their services, places and spaces - piloting green economy approaches.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

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### 6.1 Conclusions

The main conclusions of this final evaluation report are organised in line with the main evaluation questions from the brief:

#### The Local Development Strategy

- **Relevance to socio-economic conditions of area** - The Bridgend LDS provided a good framework within which to deliver projects that addressed the socio-economic challenges of rural communities in Bridgend, but the tension between the (bottom-up) *Strategic Objectives* and the (top-down) *Programme Themes*, existed throughout the Programme delivery period, and despite the best intentions and efforts of all concerned this tension, at times, clearly got in the way of a truly strategic and bottom-up led approach to meeting the needs of local communities.
- **As an enabler of a strategic approach** – The Strategic Objectives (SOs) within the Bridgend LDS were clear and well understood at the outset to the Programme, but poorly understood by the end, rendering them and a ‘strategic approach’ largely redundant. This was in part to do with the fact the delivery period was extended to nearly 9 years (too long to maintain momentum and relevance?), and during that time the composition of both the LAG and the Programme delivery team changed quite radically. There was also no comprehensive review of the SOs by the LAG, but also a sense that changing them mid-Programme would be too difficult a task to take on because of the administrative restrictions within the Programme procedures.
- **Collaboration in project development** - The Bridgend LDS clearly promoted collaboration and there were notable exemplars at the regional (inter LAG), county-wide and most especially at the community level. There were also perhaps missed opportunities. In some instances this appeared to be been down to the imperative to achieve results. Most projects, however, enjoyed a good level of collaboration and where project Steering Groups and/or Networks of Expertise were successfully established, the benefits of collaboration were strongly in evidence.
- **Delivery against the five LEADER Themes** – Taking into account the ‘tension’ that existed within the Programme between the SOs and the Themes (see above), the Bridgend LAG did in fact deliver projects that were broadly in line with the targets set for theme coverage within the LDS. There was a natural and strong demand for projects under *Themes 1* and *3*. Where gaps in theme coverage occurred, there were reasons put forward including: the restrictions of State Aid (affecting business engagement in *Theme 2*), the withdrawal of the feed-in tariff (affecting the development of community renewable energy projects in *Theme 4*), and the challenges in keeping pace with the rapid changes in digital technology (affecting *Theme 5*).

## Programme implementation

- **Quality and effectiveness of the LAG** – The Bridgend LAG was clearly well run and did a great job in line with its terms of reference. Transparency in project selection, teamwork, acting as a critical friend, and providing excellent networking and partnership development opportunities were all in evidence. However, the enthusiasm and commitment of its members waned towards the end of the Programme period, most especially as a result of the uncertainty as to what might follow-on from LEADER. This had a direct impact on decision-making, maintaining a quorum, for example, was especially challenging.
- **Mobilisation of local resources** – The Bridgend LEADER Programme helped stimulate action and mobilise both people and organisations at all different levels within the Bridgend area. The Case Studies are evidence of the extent to which this happened. They show in particular, a strong engagement of local volunteers, additional financial investment levered in through alternative external funding sources, and good use of the natural & heritage assets of the area to promote informal recreation, whilst protecting & enhancing important natural habitats.
- **Appropriateness of the model in the Bridgend context** – The work of the Reach team officers was applauded by everyone consulted. Their role, which was akin to that of project animateurs, was particularly well received at the community-level. Some stakeholders, most especially local community organisations, struggled with the ‘strategic’ nature of the Programme and the concept of a ‘conceive and commission’ approach, perhaps because of being more used to making grant applications.

## Strategic fit

- **Fit between the LDS and the wider strategic context of the area** – Whilst the LDS may have had a good fit with the wider strategic context at its inception, the duration of the Programme, the lack of a review of the strategic fit along the way, and the fact that in the intervening period there have been a series of world-wide crises (not the least of which was the pandemic), has led to LDS being perhaps less well-aligned at Programme end. The response to the pandemic under the LEADER Programme in Bridgend, can nevertheless, be said to have been excellent, notably in support of the development of the ‘Community Food Pantries’. On a project by project basis too, there is clear evidence that individual projects have been designed in line with other strategies, including many new and emerging initiatives.

## The Cross-cutting Themes

- **Integration of cross-cutting themes and the Welsh language** – This tended to happen best where the nature of a particular project was in line with a particular cross-cutting theme e.g. The Welsh Place Names project helped stimulate use of the Welsh language. Where this was not the case there was less evidence of the cross-cutting themes having been embraced at project design stage, and during implementation.

## Communications

- **Effectiveness of publicity and consistency of message** – The Bridgend LEADER Programme was promoted effectively to target audiences and targets for promotional activities were well exceeded. The Thriving Rural Communities Scheme branding and publicity materials helped translate the LDS into something more coherent and appealing. It was the efforts of the LAG members and Reach team officers in particular, however, that ensured a good consistency of message and a better understanding of what the Programme was trying to achieve.
- **Extent to which local communities and people have been engaged** – There is good evidence to show that a highly diverse range of people and communities have been engaged in the Bridgend LEADER Programme. This is best shown in the Case Studies in Section 5.2 above.

## Delivery and the LEADER Approach

- **Project contribution to achievement of Strategic Objectives** – The portfolio of projects contributed strongly to the delivery objectives under *SO1 – Creating self-sustaining rural communities*, most especially *SO1.2* concerned with ‘*exploring new ways of providing non-statutory services*’, and *SO1.4* concerned with developing a pilot package of ‘*Our Green Spaces*’ projects. There were projects that addressed the Strategic Objectives concerned with *Developing diversified rural enterprises (SO2)* and *Supporting vibrant rural economies (SO3)*, and only one delivery objective, concerned with ‘*pilot innovative interventions that create opportunities for community-based earning*’, remained unmet. The conclusion here is that the portfolio of projects contributed well to the Strategic Objectives within the LDS.
- **The extent to which the seven aspects of the LEADER approach have been delivered**
  - **Area Based** – Well delivered. Good evidence that the Programme has been centred on local strengths and has realised opportunities to build on the asset base of rural communities in the Bridgend area.
  - **Bottom-Up Approach** – Well delivered. Good evidence of projects that have been developed in line with identified community needs and are community-led.
  - **The Local Action Group** – Very well delivered. A strong well-led LAG with a diverse membership.
  - **Innovation** – Delivered. Evidence of some innovation within the project portfolio. Evidence of the LAG taking calculated risks, promoting creativity, and being responsive and flexible to changing circumstances.
  - **Integrated & Multi Sectoral** – Well delivered. Lots of good examples of the LAG facilitating joint working on community projects.
  - **Networking** – Delivered. Good evidence of networking happening between LAG members, more might have been done to facilitate networking at community level.
  - **Cooperation** – Delivered. One stand out project that helped deliver this strand of work, but other opportunities not developed as well as they might have been.

## 6.2 Recommendations

As this is a Final Evaluation and there remains uncertainty at the time of writing as to what if anything will serve to replace and/or build on the work undertaken under the Bridgend LEADER Programme, the scope to make recommendations is therefore limited to some degree to generalities. The recommendations are nevertheless as follows:

- **Take a more intelligent approach to programme design** – the use of a logistical framework to show how Programme outcomes relate to activities was helpful. However, it became overly complicated, and the introduction of competing Objectives and Themes diminished the real value of the tool both in construction and use. Also, the expectation that LAGs might fill out (what was in effect) a grant application form, and then label it and use it as a ‘Strategy’ is not helpful. The best strategies are simple in format and easily understood. It makes them easier to design, to review and to amend as circumstances change, as they invariably do.
  - **Reduce the bureaucracy** – The consultant has been overwhelmed by Programme paperwork, some of it read by very few (if any!) people. Plenty of other funded Programmes expect much less in terms of their administration, but achieve just as much in terms of outcomes.
  - **Factor in more time for reflection** – It is acknowledged that there were recommendations that all LAGs should do this, and that Mid-term Evaluations would be a key part of that process. The reality, however, appeared to be that the Bridgend LAG was so tied up with administration, and meeting its targets, that the important activity of taking an overview of the real progress being made, got a bit lost.
  - **Continue to invest in the delivery team** – Perhaps unsurprisingly one of the major success factors of the Bridgend LEADER Programme was the work of the Reach Officers at the very sharp end of Programme delivery. There is no doubt that their employer (BCBC) and the LAG itself provided them with good support, but some of the decisions around staffing (e.g. the reduction in team numbers following the extension of the project), will have had an impact on capacity, if not on team morale.
  - **Try to finish stronger than you start** – In long distance running there is the notion of achieving a reverse split time i.e. running the second half of a race faster than the first. After a great start the Bridgend LEADER Programme appeared to lose momentum and run out of steam. With no sense of what is coming next for all those involved, there is understandably less enthusiasm for celebrating the results. What a shame. There is so much good about this Programme left to celebrate.
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# Appendices

## Logic matrix to identify source material / line of questioning to identified stakeholder groups

| Stakeholders                                                                                                                 | Administration and Project Staff                                                                                                                                                   | LAG Members, Steering Group, Project Proposers                                                                                                      | Delivery Contractors, Project Beneficiaries                                                                                                 | Partner Organisations                                                                                                                       | Representatives of the local community                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Evaluation questions</b>                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>The Local Development Strategy (LDS)</b>                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relevance to socio-economic circumstances</b></li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseline stats in LDS</li> <li>• Project progress reports</li> </ul>                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What changed during the course of the project? (Pandemic, Climate crisis, War!!)</i></li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What changed during the course of the project? (Pandemic, Climate crisis, War!!)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What changed during the course of the project? (Pandemic, Climate crisis, War!!)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What changed during the course of the project? (Pandemic, Climate crisis, War!!)</i></li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effectiveness as a strategic approach to LEADER delivery</b></li> </ul>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How useful was the guidance on LDS development from WG?</i></li> <li>• <i>Did the team look at other LEADER strategies?</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Did the strategy do its job of providing a sound strategic framework to work to?</i></li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Level of awareness of the strategy?</i></li> </ul>                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Level of awareness of the strategy?</i></li> </ul>                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Level of awareness of the strategy?</i></li> </ul>                                              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Extent to which LDS promoted collaboration in project development</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project applications</li> <li>• <i>In what ways did the project team encourage collaboration in project development?</i></li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In what ways did the LAG encourage collaboration in project development?</i></li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How did you collaborate in project development?</i></li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Were you encouraged to support collaboration in project development?</i></li> </ul>             |                                                                                                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delivery against the five LEADER themes</b></li> </ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How far has the LAG implemented activities which deliver against the five LEADER themes?</i></li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How far has the LAG implemented activities which deliver against the five LEADER themes?</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Awareness of themes?</i></li> </ul>                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Awareness of themes?</i></li> </ul>                                                             |                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Implementation</b>                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Quality &amp; effectiveness of LAG</b></li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG minutes and progress reports</li> </ul>                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG minutes and progress reports</li> </ul>                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How well did the LAG manage your project / the project you were</i></li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How would you assess the quality and effectiveness of the</i></li> </ul>                        |                                                                                                                                             |

|                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                           |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would you assess the quality and effectiveness of the LAG's implementation and management of LEADER? What worked well? What aspects could have been improved?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would you assess the quality and effectiveness of the LAG's implementation and management of LEADER? What worked well? What aspects could have been improved?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involved in supporting? What worked well? What aspects could have been improved?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG's implementation and management of LEADER? What worked well? What aspects could have been improved?</li> </ul> |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extent to which local resources have been mobilised in the development phase</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project application forms and reports</li> </ul>                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How far was networking and collaboration encouraged during project development?</li> </ul>                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who do you consult and collaborate with during project development?</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of networking and collaboration at a local level?</li> </ul>                                             |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriateness of model in Welsh context</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparison with other LEADER models elsewhere in Wales</li> </ul>                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you feel the model performed?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you feel the model performed as compared with your experience of working with other LAGs?</li> </ul>        |  |
| <b>Strategic fit</b>                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LDS and projects fit with wider strategic context</li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project application forms and reports</li> </ul>                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of wider strategic context and potential connections to LDS?</li> </ul>                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of wider strategic context and potential connections to LDS?</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of wider strategic context and potential connections to LDS?</li> </ul>                                  |  |
| <b>Cross-cutting themes</b>                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extent to which cross-cutting themes have been integrated</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project application forms and reports</li> <li>How were cross-cutting themes promoted to project applicants?</li> </ul>                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did LAG members ensure that cross-cutting themes were integrated?</li> </ul>                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did project beneficiaries ensure that cross-cutting themes were integrated?</li> </ul>  |                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extent to which projects took actions to promote Welsh</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project application forms and reports</li> <li>How was use of Welsh promoted?</li> </ul>                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did LAG members ensure that Welsh was promoted?</li> </ul>                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did project beneficiaries ensure that Welsh was promoted?</li> </ul>                    |                                                                                                                                                           |  |

| Communications                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effectiveness and consistency of message promotion</b></li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project promotional material, events &amp; activities.</li> <li>• <i>What was the message being promoted?</i></li> <li>• <i>How was the project promoted?</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What was the message being promoted?</i></li> <li>• <i>What did LAG Members do to promote the project?</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How did you hear about the project?</i></li> <li>• <i>What was your understanding as to what the project was trying to achieve?</i></li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Have you heard of LEADER? The Local Development Strategy? Thriving Rural Communities? Bridgend Rural Reach?</i></li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Extent to which local communities and people have been engaged</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project reports</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How far do you think the project engaged with local communities and people?</i></li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How have you engaged the local community in your project?</i></li> </ul>                                                                       |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In what ways were you engaged in this project?</i></li> </ul>                                                              |
| Delivery and the LEADER approach                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How far projects have helped achieve objectives</b></li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project reports + Case Studies</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How far has the project met your own objectives?</i></li> </ul>                                                                                |  |                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delivery of the seven aspects of the LEADER approach</b></li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project reports + Case Studies</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How far did your project adopt the seven aspects of the LEADER approach?</i></li> </ul>                                                        |  |                                                                                                                                                                        |

## Bridgend LEADER Evaluation – Questionnaire for project beneficiaries

*Thank you for agreeing to take part in the evaluation of the delivery of the LEADER Programme in Bridgend – your time in answering the questions set out below is very much valued and appreciated.*

*The questions have been designed to provide the starting point for a discussion between the project evaluator (Gareth Kiddie of GKA), and yourself as a LEADER Programme project beneficiary organisation. **Please note** that I will aim to keep the discussion short and to the point - it is nevertheless likely to take 15-20minutes.*

*You may wish to refer to GKA's privacy statement for this piece of work which is provided at the end of the questionnaire.*

*Looking forward to our discussion!*

*Gareth Kiddie*

- 1. How was your project identified for support from the Bridgend LEADER Programme in the first instance? Who was involved in helping you get your project going?**
- 2. Did you develop any partnerships with other organisations in the development and/or delivery of your project? If so, which ones? Are these partnerships ongoing?**
- 3. What was the nature of the project that the Bridgend LEADER Programme supported?**  
[N.B. I will have read about the basic nature of the project, but I will be interested to hear your summary of the work undertaken]

- 4. How would you rate the project application process?**

|      |   |   |   |   |         |   |   |   |   |    |           |
|------|---|---|---|---|---------|---|---|---|---|----|-----------|
| Poor |   |   |   |   | Average |   |   |   |   |    | Excellent |
| 0    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5       | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |           |

**Please explain the reason for your score...**

- 5. Were you aware that your project was designed to meet specific objectives and cross-cutting themes as part of the Bridgend Local Development Strategy?**

well aware / somewhat aware / not really aware / not aware at all

**What is your understanding of the Bridgend Local Development Strategy, the strategic objectives and cross-cutting themes that your project was designed to meet?**

- 6. Did the project go to plan? Did anything unexpected happen? What were the factors that affected the delivery of the project in both a negative and/or a positive way?**
- 7. Did you engage the local community in your project design and/or implementation? If so in what ways were they engaged?**

**8. In the course of your project were you encouraged to network and/or collaborate with other LEADER supported projects? If so which ones?**

**9. What publicity did your project receive?**

**10. How would you rate the support that you received from the Bridgend Reach Rural Development Team in the implementation of your project?**

Little or no support provided excellent support provided

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**Please explain the reason for your score...**

**11. In your own opinion, how successful was your project?**

Unsuccessful Successful

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**Please explain the reason for your score...**

**12. Do you think that the project would have proceeded without support from the Bridgend LEADER programme? Did that support help to draw in additional 'match' funding or other 'time in kind' resources?**

**13. Is the project ongoing? Did it help towards meeting your own organisation's wider / long-term objectives? If so, in what ways?**

**14. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the success of your project?**

#### **GKA privacy statement**

Your name and contact details were obtained by GKA from the list of delivery contractors held by The Bridgend Reach team. Any data you provide will only be used for the purposes of the research undertaken by GKA as part of the evaluation of the LEADER Programme in Bridgend. Any personal information collected as part of the research will be kept confidential. The answers you give during the interview will not be made public in a way that could lead to you being identified. GKA will produce a report based on the information but this will not identify any individuals without prior consent.



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Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu Gwledig  
Ewrop yn Buddsoddi mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:  
Europe Investing in Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government