



**Mid Term Evaluation of Torfaen's
Leader Programme
Torfaen County Borough Council
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Executive Summary

Torfaen County Borough Council in June 2018 sought mid-term evaluation services that would evaluate the delivery and implementation of the LEADER Programme in Torfaen and its progress towards both the Local Development Strategy (LDS) and the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Torfaen's 'Create' rural programme has maintained its territorial focus and identity with its Local Development Strategy seen in the first half of its delivery to be focusing on its Enhancing the Local Environment by tackling a number of key issues. These include tackling isolated producers, lack of enterprise and innovation, lack of investment and addressing the aura of decline in the rural landscape, but it still needs to address farming related issues as well as the more significant issues of climate change.

In reviewing **governance and management**, the Local Action Group (LAG) has become more strategic due to the removal of the previous grant giving function and has been focusing in the first few years in developing project scope, plugging gaps through feasibility studies and building networks and piloting initial activity. Areas for improvement include the need to disseminate best practice between and outside of the LAG and the need for a dedicated Create website integrated to social media, so that there is more of an online culture and openness to the programme. There is also a need to review ways to increase participation and discussion with the farming community. Whilst the service level agreement with Torfaen Council's Neighbourhood Services has helped in releasing resources and integrated working, the lack of additional resources to manage RCDF has had a resultant impact on programme management.

The mid term review of **Enhancing the Environment** Leader activity has identified the need to encourage more direct networks to develop between landscape management groups, including environmental groups, farmers and Commoners. A priority of developing greater awareness with project beneficiaries and land management networks of the LEADER through explaining and promoting the 'wider ecology' of the programme. A focus on opportunities to tackle the cross-cutting nature of LDS themes (food, tourism etc.) with land management at a more appropriate landscape/regional scale is also required going forward.

The themes of **Developing Local Produce/Promoting Tourism/Encouraging Enterprise** tend to work collectively as project activity. Barriers to local food production and food tourism product are still perceived to exist due to ageing farmers, general apathy and a lack of trust in Rural Development Programmes, with the local consumer base identifying with cost as a key purchasing factor. Nevertheless, urban events and presence at markets is engaging residents with local producers and their story with events like Big Pit Festival (180% increase in visitor numbers in 2018) and On Your Doorstep, and Foodie Thursday at Pontypool Market is starting to build a presence and a following of new customers and supporting food related businesses. Areas for attention include the displacement of traders to other EAFRD funded markets outside of Torfaen from the Llanyrafon Market, which has had an impact on diversity and critical mass of stalls and resultant experience.

In looking to the remainder of the programme, further training in digital marketing and continue networking has been identified by local producers and makers, with the regional sustainable supply chain programme Agora needing to continue its collaboration with the local project officer through signposting and providing more specialist advice on primary produce. To overcome some of the

barriers to local engagement with local produce, the Orchards and U study has the potential to engage local residents and groups in learning about fruit and production and a pathway in growing and buying local.

The **Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF)** has been a success for Torfaen to date with £496,000 of grant secured to date from Welsh Government but has placed additional pressures on programme management and Torfaen Council officer time. Applicants have also needed support at EOI, full application and at claim stages which has been a steep learning curve for most groups and organisations. Key areas for improvement include timetable for assessment and payment in arrears causing difficulties for some organisations in terms of limited reserves and cashflow. It is too early to look at linkages between projects at the point of implementation but there is a need to look for organisational networking and activity integration to avoid duplication and also link in Leader project activity e.g. YETI project.

In looking at the main successes of the programme to date, the **Rural Innovation Scheme (RIS)** has been strong on the delivery of feasibility studies and testing of ideas through the distribution of the RIS funding, with the Rural Project Officers key to acting as the advocate of LEADER with its target audience and communities at a time when awareness and understanding of the overall programme is perceived to be low outside of the Local Action Group. **Events & Raising Awareness** such as On Your Doorstep and Big Pit Festival are also getting residents and visitors closer to Torfaen produce and adding to the sense of place specifically in Blaenavon and its World Heritage Site status. **Developing Regional/Cross Boundary Links** through the South East Wales Resilient Uplands project enables land management issues and activity to be addressed at a more appropriate landscape scale and helps draw in additional resources and bring about a regional approach to the uplands. A focus on **Community Based Solutions** needs to be developed with the YETI and Orchards and U projects providing the opportunity to engage, learn, help harvest, develop products and recycle income into their communities as well as support people back into employment.

In addition to some of the challenges previously mentioned, the evaluation has heard from rural businesses on the need for continued marketing and promotion from social media, events, producer directories, trails and other activities. The future sustainability needs to be discussed and how networks are upskilled and organised to be self-dependent in the future.

The remainder of the programme has had a **Thematic Focus**, with activity distributed across i) Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources ii) Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains and iii) Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services. Due to the relatively small amount of budget, there has been no activity in iv) Renewable energy at Community level or v) Exploitation of digital technology. It is recommended that these latter themes are developed through RCDF where more funding exists.

At a crossroads for rural areas, specifically with **Brexit** on the immediate horizon, there is call from strategic partners and organisations for continued rural development/project officers if impact is to materialise from the current rural development programme period. The need for small grants for businesses, farmers and other organisations, is also seen a necessity for future innovation and business growth. Finally, greater integration between urban and rural economies is even more important at this critical time, as direct rural development funding will probably be not on the same

scale as before with locality and service design needing to fit with the principles of foundational economies as well as the position of Torfaen within the Cardiff Capital Region.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

Torfaen County Borough Council in June 2018 sought mid-term evaluation services that would evaluate the delivery and implementation of the LEADER Programme in Torfaen and its progress towards both the Local Development Strategy (LDS) and the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Chris Jones Regeneration supported by Owen Davies Consulting were appointed to undertake the evaluation.

1.2 Evaluation Focus

As with previous evaluations, the review is required to fulfil the requirements of the funding received from the Welsh Government and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for implementation of the LEADER measure of the Rural Development Programme Wales 2014 – 2020 (RDP). Project support in this instance is allocated to rural wards only, those of Blaenavon, Llanyrafon South, Two Locks & Henllys, Abersychan, Wainfelin, Cwmynyscoy, and Llantarnam.

The focus of this evaluation is on the following:

A. Local Development Strategy

Undertake a review of the Local Development Strategy to ensure all are still relevant and link to the projects being developed. This will include the:

- Key Themes and Objectives
- SWOT Analysis
- Performance Indicators
- Intervention Logic Table
- Cross Cutting Themes

B. Implementation and Delivery

Undertake an evaluation of progress against the implementation and delivery of the Local Development Strategy for Rural Torfaen at the mid-term, which will include delivery to date of the Rural Innovation Schemes approved projects, internal project management and monitoring processes.

C. Strategic Fit

Assess the strategic fit of projects supported to date in line with the wider policy context.

D. Communication

Consult with the LAG and its admin body staff, contractors and beneficiaries working across the LEADER themes.

- E. Provide recommendations to the Administrative Body and LAG on improving or enhancing delivery for the second half of the programme.

Torfaen County Borough Council also asked that the evaluation additionally consider the role of Torfaen Leader in the local management of the Rural Community Development Fund¹.

¹ <https://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/180522-rural-community-development-fund-guidance-notes-en.pdf>

1.3 Background to the Mid Term Evaluation

The evaluation is mainly formative and summative focussing on the overall interim impact of the Local Development Strategy and Leader activity and its' associated projects with specific consideration for project management, communication, and EU monitoring and reporting. The evaluation also provides an independent assessment on the interim outputs, outcomes, and, where evident impacts to date.

Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The following approach/ methodology has been adopted for the evaluation.

Figure 1 - Evaluation Methodology and Process



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration (UK) Ltd

1.3.1 Stage 1 - Inception-Familiarisation

The initial element of the commission largely comprised of desk based analysis of existing information and the development of an evaluation methodology and framework that responds to the LDS and to specific Leader based activity.

Review of Project Management Information System (MIS) data and project documentation, management and monitoring information and key local and national strategies was undertaken. Documents and information included (but are not limited to) the following:

- Key strategic documents that support the programme and respective projects including the LDS;
- Approved programme and project applications and funding letters with conditions;
- Monitoring and reporting documents; financial and physical (MIS);
- Project management manuals – systems and protocols;
- Organisation and management systems;
- Meeting notes and reports from Local Action Groups;
- Marketing and promotion activities and associated material;
- Desktop analysis of project documentation – strategic and delivery information e.g. monitoring returns on expenditure, milestones, outputs.

1.3.2 Stage 2 - Evaluation Framework, Topic Guides and Survey

The evaluation framework methodology was adopted, identifying the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the interventions from the flow of support activities.

The evaluation framework methodology is shown on pages 4 and 5 and guided the three levels of the evaluation process: (strategic, process and beneficiary). This comprised:

- A list of all the relevant qualitative and quantitative indicators that provided the information that we needed to fully assess the effectiveness of the programme to date and its constituent projects;
- A matrix of project objectives against programme levels and information needed to feed each cell;
- A set of topic guides for each of the interviewee groups that were consulted with, to cover the above information, but critically to explore wider issues of additionality, softer impacts and unintended benefits of projects. Stakeholders that were consulted with included:
 - Local Action Group members by means of a workshop
 - Chair and Vice-Chair of the Local Action Group
 - Rural Programme Manager and Rural Project Officers
 - Lead body – Torfaen County Borough Council
 - Project beneficiaries – Leader and Rural Community Development Fund
 - Other project beneficiaries and users.

From the evaluation framework methodology, a set of topic guides for each type of consultee (strategic, operational and beneficiary) were developed, to cover the above information, but critically to explore wider issues of deadweight, additionality etc., softer impacts and unintended benefits of projects. With the co-operation of programme management and lead body, contact information was provided for each level of consultee. Details on the consultees are provided further on.

Stage 3: Evaluation Fieldwork

This stage of the evaluation was the most significant in terms of resource and understanding how the programme and its resultant activity has benefitted. Due to the focussed nature of the evaluation's timetable, the following opportunities were provided:

Local Action Group Session 1

A workshop was held on the 19th July 2018 at Llanyrafon Manor which covered a number of topics including:

- Role and responsibilities of the LAG
- Communication and networking
- Project activity to date and fit with LDS
- Sense of future priorities

Programme Officer Interviews

One to one interviews were held with the Rural Programme Manager and respective Rural Project Officers for Land Management and Food Tourism. These focussed on:

- Programme/project setup
- Fit with LDS
- Networking/communication
- Project development/delivery
- Successes and challenges
- Co-operation activity
- Future priorities

Table 1 – Torfaen Leader Evaluation Framework

	Level		
	Strategic	Operational	Beneficiary
Inputs	LDS and Business Case Design and Logic Business case and project activity need Aims / Objectives Resources	Lead Body staff time, knowledge and contributions Respective project related staff Secretariat support for LAG Expenditure	Input - skills/knowledge/products from: <i>Micro and small enterprises</i> <i>Welsh speaking communities</i> <i>Black and Minority Ethnic Groups</i> <i>Children</i> <i>The elderly</i> <i>The economically inactive and the under-employed</i> <i>Women</i> <i>Young people</i> Local communities
Processes	<p>Local Action Group</p> Local public private partnership Bottom up, inclusive approach Engagement with stakeholders, partners and sectors Adopt innovative approaches and entrepreneurship Develop and implement co-operation projects Develop local networks Encourage on-line communities and working Community capacity building and empowerment Pilot new products and approaches Best practice dissemination	Project Management Communication / Reporting Funding management Project activity support Marketing Partnership Management Recruitment of participants	Initial awareness and publicity Application process Support and guidance Delivery Monitoring Claims process Completion
	<p>Lead Body</p> Delivering LDS Monitoring progress Compliance Secretariat support		

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	Level		
	Strategic	Operational	Beneficiary
Outputs	LDS aims and objectives being met Business case delivered Project activity Monitoring report - physical and financial Knowledge gained PR/marketing/awareness raising	Monitoring reports - physical / financial PR / marketing / awareness raising Communication with partners and beneficiaries Project delivered & targets met Partnership of Colleges developed Cross Cutting Themes	Target groups include: <i>Local Action Group</i> <i>Young Farmers</i> <i>Farmers and Forest Holders</i> <i>Primary Producers</i> <i>Women</i> <i>Young People</i> <i>Micro and small enterprises</i> <i>Welsh speaking communities</i> <i>Black and Minority Ethnic Groups</i> <i>The elderly</i> <i>The Unemployed</i> Respective project associated outputs - see KPIs Cross Cutting Themes
Outcomes / Impacts	Scope for knowledge transfer Stimulates economic and social development Improved competitiveness of sectors Improved skills levels and knowledge Stronger and more cohesive rural identity	Trust (Internal)/ Recognition / Credibility Partnership building Improved project delivery and management skills Knowledge and experienced gained	Respective project associated outcomes and impacts - see KPIs Future phases of projects Succession Community cohesion Sustainable rural economies

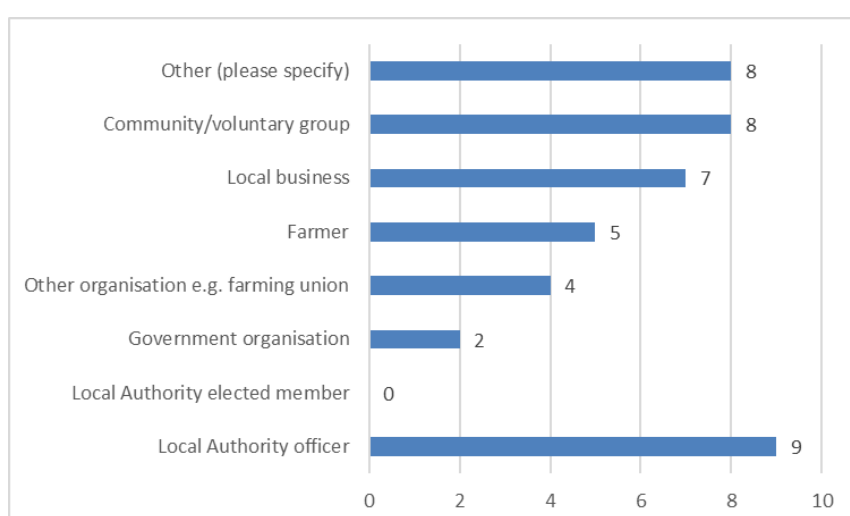
Lead Body Interview

An interview with the Head of European Policy & External Funding at Torfaen County Borough Council was also undertaken.

Online Survey

A bi-lingual online survey was issued to 70 representatives that had either engaged, received supported or had a role in Torfaen's Create Rural Programme. This was issued by email with a 52% (37no.) response rate. A postal survey was sent to farmers and commoners with one response received which was added to the on-line survey. A profile of who completed the survey is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Profile of Survey Respondent



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration (n=38)

Project Interviews

To evaluate the benefits on delivery to date, specifically the use of the Rural Innovation Scheme's approved projects, and other project activity (including RCDF support), the following organisations have been interviewed, mainly face to face

Land Management Interviews

- Blaenavon World Heritage Environment Group
- Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal Trust
- Mynydd Maen Commoners
- Uplands and Environmental Crime Initiatives, Land Management Project Officer
- Clean and Green Community Support Business Plan Preparation, Torfaen CBC Neighbourhood Services

Food Tourism Interviews

- Llanyrafon Market traders – 7 no. traders interviewed ranging from meat, cakes, chutneys, natural products, honey, jewellery, blacksmith
- Foodie Thursday traders - 7 no. traders interviewed ranging from cakes, chutneys, home-made hot chocolate, amongst others

- National Museum of Wales Marketing Officer – Festival (Big Pit Food Festival)
- Team Leader, Environmental Projects, Torfaen CBC – Orchards Project
- Team Leader Economy and Heritage Tourism
- Upcycling business - Ennirocraft
- Agora Programme Manager – Regional Sustainable Supply Chains Programme

RCDF interviews

- Horseland Community Interest Company
- Bethlehem Chapel, Broad Street, Blaenavon
- Bethel Chapel, King Street, Blaenavon
- YETI Project, C/O Changing Gearz

Local Action Group Session 2

A final workshop was held on the 18th October 2018 at Llanyrafon Manor which presented the evaluation findings and opened up discussion on the strategic direction for the remaining years of the programme.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The evaluation report is structured as follows:

Section 3 sets out the background to the Rural Development Programme, Leader Activity, Local Development Strategy and Project Activity

Section 4 details the management and governance of Torfaen's Rural Development Programme

Sections 5 & 6 outline the activity of Leader activity and RCDF to date

Section 7 sets out key findings and recommendations

2 Background

2.1 The Wales Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP)

The 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme was submitted to the European Commission on 11 July 2014. It is a seven year European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) programme, funded by the European Union and Welsh Government. Its aims are stated as being threefold:

- a) To increase the productivity, diversity and efficiency of Welsh farming and forestry businesses, improving their competitiveness and resilience, reducing their reliance on subsidies;
- b) To improve the Welsh environment, encouraging sustainable land management practices, the sustainable management of our natural resources and climate action in Wales;
- c) To promote strong, sustainable rural economic growth in Wales and encourage greater community-led local development.

These aims provide a focus to those of the previous RDP, with a greater emphasis on resilience, a lack of reliance on subsidies, and greater sustainability (of land and natural resources, as well as local populations).

Under Article 5 of Commission Regulation 1305 / 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development 18 focus areas have been identified under each of the six priorities identified for rural development.

1. Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas with a focus on the following areas:
 - a) fostering innovation and the knowledge base in rural areas;
 - b) strengthening the links between agriculture and forestry and research and innovation;
 - c) fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors.
2. Enhancing competitiveness of all types of agriculture and enhancing farm viability, with a focus on the following areas:
 - a) facilitating restructuring of farms facing major structural problems, notably farms with a low degree of market participation, market-oriented farms in particular sectors and farms in need of agricultural diversification;
 - b) facilitating generational renewal in the agricultural sector.
3. Promoting food chain organisation and risk management in agriculture, with a focus on the following areas:
 - a) better integrating primary producers into the food chain through quality schemes, promotion in local markets and short supply circuits, producer groups and inter-branch organisations;
 - b) supporting farm risk management.
4. Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry, with a focus on the following areas:
 - a) restoring and preserving biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas and high nature value farming, and the state of European landscapes;
 - b) improving water management;
 - c) improving soil management.

5. Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors, with a focus on the following areas:
 - a) increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture;
 - b) increasing efficiency in energy use in agriculture and food processing;
 - c) facilitating the supply and use of renewable sources of energy, of by products, wastes, residues and other non-food raw material for purposes of the bio-economy;
 - d) reducing nitrous oxide and methane emissions from agriculture;
 - e) fostering carbon sequestration in agriculture and forestry.

6. Promoting social inclusion poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas, with a focus on the following areas:
 - a) facilitating diversification, creation of new small enterprises and job creation;
 - b) fostering local development in rural areas;
 - c) enhancing accessibility to, use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas.

Activities under LEADER must similarly be linked to one of the five LEADER themes for Wales:

- 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
- Exploitation of digital technology

2.2 Leader

The LEADER LAGs have responsibility for the development of the LDS that sets out the opportunities and challenges in their area and explains what actions they intend to take to exploit the opportunities and manage some of the challenges.

The tasks of a LEADER LAG are set out in Article 34 of Commission Regulation 1303 - 2013 (the Common Provisions Regulation) and include the following:

1. building the capacity of local actors to develop and implement operations including fostering their project management capabilities;
2. drawing up a non-discriminatory and transparent selection procedure and objective criteria for the selection of operations, which avoid conflicts of interest, ensure that at least 50 % of the votes in selection decisions are cast by partners which are not public authorities, and allow selection by written procedure;
3. ensuring coherence with the community-led local development strategy when selecting operations, by prioritising those operations according to their contribution to meeting that strategy's objectives and targets;
4. preparing and publishing calls for proposals or an ongoing project submission procedure, including defining selection criteria;
5. receiving and assessing applications for support;

6. selecting operations and fixing the amount of support and, where relevant, presenting the proposals to the body responsible for final verification of eligibility before approval;
7. monitoring the implementation of the community-led local development strategy and the operations supported and carrying out specific evaluation activities linked to that strategy.

Each LEADER LAG will be responsible for three separately managed funding pots that together will allow the LAG to manage itself, provide animation and facilitation across the LAG area and support the implementation and delivery of LEADER activities.

The three funding pots are i) Running Costs ii) Animation and iii) LEADER Implementation (including Co-operation activities).

2.3 Rural Development in Torfaen

Torfaen joined the Rural Development Programme in 2007 and successfully delivered the 2007 – 2013 Programme, through a range of projects and grants that helped to revitalise Torfaen's rural communities.

Lessons Learnt from Business Case 2, 2011 – 2014

The following recommendations were made at the end of the 2007-2014 programme period.

2.3.1 Management and Governance

In relation to management and governance, it is understood that the LAG and Board would be merged in the next programme. It is important that the new body is as active and representative as possible. Local business representation would be a considerable asset, with community and voluntary sector representation to help provide balance.

2.3.2 Communication

The focus of communication needs to move from an internal audience to a more external one in order to promote the LAG activities and rural Torfaen identity to local businesses, residents and visitors to the area. Allied to this, marketing also needs addressing. This implies a need to encompass a fully independent website, and, critically, social media presence through Facebook and twitter. This should then help maximise the potential of the Manor and the activities that are planned for the Manor and its outbuildings, whether weddings, wedding fayres, private rental, business meetings, conferences, or local history events. Provision of Wi-Fi will be an essential component for the success of these activities.

2.3.3 Knowledge Sharing

Whilst there has been evidence of knowledge sharing and supply chain collaboration amongst businesses and beneficiaries, this needs to become more formalised through networking events; both within Rural Torfaen and with businesses in neighbouring areas, such as Monmouthshire.

2.3.4 Going Forward

The successes of Taste of Torfaen need to be built on and consolidated. Food tourism activity needs further development, and it is suggested that stronger links are made with Torfaen's neighbours, in Monmouthshire and the Brecon Beacons, for example, with Torfaen possibly using the hook of food linked to its rich heritage offer to consolidate a position in a wider area network. Within Torfaen itself, a more formal producer network should be linked into the food tourism offer, as an additional layer to the existing heritage assets of Blaenavon and the upper Torfaen area. This could then be used to

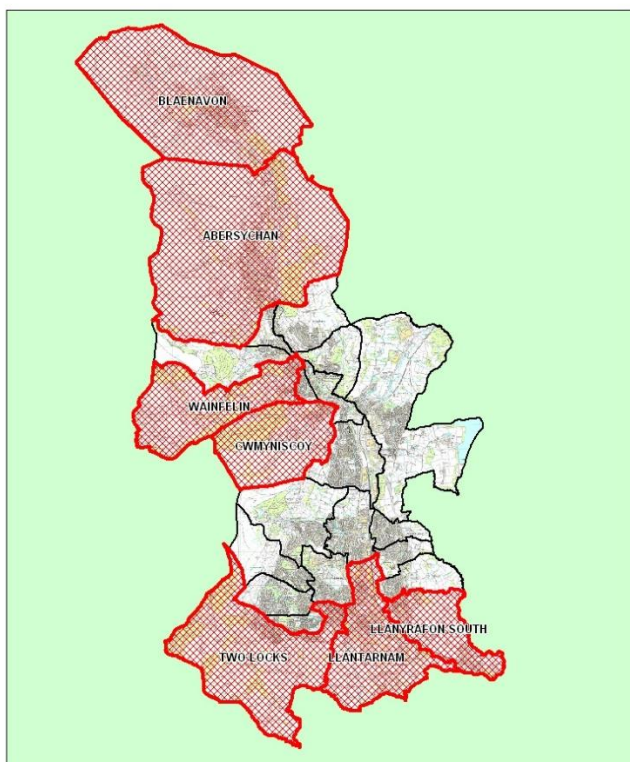
“pull” visitors down through the County Borough, utilising assets such as the canal, to an enhanced Llanyrafon Manor experience in the South. There needs to be stronger projection and communication of local food companies outside of the food and craft market(s). There is the potential to further develop clusters of producers (such as the current Polo Grounds collaboration) and identification of food champions / ambassadors to build awareness amongst local residents and hospitality businesses of what Torfaen has to offer.

Local Development Strategy 2014-2020

Before making the case for 2014-2020 programme period, Torfaen did consider an approach from neighbouring Local Action Groups, specifically Monmouthshire, for a merger but a view was taken to stand alone in order to retain a Torfaen identity and focus within the rural area.

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) is therefore the key document for each LEADER LAG area. It sets out, in a consistent format, a detailed explanation of the area; an analysis of that area through a SWOT assessment; a series of aims and objectives for the area and proposals for activities or initiatives that would achieve those aims and objectives.

Image 1 - Eligible Rural Development Programme Wards



Source: Torfaen Local Development Strategy 2014

The Torfaen Rural Local Development Strategy was developed in 2014, with it’s key aim:

“to create a place in which people take opportunities to thrive and motivate themselves and others, developing a strong entrepreneurial culture, with improved economic well-being and a sustainable society”

As part of the mid term evaluation, 88% of survey respondents are aware of the LDS, with 94% either totalling agreeing or agreeing with its aim.

2.3.5 SWOT

The following table shows some analysis of the SWOT undertaken in 2014, with some additions shown below.

Table 2 - LDS SWOT Analysis - Reviewed

TORFAEN SWOT ANALYSIS 2014			
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Farmers wishing to strengthen their business A developing tourism sector Increase in local produce Emerging arts and crafts sector Developing small holders Increase in diversification activities An establishing and professional voluntary sector Transport links to the M4 corridor Beauty of the environment Strong community links	Decline in traditional farming Lack of opportunities for unskilled and/or unqualified people Lack of support for smaller rural businesses Lack of support in developing local produce Loss of cultural traditions Unemployment Disjointed communities Lack of rural identity	Support for larger rural businesses Support for smaller rural businesses and the art and craft sector Developing Tourism attractions and accommodation Increased demand for local produce Promotion of alternative land use, including energy and production of bio fuels Potential to capitalise on the natural environment Potential to engage hard to reach individuals/groups and target specific areas of support. For example, NEETS, unemployed and Refugees.	Current economic position Increase in unemployment Further decline in employment opportunities Global Market Climate change Slow development of community participation Development of out of town retail
2018 REVIEW TORFAEN SWOT ANALYSIS			
		Brexit may lead to buy local focus and staycations in tourism market City Region opportunities	Loss of EU funds due to Brexit vote Further rise in on-line digital sales Increase in global warming and changes in weather-seasons; impact on crops and production

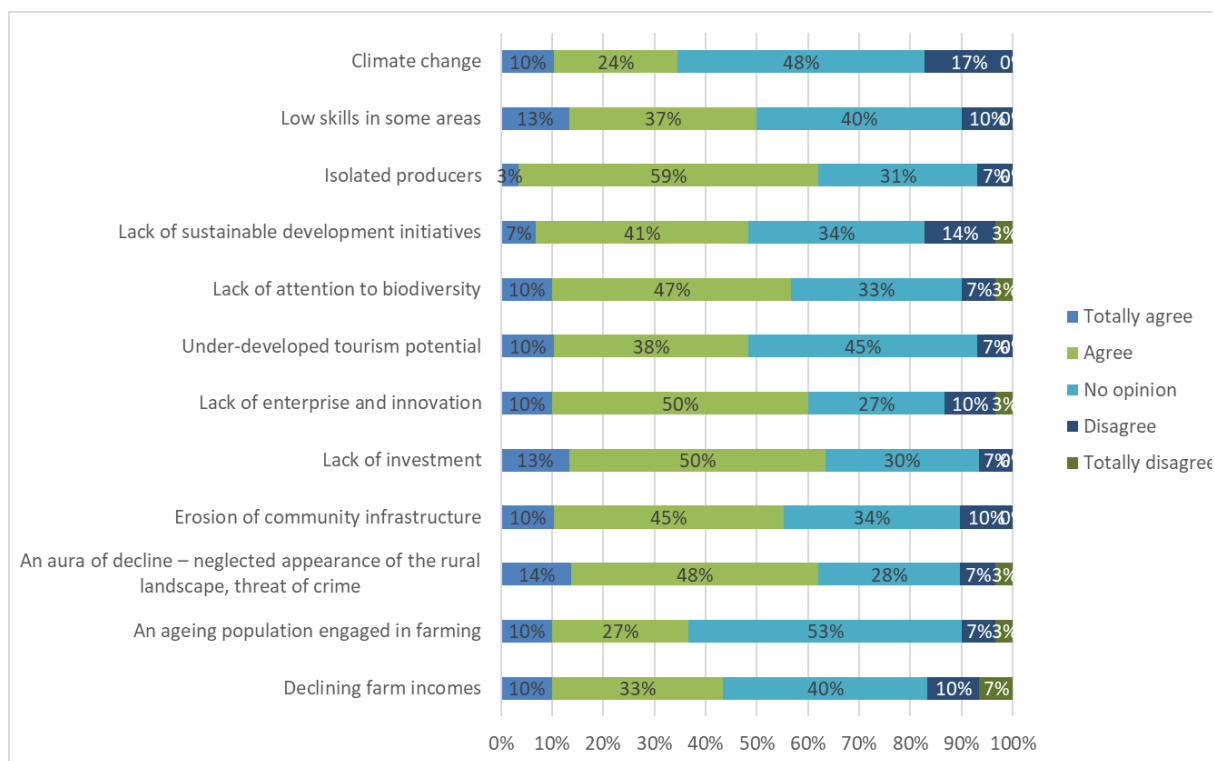
2.3.6 Problems to address

Some of the key problems that the LDS identified in 2014 included:

- Declining Farm Incomes
- An ageing population engaged in farming
- An aura of decline evidenced in the neglected appearance of the rural landscape
- Illegal activities/threat of crime
- Erosion of community infrastructure
- Lack of investment
- Lack of enterprise and innovation
- Under-developed Tourism potential
- Lack of attention to biodiversity
- Lack of sustainable development initiatives
- Isolated producers
- Low skills in some areas
- Climate change

When asked in the mid-term evaluation survey if stakeholders and beneficiaries feel the LDS is tackling issues, Figure 3 below shows that respondents identify that it is tackling isolated producers, lack of enterprise and innovation, lack of investment and addressing the aura of decline in the rural landscape. Those issues that respondents feel that more effort is required includes issues such as an ageing population engaged in farming, declining farm incomes followed by more significant issues such as climate change and a lack of sustainable development initiatives.

Figure 3 - To what extent do you agree that the Local Development Strategy is tackling the following issues?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

2.3.7 LDS Delivery

The LDS key themes are:

Theme 1: ENHANCING THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Broaden the understanding of opportunities to create a sustainable local environment through protecting and enhancing the natural landscape.

Theme 2: DEVELOPING LOCAL PRODUCE

To build a locally based, sustainable food industry, through creating opportunities in production, processing and distribution of locally grown food.

Theme 3: PROMOTING TOURISM

Increase the visitor offer through the co-ordination of tourism related activities.

Theme 4: ENCOURAGING ENTERPRISE

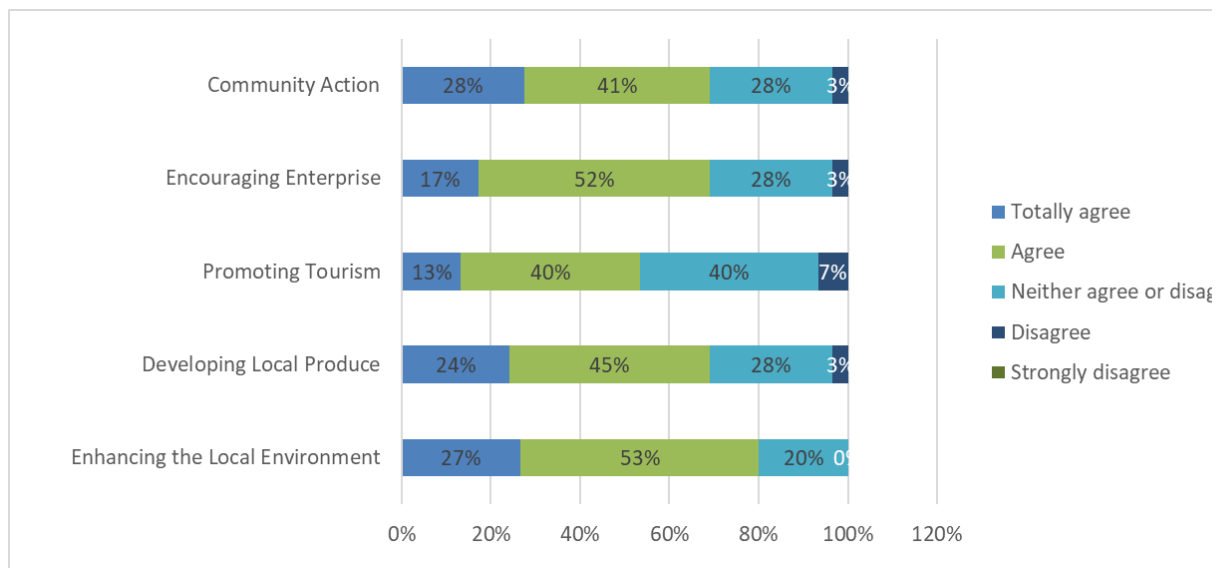
Create opportunities to develop sustainable enterprises by encouraging networking, training and mentoring.

Theme 5: COMMUNITY ACTION

To achieve self-sufficient rural community leadership which is well supported and skilful in championing the rural interests in Torfaen.

When asked if the Leader activity is working towards the themes of the LDS, Figure 4 shows that Enhancing the Local Environment, followed jointly by Developing Local Produce, Encouraging Enterprise and Community Action (69% either totally agree or agree with activity and focus), with Promoting Tourism having the greatest amount of disagreement but this is relatively small at 7%.

Figure 4 - To what extent do you agree that Torfaen’s Rural Development Programme is working towards the following Local Development Strategy Themes, so far?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

2.3.8 Cross Cutting Themes

A review of cross cutting themes in the context of Leader delivery to date has been undertaken which identifies those actions that have been addressed and those that could be developed into the final half of the programme.

Table 3 - Cross Cutting Themes Analysis

Enhancing the local Environment		
Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming	Sustainable Development	Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion
Actioned		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging local involvement in all actions undertaken All training to involve all user groups Ensure any landscape development are accessible to all Ensure all materials are available in a variety of formats 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all publicity materials are available in various formats, that websites and social media tools are inclusive and easy to use.
For Action 2018-2021		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage young people in on site farm training Encourage young people to have their say 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting existing land owners to develop innovative ways to grow produce on their land. This will be defined through the feasibility study to help build new products in Torfaen, that are not currently available. Environmental sustainability will be enhanced through growing more local produce, which will have a positive effect on local biodiversity and support land owners in learning new skills to increase effective land management. demonstrates low impact on the environment ensures that developing activities are ecologically and add `green 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism that maintains and strengthens biodiversity Tourism that maintains and enriches our unique and diverse culture of the environment Build capacity of local groups Ensure hard to reach groups are identified and opportunities are available to engage

	<p>developments` where ever possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring the activities funded have minimal impact on or takes into account the environment, e.g. any buildings restored or developed make use of micro renewables reduced pollution and degradation of the global and local environment 	
Developing Local Produce		
Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming	Sustainable Development	Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion
Actioned		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All training to involve all user groups Ensure all material are available in a variety of formats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local produce will increase giving consumers more choice and regular access to healthy local produce, helping to improve a healthy diet and healthier lifestyle. A series of food access points will be developed throughout the borough to help market and sell produce, including local produce markets, direct sales and e- sales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build capacity of local groups Ensure all publicity materials are available in various formats, that websites and social media tools are inclusive and easy to use.
For Action 2018-2021		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A marketing strategy will be developed in partnership with the Rural Network and Local Action Group, to ensure that each initiative is focused on both the needs of the producers and consumers, ensuring all target groups are reached. Engage young people in training and mentoring schemes Encourage young people to have their say 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local people will become more aware of the benefits in alternative energy, helping them to cut down on fuel bills. A sensitivity to cultural and social dynamics is created Develops activities that help to improve people health and wellbeing Improving the health and educational outcomes of children, young people

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all material are available in a variety of formats 		<p>and families living in poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure hard to reach groups are identified and opportunities are available to engage
Promoting Tourism		
Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming	Sustainable Development	Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion
Actioned		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring all activities are appealing and accessible to all All training to involve all user groups Create opportunities for networking Ensure all material are available in a variety of formats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates a sense of pride and place to not only encourage visitors but to also encourage residents to stay in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all publicity materials are available in various formats, that websites and social media tools are inclusive and easy to use.
For Action 2018-2021		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage young people in training and mentoring schemes Encourage young people to have their say through trialling new ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community involvement in tourism planning and management, Safe, satisfying and fulfilling visitor experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising household income Tourism that improves the quality of life of local communities Build capacity of local groups Ensure hard to reach groups are identified and opportunities are available to engage
Encouraging Enterprise		
Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming	Sustainable Development	Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion
Actioned		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration and inclusion of all stakeholders Marketing and communications strategies that target specific groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support new or existing producers throughout the rural wards to develop a sustainable supply chain in Torfaen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing consumer consumption and having a positive impact on local economic performance.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for networking • Ensure all materials are available in a variety of formats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing local marketing and branding initiatives which will benefit the producers, helping to position Torfaen in the regional, national and global markets. • Focus on matching supply with demand, providing support to enable producers to cope with the demand. Smaller producers can link together to create collaboration initiatives to ensure the demands are met. • Sound financial and business planning environmental management • Efficient management, training and customer service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers will develop a pride in their identity, adding value to the produce and bring life back into our rural heritage and maximise the impact of profitability. • Build capacity of local groups • Ensure all publicity materials are available in various formats, that websites and social media tools are inclusive and easy to use.
<p>For Action 2018-2021</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage young people in training and mentoring schemes • Encourage young people to have their say through trailing new ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term vision • Long term competitive and prosperous tourism businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality employment opportunities, fair pay and conditions for all employees • Improving skills • Ensure hard to reach groups are identified and opportunities are available to engage
<p style="text-align: center;">Community Action</p>		
<p>Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming</p>	<p>Sustainable Development</p>	<p>Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion</p>
<p>Actioned</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration and inclusion of all stakeholders • Marketing and communications strategies that target specific groups • Engage young people in training and mentoring schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordination of growing food locally, ensuring it is well advertised throughout the borough 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure hard to reach groups are identified and opportunities are available to engage • Ensure all publicity materials are available in various formats, that websites and social

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage young people to have their say through trailing new ideas • Create opportunities for networking • Ensure all material are available in a variety of formats 		<p>media tools are inclusive and easy to use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage new networking opportunities
For Action 2018-2021		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop local hubs to create networking opportunities 	

Key Mid-Term Messages

- Torfaen's 'Create' rural programme has maintained its focus even though it considered a merger with Monmouthshire and Newport in 2013
- Brexit may lead to more of a buy local focus and staycations for tourism
- Cardiff Capital Region opportunities may benefit the role and function of the Eastern valley
- People feel that the LDS is tackling isolated producers, lack of enterprise and innovation, lack of investment and addressing the aura of decline in the rural landscape, but it still needs to address farming related issues as well as the more significant issues of climate change
- People feel that the focus of the LDS so far has been on Enhancing the Local Environment

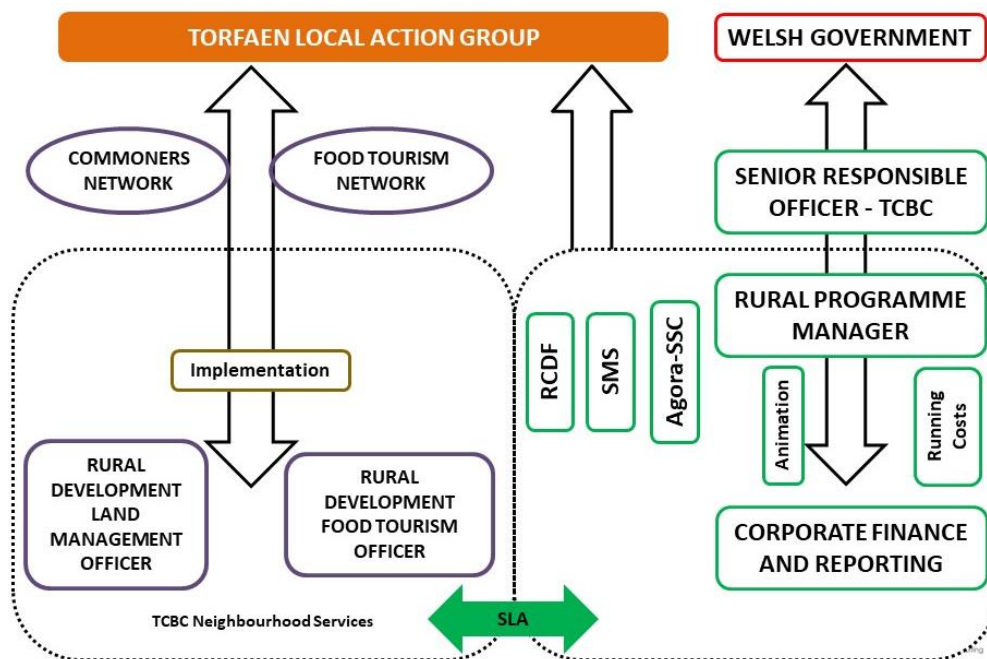
3 Management and Governance

3.1 Structure

Figure 5 below shows the overarching delivery structure for Torfaen’s Create Rural Development Programme which illustrates the relationship between the funder; Welsh Government (on behalf of European Commission), Torfaen CBC as lead body and senior responsible officer, in addition to provision of rural programme management, implementation, local networks and onwards to the Local Action Group who are responsible for strategic reporting.

In comparison to a reasonably resourced team before 2014, the way that the programme receives a funding allocation², has provided a Rural Programme Manager³ who is supported by a corporate finance officer. There are no other rural support staff within the programme management team with the Rural Programme Manager reporting directly to the Head of European Policy and External Funding. The core role of the programme manager is to lead on animation, co-ordination, monitoring and reporting of the programme, in addition to facilitating co-operation working and projects. The manager also manages the Rural Innovation scheme which thematic projects can apply to. Through working with regional partners, ‘Create’ has secured additional regional funding and activity through the Sustainable Supply Chain Scheme - Agora⁴ and the Sustainable Management Scheme – Resilient Uplands Project. The Programme Manager also sits on the Wales Rural Network and on the Community-Led Local Development group.

Figure 5 - Torfaen's Strategic and Operational Structure



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration

² This is means tested based on rural population and other indices

³ Funds allow for 3 days a week post

⁴ Managed by Menter a Busnes for SE Wales Regional Partnership

Whilst forming part of the wider Rural Development Programme and directly managed by Welsh Government, the Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF) has become part of the Programme Management function as there is no allocated Welsh Government resource, and the limited capacity and skills of applicants to apply through this process.

In 2014 a tender for Leader implementation project was advertised through Sell2Wales with a proposal from Torfaen CBC Neighbourhood Services being awarded the contract. The contract, through a service level agreement has supplied resources for two no. Rural Project Officers to deliver thematic areas, being i) land management and ii) food tourism and iii) tourism. The two officers have been focussing on activity within rural Torfaen as well as co-operation projects at a regional level. Associated with these thematic areas of work, some networks exist with Mynydd Maen commoners linking into the programme and food producers informally networking through markets and events. Other project activity is detailed in section 4 to this report.

The Local Action Group is the sole strategic decision-making body for Torfaen's Create programme, with the Rural Partnership disbanded before the end of the last programme period. It comprises twenty one members from the community, business and public sectors with groups such as Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Farmers Union of Wales and Natural Resources Wales represented. It holds its evening meetings on a bi-monthly basis at Llanyrafon Manor in the south of Rural Torfaen.

3.2 Programme Management

The Rural Programme Manager has been in post since Rural Development Programme activity started back in 2007, with a background in external funding and community development. The strategic post is seen as a *"key point to act as a streamliner, co-ordinator and signposter {sic}"* for Create, with a key responsibility to run and animate activity. One strategic stakeholder commented that *"the secondment of project delivery services as form of a contract has been a good decision and has freed up the Rural Programme Manager's time, however with the additional time spent on the Rural Community Development Fund, she has been taken away from the strategic approach"*. This comment supports the multi programme nature of the Rural Programme Manager that is strategic in terms of management but there may be a need for the LAG to demonstrate how project activity is linking together for the remaining years of the programme.

The Rural Programme Manager spends three days of the week on Leader activity, one day on co-operation activity and the remaining day on the Rural Community Development Fund. Monitoring is achieved through quarterly reviews of the agreed intervention logic table with the Head of European Policy and External Funding and respective Rural Project Officers. Having direct access to the Head of European Policy and External Funding also helps in sharing intelligence, other forms of match funding and claim monitoring.

There is a common view from interviewees that there have been lots of feasibility studies, but these have been required to fill gaps in knowledge which is the normal logic when developing a programme of activity that is Leader based. Contrary to this, one respondent stated *"Too much is going to fund local authority projects. Too much on feasibility studies. Not seeing any small business and def no farming investments. No renewables and lack of any small food projects. Funds not going where they are aimed at [sic]."* We would suggest that this perception on local authority projects being funded could be improved if there was a stronger Create web presence that would show the cross sectoral nature of support within the rural communities and show the role of Torfaen CBC in enabling this.

One of the key challenges for the Create programme, specifically the Rural Programme Manager, has been how to manage interest in Welsh Government's Rural Community Development Fund. Whilst the assessment and approval process rests with Welsh Government, the Fund has generated local interest as it is seen as *"the last pot of funding to apply for with EU programmes going"*. This has diverted resources from core Leader activities at times with the Rural Programme Manager handling initial enquiries, expression of interest development, liaison with Welsh Government and dealing with the full application stages. This has been an intense process for Create and applicants with one interviewee commenting on *"the language can be intimidating and difficult to understand {sic}"*. Other barriers to RCDF are identified further on in this report.

At the time of writing this report, Torfaen CBC had completed a restructuring exercise which has resulted in the Rural Programme Manager and the Funding team moving from Chief Executives into Neighbourhood Services. This will have significant benefits for greater integration between strategic programme management and operational delivery of project which should see stronger alignment to final outputs and outcomes in the remaining three years of the programme.

Finally, when stakeholders and beneficiaries were asked to rate the overall management of Create between 2016 and 2018, 88% rated it as good to very good.

3.3 Local Action Group

The aim of the LAG is:

"to create a community culture of entrepreneurship, to change the thinking of local people so that looking for entrepreneurial opportunities over the widest range of activities and resources becomes a way of life".

Its mission statement objectives are:

1. To lead in the development of the Local Development Strategy (LDS), focusing on the key themes and objectives;
2. Ensure all sections of the community are involved in community regeneration activities;
3. Develop innovative projects that fit with the aims and objectives of the LDS and which follow the LEADER approach;
4. Oversee the coordination, management and monitoring of the project funded and developed through the LDS;
5. Assist in building community consensus behind the LDS;
6. Promote cross-sectoral working, e.g. with other LAG's, Regeneration Partnerships, Local Service Board, RSL's etc.

The composition of the LAG is shown in Table 4 overleaf. The mix and cross sectoral representation of a LAG is key to ownership of any rural programme as well as providing a conduit for communication and networking, with 79% of evaluation survey respondents having an awareness of the LAG.

Table 4 - LAG Membership Composition

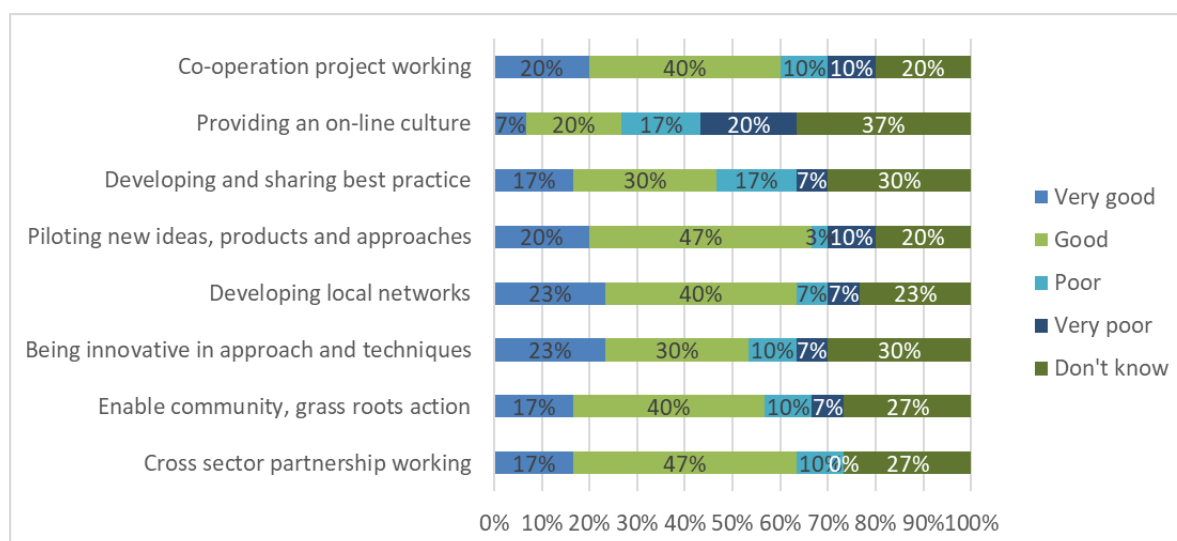
	Representing
Public	Natural Resources Wales
	Henllys Ward County Borough Councillor
	Skills Agenda
	Farmers Union Wales
	Farming Connect
	Ponthir Ward County Borough Councillor
Private	Artie Craftie
	Cwrt Henllys Farm
	Pontypool Park Estate
	Commoner
	Community Baker/Food Blogger
	Elm Tree Food
Third	Torfaen Voluntary Alliance
	Pontypool Horse Society
	Blaen Bran Community Woodland
	Torfaen Environment Trust
	Pontypool/Cwmbran Community Council

Source: Create

Comments from a number of stakeholders has been on the positive change in the LAG’s membership with the removal of grants in this programme resulting in representatives having no financial benefit and to give time on providing strategic direction, with one strategic stakeholder commenting that *“they provide some common sense to decisions and also live within the rural communities”*. Counter to this point, one member of the LAG commented that *“due to the unique set up of the LAG i.e. much of the work was already decided before I joined through the employment of Tracey and Alvin’s work streams. Both have been fantastic but also has meant that much of the LAG work has been pre planned and already decided so limited involvement of the LAG members.”*

Figure 6 below shows how stakeholders and project beneficiaries rate the Local Action Group in terms of management, with piloting new ideas, products and techniques (very good to good: 67%) followed by cross sector partnership working (very good to good: 64%) and developing local networks (very good to good: 63%). Where respondents feel the LAG could do better includes providing an on-line culture (very poor to poor: 37%) followed by developing and sharing best practice (very poor to poor: 24%).

Figure 6 - To what extent do you rate the following activities the Local Action Group has been managing, so far?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

These comments are re-enforced through the LAG workshop that was facilitated by Chris Jones Regeneration on the 19th July 2018, where members were asked to discuss how the LAG was asked to reflect on their ways of working over the last couple of years. Figure 7 overleaf shows how the workshop collectively rated their position at mid-term.

When considering partnership working the LAG still sees the perception that Torfaen is not rural as a barrier and harder for engagement. One LAG member stated that *“the rural area is not contiguous, with not a cohesive sense of rurality plus a limited reach due to funding and therefore scale of programme”*. Other members agree that the lack of grants on the programme has meant less of an incentive to engage from outside, whilst this has resulted in the LAG being more strategic and committed than before. They also see the respective Rural Project Officers as providing the one to one connection, picking up partnerships and networks, but the LAG could do more. Some strategic members of the LAG also see more alignment from the Well Being of Future Generations Act and Environment Act that help with focus and political support.

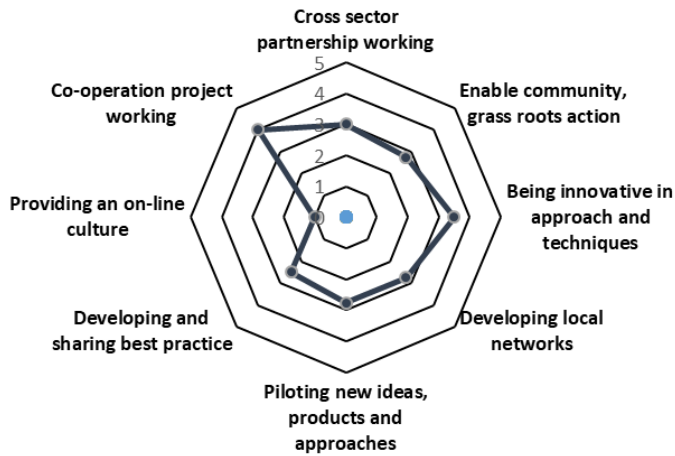
Whilst no innovative products have been developed so far, the LAG sees innovation in the need for feasibility studies, availability of Rural Innovation Scheme and learning and the development of the cross regional uplands network that the Land Management Rural Project Officers has taken a leading role in. One LAG member commented *“it’s been about testing concepts and building knowledge in the first few years”*.

Best practise is being developed with individual members visiting other rural areas and learning from other projects, but the LAG acknowledges that a template for reporting back and disseminating learning is not in place. This is linked to the lack of an online culture for the LAG with only Taste of Torfaen having a Facebook and linked twitter account, with information on the programme found within Torfaen CBC’s website⁵. Provision of a dedicated website would help with more open

⁵<https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Business/EuropeanPolicyandExternalFunding/ESIFunds2014-2020/RuralDevelopmentPlan/Rural-Development-Plan.aspx>

communication with rural communities, e.g. a rural blog page and a knowledge bank⁶ type area although one member of the LAG said, “we need to watch demand by creating a website as the programme doesn’t have significant funds”.

Figure 7 - Rating of LAG Ways of Working



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration, LAG Workshop, 19th July 2018

Other LAG members and some over evaluation respondents have said that by having a website and a stronger digital presence it would reduce the perception that the programme is Torfaen Council led which has been identified previously in this report, with their role being more enabling. Comments on communication, marketing and promotion are developed further on in this report. Other comments related to the LAG’s meetings being more accessible and roaming by hosting them across the rural wards and project site visits made by LAG members with video diaries developed linked to a new Create website.

The second half of the July LAG workshop saw members visualising where they are at mid-term, with them looking at the logic of activity and project development. One LAG member said that “the first year has been about getting to know the project scope, the second year about encouraging people to get involved and plugging the gaps with the remainder of the programme about delivery”. The LAG also sees a need for more of a collective understanding of how approvals are meeting LDS objectives, the tracking of delivery and how completed projects are meeting strategic outputs and outcomes.

⁶ <http://monmouthshire.biz/rural-innovation/projects/>

Image 2 - LAG Workshop Interim Outputs Mapping Session



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration

3.4 Reporting & Decision-Making Process

The internal reporting and decision-making process is seen by LAG members to be well managed by Rural Programme Management, with one LAG member stating “*Nikki (Rural Programme Manager) has been good at balancing the guidance from Welsh Government but also allows for independence and not telling us what to say*”. Interviewees feel that internally the LAG is well planned and timely with information provided on a “need to know” basis. There does however need to be more communication and action between LAG meetings where minutes lead to action and accountability for specific LAG members.

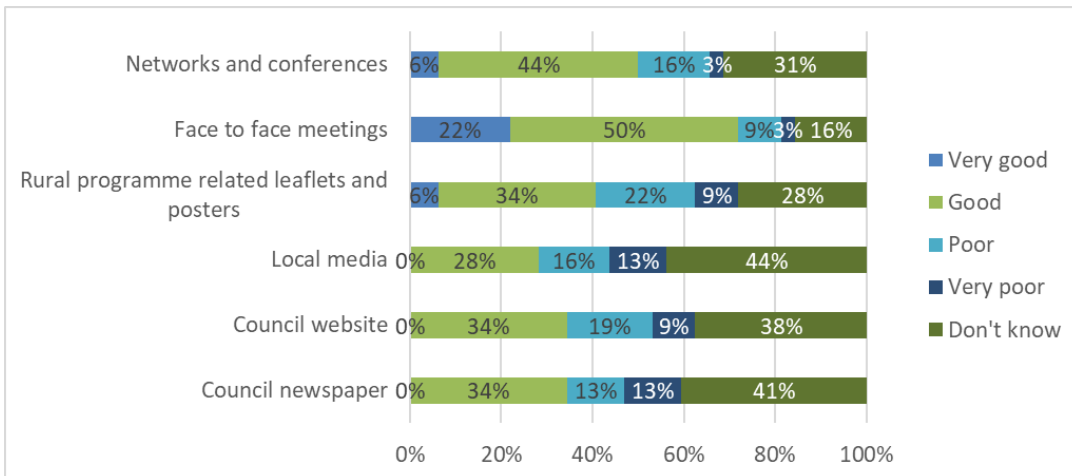
Where some frustrations rest relate to external process and funding specifically RCDF which is discussed further on in this report. One beneficiary commented “*such a long winded process for the application. Language can be intimidating and difficult to understand. Such a long time for progress to be made*”. One responsible officer also commented on the internal claims process which is impacting on time, with Council officers having to follow Council procedures and external organisations not.

Figure 10 overleaf shows the reporting and decision-making process for the LAG, with signposting to other EARDF funding shown and how these are assessed, approved and monitored.

3.5 Promotion of Programme

Some comments have already been made by LAG members on communication and promotion, with 54% of survey respondents rating the overall marketing of Create as very good to good, with 33% rating it very poor to poor. Figure 8 overleaf shows that respondents rate the face to face meetings and support (72% rate these as very good to good) with more strategic communications lacking e.g. 31% rate rural programme related leaflets and posters.

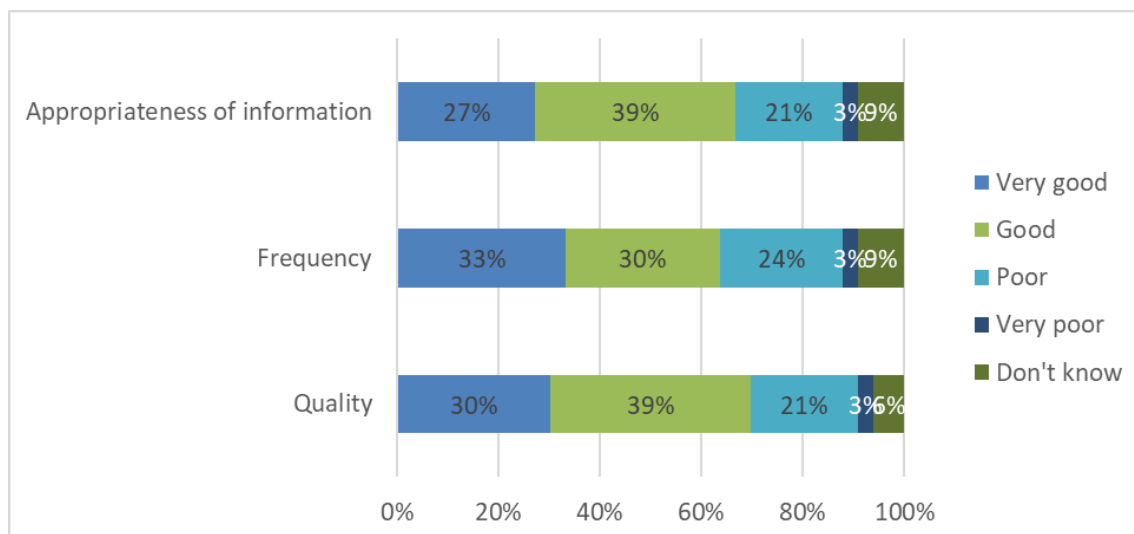
Figure 8 - How would you rate the following types of marketing and promotion that has been undertaken so far for Create between 2016 and 2018?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

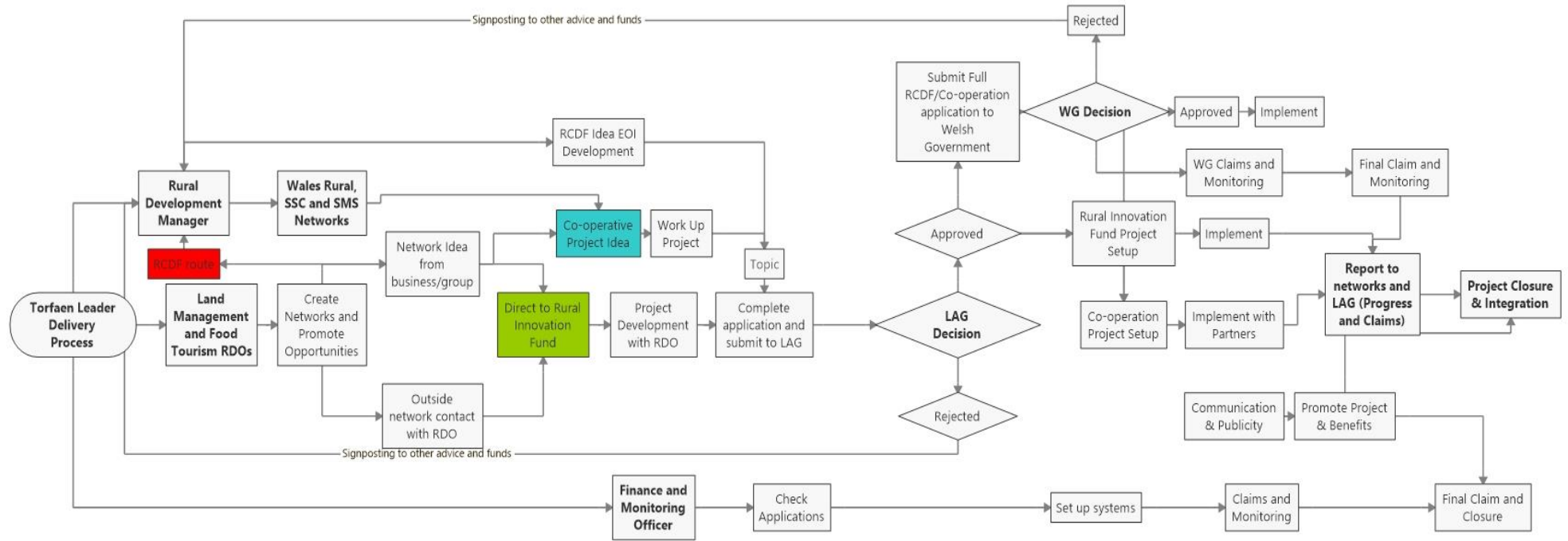
Figure 9 below shows on average 65% rate the appropriateness, frequency and quality of communication as very good to good.

Figure 9 - How would you rate the communication you have received from Create between 2016 and 2018?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

Figure 10 - Reporting & Decision-Making Process



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration

The LAG workshop, evaluation survey and stakeholder and beneficiary interviews have also identified some suggestions for improvement.

Website

The need to provide a dedicated website for Create was identified at the end of Business Plan in 2014. Ideas from the mid-term evaluation include:

- Minutes and progress reports
- Best practice area
- Projects to date – images and videos
- Spotlight on rural champions
- Blog post
- Signposting to funding

One respondent who is digitally proficient, commented *“we need more data driven marketing - web presence, analytically tracked, ideally using paid social and pay per click, critically targeted to the correct demographic following detailed segmentation and analysis.”*

Social Media

Use of more integrated social media with more presence for Community Action theme is suggested as this may be a focus for the remainder of the programme as RCDF capital investment is implemented and activities are promoted. The Create2021 twitter account was last used in November 2017 and could be used to promote opportunities and show project activity more frequently going forward.

Farmers

The evaluation has shown that it has been hard to engage with farmers due to time, capacity and some distrust in rural programmes. Working with Agora and the South East Wales Resilient Uplands Project, Create needs to find ways of meaningful engagement with the farming community and identify where added value can help this sector. Best practice and video projects such as rural crafts training, rural crime network may help with relationship building.

Networking

The report discusses later on the role of networking.

Other Ideas

These include:

- Use of radio station in Cwmbran
- Opportunity to have longer term pop-up events
- Use of mail shots, newspapers as well as social media to get to widest demographic

Key Mid-Term Messages

- The Local Action Group has become more strategic due to removal of grant giving function
- Best practice needs to be disseminated more between and outside of the Local Action Group
- Lack of additional resources to manage RCDF has had a resultant impact on programme management
- The service level agreement with Torfaen Council's Neighbourhood Services has helped in releasing resources and integrated working
- The Local Action Group has focussed in the first few years in developing project scope, plugging gaps through feasibility studies and building networks and piloting initial activity
- There is a need for a dedicated Create website integrated to social media, so that there is more of an online culture and openness to the programme
- There is a need to review ways to increase participation and discussion with the farming community

4 Leader

Create, Torfaen's Rural Development Programme, specifically the delivery of its LDS, is supported by the service level agreement with Torfaen CBC's Neighbourhood Services to provide two dedicated project officers who have a focus on i) Land Management ii) Food Tourism and iii) Tourism with these tending to meet the objectives of the five thematic areas. To support activity a Rural Innovation Scheme has been developed.

4.1 Rural Innovation Scheme

The key areas of rural innovation in this LDS are:

- Develop sustainable rural businesses
- Establish a business to business
- Develop toolkits and guidance for rural business innovation
- Support for young farmers
- Re-localise the supply chain
- Farmers and producers' markets
- Producer directory and catalogue
- Social enterprise models
- Food co-operatives
- Community Growing and Community supported agriculture (CSA)

The Rural Innovation Scheme provides support for research, feasibility studies, one to one advice, business advice, networking and training.

4.2 Theme – Enhancing the Environment (Land Management)

LDS Fit

Theme	Enhancing the Local Environment
Aim	<i>Develop links and potential areas for co-operation between land owners and producers.</i>
Objective	Activities to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop training and mentoring schemes for farmers and landowners, with a focus on upland areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mynydd Maen Commoners – Landscape crime network
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve on farm training to increase rural skills, enhance the local environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mynydd Maen Commoners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop opportunities for land based production, i.e. timber supply, wood fuel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Some proposals signposted to RCDF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assist households and farms in the rural areas of Torfaen to increase the use of micro-renewable sources of energy. Increase opportunities to recycle land waste products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Some proposals signposted to RCDF

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broaden the understanding of opportunities to create a sustainable local environment through protecting and enhancing the natural landscape. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Blaenavon World Heritage Environment Group – Clean and Green Environment Study – Ty Coch Waterway Project
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Resources

Land Management thematic activity is resourced through a Rural Project Officer, project delivery, access to the Rural Innovation Scheme, as well as engagement and co-operation with the regional partners through the Upland Commons of South East Wales Natural Resources Management Plan. There are linkages with the Food Tourism/Tourism scheme specifically where opportunities exist for linking with Commoners and farmers, however the focus of the land management initiatives have so far been on restoration and conservation led activity.

Need/Development

The land management theme originated from Torfaen CBC's Nature Fund initiative (2014) for the Eastern Valleys Uplands Project which built upon and developed the Blaenavon World Heritage Site Forgotten Landscape Programme.

The current postholder started with Torfaen CBC in 2013 as Countryside Warden and then Manager of the Forgotten Landscapes, and it was in this role that he developed links with Commoners and cross boundary links with neighbouring Local Authorities through the Upland Commons Plan. The project officer is based with Torfaen CBC's Neighbourhood Services.

The Rural Project Officer believes LEADER has been a good vehicle for taking forward good practice and ideas developed from the Forgotten Landscapes and is an opportunity to build upon the networks that were previously developed. He also recognises the difficulties of delivering a revenue based programme with Commoners and farmers that have a very practical view of delivery and often want projects that make direct improvements on the ground. The bureaucratic nature of the LEADER has meant his role has also become one of acting as a filter between beneficiaries and a seemingly complicated process. 'Operational pragmatism' to navigate around the process and to ensure delivery has been necessary to deliver the strategy. However, using the Rural Innovation Scheme has been key to funding studies and providing the professional input to provide the evidence for the activity, and the template for safe, manageable activity to take place on the ground. Some of these studies have informed the SMS funded South East Wales Resilient Uplands programme.

Activity

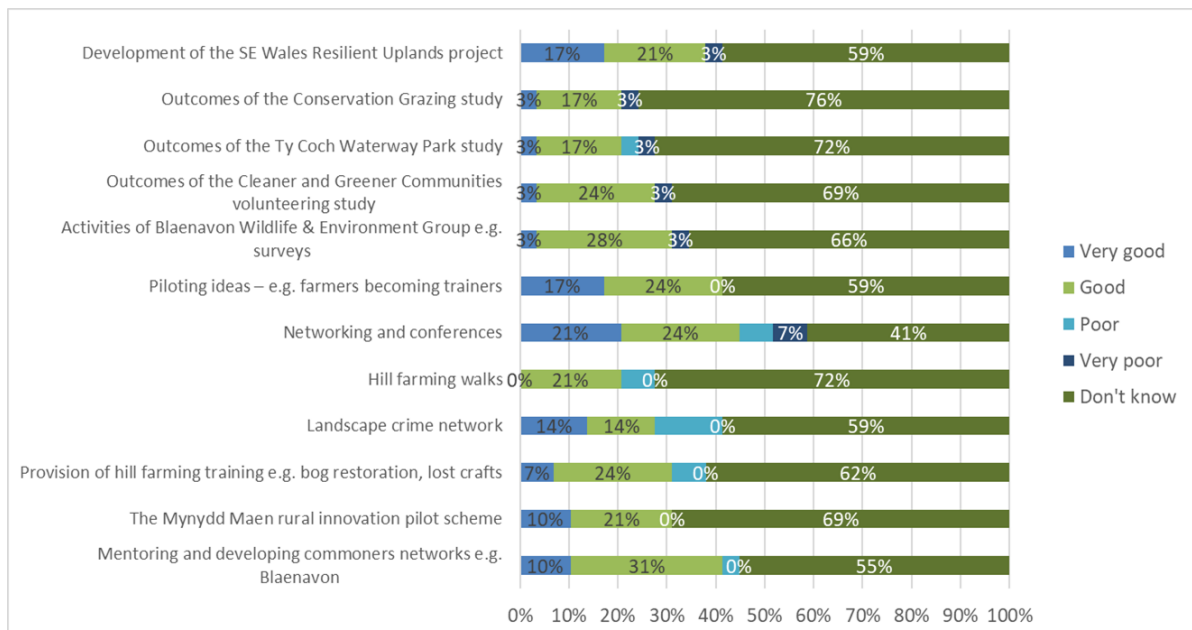
Activity to date, has focussed on groupings of activity including:

- Marketing/awareness raising with Commoners, farmers and stakeholders
- Developing and networking between groups/stakeholders
- Developing the successful South East Wales Resilient Uplands project (SMS funded)
- Feasibility/research studies
- Access to the Rural Innovation Scheme

Figure 11 shows that the relative successes have been networking/conference events, piloting ideas such as Farmers becoming Trainers and the Landscape Crime Network. The recently secured South East Wales Resilient Uplands project is also well regarded.

However, the majority of the projects have been study based or in their infancy in terms of delivery and therefore not been highly visible in the rural places. Accordingly, it is not surprising that many respondents don’t know the respective projects and/or have a low level of awareness. Those projects that are rated as poorer performers include the Conservation Grazing study and Ty Coch Waterway Park.

Figure 11 - Please could you rate the following types of activity that have been delivered so far?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

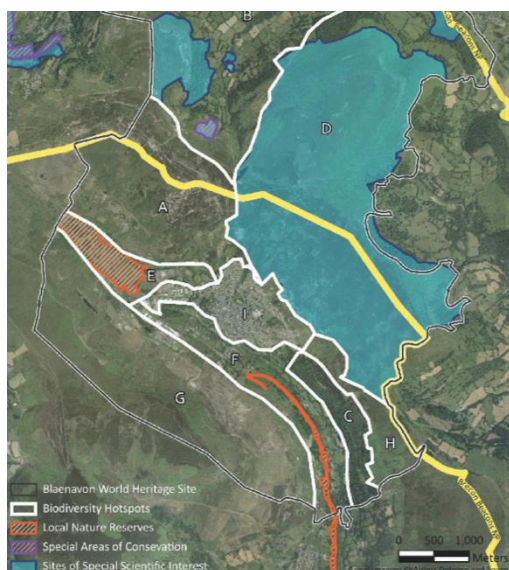
Activities Undertaken to Date

4.2.1 Blaenavon World Heritage Environmental Group (BWHEG)

BWHEG is a volunteer group undertaking practical conservation activity within Blaenavon World Heritage Site that received a Rural Innovation Scheme grant towards a Wildlife Monitoring & Guidebook project. The group carry out a wide range of countryside and rights of way management; dry stone walling through training whose aim is to repair as many walls as possible that form high priority common land boundaries in the scheme area; upland and wildlife monitoring carrying out surveys throughout the year; and guided walks.

Following the completion of the Forgotten Landscape Project the BWHEG group inherited a range of wildlife monitoring practices and programmes that the group felt needed to be reviewed to reflect the resources and skills of the volunteer group. Volunteers wanted to focus on the most useful and interesting things to do.

Image 3 - Image from Wildlife Monitoring Strategy



Source: BEWAG study

The funding was used to commission three interrelated studies to provide the group with the direction and advice it required to move forward.

- **Wildlife Survey & Monitoring Review (2017)** This report consolidates and summarises the results of surveys and celebrates the BWHEG group's valuable work on the survey and monitoring of biodiversity within the BWHS.

- **Wildlife Monitoring Strategy (2018)** – the monitoring programme will aim to collect quantitative and qualitative data using consistent and repeatable methods that offer volunteers a chance to learn new skills. The group has therefore identified eight priority sites which will each have a list of wildlife features to be monitored over the course of the strategy.

- **Wildlife Guidebook Option Study (2018)** – advised on how to prepare a guidebook on the natural history of the BWHS and its surroundings, consolidating the wildlife information and presenting it in a product for use by members of the public. There is an aspiration the guidebook would raise money for the conservation of local habitats and species, as well as promote ecotourism in the area.

LEADER has been important for BWHEG following the cessation of the Forgotten Landscape Project to support the volunteers with their work and to examine in detail the opportunity to review roles, target activity and explore income generating opportunities to sustain the group. The Rural Project Officer's role in the preparation of the funding application was key to the project moving forward and without RIS funding it may not have progressed.

A project beneficiary summarised the next steps as *"the project has helped guide BWHEG move forward with its programme of activities and the next stage for the group will be our guide book. It is felt that many aspects of writing the guide book we can organise ourselves now we have the advice we need."*

4.2.2 Ty Coch Waterway Park

The Ty Coch Waterway Park concept is a Rural Innovation Scheme feasibility study to develop proposals for the regeneration of the canal and to pave the way for Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust to apply for capital funds.

The study was commissioned by Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Trust (MB&ACT) to advise on the feasibility and viability of creating a waterway park on land south of Hollybush Way, Ty Coch, Cwmbran. The Trust stated that *"our network with Officers and regeneration bodies is very strong, and we were directed towards the Rural Innovation Scheme to help us with our feasibility study"*.

The aim of the project is to create a balancing pond with marina that will serve to supplement water supply for the newly restored locks and to moor boats in a secure environment. Around this, facilities will be created which will serve as a visitor attraction generating employment and economic benefits for the area.

Development opportunities were identified for canal and landscape-based leisure, heritage and education activities. The report has looked at: Café/Restaurant; Farm Shop; Bike Hire; Caravan and Camping; Holiday Let; Visitor centre; Water-based recreational activities; Education & training, health and wellbeing facilities. Whilst currently at a feasibility study stage, the project supports the LDS themes through testing the idea of creating a new water based attraction, and specifically developing opportunities that have the potential to link with and add value to promoting local produce and promoting tourism.

Image 4 - Images of Ty Coch Potential Layouts



Source: Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Trust

The project is currently looking at using the study to develop options for raising the capital through various funders. Further development funding for site surveys and investigations is being sought through sources such as Landfill Credit Fund. The cost is estimated in the order of £1.5 million, with a potential annual market of the order of £2 million.

4.2.3 Mynydd Maen Commoners

This is a Rural Innovation Scheme project to develop Mynydd Maen and surrounding commons into a centre for rural innovation, best practice and skills training. Led by the Mynydd Maen Commoners Association, the project undertook a mixture of a feasibility study combined with a small programme of practical rural skills workshops to develop the common into a showcase for upland innovation and best practice from which others can learn.

The study examined the feasibility of addressing drainage issues and restoration of the natural wetland on the Common. As well as a consultancy study, the Commoners were able to visit the Black

Mountains wetlands to learn and to share best practice for restoring upland landscapes. The piloting scheme of three rural skills days aimed to establish a level of interest amongst the public for learning rural skills. The three workshops were very popular but had to be limited to a small number (6 or 7 people) of participants. The themed workshops included:

- Wicker fencing
- Walking sticks
- Extra pair of hands (vices/saw benches etc)

The project has been described as an example of “*taking local knowledge and skills and helping it to develop a coherent, safe, and better integrated project that the local authority and partners could support*”.

LEADER has been important to the study as it has encouraged the running of the rural skills workshops for the general public, alongside developing new ideas for the restoration of the wetlands from professional studies and a study visit. The project has provided the opportunity to test the feasibility of enhancing the natural landscape, encouraging enterprise and community action themes of the LDS.

Image 5 - Images of Land Management Activity



Source: Various

The project beneficiaries are keen to take forward the opportunity to implement the management plan and future rural skills workshops. These will be considered through the South East Wales Resilient Uplands programme.

4.2.4 Landscape Crime Network

Informal discussions initially took place between emergency services, Police and Crime Commissioners Office, responsible officers, local politicians and Commoners to tackle landscape crime (address anti-social problems such as sheep worrying, fly-tipping, arson and illegal off-roading etc) through the implementation of a previously developed South East Wales Landscape Crime Toolkit. The purpose of developing a local partnership through a collaborative network of politicians, farmers and professionals was to inform the emerging South East Wales Resilient Uplands project. In addition to targeting RDP funding (SMS), the partnership has opened up other opportunities such as the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner Partnership Fund.

The initiative has been successful at growing a network of interested parties and has stimulated support at the highest levels. However, the network continues to evolve, and there is a need to set up sub-groups focussed on the delivery of the agreed actions.

The network is supporting the LDS through an initiative that protects and helps to enhance the natural landscape as well as supporting rural farming, common land community and recreational users of common land to take appropriate action against landscape crimes.

4.2.5 Blaenavon Conference - Paying for 'results' in agri-environment schemes (February 2018)

The RDP programme funded an international conference in 2018 to discuss innovations in delivering multiple policy objectives through the management of the countryside by farmers.

The conference was instigated by a network established between the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism and the Rural Development Officer that was itself formed through the RDP funded Wales Hill Farming Training Scheme. Discussions about post-Brexit policy, and an increased focus on the support payments system in the delivery of ecosystem land management services led to the idea of holding a conference to share best practice, widen network and influence Welsh Government policy.

Image 6 - Photo from Conference



Source: Torfaen Create

As a basis for the conference, it was felt that in traditional prescriptive schemes, farmers are treated as unthinking agents of Government – putting into practice exact instructions. Their skills and experience and their ideas on how policy objectives could best be achieved are at best undervalued and a results-based approach should be considered. These problems were known not to be unique to Wales and speakers from Burren in Ireland, Dartmoor, Yorkshire Dales and Cumbria were present to share their ideas and experiences.

Following the conference, wider networks have been formed and a visit has consequently been arranged for members of the LAG and a hill farmer to visit Burren in the near future to see how local

farmers thought that things could be done differently and how over many years developed a programme which has been adapted into the national RDP.

4.2.6 Clean & Green Environmental Study

The Rural Innovation Scheme supported the preparation of a business plan and funding applications for a community group support programme that encourages and supports locally based groups of individuals to deliver practical activities in their local environment in a more coordinated way than currently exists. The activities aim to enhance, protect and promote natural green space whilst providing mental and physical well-being benefits to those involved.

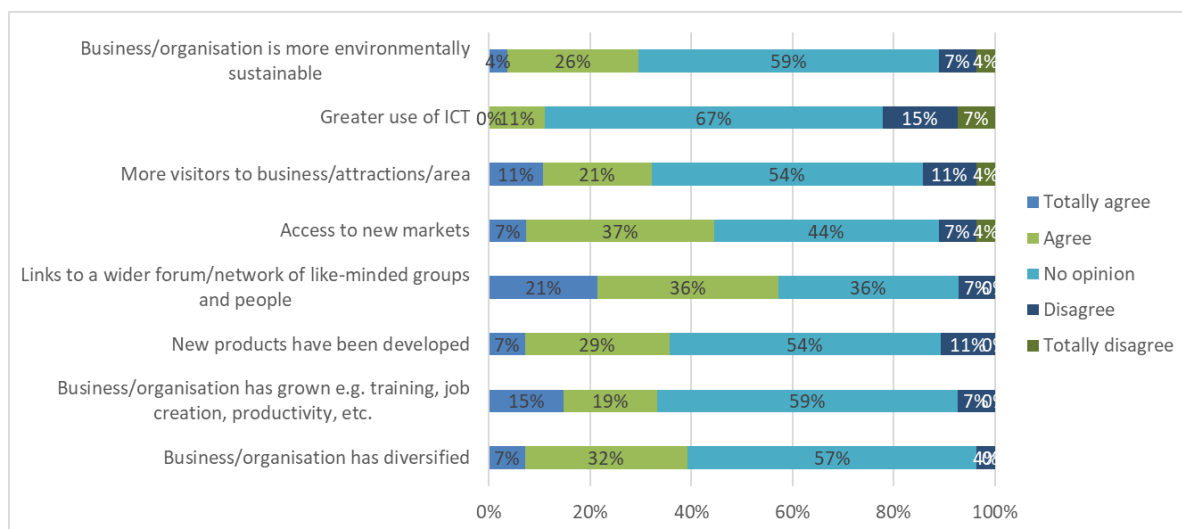
Groups working on environmental (and heritage-related) projects range from small-scale local projects to wider landscape-scale activities. However, many groups have capacity issues, especially with administration and related activities including promotion and marketing, with some struggling to maintain or increase membership. At the same time, Torfaen CBC's diminishing resources have impacted on service delivery capacity in Torfaen, requiring the Council to work differently to support local people and sustainably manage the area's natural resources.

The study supported the LDS in delivering its' enhancing local environment and community action themes. The business plan identified the need for better coordination within Torfaen CBC and between volunteer groups. The results of this study were used to underpin a successful application submitted by Torfaen CBC to NRW in January 2017 for a contribution of £32,500 towards the appointment of a coordinating officer for a year.

The project manager recognises the opportunity to integrate the project with other LEADER activity, one area related to using existing rural landscape management skills within the Commoners and farming community. He reflected on this challenge by stating *"We would like to work with farmers and Commoners to help deliver environmental works and to support our volunteers, but we need to make sure our procurement rules allow us to do this and to ensure the skilled individuals we have within our community can also comply with these rules"*.

Figure 12 indicates how the Land Management has been received to date by stakeholders and project beneficiaries, with the strongest level of support seen in links to a wider forum and network of like-minded groups and people (totally agree to agree: 57%), with greater use of ICT being an area for improvement with 22% of respondents stating that they disagree to totally disagree that this has been actioned.

Figure 12 - Please can you rate the extent to which the support you have received has impacted on the following?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

Future Activity

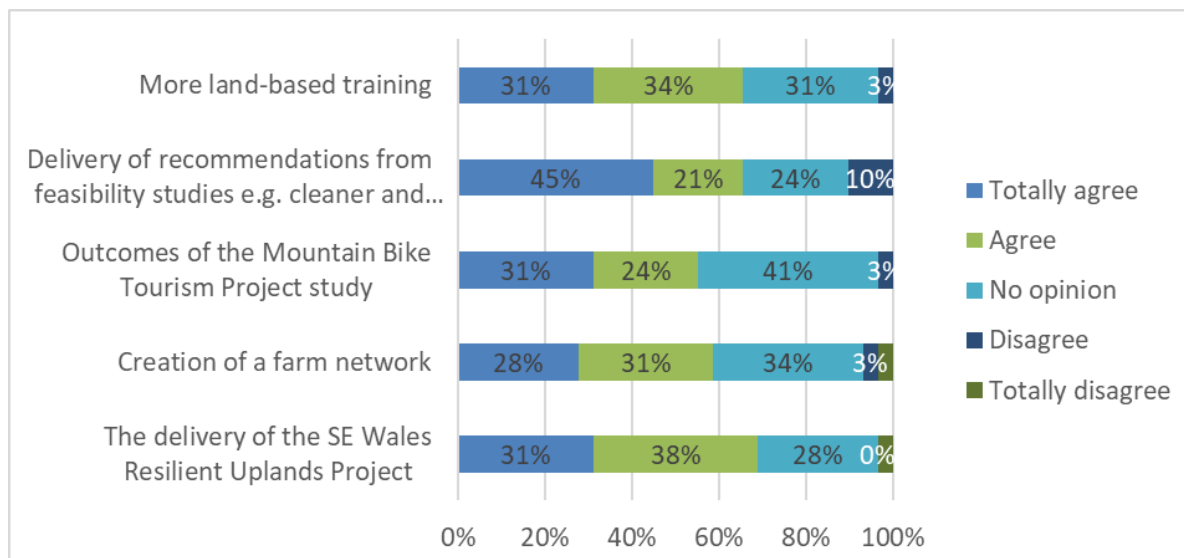
Networks and knowledge sharing – The Rural Project Officer’s local knowledge and networks have been fundamental to enabling cross cutting themes and ideas to develop, including those at a regional ‘landscape’ scale. However, in practice this has often meant that project beneficiaries have had limited exposure or needed to directly develop their networks with rural groups and land management stakeholders. For example, there is currently no direct contact between BWHEG and the Commoners Associations on the Blaenavon WHS. Justifiably, there are pragmatic reasons why communications and knowledge is channeled through Rural Project Officers, however the opportunity should be taken to build stronger networks directly between groups and individuals to create a more self-sufficient rural community e.g. farmers networks.

Communication and ‘buy in’ – project beneficiaries tend not to be aware of the ‘wider ecology’ of LEADER or how their project fit within the wider strategy. This is partly due to the Rural Project Officer acting as a filter for community/stakeholders during the funding and application process and the tendency for beneficiaries not to be too concerned with where assistance is coming from. As one beneficiary explained “RDP just seems too complicated to try to understand”. Opportunities exist to create an improved balance between Officer support that develops ideas and administers funds whilst at the same time encouraging ‘buy in’ from beneficiaries.

Cross cutting projects and themes – there is evidence that the RIS has been good at bringing together lots of ad-hoc activity and enabling grassroots organisations to develop their ideas. There has been a clear emphasis on land management and conservation themes although the direct links with other LDS themes are not always apparent such as promoting tourism and developing local produce. However, conservation and land management objective may not always be viewed as being in tune with promoting tourism for instance and further activity in developing this area could be undertaken. The South East Wales Resilient Uplands Project is an opportunity to tackle cross cutting nature of LDS themes at a more appropriate landscape scale. Figure 13 below identifies where respondents with

the delivery of recommendations from the feasibility studies being seen as a key priority, followed closely by the need for more land based training and delivery of the SE Wales Resilient Uplands Project.

Figure 13 - To what extent do you agree with the future focus of activity within this theme?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

Key Mid-Term Messages

- Encourage more direct networks to develop between landscape management groups, including environmental groups, farmers and Commoners
- Develop greater awareness with project beneficiaries and land management networks of the LEADER through explaining and promoting the 'wider ecology' of the programme
- Focus on opportunities to tackle the cross-cutting nature of LDS themes (food, tourism etc.) with land management at a more appropriate landscape/regional scale

4.3 Themes: Developing Local Produce/Promoting Tourism/Encouraging Enterprise

LDS Fit

Theme	Developing local produce
Aim	<i>To build a locally based, sustainable food industry, through creating opportunities in production, processing and distribution of locally grown food.</i>
Objective	Activities to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To build upon the mapping exercise undertaken in past programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Land Based Study Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To identify whether there are any new areas of produce for which the land can be used which could be sustainable in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Land Based Study Report – Orchards and U Project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish network links between land-based producers in Torfaen and surrounding areas to promote food and create closer working links with producers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Informal producer network – RIS Workshops
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assist producers to develop speciality foods which can contribute to the market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Some RIS support e.g. The Goat Lady – RIS Workshops
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote awareness amongst urban residents in Torfaen of what is produced on the land in rural areas of the County Borough, where it is available for retail purchase. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Taste of Torfaen – social media – On Your Doorstep event – Cwmbran town centre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish opportunities for direct sales of local produce through developing a series of festivals and events, including the development of Llanyrafon Manor Food and Craft Market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Big Pit Festival – On Your Doorstep event – Cwmbran town centre – Llanyrafon Manor Markets – Foodie Thursdays – Pontypool Market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To create a sustainable infrastructure for land-based food production in Torfaen, well-linked to sub-regional networks and markets, that improves supply chains and strengthens customer base. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Links to Agora project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop working links between producers to develop co-operative working practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Foodie Thursdays – Pontypool Market

Theme	Promoting tourism
Aim	<i>Increase the visitor offer through the coordination of tourism related activities.</i>
Objective	Activities to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To assess what potential increased tourism may have to provide sustainable economic activity in the rural areas of Torfaen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Heritage and church tourism through RCDF in Blaenavon through Workmen’s Hall and respective Chapels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To support the development of accommodation ventures to draw in visitors by linking in with Food Tourism Initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – RIS support for accommodation providers such as Oakfield B & B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undertake physical improvements to identified areas to enhance the appearance of the landscape and encourage visitors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – RCDF route and future SMS project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a series of local festivals and events to celebrate Rural Torfaen and educate local communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Big Pit Festival – On Your Doorstep event – Cwmbran town centre – Llanyrafon Manor Markets – Foodie Thursdays – Pontypool Market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further exploit cross boundary links to develop regional tourism activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agora regional project

Resources

Food Tourism and Tourism Thematic activity is resourced through a Rural Project Officer who supports project delivery, access to the Rural Innovation Scheme as well as engagement and co-operation with the regional sustainable supply chain – Agora. The officer also looks to linkages with the Land Management scheme specifically links with commoners and farmers and opportunities for short supply chain development.

Need/Development

The food tourism theme originated from a Land Based study by Ecostudio during the 2007-2013 programme period, with it leading to the formation of the Taste of Torfaen project during the Business Plan 2 period. This was also amplified as part of the final evaluation review in 2013, with a mini food tourism action plan produced by Miller Research (UK) Ltd. The Llanyrafon Manor project was also seen to form part of a food tourism offer with its tea room and events and activities in the grounds.

The current postholder joined the project in June 2016, with her previous background as World Heritage Site Manager and Project Officer for Forgotten Landscapes. The Rural Project Officer is based with Torfaen CBC’s Neighbourhood Services. Whilst there was an enthusiastic start to the project, the Rural Project Officer has come to realise that whilst there is an abundance of cake makers, there is a limited number of primary producers. Limiting factors are perceived to be the size of farm units, aging farmers, a perceived sense of apathy and lack of trust in the Rural Development Programme as they sometimes witness duplication of efforts as well as a demand for low cost products from local

consumers. On the latter factor, cost is seen as a key purchasing factor for local residents and for the hospitality trade, with farmers and producers not generating the volume to maintain buyer confidence leading to high costs of meat production that is not affordable. On the size of food producers, a member of the LAG commented that “*food producers are small in number and size and whilst we have provided events like On Your Doorstep and the monthly manor markets, the RDP can provide the water and try to lead people to it...it’s about hand-holding and growing confidence {SIC}*”. It was also noted by some interviewees that some food businesses don’t need support as they are already viable, have good growth and have been established for some time.

In relation to support and development, one strategic stakeholder commented that “*it’s about identifying producers, provide support, fill gaps in knowledge through feasibilities to understand our first steps. It’s not often tangible and visible, but it needs this*”.

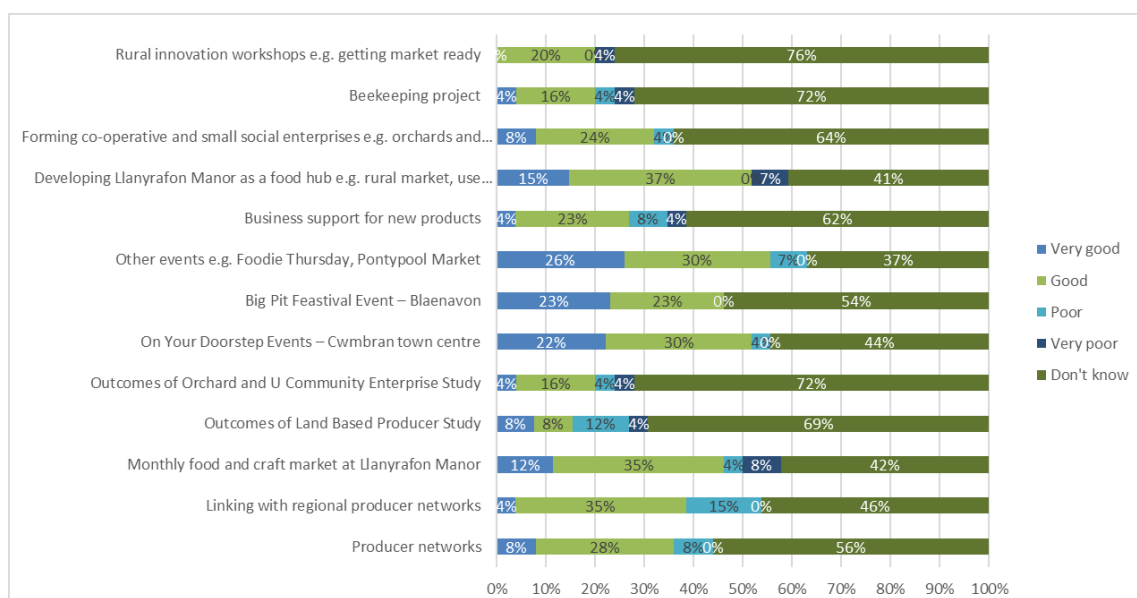
Activity

Activity to date, has focussed on groupings of activity including:

- Marketing/awareness raising events
- Community projects
- Developing Llanyrafon Manor as a food hub
- Feasibility/research studies
- Rural Innovation workshops

Figure 14 below shows that the success stories have been event focussed with Big Pit Festival, On Your Doorstep event in Cwmbran town centre and Foodie Thursday in Pontypool Market rated by approximately 46% as being very good to good. Some projects that seem to be still study based and not visible in rural places, and therefore not that well known include the Orchards and U project and the Beekeeping project with 64% to 72% of respondents not knowing these respective projects and/or have a low level of awareness. Those projects that are rated as poorer performers include the Land Producer Study and linking in with the regional producer networks, followed by business support for new products.

Figure 14 - Please could you rate the following types of activity that have been delivered so far?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

Activities Undertaken to Date

4.3.1 Food Tourism Events

Food tourism events range in scale from large annual events such as Big Pit’s Festival to the monthly markets at Llanyrafon Manor, with them tending to reach out to local people within the Eastern Valley of Torfaen with a primary objective of promoting local food and drink, buying local and helping to grow local businesses. The role of the Rural Project Officer is to engage with producers, signpost to opportunities, build networks and work towards a coherent identity using the established Taste of Torfaen brand.

Llanyrafon Market

Since the last rural programme, Llanyrafon Market has a new operator to manage the site, specifically its tea rooms, education and interpretative activity, the gardens and wider site. The markets have been held between 10am to 3pm on the last Sunday of each month for the last four years and are managed by the Manor leaseholder, currently occupied by Elm Tree Foods, with the support of the Rural Project officer. They are promoted through the Manor’s website, Facebook and on site. The formula for the market is a mixture of food producers, crafters, gifts and other local businesses that complement the market’s ethos. Businesses apply to Elm Tree foods with the necessary insurance and meeting specific requirements with stalls charged at £20 for pre-set up or £15 for traders who bring their own awnings and tables.

The Manor was visited on Sunday, 26th August 2018 as part of the evaluation. Whilst the weather was inclement there were approximately 16 stallholders set out in the grounds of the Manor. A central cabin managed by Elm Tree Food tends to anchor the site with the sale of hot and cold drinks. The stalls tend to

be situated within the ruins of the Long Barn and along the main path towards the Manor house. Even though there was heavy rain, there were some loyal customers who braved the elements with a sense that they were regulars to the market. Chris Jones Regeneration interviewed 6no. traders asking questions about their products and focus, business history, awareness of Taste of Torfaen and food tourism initiative, the role of the market and future priorities. The businesses ranged from cakes, chutneys, honey producers, jewellery, local meats, a blacksmith, cheese, soaps, amongst others.

Food producers have chosen to be in this sector for a number of reasons, either as a lifestyle change, a part-time hobby or part of farm diversification, amongst others. Most of the businesses are relatively new having been established in the last few years. When asked about their awareness of the Torfaen Rural Programme, specifically Taste of Torfaen most businesses see Tracey Marsh as the main face and point of contact, with her main role seen by one food business as *“to promote, signpost, grow and bring businesses together through the market, Foodie Thursday and the big success that was*

Image 7 - List of 2018 Manor Markets



Source: Create

Feastival at Big Pit". Communication is mainly by email and through informally meeting businesses at events, and whilst seen as being a challenge in the past some traders see a collective network as now being the right time to be formed. Such a network was seen by some traders as having a focus on training and development with opportunities to cross-markets and understanding promotional campaigns feeding in. When asked about Food Tourism in Torfaen and audience for such products, businesses interviewed didn't see the area, apart from Blaenavon as having a visitor demand with most seeing consumers from "urban" Torfaen, Newport and into rural Monmouthshire.

In reflecting on the monthly markets, traders tend to have the same pitch which helps in building a regular audience that are loyal, local and mostly from "down the road". The cost for attending is seen as reasonable and good value in return for the stall, location and associated marketing. A number of businesses have identified the specific need for a large sign off the A4042 roundabout to raise awareness to passing traffic. Some traders are conscious that Cotyledon markets, a Blas Lleol project which is supported by EAFRD, holds a market at Belle Vue Park in Newport on the same day as the Manor Market which has caused some displacement and split in consumer demand. Consequently, this has split the critical mass of Torfaen traders, with those businesses at Llanyrafon seeing a need for more producers, specifically those that tend to anchor a market such as street food, bread, meats/charcuterie, etc. On displacement of producers outside of rural Torfaen, a strategic stakeholder commented that "we used to have twenty producers in our network at the start, we now have a core group of six remaining". Another stakeholder commented that "there is a risk of markets over-heating in terms of numbers, with no spirit of co-ordination as well as chasing the same performance indicators".

In looking at future support and priorities, almost all of the businesses interviewed at the market see the need for digital and social media training as either a refresher or as a new training need. It was evident on the day of the market that some local businesses had used twitter or Facebook to promote ahead of the event as well as on the day, with others not doing so. Others commented on the need to understand how to cross-market and use appropriate tags⁷ to grow their following and feel part of a buy local movement. All businesses welcomed the proposed food directory with the need to promote the sense of place in Torfaen and show the types of food business which will help sign consumers to markets and events as well as within retailers. A couple of businesses are looking in the medium term to move production from their home into a food processing unit within Torfaen and will be seeking advice and incentives with this move from Torfaen CBC.

On Your Doorstep

On Your Doorstep has been a partnership between Cwmbran Shopping, Taste of Torfaen and Llanyrafon Manor Market with the main aim of bringing a rural market into an urban shopping environment and getting closer to consumers and raising awareness of local businesses and their products. The market has more of a food focus, held quarterly since May 2017 providing a shop window for local and small businesses. The last two events have seen 28 businesses attending with a nominal fee of £15 per pitch. Businesses interviewed at Llanyrafon Manor Market saw On Your Doorstep as a good event in terms of significant footfall, good demographic and provided the opportunity to test new products. The Rural Project Officer also sees such an event as "a place where

⁷ Social media meta tags are HTML tags that allow you get more engagements and re-shares.

traders jump up from a hobbyist to becoming businesses as they engage with shoppers and get a sense of what products are working”.

Image 8 - Images of Food Tourism Events Activity



Source: Various

Festival

The Big Pit Festival has been a collaboration between the National Museum of Wales and Food Tourism Project Officer within Create as part of a two year pilot. Due to the Project Officer’s past role within Blaenavon’s World Heritage site, she saw the opportunity to connect the High Street with the key visitor assets of the railway, local food and drink producers e.g. Rhymney Brewery and Big Pit.

The on-site food offering for Big Pit is mainly provided through the Miner's Canteen which projects a sense of place through its home cooked food of faggots and peas, Glamorgan sausages, and other locally sourced Welsh food. This experience could be promoted through a valley food trail or directory. In looking to creating a year round food tourism offer, the National Museum of Wales is developing a food strategy that will further promote Welsh food and its place in heritage and culture.

Father's Day was therefore seen as a different approach to an event, with Feastival seen as a mixture of steam, beer/cider, good food and pit tours.

The communications officer at the National Museum of Wales had previous contact with Tracey Marsh, Rural Project Officer when she worked for the World Heritage Site. Some five to six years ago they hosted an event called Love Food around St Dynwen's Day⁸ which didn't work well due to bad weather. After a debrief, the two partner organisations saw an untapped market of dads and fathers with the aim to put on an event where families can spoil them. From a Big Pit perspective this would target a specific segment of visitors that wasn't tapped into in terms of audience development with 50% of Big Pit's visitors being educational/school groups and UK wide/overseas with local families and day visitors also key to their regular visits.

The first Feastival event in 2017 was across the whole site, with the miner's canteen and the pit top courtyard used. 676 no. visitors came to the food festival with 300 no. of these direct visitors. A critique of the event felt it was too fragmented and needed more of a focus with the courtyard solely used in 2018 which created more of a buzz and a focus. There were 23 no. stalls at the event which comprised of street food (including curry, pizza and noodles), cheeses, chutneys, beer, gins, cider and cakes and confectionary. A 180% increase in visitors in 2018 saw 850 no. direct visitors with a further 350 no. taking the underground pit tour as well. The success was also seen to be a result of including the Blaenavon Heritage Railway, local brewery Rhymney bitter and the Big Pit site.

The role and resources of the Food Tourism Project officer is seen as significant with the event not happening without her support. This included the development of a joint communications plan, health and safety paperwork, advertising and promotion⁹, booking food businesses, loan of gazebos and hire of generators.

For 2019, the plan is to revert back to a wider site event as Feastival starts to grow with the objective of people exploring more. The National Museum of Wales also has an events team that is focussed on growing visitor based events at Big Pit that re-enforces food heritage and sense of place through its various sites. This event is a good example where Taste of Torfaen has provided initial support and has pump-primed with the National Museum of Wales starting to take it on more.

Foodie Thursday

This initiative has been led by Taste of Torfaen to meet a number of mutual objectives. Firstly, to promote local food businesses to Torfaen residents by targeting one day in a month that becomes known to customers, builds a following and takes traction of its own. The other objective was to focus on Pontypool Market as a key hub that would draw in shoppers on a day of the week when there is not an outdoor market, resulting in additional footfall that would not normally be generated. This

⁸ St Dwynwen is the Welsh patron saint of lovers

⁹ £1700 was provided by Create towards marketing and promotional material

also benefits other permanent market businesses with linked expenditure, potentially introducing new customers and creating a buzz in the market.

Taste of Torfaen provides tables and stalls within the market for free to Torfaen food businesses and to other food businesses that are located outside of the County Borough that may meet a specific product gap that cannot be met locally. This complements the objectives of the Agora regional supply chain project.

As part of the evaluation, Chris Jones Regeneration visited Foodie Thursday on the 6th September 2018. Held in Pontypool Market, the Foodie Thursday hosted approximately 10 producers tending to occupy the lower half of the market with a mixture of cakes, confectionary, chutneys and chilli sauces, fresh meat, vegan savoury products and artisan hot chocolate products. 60% of businesses are located in Torfaen with some businesses based in Aberdare, Bedwas and Chepstow. Taste of Torfaen had a presence with a pop up banner, information and officers in attendance to speak to producers and shoppers. On the day of the event, Taste of Torfaen staff were sharing tasters in the nearby Civic Centre foyer for Council employees as a way of promoting local food. A representative from Menter a Busnes was also present networking with businesses as part of the regional Agora project.

Image 9 - Images from Foodie Thursday



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration

A number of traders were interviewed as part of the evaluation. Some of the traders were interviewed at Llanyrafon Manor, so the discussions focussed on other businesses represented. When asked about their awareness of the Create rural programme, most had engaged with Taste of Torfaen, listing events such as On Your Doorstep and Festival. One business met the Rural Project Officer through a Communities First meeting which helped with marketing support and signposting to food hygiene. Support received from Taste of Torfaen includes social media promotion, informal networking, help with setting up Facebook page administration, access to markets and events and providing advice. One business said that they benefitted from a trip to the Malvern show where they picked up tips and learnt from other producers who travelled within them.

When asked what food tourism means to them as businesses in Torfaen most saw Blaenavon as the key opportunity for this with the remainder of the Eastern Valley about local people and getting them to buy locally sourced and made food. One trader who makes beautiful ice slices said "I make my cakes using free range eggs from a farm in Pontypool. People need to know what's on their doorstep".

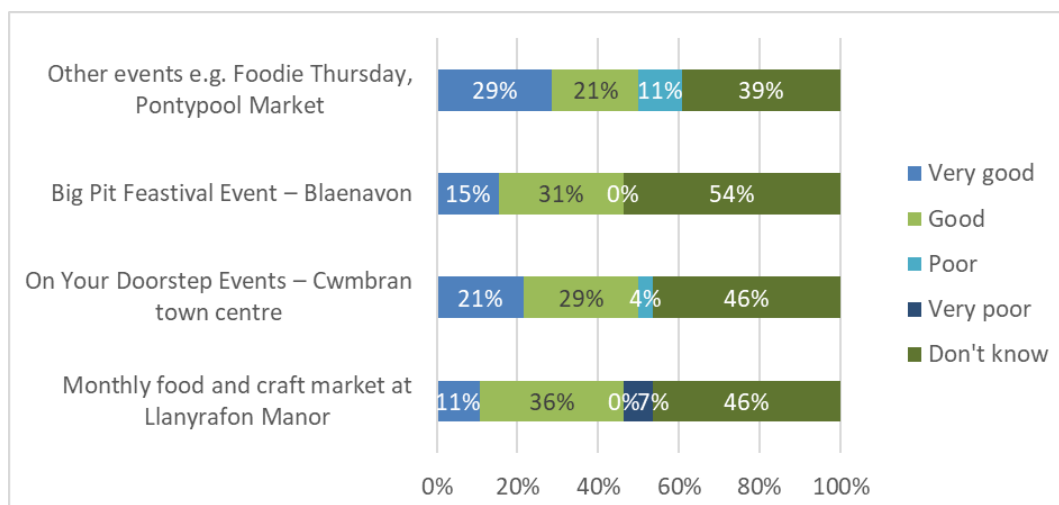
A permanent trader in the market who runs a bakery stall said that the experience needs to be about the community e.g. an afternoon tea, that visitors can also get immersed in.

The Foodie Thursday experience was seen as positive by all traders, even though there had been a lull, before the summer. Most recognised a resurgence in marketing and promotion, with the day being a success in terms of sales and visibility. The event has built a loyal following with the market seeing new shoppers who wouldn’t have visited before. Face to face engagement and talking to the producer is seen to be key to the personality and story of food based products with businesses sharing their knowledge, care and passion for what they do. One trader commented that *“the exchange between producers and shoppers leads to banter and a good market atmosphere”*.

On future support and the role of Foodie Thursdays, most agree that monthly works in terms of frequency of the event with more marketing support, cross-marketing through a Facebook page and the suggested food directory being a good idea. As with traders in Llanymorfa Manor Market there is an appetite for a forum or network as confidence is starting to build. For future development a strategic stakeholder commented on the need to extend the market experience with regular chef demonstrations, which signs people to permanent and pop-up market producers/traders, with simple menu cards and Taste of Torfaen bags.

Figure 15 below shows that almost 50% of respondents tend to rate producer based events as very good to good with only the monthly food and craft market at Llanymorfa Manor open to some criticisms with only 7% of respondents rating it very poor.

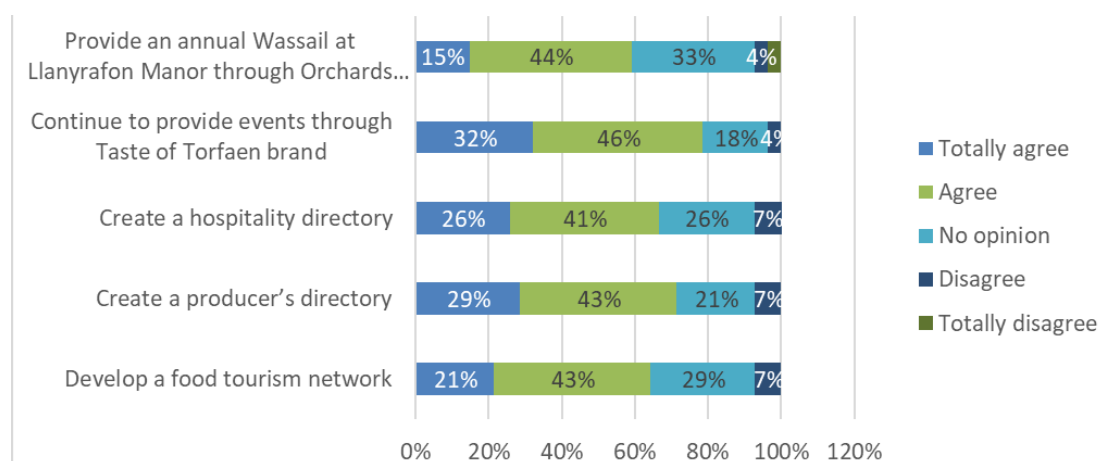
Figure 15 - Please could you rate the following types of activity that have been delivered so far?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

Figure 16 shows where stakeholders and beneficiaries see future focus with continuing Taste of Torfaen branded events, followed by the creation of hospitality and producer’s directory, with a food tourism network seen as supporting these tangible outputs.

Figure 16 - To what extent do you agree with the future focus of activity within this theme?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

4.3.2 Land Based Study Report

Cotyledon Business and Management CIC was commissioned by the Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) RDP Team to research and develop an action plan for the development and supply of land based produce, specifically meat products in Torfaen. The study was designed to be an update on the mapping exercise carried out by Eco Studio in 2012. The study sought to establish an action plan that included i) a current and referenced database of all land based producers, farms and smallholdings in the County (with a focus upon the 9 rural wards) ii) a clear delineation of meat production by type in the County and other segments as required iii) evidence from land based producers on their views and willingness to participate in a Torfaen Farming Network iv) identified training needs of land based producers to improve business skills and resilience v) identified practical needs to overcome challenges and barriers of land based producers in terms of routes to market and participating in diversified markets to improve business resilience and vi) identified best practice and appropriate models for testing. The study through its SWOT analysis identified the following opportunities:

- Brexit – the need to change
- Agora a regional supply chain project – training, follow-on activity, engagement
- Sustainable Management Scheme – Resilient Uplands – practical aspects, support and follow-on activity, engagement.
- Farming Connect, Menter a Busnes and other training
- Succession surgeries and other courses to encourage change
- Sub-Saharan / Asian market for undervalued meat products
- Local butcher liaison and links with farmer markets regionally, festivals etc.
- Connections with main catering companies
- Collaboration to develop response to LA procurement processes
- Environmental focused grants alternative approaches to farming
- Wales Food and Drink drive to improve knowledge and brand of local provenance

The study concluded that *"barriers were many and complex, requiring ongoing and wider collaborations, many of them structural in nature in order to identify and reach new routes to market as well as sustain the sector locally"*. As documented earlier in this report, the gap between the consumer perception of local produce and farm's ability to meet changing consumer behaviour, the consumption of local produce will remain unknown, undervalued and perceived to be within the gift of the middle classes.

As stated by the Rural Project Officer, there is a lack of trust and fatigue in the sector, barriers of terminology and language between stakeholders and farmers which recognises there is a problem and the market is diminishing. Trying to break down these barriers, the study found a small appetite for developing a network and numbers could be increased with sensitive discussions and connections made with already engaged farmers, but this need to be practical in nature and identified to achieve physical change. There is a need for the supply chain development scheme to have greater visibility and coordinated approach at the local level such as through Agora.

Key recommendations from the study included:

1. Work with Agora and Sustainable Management Scheme to establish a Torfaen Agri network on similar terms to the Caerphilly model and arrange for cross county collaboration at least twice yearly
2. Succession and apprenticeship or buddy scheme to introduce new people to farming
3. Challenging or adopting NZ model and creating method to influence UK Government
4. Natural collaborations – on a practical basis, building from trusted relationships
5. Identify and demystify value of environmental focused agricultural grants
6. Strengthen and encourage take up of Peer-to-peer learning and communication, connections with Farming Connect etc to organise relevant training programmes
7. Tap into Sustainable Management Scheme to expand Common land treatment and seek to allocate an annual fund for farmers to subscribe to so that the number of hectares of bracken on common land can be managed

4.3.3 Orchards and U Project

The opportunity around orchards came about as Torfaen Council had planted some 200 fruit trees across a number of its sites e.g. Greenmeadow Farm, as part of a Nature Fund project. The orchards are now establishing and are beginning to develop a useable crop of apples and other fruit such as cherries, plums, pears and gages. This was seen as a positive intervention by the Team Leader for Environmental Projects at the Council as it brings an urban audience discussing a product that is mostly associated within a rural setting. He continued on this point by stating *"Torfaen has a unique relationship between key urban settlements with its rural environment at the end of people's back gardens. It also has pockets of deprivation and limited access to services that an RDP focus can unlock"*.

In March 2018, Consultancy Coop completed the "Orchards and U Community Enterprise Plan" with their main brief to i) undertake baseline information ii) develop a feasibility assessment iii) undertake market research and iv) develop a 5 year business plan.

The client group for the study comprised of Torfaen Training, Blaen Bran Community Woodland, Greenmeadow Community Farm, Croesyceiliog and Llanyrafon community council and several smaller friends' groups. The 'partnership' has an interest in fruit production from planting new orchards to seeking to create an income from established orchards. The partnership also has training facilities in the form of kitchens, educational rooms, some orchard management equipment, storage facility, training development expertise, land management expertise and a communications resource.

The report concluded that due to the low volume and wide variety of fruit trees, a commercial operation would not be viable. It therefore recommended that a Community Enterprise, based around existing community organisations, using volunteer labour for many tasks which could

carry out activities such as training (pruning and care, harvesting, preparation of juices / jams / dried fruit etc), hire of equipment for juicing and drying, community apple days and work with schools to raise awareness of fruit, horticulture and how fruit can be turned into longer-lasting food.

Within the report, Llanyrafon Manor was seen as a potential hub for education, community outreach as well as the nearby SINC site which has a variety of fruit trees and for events such as Apple Days and Country Fairs. There are other community based sites across the County Borough but there could be further opportunity to grow fruit trees within the new critical care hospital being built in Llanfrechfa, within the South Sebastopol site, golf courses and across public amenity space.

In taking the proposal forward the Team Leader for Environmental Projects at the Council wishes to extend the partnership to include Bron Afon Housing Association, Garnsychan Partnership and some small-holders that could help form stronger linkages into the Land Management activity. A wider physical reach could assist with the volume of fruit, community engagement and importantly link with local schools that in addition to growing and harvesting can also understand the "sugar trail" through a hands on educational programme. This type of project activity is seen to be a key link between land management and the promotion of food that could appeal to visitors through fruit based festivals as well as providing a community venture that harvests, processes and educates residents and community groups. A key consideration going forward is the capacity of the Team Leader for Environmental Projects, with the need to explore a dedicated post to help further develop and deliver.

4.3.4 Business Support (Rural Innovation Scheme)

On business support, the main route has been through the Rural Innovation Scheme (RIS) which has moved away from grants to mentoring, training and feasibility studies. This has been provided for local guest houses and B&Bs, public houses, local soap producers with course provided by Lantra¹⁰ through the Getting Market Ready theme, in addition to understanding Food Tourism as a product.

Image 10 - Apple Pressing - Community Orchard



Source: Garratt Community Orchard, Kent

¹⁰ Awarding body and land based and environmental training

Whilst this has plugged specific skills gaps and tested out new ideas and approaches, a number of small businesses keep coming back to the need for small pots of money that help with their digital presence, small processing equipment and or marketing material that are not within reach from existing government programmes especially those in the tourism trade with Visit Wales’s Tourism Product Investment Fund, Tourism Innovation Support Scheme and Tourism Amenity Investment Scheme too big and complex to apply for.

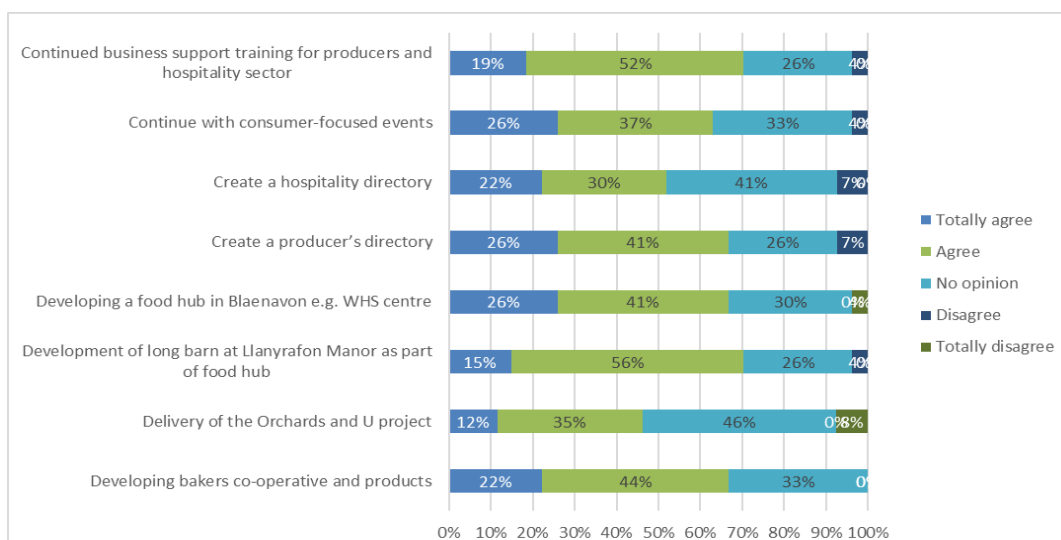
Future Activity

Figure 17 below indicates that survey respondents wish to see further and training for producers and the hospitality sector, followed closely by the development of the long barn at Llanyrafon Manor as a food hub, developing a food hub in Blaenavon and continuation of consumer focused events. Where people have less familiarity with the project, they tend to rate these less such as the Orchards and U project. It is recommended that this project is presented to the LAG and to other partners to discuss its findings and future feasibility.

In looking to future activity for food tourism, one strategic stakeholder representative sees a need to target the hospitality and accommodation sector such as small guest houses and bed and breakfasts. This could also be linked into sense of place training in terms of a Welsh breakfast and menu design. Accommodation providers that form part of a “Great Welsh Breakfast” campaign could tie into producers like Cwrt Bleddyn Farm (bacon), Bill King Artisan Baker or Randall’s butcher in Abersychan for its sausages, as well as local egg suppliers and jam makers. Oakfield Bed and Breakfast is held up as an exemplar of using local produce, with honey, chicken and eggs sourced within the area.

This could all form part of a valleys food itinerary that blends information for residents and visitors, with one interviewee outlining the need for Torfaen’s sense of place such as framing products around “granny’s store cupboard”, “miner’s canteen” and the “train heritage market”.

Figure 17 - To what extent do you agree with the future focus of activity within this theme?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

A more visible brand and product needs to also be developed with a proposed producer directory to be printed and available digitally and to links this into quarterly seasonal events. The directory could be made available in pubs, dentists, doctors’ surgeries and other public outlets as well as in visitor facing venues.

To build in sustainability around communication, marketing and promotion, there is a need to understand how Torfaen Tourism Association can help with engagement and dissemination but there needs to be an audit of their capacity and skills to see what can be offered.

As a bridge between community and commercial needs, the proposal for a community kitchen facility has been discussed within Torfaen and regionally as a place to develop new products, social enterprises and aggregate emerging producers in one place that benefits economies of scale. Whilst a full business case would need to be made in terms of mapping demand and current kitchen provision, such a project may provide an accessible entry into the food sector with reduced risk and costs.

4.4 Co-operation Projects

Resilient Uplands Project (Sustainable Management Scheme)

4.4.1 Resources

The project has been resourced at the funding application development stage through a Rural Project Officer, he has led the engagement and co-operation with the regional partners that has been a natural progression from his previous management of the Upland Commons of South East Wales Natural Resources Management Plan. The successful project will be resourced by a new Programme Manager position and through the regional partnership led by Torfaen CBC, involving Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Councils, Natural Resources Wales, Police, Fire and Rescue Services and Brecon Beacons National Park.

Image 11 - Welsh Uplands



Source: Welsh Government

4.4.2 Activities Undertaken to Date

The funding application has been developed including a long list of project activities and themes. These include: agricultural diversification and business planning; sustainable tourism and recreation; land management; cattle grazing; habitat management, fire breaks, peat creation/restoration; tree planting; wildfire plans, commoner skills training etc.

Many of these activities have benefitted from feasibility studies funded through the RIS (e.g. Mynydd Maen Rural Skills), and the development of networks at a strategic level such as the Landscape Crime Network.

4.4.3 Complementarity

The project addresses the sustainable future of the uplands and include: declining farm incomes, loss of grazing areas and habitat, loss of connection amongst local people, landscape crime and insufficient collaboration. Several of the identified solutions have been developed from the experience built up through the Rural Project Officer for Land Management and feasibility studies funded through the RIS and helps to form the basis of this project. It was developed through wide stakeholder consultation with the support of WG Nature Fund grant, and also through networks such as the Landscape Crime Network.

The project identifies a range of ecosystem that support upland farm enterprises, citizens and visitors, creating more resilient communities and habitats, and aligns with priorities within RDP Local Development Strategies. Working at a landscape scale across the three local authorities, the project aims support many of the themes of the LDS:

- Deliver land management to improve soils, water quality and regulation, grazing, biodiversity, and carbon storage;
- Strengthen relationships between stakeholders and Commoners to support upland communities;
- Build capacity through volunteering, training and community engagement

- increase farm competitiveness and viability through diversification and development of innovative business opportunities;
- Tackle the underlying causes of upland degradation caused by poor land management and anti-social problems such as fly-tipping, arson and illegal off-roading;
- Provide opportunities for quiet recreation and enhance the area's tourism offer.

Agora (Sustainable Supply Chains)

4.4.1 Need

Agora was developed in response to a collaborative assessment of supply chain development support which identified lots of duplication, with respective LAGs missing out on opportunities to collaborate. There were also examples of different funding restrictions with one LAG only allowed to work with groups of producers and not on a 1 to 1 level, with others open to working with individual businesses.

A resilient supply chain scheme was seen to be key to help farmers take the first step on the ladder with a not too prescriptive definition of *"land based goods, that are grown in Wales"*.

Agora primarily provides 1-2-1 Support, Specialist Workshops, Mentoring, Study Tours, opportunities to develop new contacts, collaboration and creating groups with like-minded individuals.

The project was approved in November 2017 and became operational in March 2018 with the project due to finish in August 2019.

4.4.2 Resources

The project is resourced through a Project Manager, three business development officers and a marketing officer. Advice and support is provided on i) steps to take before starting a business ii) costs iii) market research iv) legal requirements v) branding vi) sales & routes to market and vii) marketing & communications. Communication with farmers tends to be face to face through Livestock Markets, Farmers Markets and through NFU/FUW links.

4.4.3 Activities Undertaken to Date

In Torfaen, Agora has worked with the Rural Project Officer as she has signposted a number of farmers who wish to develop meat box schemes. This initially involved a workshop for local farmers with John James from Caernarfon who has 20 years' experience in meat box products. Three Torfaen farms have signed up to Agora support and advice which has helped with abattoir, cutting facilities and packaging.

Image 12 - Agora Marketing Material



Source: Agora

Agora and Taste of Torfaen meet on a regular basis with clients tending to be small in size and known at a personal level with no need for a database or any formal account management.

Current focus is at how primary producers can be linked into processing food businesses. This includes looking at off-cuts from farmers being used by pie-makers and also wheat being milled locally for bread.

Other project areas include orchards and how these can be aggregated across the region for wholesale use for cider production. There are also community based models that could achieve a good return from cider if they produce upto 7,000 litres being eligible for duty free. This could be community enterprise run with events and educational activities.

On promotion and marketing, Agora helps in advising clients which events to attend in terms of focus and audience as well as providing subsidised presence e.g. in 2019, nine stands at the Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells is being provided. The Agora Project Manager sees events as *"a good experience to foster food culture, stimulate collaboration as well as exposure of products"*.

4.4.4 Complementarity with Create

The benefits of Agora are seen to work and network cross-regionally which helps look at gaps in market, cross border partnering and championing entrepreneurs and trailblazers. The Agora Project Manager reflected on those areas which have a strong food identity. *"Success breeds success, sometimes this is due to physical aspects (soil and aspect in the case of wine) but it's also having an entrepreneurial spirit. An example of a "trailblazer" was provided with Ruth Davies of Cwm Farm at Rhydyfro near Pontardawe who started with a catering trailer in 2012 and now sells award winning charcuterie.*

Image 13 - Ruth Davies, Cwm Farm



Source: Cwm Farm Website

Agora can also look at facilitating group work around shared learning with access to Environmental Health Officers, advice on pricing, packaging and merchandise design.

Agora's Project Manager sees a proactive relationship with Create's Food Tourism project officer that is collaborative and making the right links. When asked about whether support was in the right form, Agora identified the lack of smaller capital grants that could help fit our food units and help grow a business in terms of processing.

Key Mid-Term Messages

- Barriers to local food production and food tourism product are still perceived to exist due to ageing farmers, general apathy and a lack of trust in Rural Development Programmes
- The local consumer base identifies with cost as a key purchasing factor but urban events and presence at markets is engaging residents with local producers and their story
- Events have been a success story especially Big Pit Festival (180% increase in visitor numbers in 2018) and On Your Doorstep
- Foodie Thursday at Pontypool Market is starting to build a presence and a following of new customers and supporting food related businesses
- Llanyrafon Market has a core crowd of stallholders and customers but has seen displacement of traders to other EAFRD funded markets outside of Torfaen, which has had an impact on diversity and critical mass of stalls and resultant experience
- Further training has been requested e.g. digital through a networking environment
- The Orchards and U study has shown the potential to engage local residents and groups in learning about fruit and production and a pathway in growing and buying local
- Co-operation activity has led to the Land Management officer securing the regional Resilient Uplands Project (SMS)
- The regional Agora (SSC) has been collaborative between the business development officers and local project officer which has supported signposting and providing more specialist advice on primary produce with three meat box schemes being delivered

5 Rural Community Development Fund

5.1 The Programme

The Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF) is an important element of the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 delivering under Measure 7 (Article 20 of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013).

Under RCDF the Welsh Government will offer grants, primarily aimed at LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) and other community-based organisations for investment funding across a wide range of interventions designed to prevent poverty and mitigate the impact of poverty in rural communities, improving conditions which can lead to future jobs and growth.

RCDF has three main objectives:

1. Promote social inclusion, poverty reduction, and economic development in rural areas
2. Help those most deprived in rural Wales and those that have limited scope to change their circumstances
3. Develop the resilience and capability of rural communities so that they are better able to cope with and adapt to change

RCDF covers activity relating to all 7 of the sub-Measures under Measure 7 which are listed below.

- 7.1- support for drawing up development plans and protection and management plans
- 7.2 - support for investments in the creation, improvement or expansion of all types of small scale infrastructure, including investments in renewable energy and energy saving
- 7.3 - support for broadband infrastructure, including its creation, improvement and expansion, passive broadband infrastructure and provision of access to broadband and public e-government
- 7.4 - support for investments in the setting-up, improvement or expansion of local basic services for the rural population including leisure and culture, and the related infrastructure
- 7.5 - support for investments for public use in recreational infrastructure, tourist information and small scale tourism infrastructure
- 7.6 - support for studies and investments for maintenance, restoration and upgrading of cultural and natural heritage
- 7.7 - support for investments targeting the relocation of activities and conversion of buildings or other facilities located inside or close to rural settlements, with a view to improving the quality of life or increasing the environmental performance of the settlement

5.2 Fit with LDS

RCDF is seen to fit with the other thematic aims and objectives of the LDS, being:

Encouraging Enterprise

- Create opportunities to develop sustainable enterprises by encouraging networking, training and mentoring
- To develop the skills of the population living in the rural areas of Torfaen so that they can engage in sustainable economic activity
- To implement a programme of training and mentoring for businesses and individuals

- To support business start-up and growth in the rural areas of Torfaen with in emerging sectors e.g. food, arts and craft, forestry, renewables

Community Action

- To achieve self Sufficient rural community leadership, which is well supported and also skilful in championing rural interests in Torfaen
- Exploit the connections between the rural areas of Torfaen and industrial and social heritage
- Develop Llanyrafon Manor Rural Heritage Centre into a Rural Community Hub
- Link people with unwanted and under developed land to create community growing initiatives
- Provide alternative ways to develop local rural skills. (i.e. training the trainers schemes)

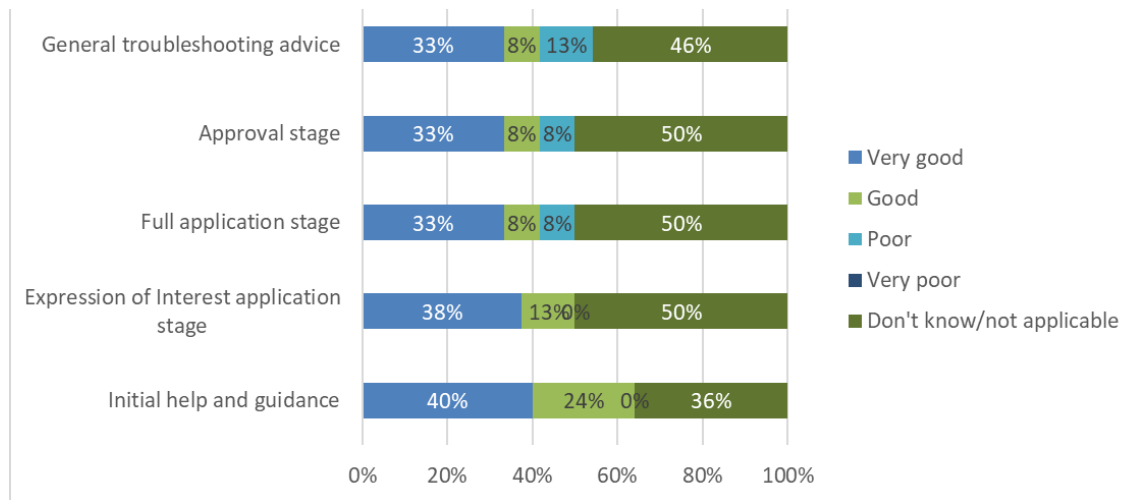
5.3 Application Process

The RCDF application process has been managed locally by Create, specifically by its Rural Programme Manager. This has happened in response to groups not having the skills to apply on their own and no local dedicated resource provided by Welsh Government for the programme. Create has therefore stepped in, with the Rural Programme Manager and Torfaen Council responsible officers providing knowledge, encouragement and support to applicants. Specific examples from respective organisation is outlined within the four projects that follow. There are however, some common themes that all applicants have identified:

- Simpler guidance that is user friendly and de-mystifies jargon and procedures;
- The Welsh Government assessment process, mostly at full application stage, tends to overrun specifically past the 90 days period with changes in staff at Welsh Government impacting on consistency and time taken;
- Payment in arrears by claims does cause problems with new organisations or enterprises in terms of cashflow;
- Lack of wider communication on RCDF; only known through Torfaen CBC and other projects that are connected.

Figure 18 shows that those organisations that have experienced the RCDF process tend to confirm that the full application and final approval stage to cause difficulties, with the initial help and EOI stage being better.

Figure 18 - How would you rate the following aspects of the support you have received to date?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

5.4RCDF Approved Projects

Table 5 - Approved RCDF Projects

Project Name	Main Contact / Organisation	Description of Project/Business	Type of Support Required	Project Stage	Total Project Cost	RDP Amount	Match funding
YETI	Gareth Jones, TCBC	Develop enterprise opportunities for NEETS through community growing and digital inclusion	Capital	EOI to be submitted June 16. Taken to LAG for comment in April 16. EOI Submitted June 16. EOI Approved Sept 16. Full application now approved, project underway	£30,000	£22,000	£8,000
Bethlehem Chapel - Blaenavon	Kate Fitzgerald, TCBC	to extend into a community facility, offering low cost child care, training, youth group	Capital	EOI to be submitted June 16. Taken to LAG for comment in April 16. EOI Submitted June 16. EOI Approved Sept 16. Full application submitted, awaiting final approval.	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Horseland CIC	Horseland CIC	To build a log cabin to extend their educational programme	Capital	EOI submitted October 16. EOI Approved Jan 16. Full app due July 17. Approval Letter received, commissioning for contractors.	£156,000	£90,000	£66,000
Busy Bees Play Group	Sue Driscoll	To restore the building to bring up to housing core standards.	Capital	EOI to be submitted June 16. Taken to LAG for comment in April 16. EOI Submitted June 16. EOI Approved Sept 16. Full application submitted, now approved.	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Blaenavon Workingmen’s Hall	Verity Hiscocks, TCBC	To restore the rafters in the roof	Capital	EOI Submitted Jan 17. EOI Approved April 2017. Full App due Oct 2017. Full application submitted, now approved.	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Blaenavon Workingmen’s Hall	Verity Hiscocks, TCBC	To seek alternative energy	Capital	EOI Submitted Jan 17. EOI Approved April 2017. Full App due Oct 2017. Full application submitted, now approved.	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Totals					£666,000	£496,000	£170,000

Horseland CIC

Horseland CIC was established as a Community Interest Company some two years having had advice from the Wales Co-operative Centre and Torfaen Voluntary Alliance on their setup as an asset locked and non for profit organisation.

Woodland Farm is located near Pantygasseg some 2 miles west of Pontypool. The 23 acres farm is mainly fields and woodland, co-owned by Cathy Pritchard and Lisa Owen with their previous careers as teachers in nursery schools and before establishing Horseland CIC they rescued horses.

5.4.1 The Project

The project is to provide a resource for primarily excluded children that would normally be attending pupil referral units as well as adults with learning difficulties. Using horses as the therapeutic medium, research has proven that it can help to manage behavioural issues, by controlling emotions and anger and improve communication skills. Some local authorities are sending pupils to private special need provision, sometimes out of area with significant costs for such placements.

Horseland CIC will provide both an indoor and outdoor environment with the horse as the key focus. Reading, writing and maths is also provided on-site with Cathy and Lisa trained in these subjects. A log cabin will provide the classroom space with ancillary dining room space, kitchen and toilets. Hand washing facilities are also provided for horse related activity. Outside a ménage, which is a riding arena, has been provided which is approximately 20 metres by 40 metres.

Image 14 - Image of Ménage Area - Horseland CIC



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration

5.4.2 Process

Cathy and Lisa became aware of Create when invited by the Rural Programme Manager to a meeting at Llanyrafon Manor some 2 ½ years ago which was attended by local rural businesses. They initially looked at lottery funding but RCDF seem to fit them better for them.

The initial EOI was filled in by Horseland CIC with advice from the Rural Programme Manager. Lisa and Cathy felt that the form was within their capabilities with the approval fairly smooth being all within the 30 days, but the Part 2 form was more complicated. The application was a steep learning curve with a

level of information and necessary procurement they had not experienced before. This ranged from seeking planning permission with associated fees, obtaining three quotes for the physical works with some costs sunk because of timing. There was also the added stress of owing the main supplier of the cabin Pegasus, the part payment ahead of installation. *"The main challenge has been finance and cashflow as a new community enterprise, as suppliers and fees need to be paid upfront"* said Cathy from Horseland CIC. The Rural Programme Manager made a case to Welsh Government that *"no way that a small business can have a reserve of this amount in their accounts"*. The request was considered and approved by Welsh Government with an up-front injection of grant to assist cashflow.

On proceeding to Part 2 of the process the main issue was the assessment going beyond the 90 days due to a heavy workload at Welsh Government, with the delayed decision causing a slip in the build programme for the project which had pressures on finances. A digital barrier to completing and uploading on-line applications and information to Welsh Government has been an issue with a broadband speed of 0.01mb providing a poor connection in their area.

Other issues also concerned the time to taken for claims to be processed with some anomalies over percentages rates and a software issue at Welsh Government that led to a back-log of claims. Lisa from Horseland said *"the claiming process has been ridiculous.... almost impossible and has had an impact on the Rural Programme Manager's workload"*.

5.4.3 Going Forward/Perceived Benefits

At the time of writing the evaluation, the ménage had been constructed with the log cabin due to be erected with base, cabin and electric/water being fed in.

In going forward, Cathy and Lisa have created a website and use Facebook to promote their services as well as word of mouth and contacts with pupil referral units across Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Newport and Monmouthshire.

The completed works will significantly help with the flow of custom, income and future sustainability with the physical improvements and facilities helping to extend the range of services. This includes a compliant facility with hand-washing and food preparation areas as well as access to an inclusive curriculum for users that cannot access formal education.

In looking at the rural location of Horseland, Cathy and Lisa can see a cluster of rural enterprises such as Bed and Breakfasts, other stables, small-holdings and feed supply companies that could informally network and work together. Informal mountain bike trails within the Tirpentwys nature reserve and forestry areas could also be a draw with accommodation such as glamping pods is to be explored in the future. When asked if they would have used RCDF funding for their Horseland project, Cathy and Lisa said *"whilst the process has been unnecessarily stressful, the outcome has been good. We never would have this money and the grant will be the making of what we do!"*

Bethlehem Chapel

Bethlehem Chapel was built in 1820 to meet the needs of the Welsh Congregationalists who had long worshipped in Blaenavon. In 1840 due to the existing chapel being too small, a new classically styled Bethlehem Chapel was built alongside the stream, the Nant Llechan, in 1840. The interior of the chapel was plain, in keeping with the many early 19th century non-conformist chapels, although the gallery was supported by eight cast iron piers, demonstrating local pride in the iron industry. During the second half of the 19th century, as the English language gained in strength and influence in Blaenavon, Bethlehem Chapel continued to worship in Welsh. Some English-speaking members decided to hold their own services, eventually establishing Lion Street English Congregationalist Chapel in 1867.

As the Welsh language declined, Nonconformist chapels across Wales, were forced to hold bilingual or English language services. Bethlehem Chapel, however, resisted this change for as long as possible and continued to hold Welsh language services until the early 20th century, making it the last chapel in Blaenavon to abandon the native language. Sadly, Bethlehem Chapel closed in April 2009.

5.4.4 The Project

The closure of the Chapel in 2009 led to its gradual deterioration with ceilings coming down and worries over damp and it being watertight. In finding a new life for the building the Town Council considered it as a venue for their Town Hall, but it had to be retained as a chapel.

Jill Stephens came to get involved in the Chapel as her late husband was a church support worker and saw the need for the Chapel not to be lost.

Their first project was to refurbish the former school room, specifically to improve the kitchen, provide a dining space and a flexible for groups to meet in. This was funded through a mixture of Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Town Team monies, Awards for All and other small grants. The space enables groups such as the Brownies, Arts group, Town Team, History group, Mothers and Toddlers, Lunch club, Dance clubs and evening meetings to be held.

In addition to the school room, a property improvement grant has been provided for the external façades of the buildings. The chapel's next focus has been on the main chapel internal space due to its poor state of repair.

Bethlehem Chapel's need for refurbishment is not only for community purposes but is seen as a building of Outstanding Universal Value within the UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) status for the town. It has been identified as part of the story, with it being the last church to speak Welsh in the town.

The project was therefore seeking support from RCDF for works to the roof and then a series of internal works to the main Chapel room. This included internal decoration, mechanical and electrical works, replacement of glass doors, heating and flooring and the safeguarding of this WHS asset. The works do not include the upper balcony area.

By bringing the space back into use, it would support a number of chapel and community activities. Groups such as the Youth Chapel, the ROC (Redeeming Our Community) multi-agency group would be regular users with also the Food Share project continuing in the space. Adding activity to the Broad Street area of the town centre, with indoor markets linked to the courtyard outside, as well as cheese tasting events and other town festivals.

5.4.5 Process

The Chapel came to RCDF as it was the only significant pot available due to other EU programmes going. The funding approach was also to match funds from Heritage Lottery (HLF) funding, the Co-operative Society and through crowd-funding.

Image 15 - Outside Bethlehem Chapel



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration

The starting point for engaging with RCDF was with the Senior Regeneration Officer for Blaenavon that had been delivering WHS project and town centre regeneration activity. The initial EOI was seen to be simple but there was need for support from the Congregation Federation Limited to co-apply as the Bethlehem Chapel Community Group was not a legal entity, which did cause problems in the early days with them having to reapply.

In completing the Part 1 and Part 2 application forms, the Chapel had problems in being provided the wrong Unique Reference Number (URN), and also be managed by four different Welsh Government case officers throughout the process which had impacts on time and consistency of assessment. Finances is also seen to be an issue with RCDF only allowing organisations to claim in arrears which could be become problematic with winter building risk costs and spreading cashflow across the refurbishment period. The other challenge was the timing of the HLF decision and RDP approval, with HLF approval conditioned in March 2018, waiting on Welsh Government's decision. On reflecting on the role of Torfaen County Borough Council, Jill said "*Kate (senior regeneration officer) can relate to the strategies and Welsh Government policies and has been key to mentoring us over the last few years*".

Recently the project has had support from a Contracts Manager who has been employed to monitor a series of HLF awarded projects for Torfaen CBC which will be a useful resource for tender advice and claim management.

The main lessons learnt have been around project management and the timetable for individual grants and the procedures the group has had to go through. Jill feels that this would have been far more difficult "*with not having Kate who has been nice to work with*".

5.4.6 Going Forward/Perceived Benefits

The completed project is seen to bring back into a chapel that is "*not any church*" says Jill "*but a place where all are welcome, providing a central place to reflect and a space for activities*". She also sees the planned works as "*a place to tackle Isolation, mobility and bring about cohesion that is cross age and gender [SIC]*." In addition, the Chapel will provide interpretation as part of the WHS story and be a visitor destination.

Going forward, there is a need within Blaenavon to grow the network of churches as places for the community as part of the WHS so that they become integrated. There is also the need for "connectors" such as the Food Tourism officer to look for cross-cutting activities that helps consolidate a food tourism offer and use RCDF financed projects as hubs or destinations for this.

Bethel Chapel

Bethel Chapel was established in King Street in 1879 being the oldest non-conformist Chapel in Blaenavon. The Kennard family who were ironmasters in the town have a significant contribution to build the Chapel with it being prominent in the community for the last 140 years.

The Chapel in the past has been home to its Sunday School, town and visiting band performances, the Women's Guild, Horticultural Society, monthly meetings of the Town Team, an election station, used by the Williams Fellowship for fish & chip suppers and an open house for befriending. Funerals have not been held in the Chapel for some years which has some distress for local families.

5.4.7 The Project

In recent years, the 200 year old school room has been renovated with new decoration, kitchen, rewiring, treated internal wall in addition to structural and damp roofing works to roof and gable end wall. The school room is in regular use by adult learning, computer clubs, craft sessions, birthday parties, baby showers and afternoon teas.

The RCDF project is to address the internal fabric of the main Chapel, specifically treatment of dry rot, installation of six new windows, two new staircases, roof and new ceiling an improved and accessible toilet. They are also looking to apply to Garfield

Image 16 - Image of Interior of Bethel Chapel



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration

Weston Foundation for new flooring and carpeting, and some new internal doors.

5.4.8 The Process

After unsuccessful Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery applications the Council's Arts officers spoke to the Deacon of the Chapel on the potential of using RCDF for the works. The Deacon, Janet Jones and Treasurer Rita Preece had their first meeting with the Rural Programme Manager in in 2016 with their EOI submitted in January 2017. It was initially rejected but after some encouragement from Nikki Williams, the Rural Programme Manager they reapplied with more of a heritage focus, in addition to community involvement. Janet speaking on the support said, *"Without Nikki's support we were down and needed constant encouragement with her listening and focussing on our key attributes."* They also received support from the National Churches Trust as well.

In December 2017, the EOI was approved, with them proceeding to Part 1. Welsh Government raised questions over liability insurance, safeguards that it would be retained as a chapel and conditions of recovery of costs. Quotes for the works were also obtained at this time. The key lessons for the Chapel was to also ensure the contractor was fit for purpose due to their previous roof and damp proofing experiences. Whilst completing the Part 1 and Part 2 applications the Chapel also applied to the Town Council (£3,000), National Churches Trust (£30,000), Torfaen Council's Members community fund (£na), as well as £2,000 from the Chapel's funds with the RCDF request being £128,000.

At the time of writing this evaluation report, the Chapel was expecting a decision from Welsh Government at the end of August 2018, with National Churches Fund to provide a final approval around November 2018. If RCDF is approved, the works are planned between January and August 2019.

5.4.9 Going Forward/Perceived Benefits

If the project is approved Janet and Rita see the finished works as *"retaining a close community for several more generations to come, ensuring the family values of the Chapel and its cohesion and not isolation."* It is also seen as part of the town's heritage trail with the need to work with other chapels to co-ordinate information and guided walks.

When asked if the funding package including RCDF wasn't available or a lack of staff time through Create they both said, "*we may apply elsewhere but we couldn't do it on our own, so may have to say bye bye to the chapel*". In going forward, they see the need for training on how to collect information for monitoring purposes and to need ensure a maintenance programme that ensures the completed works have a long-lasting impact.

YETI Project

YETI Project (Youth Enterprise in Torfaen Initiative) has been developed by the Engagement and Progression Co-ordinator at Torfaen County Borough Council. With a background in young people engagement, he has had support from the European Social Fund to develop an outreach service that is school based as well as for those that economically inactive. This has been mainly focussed on key barriers around mental health awareness, behavioural issues, parenting and helping young people with pre employment process.

Based in Croesyceiliog Community Education Centre, this range of services has helped to support young people, working with Careers Wales, Bridges into Work and has also linked into the Changing Gearz project in Griffithstown run by Torfaen Council.

5.4.10 The Project

Image 17 - Images of Bikes, Part of YETI Project



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration

The Project aims to develop entrepreneurial and personal development skills to help with future employment in the rural wards of Torfaen. This is based on a series of four micro projects that are focussed on film making; cycle repair; market garden production and computer repair. The main beneficiaries to be targeted are "*young people that are NEET and those at risk of leaving school with little or no direction or qualifications and target their personal and skill development including significantly looking at entrepreneurial training and self-employment knowledge and support*" as stated in the approved application.

The main expenditure is to purchase the equipment to facilitate training e.g. repair tools for IT activities. In relation to the cycle training project, RCDF will be used to purchase the cycle stands and tools and progress the bike repair training activities for the young people aged 11-24 using both outreach in key wards and basing key activities in the Changing Gearz Bike project. On market garden production, two market gardens, one in a north rural ward and one in the south. Other income that has been brought to the project includes £10,000 of generated by time invested by young people.

The project is developing relationships with feeder schools in Abersychan and Cwmbran with a proposed allotment scheme in Blaenavon primary school. Garnsychan Partnership is also looking into providing container polytunnel that can complement their food box scheme as part of the LIFE station allotment association which helps to harvest and produce, thereby selling and using produce within its café.

5.4.11 The Process

Awareness of Torfaen's Rural Development Programme was through email bulletins through Torfaen Council from the Create team. Gareth Jones, the Engagement and Progression Co-ordinator when working in Swansea he had involved in their Local Action Group through a youth mobile project. In scoping the project, the Engagement and Progression Co-ordinator whilst acknowledging rural wards saw that *"young people don't see themselves in a Community First ward or a rural ward"* as young people tend to mobile in terms of activities and daily lives.

The development of the project started in September 2016 with the EOI being developed and submitted. The assessment process was seen to working well, with the LAG suggesting minor modifications. Part 1 and Part 2 was submitted to Welsh Government with an approval issued in September 2017.

5.4.12 Going Forward/Perceived Benefits

The Engagement and Progression Co-ordinator see the main benefits to be generated from the project, stating *"it's about young people and their participation, taking them on a journey that supports their referral, makes them self-sufficient and provides accredited qualifications"*, he continued by finishing *"look at the market garden project – it's about dig and grow in all sorts of ways"*.

In going forward, Gareth sees the need to develop more integration across the rural programme with other projects and other regeneration/investment projects. A number of examples were given including using canal hubs (basins) as places to take up bike courses as well as using young people to assess cycle path upgrades using GoPro technology so that IT meets product testing. Digital skills were also seen as an opportunity with young people helping the Rural Programme with an enhanced web presence. Apart from web design, there are also opportunities to film projects such as orchard production, bee-keeping, rural crafts and events which promotes the scheme, shows best practice and knowledge transfer that is more accessible and animate.

When asked what would have happened if RCDF, Gareth said that *"we wouldn't have out the container in Garndiffaith"*. He concluded by stating that *"the Rural Development Programme is a small, creative and innovative approach that is focussed on local governance and decision-making"*.

5.5 Summary

With only six RCDF projects approved to date, and six pending full application assessment it is too early to look for any linkages across projects whether these be due to physical location or by issue that is being tackled. There are however opportunities for organisations to co-ordinate in Blaenavon, once works to Bethlehem and Bethel Chapels are completed, specifically community venue space for well-being and activity, the local heritage story (interpretation/trails) and the Churches Working Together (ROC) initiative. The Horseland CIC project can also become a rural centre of excellence for the use of natural horsemanship to grow young people and adults and provide an enhanced pathway for learning and future employability. Finally, the YETI project can cross fertilise other Leader and RCDF activity with the four micro rural projects immersing young people through ICT, cycle repairs, film and market gardening as well as providing cross-cutting promotion and use of media across Create projects and its website.

5.6 Other RCDF Proposals

Other applications that have been approved at EOI or waiting full application decision are shown in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 6 - RCDF Applications that have EOI Approval

Project Name	Main Contact / Organisation	Description of Project/Business	Type of Support Required	Project Stage	Total Project Cost	RDP Amount	Match funding
Blaenavon Enterprise Centre	Tom Wood	Develop an SME Enterprise Centre	Capital	EOI Submitted Jan 17. EOI Approved April 2017. Full App due Oct 2017.	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Forgeside Rugby Pitch	Steve	To restore the changing rooms and sort water logged pitch	Capital	EOI Submitted March 2017. EOI approved, full application May 18	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Sports Grounds Blaenavon	Cllr Alan Jones/Kate Fitzgerald	To refurb the changing rooms	Capital	EOI submitted October 2017. Not successful, will resubmit when next window opens	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Totals					£480,000	£384,000	£96,000

Table 7 - RCDF Application at Full Application Pending Decision

Project Name	Main Contact /Organisation	Description of Project/Business	Type of Support Required	Project Stage	Total Project Cost	RDP Amount	Match funding
Llanyrafon Manor Rural Heritage Centre	Communities, TCBC	Rural Community Hub - to restore the long barn into a flexible community space	Capital	EOI to be submitted June 16. Taken to LAG for comment in April 16. EOI Submitted June 16. EOI not successful Sept 16. Resubmitted Oct 16. EOI approved Jan 17. Full application submitted, awaiting final approval.	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Llanyrafon Manor Rural Heritage Centre - Digital Inclusion	Elm Tree Food/ LMCg	To install digital heritage throughout the site and an internet cafe	Capital	EOI Submitted Jan 17. EOI Approved April 2017. Full App due submitted, awaiting response	£30,000	£24,000	£6,000
Bethel Chapel - King Street	Bethel Chapel	to restore the building and roof to expand community usage	Capital	EOI submitted Jan 17, not successful. 2nd EOI submitted in October 2017. EOI now approved. Full app due December 2018	£160,000	£128,000	£32,000
Totals					£350,000	£280,000	£70,000

Key Mid-Term Messages

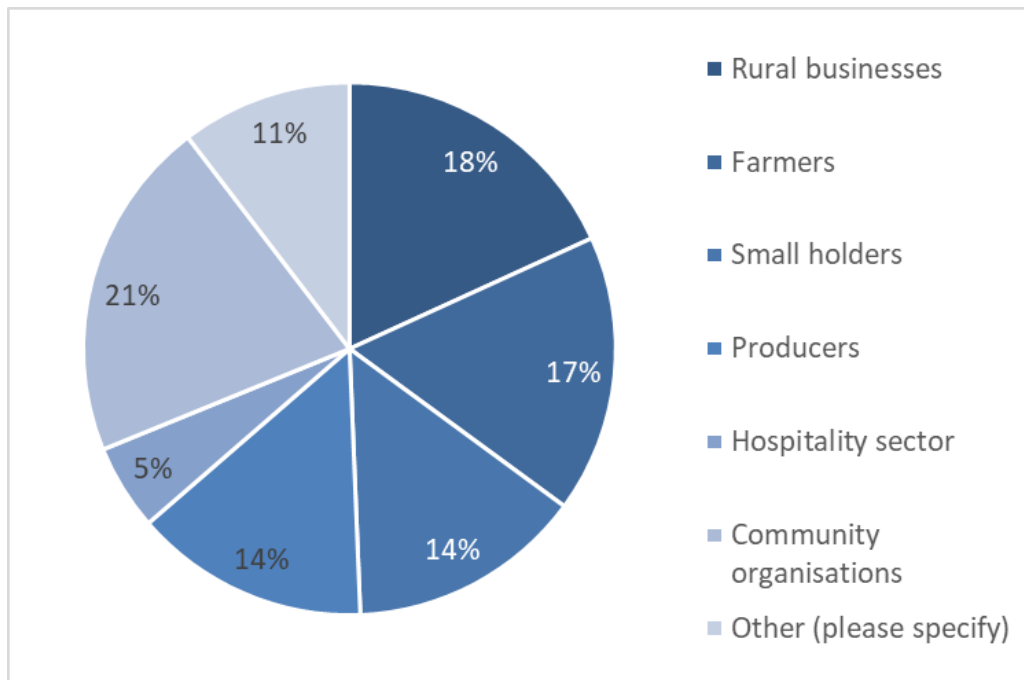
- Local support not accounted for in the programme management of RCDF which has had a resultant impact on Create's Rural Programme Manager and Torfaen CBC officer time
- Applicants have needed support at EOI and full application stage which has been a steep learning curve for most groups and organisations
- Time taken to assess has overrun with changes in Welsh Government not helping process
- Payment in arrears has caused difficulties for some organisations in terms of limited reserves and cashflow
- Too early to look for linkages between projects but there is a need to look for organisational networking and activity integration to avoid duplication and also link in Leader project activity e.g. YETI project
- There is a need for training from RCDF approved projects specifically in collecting and monitoring data
- £496,000 in RCDF grant secured to date from Welsh Government

6 Overall Summative Achievements – Mid Term

6.1 Beneficiaries

When survey respondents were asked who the main beneficiaries are, community organisations, followed by rural businesses and farmers were seen as the main recipients of support with small holders and producers grouped next and the hospitality sector last.

Figure 19 - Who do you perceive as being the main beneficiaries of the activities carried out to date by Create, since 2015?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

6.2 Outputs

At mid-term point it is hard to understand and identify physical or tangible outputs as the focus of the programme has been on training, mentoring, networking, feasibility studies to fill gaps in knowledge, promotion and awareness raising.

Qualitative

Comments from stakeholders and beneficiaries are detailed in section 4 and 5 to this report.

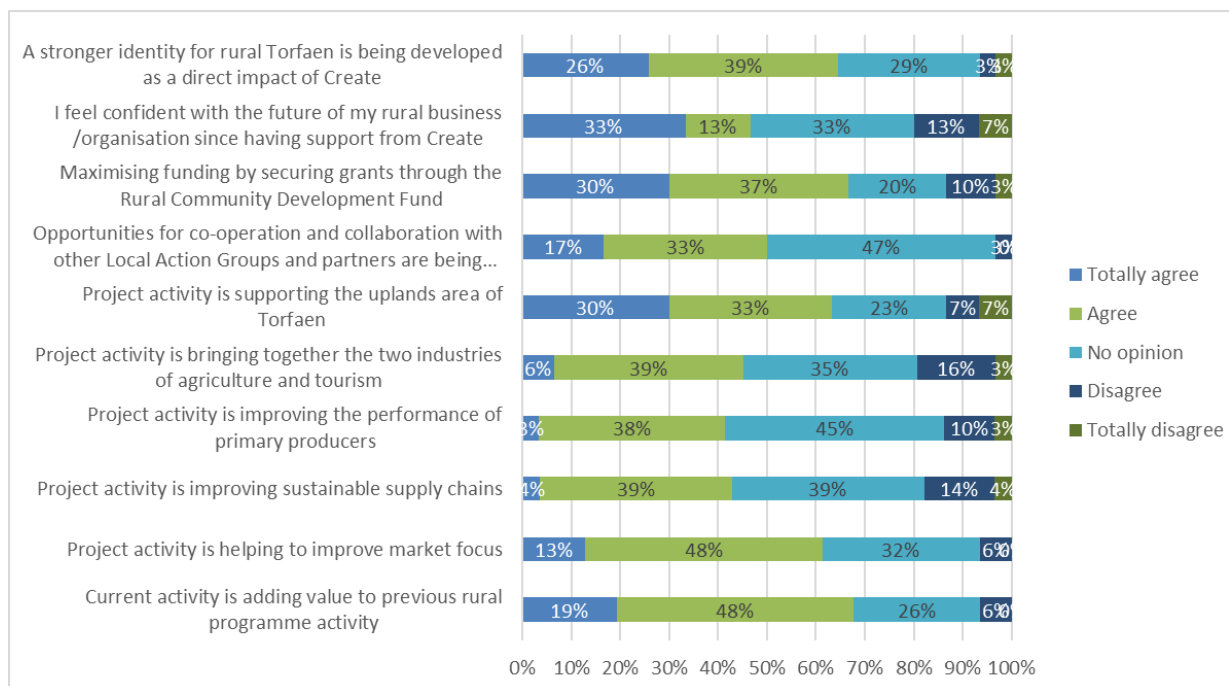
On **land management** and **food tourism** most respondents to the evaluation survey see the programme as raising awareness, providing engagement opportunities and networking. For land management, they see that it has led to some environmental improvements and significantly the recent success in the SMS Resilient Uplands project.

The Developing Local Produce theme has seen through food tourism resources to raise awareness of the “locale” and localness, support for local food producers, with local markets seen as bringing producers from varying backgrounds together in the community.

At a strategic level, respondents have commented that Create is “*making Torfaen rural awards a better place to live*” and it has “*given hope to communities in need*”.

Figure 20 shows how people rate aspects of the Create rural programme since 2016. Where there is most consensus on where progress has been made includes current activity is adding value to previous rural programme activity and is helping to improve market focus, maximising funding by securing grants through the Rural Community Development Fund, followed by rural Torfaen having a stronger identity as a direct impact of Create. Areas where stakeholders and beneficiaries see the programme falling short include project activity not seen to be bringing together the two industries of agriculture and tourism and some rural businesses not feeling confident in future since having support from Create.

Figure 20 - To what extent do you agree with the following statements on progress made to date?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

Quantitative

Figure 21 shows that under Strategic Theme 1 - Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources it has met 40% of the number of information dissemination actions/promotional and/or marketing activities to raise awareness of LDS and/or its projects, 17% of stakeholders engaged and 50% of participants supported. Actions include:

- Develop training and mentoring schemes for farmers and landowners
- Providing a programme of walk and talks relating to the heritage value of the uplands
- Develop action plans on land based production e.g. commercially viable harvesting for bracken – composting, bedding, fuel, etc

Figure 22 shows that under Strategic Theme 2 - Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains, it has met half of the feasibility studies required, 40% of the number of information dissemination actions/promotional and/or marketing activities to raise

awareness of LDS and/or its projects, with 40% of participants supported and 17% of stakeholders engaged. Actions include:

- The production of its land based feasibility study
- Identify local festivals and events that can be used as a marketing tool to promote produce to Urban and Rural residents
- Facilitate local producers to attend Llanyrafon Market
- Link in with regional teams to create regional producer networks

Figure 21 - Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources

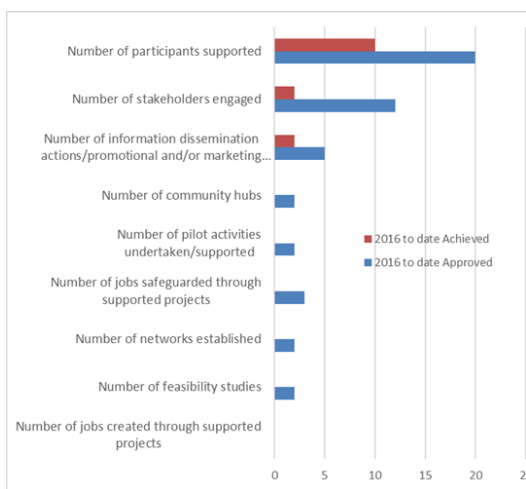


Figure 22 - Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains

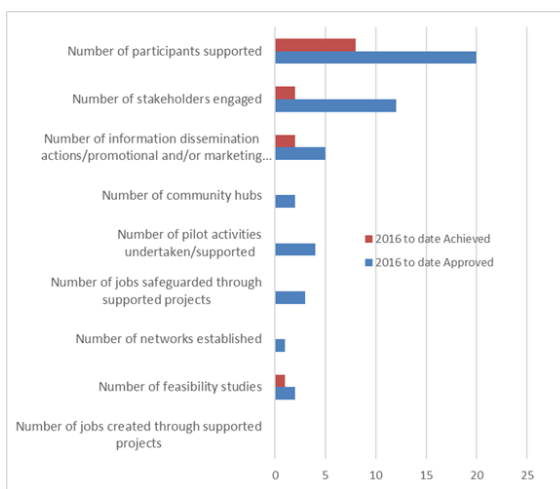


Figure 23 shows that under Strategic Theme 3 - Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services that 25% of participants have been supported, 17% of stakeholders engaged with and 40% of the number of information dissemination actions/promotional and/or marketing activities to raise awareness of LDS and/or its projects met. Actions include:

- Facilitate food producer’s attendance at local and regional festivals and events e.g. On Your Doorstep, Big Pit Feastival
- Develop and deliver toolkits for Rural Innovation Scheme – e.g. getting market ready, what is food tourism
- Regional co-operative working

Figure 24 shows that under Strategic Theme 4 - Renewable energy at community level that 25% of participants have been supported to date. Actions include:

- Mapping existing and studies to identify the willingness of businesses and possibilities for co-operative working between business and the community on farms to increase the use of micro renewables

Figure 23 - Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services

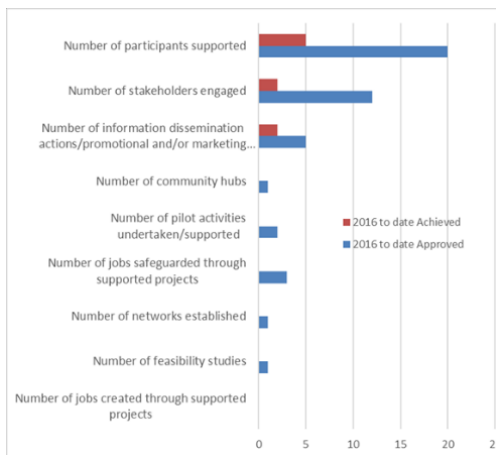


Figure 24- Renewable energy at community level

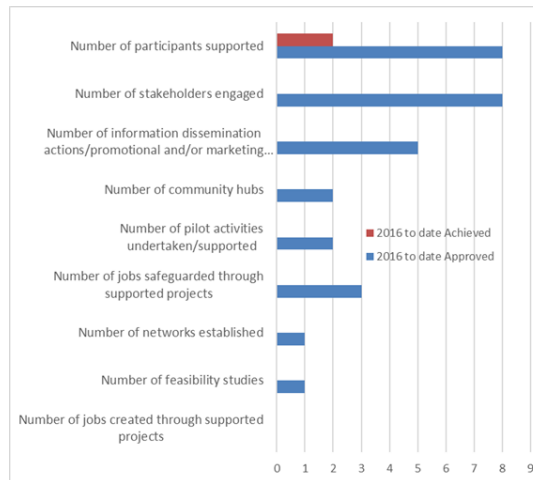


Figure 25 shows that under Strategic Theme 5 - Exploitation of digital technology that 10% of participants have been supported to date. Figure 26 show that no co-operation targets have been met to date.

Figure 25- Exploitation of digital technology

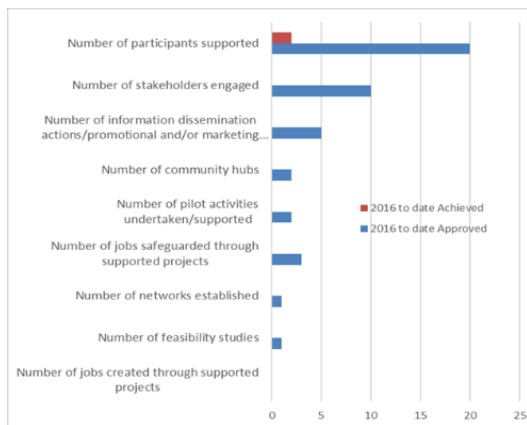
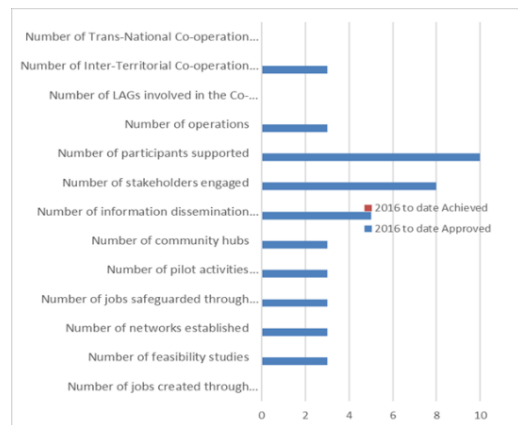


Figure 26 - Co-operation

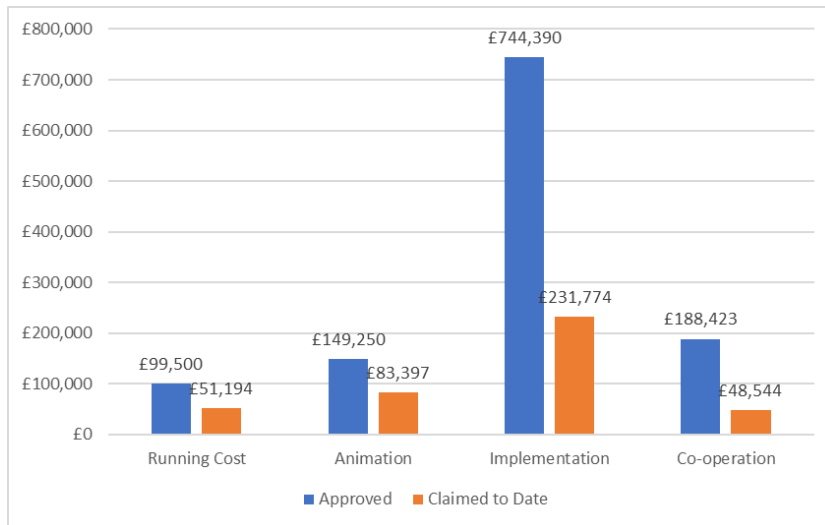


6.3 Financial Progress

Leader

Figure 27 shows the approved amount of funding from Welsh Government by sub measure and the claim position as of September 2018. The chart shows that 51.5% of running costs has been incurred at this mid term point, 55% of animation costs, 31% of implementation and 26% of co-operation activity.

Figure 27 - Welsh Government Offer by Sub Measure and Financial Claims to Date

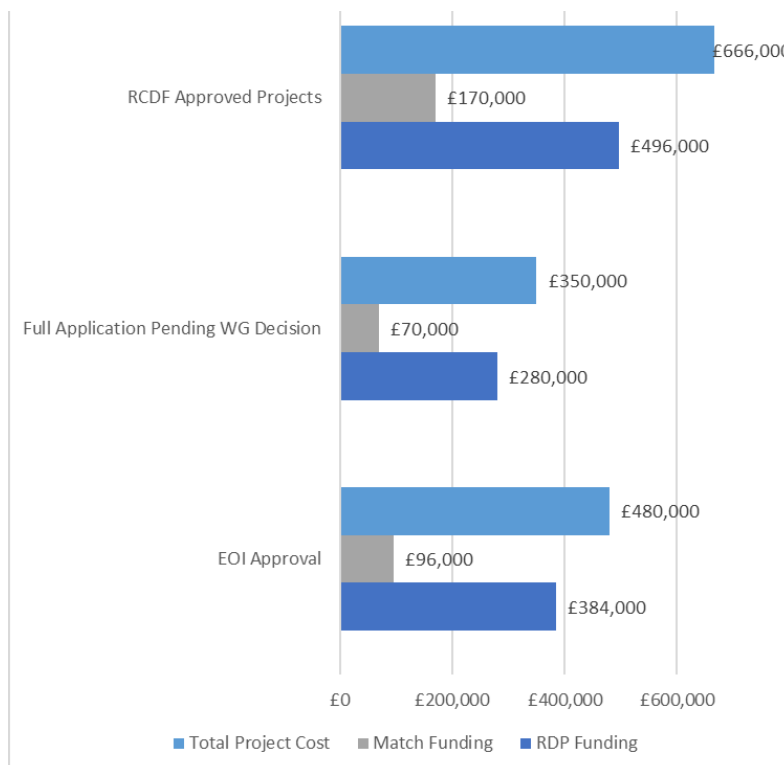


Source: Welsh Government February 2017 Letter and Claims Position, September 2018

Rural Community Development Fund

Figure 28 shows the position on RCDF funding that Create has helped to support organisations to apply for. It shows that £496,000 of RCDF grant has been secured with £170,000 of match funding leading to the four projects totalling £666,000. Subject to approval from Welsh Government there is a potential to draw in a further £664,000,000 from RCDF if projects met the business case checks.

Figure 28 - EOI and Full Applications - Pending WG Decision



Source: Create

7 Conclusions

7.1 What have been the main successes to date?

Rural Innovation Scheme (RIS) - strong delivery of feasibility studies and testing of ideas through the distribution of the RIS funding. The role of the Rural Project Officers have been key to bringing together lots of ad-hoc activity and developing this into a more strategic approach.

Rural Project Officers – the posts have been key to acting as the advocate of LEADER with its target audience and communities at a time when awareness and understanding of the overall programme is perceived to be low outside of the Local Action Group. Key to the success has been the ability of the officers to take local knowledge and networks and mould them around the programme, at the same time develop some integration between projects. Clearly, there has been a need for this level of professional input to turn ideas into activity that the LAG and Local Authority understands, particularly when there are barriers to building capacity e.g. procurement rules, lack of IT skills, and apathy in rural community.

Events & Raising Awareness – some notable events such as On Your Doorstep and Big Pit Festival are getting residents and visitors closer to Torfaen produce and adding to the sense of place specifically in Blaenavon and its World Heritage Site status. Whilst Foodie Thursday in Pontypool Market has seen some difficult times, recent marketing and promotion has seen a resurgence in activity with the initiative providing visibility for new and emerging food business and consolidating the indoor market as place for local produce.

Developing Regional/Cross Boundary Links through the South East Wales Resilient Uplands project that enables land management issues and activity to be addressed at a more appropriate landscape scale helps draw in additional resources and bring about a regional approach to the uplands. The Agora (SSC) project is also showing dividends with several meat box schemes being delivered as result of local Leader activity and regional support.

Community Based Solutions. Some of the feasibility study reports are realistic about local solutions in Torfaen with the Orchard and U project concluding that the number and diversity of fruit orchards are not commercially viable for larger scale production of cider, perry and other fruit based products but there is an opportunity for community based enterprises to engage, learn, help harvest, develop products and recycle income into their communities as well as support people back into employment. This would help raise awareness of growing and buying local and may be more in tune with Torfaen.

7.2 What have been the key challenges for Rural Torfaen?

Valuing Local Produce. The mixed demographic of the County Borough and good connectivity provides residents with choice, with cost being a major factor in purchasing produce. The rural area not being contiguous also presents challenges with no real strength of rural identity. There is therefore a challenge in engaging local residents with producers, understanding their story and educating people on the value of local and resilient economies.

Food Tourism in Torfaen. Following on from previous points made, there needs to be local solution to how residents engage in local produce that then organically leads to tourism experiences. For example, tourists help local residents to harvest apples and enjoy some local cider and locally bred pork as a thank you. In relation to hubs, Blaenavon is seen as a natural hub for food tourism due to

infrastructure investment, attractions and events in the World Heritage site. RCDF funding should work to unlock this product as well as the culture and heritage of the place.

Sustaining Marketing & Promotion. The evaluation has heard from rural businesses on the need for continued marketing and promotion from social media, events, producer directories, trails and other activities. The future sustainability needs to be discussed and how networks are upskilled and organised to be self-dependent in the future.

Thematic Focus. Activity to date has seen the distribution of activity across LEADER to be on i) Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources ii) Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains and iii) Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services. Due to the relatively small amount of budget, there has been no activity in iv) Renewable energy at Community level or v) Exploitation of digital technology. It is recommended that these themes are developed through RCDF where more funding exists.

Managing the Rural Community Development Approach. The local management of RCDF has diverted resources from other programme management responsibilities at this mid-term milestone. At the time of writing this report, six EOIs and full applications have yet to be determined. If more are approved, there will be demands on support for monitoring and claiming locally that will have impacts on the strategic direction of the overall Create programme.

7.3 Post Brexit Challenges

Figure 29 shows the future needs for rural areas like Torfaen post 2021 when European funding will cease. Only a slightly higher response (28%) is the **need for small grants** for businesses, farmers and other organisations, which re-enforces other comments from rural businesses, Rural Project Officers and from the Agora programme on the lack of small grants that can help with innovation and business growth.

The role of rural development/project officers should not be underestimated as the key people on the ground that link need to programmes to delivery. Skills in collaboration, capacity building, mentoring and co-operation within communities is essential for developing any type of community or cluster of businesses. Whether these are thematic or broad community based this resource needs to have continuity if impact is to materialise from the current rural development programme period. Whilst Business Wales provide business support advice, Leader and Agora type programmes can provide more bespoke and specialist advice.

This **one to one support** helps build trust in a community with grass routes working and a local focus helping to bridge gaps in provision and developing skills that residents and community organisations wouldn't not have.

Circular economy in rural areas. A paper¹¹ by Professor Terry Marsden of Cardiff University discusses the need for a distributed strategy for rural Wales, with countries like Canada, Sweden, Finland, Germany looking at obtaining foods, energy, materials, timber, water and fibre from rural areas and its immediate "bio-sphere".

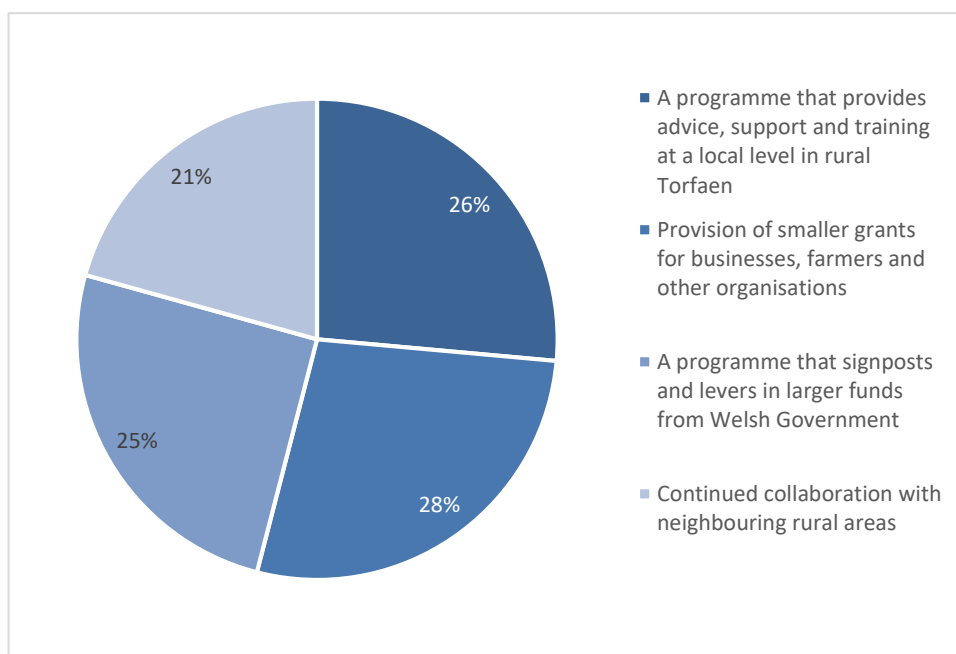
¹¹ The question of rural development: post-Brexit, Terry Marsden of Cardiff University, Professor of Environmental Policy and Planning and Director of the Sustainable Places Research Institute, Cardiff.

In the case of Torfaen, where three urban settlements are on the edge of countryside, Professor Marsden sees the need *“to plan for more distributed systems of provision and markets, especially in rural areas and in the relationships between rural areas and urban areas. Distributed systems mean not just decentralising facilities or decision-making. It means really re-localising activities so that you obtain synergies and ecological efficiencies between the exchange and transformation of energy, materials, food and water resources.”* He continues, *“this is a more networked and place-based approach to developing re-localised economies which are linked together, and with their larger more agglomerated urban neighbours, through efficient communication and transport connections”*.

The Future Generations of Well-being Act and the Environment Act both give the legal framework to establish these rural policies. Professor Marsden sees *“The current timely opportunity is to give all this institutional apparatus a real, concerted and cohesive policy direction and leadership- one which recognises and enrolls all of the rural stakeholders - private and public, landed and community interests”*.

This inter-dependency needs to be explored further between urban and rural areas and across public, private and community investment with some strategic opportunities in Torfaen such as the British site in Talywain and the Specialist and Critical Care centre in Llanfrechfa centre that can align themselves to short supply chain development and better accessibility. This is a strategic discussion for Torfaen’s Public Service Board as direct rural development funding will probably be not on the same scale as before with locality and service design needing to fit with the principles of foundational economies as well as the position of Torfaen within the Cardiff Capital Region.

Figure 29 - What do you want from a post Brexit rural funding programme that is still delivered regionally within Wales?



Source: Chris Jones Regeneration N=38

Comments from stakeholder and project beneficiaries also identify the following areas for focus post Brexit:

- Climate change impacts on local food production to ensure resilience

- Create a well-being and caring culture within the communities of Torfaen
- Local strategic planning should enhance rural life and natural environment, not degrade it as is happening
- Maintain local food produce identity
- Long term improvement and marketing of uplands for tourism
- Rural Heritage Crafts that is about job creation
- Improved rural transport
- Keeping skills alive, keeping the country side accessible though mowing and spraying, programme for maintaining the good work already started
- The future is uncertain but it is clear that the need to access wider markets is critical

7.3 Future Priorities

Table 8 below are the top priorities that local stakeholders see for the Create Rural Development Programme going forward.

Table 8 - No.1 Priorities - Evaluation Survey

- Delivering recommendations from previous feasibility studies
- Communities
- Environmental improvements
- Building the base and emphasis of rural land-based businesses
- Continue to support funding applications in Torfaen
- Strengthen work on upland areas
- Developing Llanyrafon as a genuine Market not an add on to the Manor events
- Improving internet access in rural areas
- Art and Craft small business within rural ward
- Enhancing the local environment
- Continue network development
- Sustainability & Diversification
- Supporting local businesses not just farmers
- Sustainable Local food produce
- Reaching and funding very small businesses
- Getting away from funding Torfaen BC
- Tangible delivery
- To implement a sustainable programme for the uplands
- Moving from upland vision to sustainable management by farmers
- Sustaining local farming
- Wider community engagement

Source: Chris Jones Regeneration n:38

7.4 Recommendations

7.4 Recommendations	
Local Development Strategy	1. To consider the mid-term evaluation findings, specifically results and performance to date.
	2. To consider the Community Action theme of the Local Development Strategy and how activity to date can contribute to hubs that are either physical or virtual in nature; discussion over northern and southern hubs and how projects such as the YETI project, Orchards and U and RCDF investment can be aggregated to create integrated hubs.
	3. To identify larger strategic regeneration and investment projects e.g. the British and the new Llanfrechfa hospital and how rural supply chains can benefit.
Management and Governance	4. To look at ways of closer integration between land management and local produce in terms of participation of farmers, producers and suppliers.
	5. To develop a communications plan for Create that is more digitally accessible and allows the Local Action Group to promote the benefits and activities of support to date and in the future. Specific actions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Roaming Local Action Group meeting and project visits b. Dedicated website for Create that has links to regional rural projects c. Integrated social media d. More visible networks that meet through training and action based support, that link digitally
Implementation	6. To pause and review future resource implications for managing approved and pending RCDF projects.
	7. To consider the strategic shape of the programme in terms of focus and how remaining implementation funds can realise outputs from feasibility recommendations, specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Land based study – short supply chain development – meat producer cluster and how leads on this – Agora or Create? b. Orchards and U - community enterprise project – need to provide resources to take this project forward that helps build relationships with local produce and the community



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