

Community Delivery Project with Powys Countryside Services and the Vale of Montgomery Rural - VMRC

Project Title:	Community Delivery Project with Powys Countryside Services and the Vale of Montgomery Rural - VMRC
Delivered by	Powys County Council
LEADER Theme:	Theme 3 - Exploring New Ways of Providing Non-Statutory Local Services

Total Expenditure:	£24,616.77
RDP Funding:	£19,516.77
Match funding:	£5,100.00

Introduction

The project solely focused on working with a constituted cluster group called the Vale of Montgomery Rural Cluster Group (VMRC). The purpose was to assist the cluster group to identify and train their own volunteers to prioritise and manage the public rights of way within their boundary, and to take some ownership of public access to improve the health and well-being of their residents and that of the local economy by promoting the public rights of way that are opened and maintained.

One of the key priorities for the VMRC was the increased provision for public access, and to open and maintain the public rights of way network that had become impassable due to wilful obstruction. The community was motivated to ensure that this did not continue, and, as it happened, Countryside Services was looking to adopt a more community led approach to managing the public rights of way network at the same time

The challenges

The key problem the project faced was to retain an active and trained Volunteer Team Leader (VTL). The VTL is a key position that is suitably trained for the post, and a volunteer that takes the responsibility for supervising volunteers on the ground.

The VTL is a key position, and, whilst the project recruited a VTL, the position could not be retained during the life of the project.

Solutions

The solution was that a variety of walks were developed using Montgomery as a central hub for the Walking Festival in collaboration with the VMRC. This provided focus for identifying and training community volunteers for the mid and long-term objectives of the project.

The VMRC as a constituted cluster group saw the management of its public rights of way network to develop walks and the local economy as a key priority. The aspirations of both

Countryside Services as the highway authority and the VMRC was therefore an ideal partnership.

The training for volunteers and VTLs is entirely based on what Countryside Services already provides, and there are currently eight active volunteers working with the community currently managed by Countryside Services.

Benefit

With a solid volunteer workforce the public rights of way can be managed by the community, which means they can identify and prioritise works as they see fit. There will be on-going advice and dialogue with the Council as the highway authority, as well as the legal orders and formal enforcement should it be required. This methodology, and working more with the community, is something the service is striving for and has adopted within its draft 10 year Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Result

- A good amount of footpath work has been undertaken in an area with a substantial Public Rights of Way network but with many issues with infrastructure, waymarking and blocked paths.
- A group of local trained and equipped footpath volunteers to carry out prioritised work across the Cluster.
- Focused work on the area by Countryside Services contractors where tasks cannot be easily undertaken by volunteers.
- A sustainable community project focussing on paths important to the communities that can be self-programming once the Volunteer Team Leaders have received training.
- An increase in walking in the area with a two new walking groups and two other groups seeing a significant increase in membership.
- Assisting Walkers are Welcome Montgomery to establish an annual Walking Festival by ensuring the routes planned were easily accessible and by assisting with promotional material. This brought in over 80 people from outside the area and many are returning for Festival 2018, a welcome boost to the local economy.
- Publication of a number of circular walk leaflets across the Cluster describing routes now accessible. These are being well used by local people and visitors alike. Again of considerable benefit the VMRC's tourism economy.
- Good working relationships with the VMRC and Countryside Services, with the VMRC gaining a better understanding of the rights and responsibilities regarding the network.

The cluster is currently establishing a steering group to take forward the Footpaths project. This will be representative of the cluster; to link with the community when footpath issues arise and liaise with Countryside Services for advice and support. The group will prioritise the work programme for the volunteers and ensure this is equitable across the Cluster. Overall the programme has been beneficial in improving access; promoting Rights of Way and establishing protocols for cross-community working and links with Council departments.



Project Outputs

Output (Case Level Indicator)	Achieved
No. of feasibility studies	0
No. of networks established	0
No. of jobs safeguarded	0
No. of pilot activities undertaken / supported	1
No. of community hubs created	0
No. of stakeholders engaged	24
No. of participants supported (awareness raising events only)	6

Outcomes	Achieved
No. of jobs created	0
No. of communities benefitting	4
No. of businesses benefitting	3

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