**Regenerate NPT**: **Project Closure Report**

Project Organisation: NPT Council’s Countryside & Wildlife Team

Project Name: Working with Nature

Project Start Date: 01/08/2016 Project End Date: 31/03/2021

Date of Report: 26/05/2021

Addendum Documents List:

There is a mandatory requirement to complete this document at Project Closure. The purpose of the report is to provide a project level document evidencing how well the project has performed against the original Business Plan delivered by the Local Partnership and Local Action Group during the lifetime of the project, and how it has contributed to the aims and objectives of the Local Partnership’s Local Development Strategy. It should also document how the project has performed against the planned costs, delivery timescales, and Key Performance indicators. Please try and keep within the maximum word count.

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| 1. **Background:** (briefly detail the background to the Project – 250 max)
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| The overall aim of the project was to build the capacity of volunteers and community groups to take a more active role in the management of our local sites, whilst fostering a greater understanding and connection with the natural environment. Combined losses of environmental quality and biodiversity on a global scale and a lost connection with our natural environment over the years has led to poorer health within society. This project looked to raise the profile of our natural environment and the ecosystem services that they provide for us, whilst encouraging a general shift in lifestyle and attitude, to respect and benefit from our natural environment.Through community engagement events and activities, coupled with practical management of nature sites within Neath Port Talbot, the project worked to benefit communities across the borough. Volunteers benefits from gaining new skills, socialising and health and wellbeing improvements as a result of physical activity in nature. Participants who engaged in recreational activities and events also gained new skills, but benefited from greater knowledge and understanding for our natural environment as well as health benefits of time spent in nature.Two project officers were contracted to run the project, one a volunteer coordinator who oversaw the practical work at the sites, and the other a community engagement officer, who developed relationships and networks across the borough to engage with various groups, schools and communities. Together, they raised the awareness and education for our natural environment, instilling a value that was needed for behaviour change. |
| 1. **Project Outcomes as per application**
 | **Was this achieved? What supporting evidence is there of achievement? If not achieved, why not?** |
| **Participants are more employable through increased skills, knowledge and experience in conservation/countryside management** | This was achieved through a combined volunteer programme and training opportunities for participantsA volunteer network of 39 volunteers were signed up during the course of the project. Volunteers were given health and safety training as well as safe tool use training and set to work carrying out practical management of nature sites across the borough. This developed skills, knowledge and experience to move into the conservation sector. Both accredited and non-accredited training was completed with a range of participants, including tree identification, habitat management and safe tool use. These were open to volunteers and participants and increased the skills, knowledge and experience to gain employment. |
| **Volunteer groups/partner organisations have increased capacity to continue with site maintenance/further project delivery, through skills learnt and ongoing partnership support** | This was achieved. Some groups needed only partial support, while others required a greater level of involvement. Volunteer groups such as the Friends of Craig Gwladus, Friends of Ynysmeudwy Park, YGG Trebannws, FAN (Friends And Neighbours) Community Alliance and Save Our Sanity are all better place to carry out site maintenance and health & wellbeing activities having engaged with the project. YGG Trebannws underwent teacher training in order to run outdoor sessions with pupils and maintain a small section of woodland for use, up until the Covid-19 pandemic, they carried out weekly sessions with classes in the school and have continued to engage with nature. Save Our Sanity formed a group after attending monthly sessions with the WWN project, initially they lacked confidence outdoors, but after many sessions their confidence built and they have set up a constituted group to support others in the community with their mental health. |
| **A network of sites are being actively managed for nature conservation and community access** | Project officers worked across 17 different sites over the course of the project. Some required more extensive work and support than others and had more time spent on them. However, multiple sites have improved drastically, both from an ecological perspective and a community use and access one. The Cwm du Glen and Glanrhyd Plantation Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in Pontardawe has seen huge improvements through the removal of invasive species and the installation of additional amenities, including a woodland classroom, additional footpaths and habitat improvements alongside a focus on historical importance of the site where volutneers and officers worked to highlight key aspects of the site, including excavating and fencing off Wales’ first outdoor swimming pool. Other sites had more basic work carried out, focused on improving the habitat or community access. Banwen meadows and woods, two sites situated at the top of the county gained a smaller woodland classroom and new footpath through the woods, with management of the tree growth in a valuable wet meadow.  |
| **Through the physical work that will have been carried out, the quality and accessibility of our local environment is improved, for local residents and visitors in general.** | This has been achieved. As stated in the previous outcome, at least two sites have had new footpaths installed while further sites have had benches installed along footpaths and on hills to allow for rest and relaxation. Access for the sites has been improved from a practical point, making it easier to access for more people, but alongside this, the huge push and work by the community engagement officer and active events that took place across the borough created an increased level of awareness of the sites. This has led to a continued increase in use of the sites over the course of the project.  |
| **Participants, residents and school pupils have a greater appreciation and understanding of the value of ecosystems and the services they provide, through their participation in the activities and awareness raising material** | This has been achieved. Multiple educational activities were held through the course of the project. Schools across the borough were engaged to participate in educational activities in nature. Some schools engaged to a greater level and carried out multi-week programs where classes engaged regularly, while others underwent teacher training to allow them to carry out their own activities beyond the course of the project (YGG Trebannws). Likewise, groups and residents have participated and engaged beyond the project with additional volunteering and participation in engagement through partner organisations (Coed Lleol). Participants engaged to different levels, some threw themselves into the project and opportunities, while others dipped in and out less regularly. The focus of all sessions was on nature, crafts and awareness raising and so each participant will have taken additional value away from sessions, this will have increased with more events attended. |
| **Residents have engaged in a wide range of outdoor activities, and will return and use these areas on their own and with family, providing them with on-going benefits to their health and well-being** | This has been achieved. In total, the project engaged with 831 individuals (628 who live in rural wards). These participants have gained a greater level of appreciation for nature and awareness of new sites.The project has improved 17 different sites, improving access and awareness of the sites. Officers have witnessed increased use of the sites over the course of the project through visible signs of use (worn footpaths, litter and on-site inspections).  |
| 1. **Strategic Achievements:** (outline what the Project has achieved in terms of alignment with LEADER Themes and Priorities and any contribution to national strategies - 300 max)
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| Two leader themes were linked in the Stage 3 application: adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources and exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services. The first of these was achieved through engaging with local communities across NPT that focused on behaviour change through improving values and awareness as well as a belief that they can make a difference to the quality of their local environment. Recreational, educational and practical events were held to provide a broad range of skills and experience and knowledge to communities that included ecological, historical and cultural events. Coupled with the improved access and amenities at sites, this objective was achieved. The second objective focused on looking at ways to increase capacity and interest of local groups to take more active roles in on-going maintenance of sites. This aspect was more challenging at sites where no groups currently existed. However, support of established groups was provided and has seen a step in the right direction in terms of taking on management of sites. The friends of Craig Gwladus was heavily involved in the early years of the project but the size of the site meant a new project and officer was engaged to support them beyond WWN. Numerous individuals have taken on more responsibility and report incidents and carry out minor improvement works when out visiting a site (trimming paths etc.) which reduces the needs for council officers to attend as regularly. The increased awareness and value of the sites utilised within the project has benefited the community and council greatly, allowing a more specific focus for sites and footpaths to ensure suitable areas are maintained for public use.  |
| 1. **With regards to your comments at application stage, how have you managed this project in terms of sustainability**? (What plans have been put in place to maintain the project once it is completed? 400 words max)
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| As highlighted in stage 3 application, there was an assumption that there would be a continued need for support beyond the life of the initial project to support new groups or individuals who wanted to be involved and for the practical management of sites beyond what was capable of volunteers. This is set to be covered by the ENRaW funding and Green Infrastructure project that is being established. Numerous sites have been improved and the local and county-wide awareness of the sites has been raised. New understanding of the ecosystem-services for sites and the value of them has been increased meaning a greater level of protection can be afforded them due to local resident interest. This is particularly relevant to Craig Gwladus Country Park, Banwen Woods, Cwm du Glen and Glanrhyd LNR and Dyffryn Clydach – Coed Bach woodlands. Each of these sites had significant improvements made to increase access and to engage with local communities to a point where local volunteers are on board and report any concerns into the team. Partnerships with health organisations was a success through the project. From the outset, the engagement officer position was filled by project partner Coed Lleol (Welsh branch of Small Woods) who have a strong emphasis on health and wellbeing in nature. This partnership allowed a number of activities to be tailored more towards health and wellbeing, while also provided the expertise to develop a network within the health and mental health sector. Additional partnerships were created including Mind NPT, National Autistic Society, Cwm ni Iach and the Stroke Association. All groups engaged to some level, with the National Autistic Society scheduling twice monthly volunteering on sites on their own beyond the project and Cwm ni Iach being instrumental in supporting the creation of the Save Our Sanity groupThe biggest challenge has been the creation of new volunteer groups or ‘friends of’ groups for sites that previously had no groups associated with them. It was found to be, in practice, impossible to create a group from nothing. While volunteers took active roles and interest in the sites, there was always an underlying concern in taking on responsibility for further work. Many groups of this type form when a site of value faces a threat. This project focused on raising values and awareness of sites, but a lack of threat and the continued presence of officers delayed creation of groups.  |
| 1. **Project Beneficiaries:**
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| In total, over 800 individuals were engaged over the course of the project and multiple groups and organisations. Schools who engaged benefited through increased awareness and ability to utilise outdoor spaces for education, while organisations who partnered with the project will likewise have benefited including local libraries, who partnered for children focused events.The success of the project and the combination in health and wellbeing with ecology has been successful for the whole population of NPT as it highlights the effectiveness and potential for supporting resident health through use of nature activities and sites.  |
| 1. **Cross Cutting Themes:** If relevant, briefly describe how your project contributed to the following themes:
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| **Equal Opportunities:** the project attempted to provide activities that were open to everyone in all instances. However, due to the nature of many nature sites, they were not always suitable for all: some nature walks included steps and rough terrain unsuitable for wheelchair users. This being the case, efforts were made to ensure alternate activities were arranged where everyone was welcome to attend. Some events focused on those with poor health and so made every effort to increase confidence and capabilities for participating in outdoor activities. |
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| **Sustainable Development including Economic, Environmental and Social** |
| The promotion of sites and their ecosystem services was a vital part of the project. Improving sites, access and amenities will result in increased visitation to these areas, improving the economic and social values of the areas and increasing value and support for the environmental factors.  |
| **Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion** |
| New skills, training and experience offered to everyone allowed more people to develop confidence and skills that improved employability, not just in the conservation sector but across the board. Many individuals suffered from confidence or social exclusion, and attending these events made a significant difference to their health and wellbeing and allowed them to move onwards.  |
| 1. **Project Performance – Financial & Indicator Achievements:** (details performance against approved timescales and budget expectations. Include the reasons for all variances)
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| 1. Performance indicator achievement against targets approved:Please complete final position
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| **PI Reference** | **Approved Target** | **Total Achieved** | **Justification for underachievement** | **How has achievement been evidenced** |
| LD.CL.006 | **Number of information dissemination actions/promotional and/or marketing activities to raise awareness of the LDS and/or its projects**  |
|  | 150 | 136 |  | **Bilingual marketing materials.** |
| LD.CL.007 | **Number of stakeholders engaged** |
|  | 350 | **831** |  | Registration forms and Emails. |
| LD.CL.008 | **Number of Participants supported** |
|  | 600 | **831** |  | Activity and events attendance sheets |
| NPT01 | **Number of communities engaged** |
|  | 12 | **13** |  | Emails, meeting minutes and marketing materials. |
| NPT02 | **Number of groups engaged** |
|  | 20 | **29** |  | Emails, meetings and attendance sheets |
| NPT03 | **Number of children and young people participating in the project** |
|  | 250 | **216** |  | Activity and events attendance sheets and registration forms |
| NPT04 | **Number of women participating in the project** |
|  | 250 | **217** |  | Activity and events attendance sheets and registration forms |
| NPT05 | **Number of Welsh speakers participating in the project** |
| 80 | **56** |  | Activity and events attendance sheets |
| NPT06 | Number of older people participating in the project |
|  | 50 | **41** |  | Activity and events attendance sheets and registration forms |
| NPT07 | Number of individuals with disabilities participating in the project |
|  | 25 | **19** |  | Activity and events attendance sheets and registration forms |
| NPT08 | Number of projects aimed at environmental enhancement/sustainability |
|  | 16 | **17** |  |  Activity list, Community Council minutes and work schemes. |
| 1. **Pilot Activities/Projects:** please forward you plan to the RDP Team, outlining all of the stages and activities, including the timelines, as an addendum to this report. This should be available to promote externally and will be linked to the Wales Rural Network Website. Please tick one of the following:

 Not applicable for this project x 🞎 Forwarded to RDP Team 🞎 |
| 1. **Feasibility Studies:**  please forward your final report to the RDP Team. This should be available to promote externally and will be linked to the Wales Rural Network Website. Please tick one of the following:

 Not applicable for this project x 🞎 Forwarded to RDP Team 🞎 |
| 1. Project closure financial position will be taken from the information supplied in your final claim. Please also provide high level financial performance detail in the following table:
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| **High Level Performance Details:** |
| **Timescales** | **Original Approved** | **Latest Approved** | **Final Outturn** |
| **From** | **To** | **31/03/2021** | **31/03/2021** |
| **01/08/2016** | **30/09/2019** |
| **Summary of Financial Performance** |
|  | **Original Approved** | **Latest Approved** | **Final Outturn** |
|  | **Revenue £** | **Revenue £** | **Revenue £** |
| **Total Project Costs** | **£125,000** | **£125,000** | **£124,701.74** |
| **RDP Funding** | **£100,000** | **£100,000** | **£99,701.74** |
| **Levered Funding** | **£25,000** | **£25,000** | **£25,000** |
|  | **Original Approved** | **Latest Approved** | **Final Outturn** |
| **Intervention Rates** | **RDP**  | **80** | **80** | **80** |
| **Levered**  | **20** | **20** | **20** |
|  | **Cost Heading** | **Justification for under/overspend** |
| **Justification for****Under/overspend by****Cost Heading** | **£298.26** | **Cessation of activities due to lockdown** |
| 1. **Conclusion:** Please provide a summary on the Project’s performance, identifying any key issues that need to be addressed:
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| 1. **Summary**

In summary, the Working with Nature project can be deemed a success. 831individuals were engaged over the course of the project with many returning for numerous events and training opportunities. The number, and location of sites covered the whole county and engaged with communities from multiple wards and increased awarenesss and value for our natural environment and improved health and values for the environment that will feed into a more sustainable use of our natural resources. |
| 1. **Key Issues**

Key issues we faced came predominantly in the form of creating a sustainable outcome for sites that previously didn’t have a community group linked with it. The creation of these groups proved impossible in the timeframe. However, a strong volunteer network of 39 volunteers allowed effective and successful management and improvement of all sites we engaged with. |
| 1. **What went well?**

The project ran smoothly and engaged with communities and individuals relatively easily. The targets were met early and increased, which highlights the effectiveness and need for the project more fully. There is a desire from residents within NPT for these activities to be made available and the combination with health organisations proved effective for supporting and targeting more excluded groups and individuals with lower confidence levels who wouldn’t necessarily attend these sites alone.  |
| 1. **What didn’t go well?**

As described in key issues, the creation of new groups proved difficult and the establishment of a self-reliant volunteer group didn’t come to fruition. However, the group is still active at sites in NPT and works closely with the volunteer coordinator beyond this project.  |
| 1. **What could have been done differently?**

In hindsight, a pre-determined selection of sites could have been focused on with set plans for them over the course of the project and more time and emphasis put on them, with a management strategy beyond the project the outcome, along with greater focus from communities for those sites. Working across 17 sites, while reaching more communities, meant that less time was spent at each. It could potentially benefit future projects to target 3-5 sites spread across the borough as ‘key sites’ for attracting users.  |

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| 1. **Handover contact details**: For post project monitoring and evaluation activities, Welsh Government will require contact details of staff who may be able to provide assistance.
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| Name: Neil Hinds Designation: Project Engagment Officer /LeadEmail: n.hinds@npt.gov.uk Telephone: Website address:Facebook page: |
| **Document Retention Procedures:**Documents (which includes all evidence relating to your project) must be retained in a suitable format for a period of 10 years following the end of the current LEADER programme – this means at least until 2031. |

**Signed: Date:**

 **(Project Lead)**

**Signed:** N.SBray  **Date: 02/06/2021**

 **(RDP Manager – Lead Body)**

For Lead Body Completion:

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| **Post Project Activities by the Local Partnerships and Local Action Group:** Define what activities need to be undertaken by the Lead Body after the project has been closed include any post project follow up actions which may need to be undertaken following project closure: |