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# Evaluation of Torfaen's Delivery of the Rural Development Plan Business Case 1

## Final Report

Torfaen County Borough Council

July 2012



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## 1 Introduction

Torfaen County Borough Council was designated a rural programme area in 2007 with its first series of project activities under Axis 3 and 4 of the Rural Development Plan for Wales commencing in 2008 up to 2011.

Create – Torfaen's Rural Development Programme is a new rural partnership and as part of its monitoring and evaluation responsibility sought an independent evaluation of its first business plan (Business Case 1).

Due to the emerging nature of rural development activity in Torfaen, the County Borough Council, as lead body has asked for a formative and summative approach so that lessons learnt can be carried forward into successive programmes as well as identifying key success stories and best practice.

### 1.1 Evaluation Focus

The main focus of the evaluation is on:

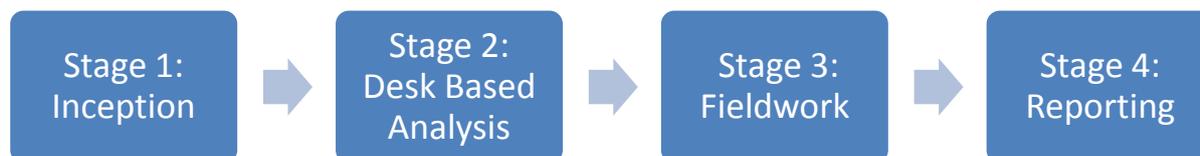
- a) The implementation and the relevance of the Rural Development Plan projects to meeting the key challenges outlined in the Local Development Strategy.
- b) The activities undertaken during the period of the Local Development Strategy
- c) Performance against the outputs and indicators approved for each project under the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Including what has worked well and what has not, for whom and under what circumstances.
- d) An assessment of project delivery, including project management and administrative systems.
- e) Partnership working across agencies and other participants.
- f) Fostering links between private sector, public and third sector.
- g) The "added value" contribution of the Local Development Strategy in the context of improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversifying the rural economy.
- h) Identify any future improvement measures to improve project delivery in Business Case 2 and any future programmes.

### 1.2 Background to the Evaluation

The evaluation is both formative and summative focussing on the overall impact of the Business Plan 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 outputs, outcomes, and, where evident, impacts.

## 1.2.1 Evaluation Approach

Figure 1 - Evaluation Approach and Methodology



Source: Miller Research (UK) Ltd

### Stage 2: Desk Based Analysis

This stage involved a robust analysis of existing monitoring data to assess the extent to which it met the requirements of RDP evaluation criteria, specifically the CMEF approach. A comprehensive evaluation framework and monitoring system has been developed which has guided the evaluation process and informed the delivery of future programmes.

A review and analysis of strategic management and project information systems has been undertaken which has included the following:

- Key strategic documents that support the programme and respective projects;
- 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;
- Marketing and promotion activities.

On reviewing key documentation and the evaluation framework a series of topic guides was produced for:

- Local Action Group members;
- Rural Partnership members;
- Lead body and operational staff, and
- Project beneficiaries.

During the process, we also agreed the best means of consulting with each target group, which is outlined in the fieldwork stage.

### Stage 3 – Fieldwork

This stage of the project involved the collection and collation of primary evidence to support the evaluation, over and above that which is already available through existing information.

### Engagement with Delivery Team

A series of meetings were held with the following officers/representatives:

- Lead Body
  - Senior Responsible Officer - Rob Wellington (TCBC) – 27th April 2012
  - Programme Manager - Nikki Davies (TCBC) – 27th April 2012
- Axis 3 lead project manager – Rebecca Hartley (TCBC) – 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012
- Local Action Group Members – 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012
- Rural Partnership Members – 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

To augment collective views with the Local Action Group and Rural Partnership a series of targeted strategic level interviews have been held. These have included the Chair of the Local Action Group and members of the Rural Partnership..

### **Project Beneficiaries (grant recipients) Interviews**

Seven face to face site visits/interviews across Axis 3 and 4 project activities were undertaken as follows:

#### **Axis 3**

- Chair of Llanyravon Manor Community group

#### **Axis 4**

- Pet Plus
- Cymynyscoy Community energy project Feasibility study
- Woodwise Project, Garnsychan Partnership
- Pentrebach Farm
- Oakfield B&B
- Lower Pen Tranch Farm

### **Online Survey**

To ensure views at both a strategic and local level were obtained a short impact questionnaire was circulated as an online survey through Torfaen's Rural Development Manager. This was sent to LAG members, Rural Partnership members and project beneficiaries.

### **Case Studies**

As part of the beneficiary interviews a detailed set of case studies has been developed.

## 1.3 Structure of the Report

The evaluation report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** sets out the background to Rural Development, Local Development Strategy and the Business Plan.
- **Section 3** details the management and governance of Torfaen's Rural Development Programme.
- **Sections 4 & 5** document Axis 3 and 4 project activities and performance respectively.
- **Section 6** sets out key findings and recommendations
- **Section 7** identifies conclusions and recommendations

## 2 Background

### 2.1 The Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 for Wales

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007 – 2013 for Wales is part of an EU wide programme to develop rural communities. The programme is funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The aims of the programme are:

- To improve the quality of life in rural communities.
- To strengthen the farming and forestry industries.
- To safeguard and enhance environment and rural heritage.
- To foster competitive, sustainable businesses and thriving rural communities.

The Rural Development Plan comprises four 'Axes':

- Axis 1 - Improving the competitiveness of our agricultural sectors, delivered by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- Axis 2 - Improving our environment and countryside, delivered by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Forestry Commission for Wales.

Projects and funding under Axis 1 and 2 apply to all parts of Wales and are delivered by the Welsh assembly Government.

- Axis 3 - Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification, delivered locally in Torfaen.

Specific objectives for Axis 3 are:

- Providing a broader range of better paid employment opportunities;
- Helping to raise economic activity rates;
- Enhancing or providing additional mainstream services for the rural economy;
- Providing openings for future economic development, including tourism and craft activities;
- Improving the physical environment of villages and conserving the rural heritage; and
- Addressing social exclusion by providing better links between urban and rural areas.
- Axis 4 - Building local capacity for employment and diversification, delivered locally in Torfaen.

Axis 4 actions are centred on five economic themes:

- Stakeholder partnership activity;
- Area identity and new product development;
- The natural environment;
- Sustainable rural services;
- Outdoor activities, tourism development and well-being.

Projects funded under Axis 3 and 4 are allocated to rural wards only and are delivered locally. Axis 3 & Axis 4 LEADER is implemented through a combined Local Partnership at a Unitary Authority level. As stated in Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 Local Action Groups deliver Axis 4 LEADER activities and are part of the combined Local Partnership.

## 2.2 Rural Development in Torfaen

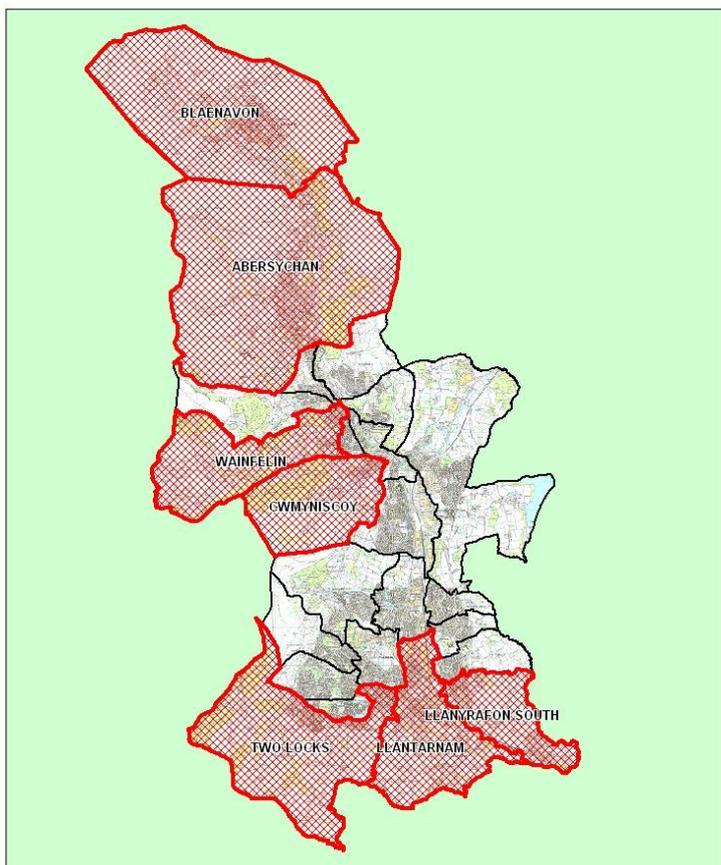
In 2007, Torfaen County Borough Council was approached by Welsh Government to consider whether the County Borough wished to put forward a case for rural development programmes. Whilst relatively "late in the day" the Council used the existing Objective 1 Partnership as a shadow Local Action Group to help shape the Local Development Strategy and to help identify opportunities for a business plan application.

In the autumn of 2007 the Local Development Strategy was approved by Welsh Government with a refresh undertaken in October 2009 and November 2011. The current version is more thematic and has helped shape direction and relate actions to thematic objectives.

## 2.3 Torfaen's Local Development Strategy

Torfaen's Local Development Strategy was initially written in 2007 with updated documents provided in 2009 and 2011.

Figure 2 - Eligible Rural Development Programme Wards



Source: Torfaen Local Development Strategy 2011

Figure 2 shows the eligible rural wards within Torfaen County Borough. Llanyravon South and Blaenavon South are the two genuine rural wards whilst the wards of Abersychan, Wainfelin, Cwmynyscoy, Two Lock and Llantarnam are more service centre wards due to their population density and proximity to main urban settlements.

In assessing the main concerns and issues to face the rural area the shadow LAG and Rural Partnership identified the following:

- Decline in incomes from conventional rural activities
- Ageing population engaged in farming
- Effects on the rural landscape and the environment
- Absence of diversification initiatives
- Low levels of sustainable economic activity
- Low levels of educational achievement
- Lack of skills and training
- Health and wellbeing

To support this, a SWOT analysis was undertaken.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers wishing to strengthen their business</li> <li>• A developing tourism sector</li> <li>• Increase in local produce</li> <li>• Emerging arts and crafts sector</li> <li>• Developing small holders</li> <li>• Increase in diversification activities</li> <li>• An establishing and professional voluntary sector</li> <li>• Transport links to the M4 corridor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline in traditional farming</li> <li>• Lack of opportunities for unskilled and/or unqualified people</li> <li>• Lack of support for smaller rural businesses</li> <li>• Lack of support in developing local produce</li> <li>• Loss of cultural traditions</li> <li>• Only 2 full rural wards</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for larger rural businesses</li> <li>• Support for smaller rural businesses and the art and craft sector</li> <li>• Developing Tourism attractions and accommodation</li> <li>• Increased demand for local produce</li> <li>• Promotion of alternative land use, including energy and production of bio fuels</li> <li>• Potential to capitalise on the natural environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current economic position</li> <li>• Increase in unemployment</li> <li>• Further decline in employment opportunities</li> <li>• Global Market</li> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Slow development of community participation</li> </ul>

### The Vision

Together both the Partnership Board and Local Action Group came forward with a vision for Torfaen's rural communities. This is:

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

### Key Themes

The Torfaen Local Development Strategy aims to meet its vision through developing a variety of objectives set down through extensive consultation with the community and businesses in all seven of the rural wards.

Through consultation with the local community in Torfaen's rural wards and the Local action Group the following key themes and objectives have been identified for Business Case 2:

- Developing land based production
- Conserve local heritage
- Promote sustainable tourism
- Business support and advice
- Enhance skill development

## 2.4 Business Plan 1

Business Plan 1 was submitted in late autumn 2007 with the following projects submitted under Axis 3 and 4.

Figure 3 - Business Plan 1 - Torfaen



Source: Various Project Application Forms

A description of the Axis 3 and Axis 4 project activities is described in section 4 and 5 of this report.

## 3 Management and Governance

### 3.1 Context

*“The way in which a partnership is structured and operates is crucial to its effectiveness. Intended benefits, such as co-ordination, shared resources, greater legitimacy, or enhanced capacity to act, may not automatically occur”.<sup>1</sup>*

A key approach to rural development programme working is to ensure close links between Axis 3 and Axis 4, and they will be implemented through a joint approach. Welsh Government through the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013 places much importance on delivery and the importance of local management and governance from within the rural territory such as Torfaen. It sees greater strength between how Axis 4 LAG delivers on new products and services as well as delivering on Axis 3 activities.

Welsh Government also sees the opportunities and added value of *“the wider membership of the combined Local Partnership, and its links to other funding sources, will ensure that activities developed within the LAG will have access to a greater range of funds and be more likely to receive support when ready for mainstreaming<sup>2</sup>”*.

The Rural Development Plan for Wales sets out key actions that include:

- Developing Local Action Groups and building local partnership capacity, animation and promotion of skills acquisition;
- Improving endogenous development potential through capacity building and needs audits;
- Improving local governance by fostering innovative holistic approaches to linking agriculture, forestry and the local economy, thereby helping to diversify the economic base and strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas;
- Community capacity building and empowerment;
- Facilitating links between sectors and between public / private / voluntary and community groups;
- Support for innovation and entrepreneurship;
- Piloting of new products and approaches including dissemination of best practice;
- Support for co-operative development including infrastructure; and
- Encouragement of on-line communities to disseminate knowledge, exchange good practice and innovation in rural products and services

The importance of partnership working and the Leader approach is a critical success factor in delivering rural development projects. In acknowledging this, this section of the evaluation assesses how the lead body, rural partnership and location action group are overseeing, developing and directing activity within rural Torfaen.

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<sup>1</sup> Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-13 Axes 3 and 4 Guidance for Partnerships Applying for Support

<sup>2</sup> Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013

We have set out the key requirements from the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013 guidance note and used this as a baseline to understand how Torfaen have delivered.

## 3.2 Lead Body

The Partnership will need to appoint a suitable Lead Body and Financial Co-ordinator and define the roles and responsibilities of both. The role of the Lead Body will be to oversee the delivery of the Local Development Strategy, on behalf of the Partnership including progress on individual projects, and ensure that the projects supported underpin the overall aims and objectives. The role of the Financial Co-ordinator will be to ensure that grant is applied and used properly and within regulatory requirements in compliance with grant terms and conditions and in accordance with funding agreements, scheme guidance and all approved systems and procedures of the Partnership.

The lead body role for Torfaen's Rural Development Programme is hosted by Torfaen County Borough Council (CBC). As part of the wider Council European Policy and External Funding Team, a dedicated Rural Programme Manager has been provided which has the benefit of having strong organisational linkages with other ERDF/ESF programmes, collaborative type programmes, external funding database expertise, amongst other funding streams. The position of the Rural Programme Manager is seen by the Head of European Policy and External Funding at Torfaen CBC as being important to *"integrated and sustainable working which ensures added value and maximising impact."*

The post of the Rural Programmes Manager was established in November 2008, with Nicola Davies occupying the role to the present day.

In the formative months of delivering Business Plan 1 the Programme Manager alongside the Rural Diversification Officer, Emma Davies spent a lot of time raising awareness of the programme. Nicola and Emma had a background on funding and community development work with them identifying the need to develop a community of rural interest. In terms of rural communities, they found that a *"chat and a coffee, in a community setting"* was the most informal way of reaching out to target groups such as farming families. The Rural Programme Manager commenting on the formative months stated *"that whilst it was a lot of time walking the patch it has created a foundation that has stimulated interest in grants and rural development activity."* This comment was re-enforced by the Chair of the LAG stating that *"there was much legwork with people visiting farms, mapping rural assets and bringing together like-minded people"*.

In bringing together the Local Action Group (LAG) and Rural Partnership, the Lead Body initially used existing Objective 1 networks, recruited people through their informal rural drop-ins and with Emma Davies' community development networks an emerging body of interested people was formed. An open day was also held in County Hall, Cwmbran where this raised awareness of the programme through local organisations as well as Council officers and elected members. More detailed comments on the LAG and Rural Partnership are developed further on.

When asking LAG and Rural Partnership members through the on-line survey on how they rated the management of the programme for Business Plan 1 55% rated it very good and 36% good. In reviewing the Lead Body systems that are in place for financial and physical monitoring these are thorough and structured linking evidence to expenditure and clearly showing where and why variances have taken place. Organisation skills in terms of

meetings and how the Lead Body communicates to the both the Rural Partnership and LAG are user friendly and engaging.

As mentioned, another key responsibility of the Lead Body has been the monitoring and evaluation of the Business Plan activity. Torfaen CBC has extensive experience in managing European programmes across the County Borough but did find the initial experiences of monitoring rural development programmes to be a culture shock in terms of the way the programme is managed by Welsh Government. Comments from the Head of European Funding at Torfaen CBC and from the Rural Programme Manager outlined some contradictions between the European Commission approach to Leader in terms of risk taking, innovation and delivering local economic development and how the Welsh monitoring regime is “micro managed, risk averse and does not devolve decision making”. The “spirit of the approach” is also limited by the administrative procedures which were seen as being costly, time absorbing and over-engineered. Business Plan 2 process did respond to initial criticisms with a more integrated approach adopted although apportionment of time against Axis 3 and 4 is still seen as being over complex.

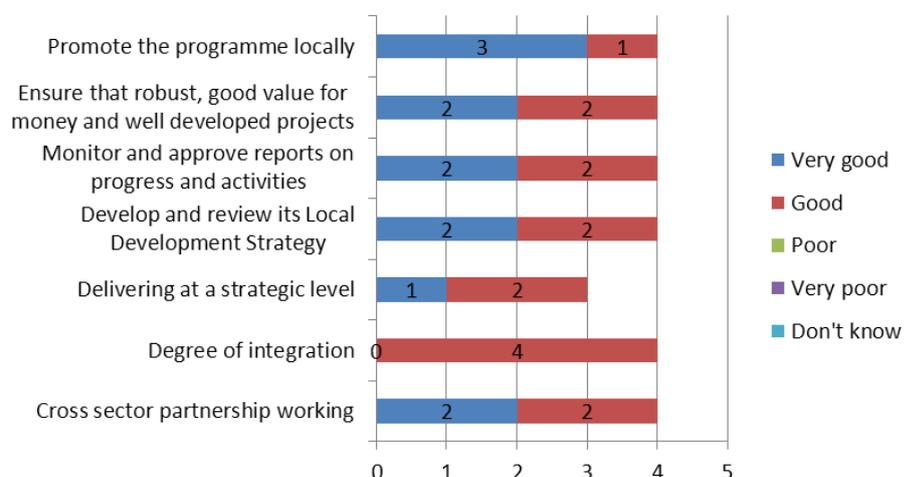
### 3.3 Rural Partnership

Partnerships must be relevant, comprehensive and representative of local needs and priorities and based on proportionate representation from the four sectors: private, public, community and voluntary. Membership of the Partnership Board should reflect the characteristics of its area and the opportunities identified in the LDS. In addition, due regard should be given to maximising the potential benefits of drawing upon existing experience and expertise when constituting the Partnership.

The terms of reference of the Torfaen Rural Partnership are appended to this report.

Figure 4 indicates the reflections from Rural Partnership members on how they have responded to their collective objectives. Whilst this is a small sample there areas for improvement are mainly at a strategic level in terms of integration and direction. Other activities are discussed further on in more detail.

Figure 4 - To what extent do you rate the following activities the Rural Partnership should be directing?



Source: Miller Research (UK) Ltd; On-line Survey Results, June 2012

### 3.3.1 How has Business Case 1 worked toward LDS?

The Rural Partnership identified that a key issue to be addressed in terms of Torfaen's rural landscape was due to farms being small to medium in size, farming communities were either ageing or slowing down in terms of productivity and succession. The farm diversification support scheme has helped to break down barriers, and re-engaged with the farming community.

The geographical coverage of the rural programme and its associated support schemes through Branching Out has also helped re-dress some deficiencies in Torfaen with a number of regeneration based programmes such as Blaenavon World Heritage initiative providing a focus for developing small to medium sized enterprises specifically in tourism and the service sector with other rural wards often over-looked or eligible for too broad business support.

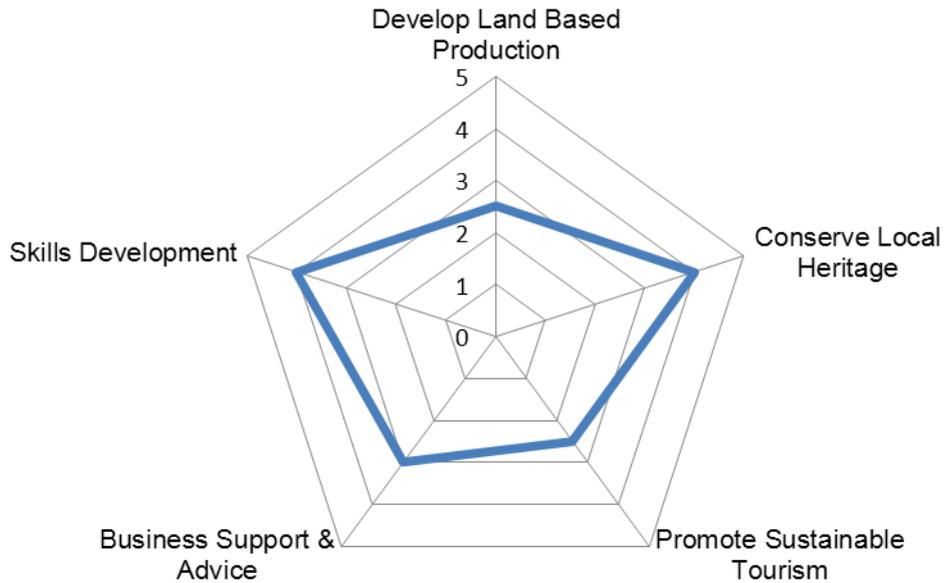
Some members of the rural partnership saw that the initial focus of Business Plan 1 has building a relationship with farmers through informal networks through the rural diversification officer role as well as rural tourism providers and other businesses.

In relation to the restoration of Llanyravon Manor some partners identify that the project has made *"links with other partners and initiatives in terms of tourism, visitor management, local produce and has become a physical focus for the Torfaen Rural Development Programme"*.

Figure 5 outlines how the Rural Partnership rate the degree of impact that Business Plan 1 activities. The restoration of Llanyrafon Manor (Axis 3) has delivered a tangible impact in terms of conserving local heritage and whilst future activities sit outside of Business Plan 1, this significant investment could generate many impacts across the rural area in terms of showcasing rural assets, learning/training, outreach work and acting as a key gateway into the County Borough.

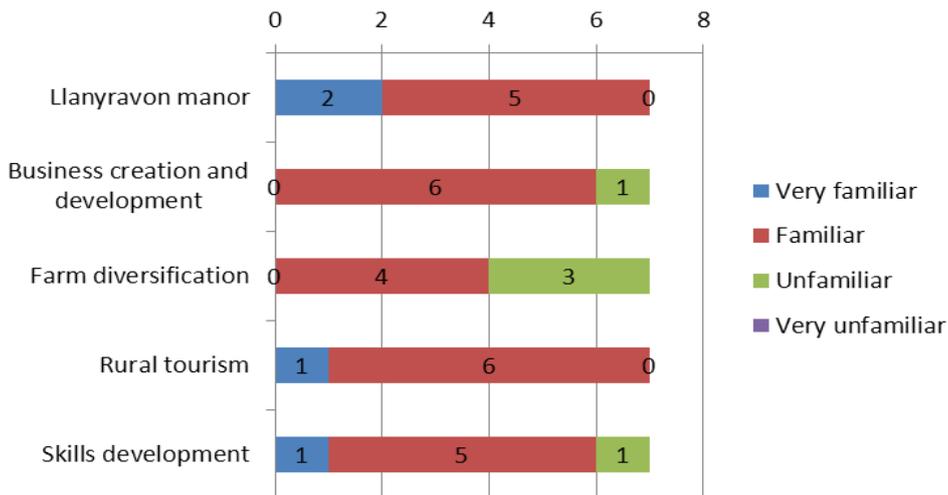
Across Axis 4 there is an acknowledgement that capacity building, developing new groups does take time and whilst the programme has substantially met its targets there is a need to understand how this investment is leading to greater awareness of rural issues and developing networks that are representative. Some partnership members also indicated that there needs to be greater understanding as to how the project activities correspond and address the Local Development Strategy so that progress and benefits are understood across the physical landscape but also mapped in terms of community resilience and health as well as organisational well-being. The need to understand how the rural programme is leading to coherence and identity within Rural Torfaen is a key challenge not just for Torfaen but for a large number of rural programmes.

Figure 5 - Rating of Business Plan 1 Activities Against LDS Themes



Source: Miller Research (UK) Ltd; On-line Survey Results, June 2012

Figure 6 - How are you familiar with the aims and objectives of Business Plan 1?



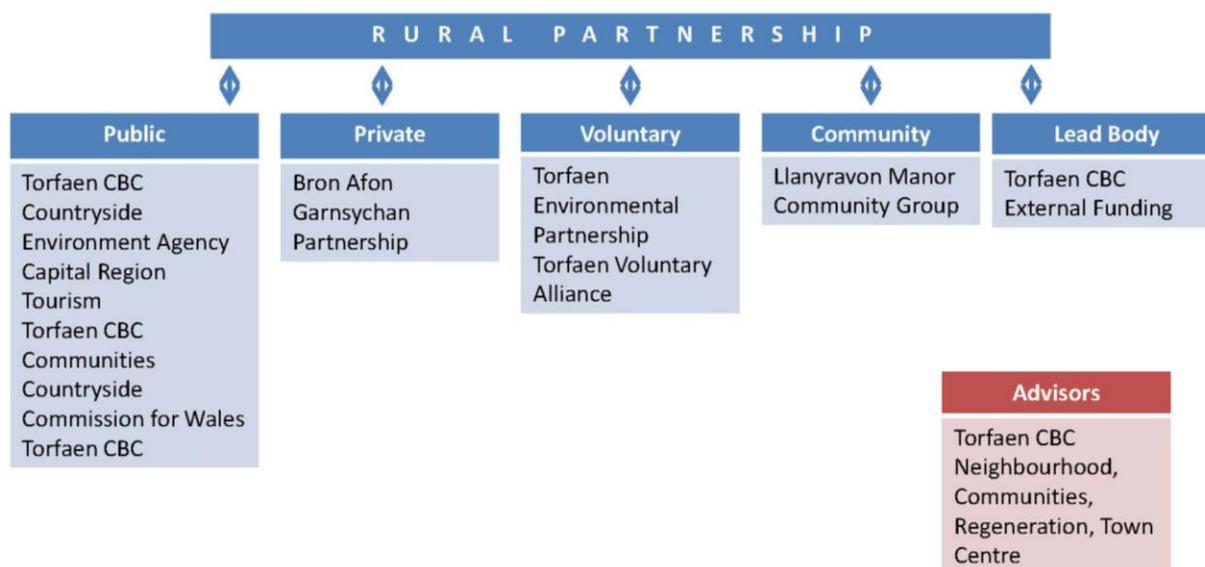
Source: Miller Research (UK) Ltd; On-line Survey Results, June 2012

### 3.3.2 Partnership Working

Figure 7 outlines the sectors and organisations that make up the Torfaen Rural Partnership. At the time of evaluating Business Plan 1 it was difficult to engage with a broad cross-section of the Partnership due to members having other commitments, unavailable for personal reasons or the representative did not work for the organisation anymore. From our evaluation process it is clear that some members of the Rural Partnership are engaged, others not, which may be to other priorities/commitments. In terms of the range of people and the level of input from Rural Partnership members, some members have commented that whilst the Lead Body/associated programme staff are important to running the Partnership its representation sometimes outweighs other sectors. There is also a need to

understand the roles and responsibilities of a partnership member, with one member commenting that “*she didn't understand her role and is there a need for a partnership?*”

Figure 7 - Torfaen Rural Partnership



Source: Torfaen Local Development Strategy

There is therefore a need to review the membership of the Partnership in terms of the mix, skills of people and organisations as well as an understanding of what is expected from them. At a partnership meeting attended by Miller Research a member did express his confusion over some of the rural acronyms and jargon that is used within guidance, the Local Development Strategy and within projects. Whilst we agree that cross sector programme delivery should be user friendly and accessible, we would also suggest that there still needs to be a general understanding of what the programme has been set up to do and for representatives to be trained up in terms of the process, types of eligible activity as well as general partnership working. This could include ideas such as being Rural Ambassadors, identifying opportunities for joint working, etc.

One partnership member has also commented that “*there needs to be a closer relationship between the LAG and the Partnership so that the Chair updates on Axis 4 activities so that there is greater synergy*”.

### 3.3.3 Promotion of Programme

Within Business Plan1 there has been a realism that the main activity has been on face to face communication in building relationships and trust. The early days of the programme and Business Plan 1 did see promotional activity through the Council's website and through press releases. Business Plan 2 has seen the “Create” brand having more exposure but there is still a need to for more local media coverage and engagement with existing business networks.

In terms of getting the message out there, one respondent to the on-line survey said, “*I think they managed to interpret a very dry subject so that it was understood by the wider community*”.

A key role of rural partnership members is to act as champions and ambassadors for the programme which would promote Create to existing and new groups. Champions could be linked to one of the five themes with a close association to the lead rural delivery officer for the activity. Whilst this is something that we would not expect within the infancy of a rural programme it is something that should now be developed within the Rural Partnership.

### 3.3.4 Project Assessment/Monitoring Activities

The LAG and Rural Partnership received regular reports from the Lead Body on a quarterly basis in terms of physical and financial monitoring. At the end of Business Plan 1 a summative report was produced which provide a succinct review of Axis 3 and 4 projects.

Figure 8 - Create - Torfaen Project Evaluation



Source: Torfaen County Borough Council

### 3.4 Local Action Group

A LAG will be specifically responsible for the implementation of Axis 4 activities although it may also be the chosen delivery organisation for some or all of the activities under Axis 3 (this principle could be extended to Axes 1 and 2 as well, where appropriate). As with Partnerships, due regard should be given to maximising the potential benefits of drawing upon existing experience and expertise when constituting the LAG, namely:

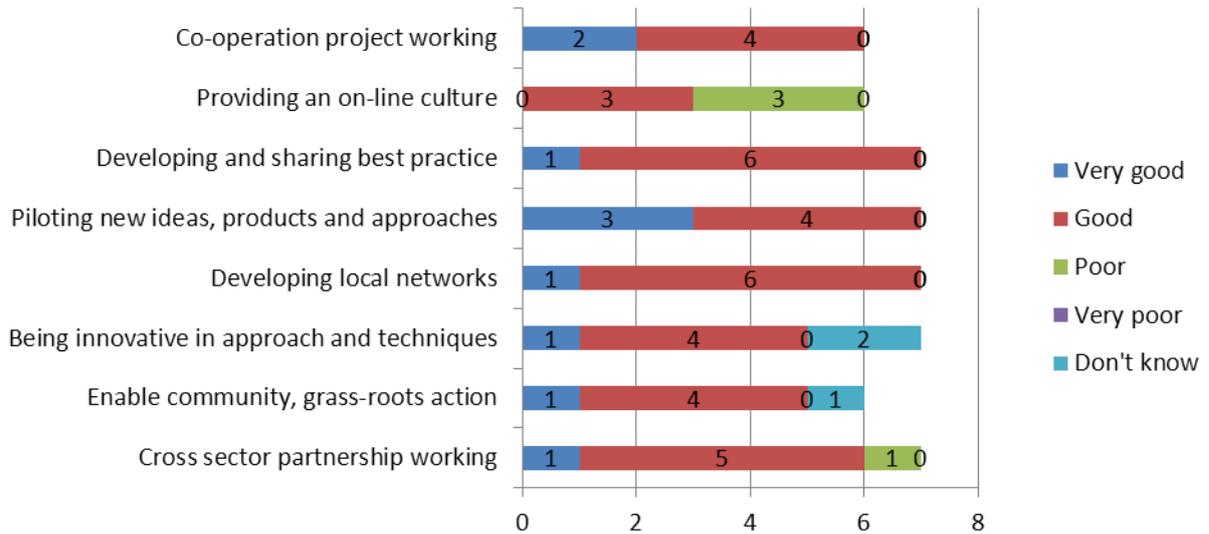
- Have an area-based local development strategy intended for a well identified sub-regional rural territory;
- Be a local public-private partnership;
- Utilise a bottom-up, inclusive approach;
- Operate through multi-sectoral design and implementation principles based on the interaction between actors and projects of different sectors of the local economy;
- Implement innovative approaches;
- Implement co-operation projects; and
- Develop the networking of local partners / partnerships.

The terms of reference of the Local Action Group (LAG) are appended to this report.

Figure 9 outlines how representatives rate the LAG in terms of its core activities. As the approach back in 2007/08 was innovative for Torfaen in terms of Leader activity, LAG and Partnership members tend to see the whole process of building capacity, developing local networks and delivering community/enterprise based solutions as new and feel that this has been innovative in terms of approach and ways of working

Areas for specific attention include providing an on-line culture and greater cross sector partnership working by one representative. The need for greater cross sector partnership working is identified by some of the Rural Partnership members which links to training, familiarisation with the LDS and the need to reviewing who represents rural communities in Torfaen.

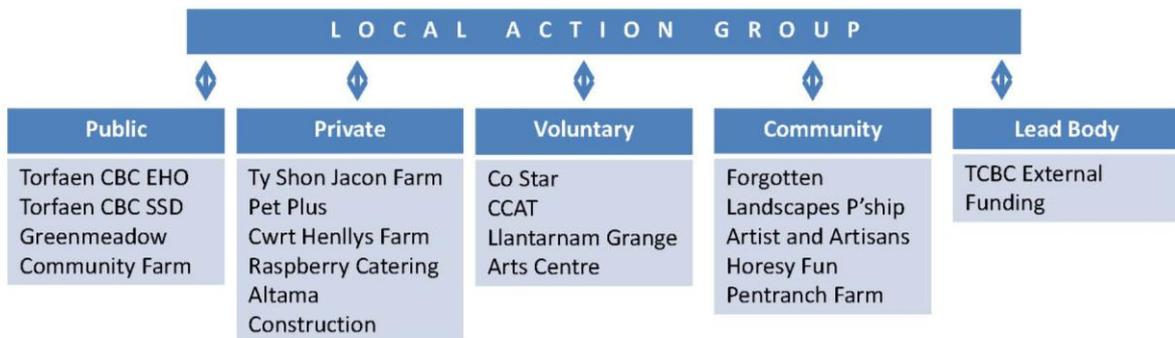
Figure 9 - How do you rate the following activities the Local Action Group has been managing?



Source: Miller Research (UK) Ltd; On-line Survey Results, June 2012

### 3.4.1 Partnership Working

Figure 10 - Torfaen Local Action Group



Source: Torfaen Local Development Strategy

The role of the LAG is seen as an evolving process with Torfaen still discovering its identity as a rural identity. During Business Plan 1 period and due to the “ready-made” nature of the project activities, the Lead Body has recognised that the formative years focussed on talking with the ideas generation stage only maturing into the development of Business Plan 2 phase. One LAG member commented that the “early stages of the process it was top-down and was guided by the RDP Manager, but as the LAG got more confident there was a shift of power. The LAG talked more and Nikki (RDP Manager) talked less.”

The recruitment of the Local Action Group has been organic and has been through local businesses, farms, organisations knowing people and suggesting they get involved. This cross fertilisation approach is shown with Raspberry Catering - a local catering company that grows local produce and provides food and drink for local businesses and events. The owner of which now sits on the LAG with a dual role as a local business and acting as a networker through the food and drink sector.

In reviewing the composition of the LAG and its decision makers it meets the RDP requirement of at least 50% being from specific target groups such as farmers, rural women, young people and their associations.

The LAG has held three joint workshops with the rural partnership to help with the refresh of the Local Development Strategy which has helped make the document more thematic, more output/outcome based which has facilitated learning amongst members. An example of strong partnership working has been where the Lead Body did not wish to suggest a name of the rural programme in Torfaen with the LAG finally coming out with "Create".

### 3.4.2 How has Business Case 1 worked toward LDS?

Initial days of rural working for the LAG did present challenges for new members with the Chair of the LAG noting that "*the Local Development Strategy was seen as a very technical thing, jargon heavy with some initial confusion on how Axis 3 and 4 differed*". She continued by saying "*if it wasn't for Nikki Davies (RDP Manager) in terms of dumbing down the language, people at a street level found it hard to get to a strategic way of thinking*".

The LAG recognises that addressing rural issues in Torfaen is an incremental process due to there being a lack of rural identity and sense of place. Due to the County Borough being relatively small in geographical size with a focus around some key settlements such as Cwmbran and Pontypool the rural landscape is sometimes on the periphery or lost within intervening areas.

Diversification is seen as important to existing farm units in terms of viability by LAG members but it is also recognised as an opportunity for local food production and to establish local markets with an immediate customer base in key settlements. The Branching Out series of support programmes under Axis 4 is identified by the LAG as a way of supporting indigenous growth within land-based, tourism and other rurally based industries. A member of the LAG commented that the support has helped "*safeguard and develop traditional crafts and skills such as hedge-laying and dry stone walling*".

This has helped purchase specific equipment which has led to business growth, diversification into new enterprises and products as well as ensuring existing businesses are fit for purpose in terms of business planning, planning application course, health and safety, first aid, compliance and marketing.

The LAG does acknowledge that Business Plan 1 did not have a cohesive network of businesses, organisations and individuals and the single conversations are now bearing fruit in terms of Business Plan 2 activity. This has led to rural producer networks and the LAG acting as a conduit for animating local action. Whilst not formally badged within the LAG, there are some emerging "RDP champions" in terms of farm diversification, local produce, etc. The LAG therefore sees its role as an entrepreneurial stimulus that develops key rural networks, the sharing of ideas that enable action.

On specific business plan 1 project activity, members of the LAG saw the Axis 3 project, the restoration of Llanyrafon Manor as a key catalyst for showcasing rural activity and acts as a visual hub for rural community development, skills/training, local produce, heritage and tourism and other land based activities. The initial restoration phase under Business Plan 1 has helped to stimulate educational activity through biodiversity projects in the hay meadow and the development of an orchard.

One member of the LAG did comment that the project was a “*done deal*” due to the short timetable and with the LAG in a shadow phase of existence it was understandable that the local authority had to take a lead. The opportunity is therefore seen “*to maximise the economic benefits with the need to develop it as a working facility (blacksmiths, carpentry) and to exploit tourism market in terms of education, rural products outlet...Farmers’ Market at the Manor*”.

Under future phases it is intended that the Manor will lead to local job creation with the building provide a place to incubate businesses, support established rural SMEs and help in developing local services and attractions that supports the building and extend out into the rural community. The LAG also sees the building as an important community focal point that not only serves the local Llanyravon community but is at a strategic gateway into Torfaen and the Valleys Regional Park area.

The key challenge for the LAG is ensure the Llanyrafon Manor project does enable rural outreach activity and that it becomes a centre for rural excellence that provides opportunity for all rural communities.

As identified at a Rural Partnership level, an objective for the LAG over future business plan periods is the ability to implement a development strategy for the area that works towards a coherent and integrated series of local and strategic actions.

### 3.4.3 Capacity Building

The capacity building activities of the LAG have mainly been channelled through the Axis 4 Branching Out fund, through the Business Creation, Diversification, Tourism and Rural Skills development. This has involved the dedicated Rural Diversification Officer with support, mentoring and grant support for specific activities. An evaluation of these capacity building activities in section 5 to this report.

### 3.4.4 Local Promotion

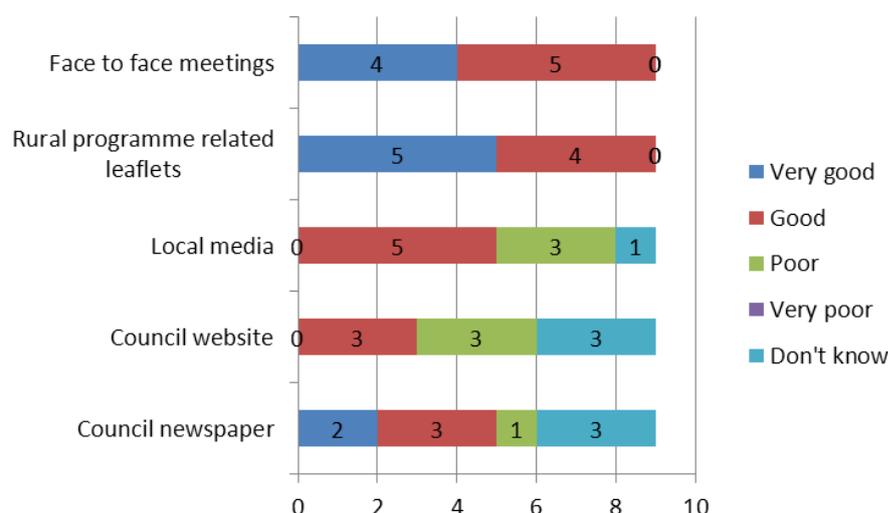
Figure 11 shows that the main focus of the LAG has been around face to face meetings through LAG meetings, site meetings with prospective beneficiaries.

In 2009 the rural partnership and LAG developed their brand and logo for the rural development programme. Evidence shows that the logo and its visibility has mainly been undertaken into Business Plan 2 with more formalised networks now having ownership of the brand and using it within leaflets, pop up stands, events and wider marketing.

An area for improvement within Business Plan 1 is the need to host web information within a neutral website area, with current information, links, contacts and news held within the Torfaen County Borough website. This would support cross sector development and address some cultural issues that some respondents to the on-line survey and face to face interviews have made.

A key challenge for the LAG beyond Business Plan 1 which is identified within the need to use local media/Council newspaper more is to promote the programme to the wider public and to raise awareness and connect residents with land based projects, local produce, farmers’ markets, etc.

Figure 11 - Rating for Marketing and Promotion of Create for Business Plan 1



Source: Miller Research (UK) Ltd; On-line Survey Results, June 2012

### 3.4.5 Engagement and Local Networks

The LAG appears to be engaging and has the right spirit and way of working. Representatives are from across the rural County Borough in terms of location with it developing from a small informal group to a known organisation. An example from one LAG member showed how a new LAG member from Lower Pen Tranch farm talked to Upper Pen Tranch Farm about their experiences of the LAG and engagement starts to become viral.

Engagement and communication tends to be through direct project activity with the Rural Diversification Officer dealing with initial project ideas, scoping, appraising and guiding potential applicants through grant and support processes.

Within the LAG, engagement is through regular meetings with members having updates and invites through email.

### 3.4.6 Innovation

In discussing whether Business Plan 1 has been innovative, the LAG feels that the process of developing rural projects, creating new networks, trialling new ideas in Torfaen is innovative to the rural County Borough. Whilst there has been no technological advancement of new product developed to date, the process itself is seen as innovative in terms of local groups influencing the decision-making process in rural areas and leading to direct investment. An example was provided by a LAG member of their visit to the Royal Welsh show where LAG members dressed up in bee hive suits and learnt about bee-keeping. Feedback from the LAG member was *“it was a new experience, it empowered you – we can do this!”*

### 3.4.7 Co-operation Project Working

No co-operation type activity was undertaken in Business Plan 1 period.

### 3.4.8 On-line Culture

Create does not have its own website, with information, updates and links provided the Torfaen County Borough Council website<sup>3</sup>.

LAG members identified that Business Plan 1 was “*about face to face contact*” there is a need to develop on-line infrastructure in terms of a dedicated web-site, social media, as well as assessing whether future rural activity require phone based technology to promote and raise awareness of rural enterprise, events and initiatives.

### 3.4.9 Training and Best Practice

The LAG has held training through updates at their regular meetings or through direct best practice visits. Internal training talks have focussed on regulation and compliance, renewable energy presentations with visits to Builth Wells Smallholders show on farming practice, stewardship, and diversification initiatives. Other best practice visits have included a trip to the Physic Garden in Cowbridge, Vale of Glamorgan and Community Orchards.

It is also recognised within the LAG that individuals bring their own expertise in terms of community development, local produce development, countryside management with members of the Rural Partnership also using their professional skills such as the Chair, Stuart Smith who is the Human Resource Manager at the local Girlings manufacturing plant.

### 3.4.10 Pilot New Ideas, Products and Approaches

As iterated within this report, Business Plan 1 has been innovative in terms of its rural focus, its engagement with rural communities, building capacity and trialling new products such as Pet Plus a nutritional pet supplement, community veg box scheme, natural wool felt products, goat milk soap and improvements in tourism infrastructure.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/AdviceBenefits/Grants/Europeanandotherfunding/Rural-Development-Plan-2007-2013>

## 4 Axis 3

The sole Axis 3 project within Business Case 1 is the Restoration of Llanyrafon Manor which is located in Llanyrafon South ward of the rural area.

In relation to scoping and identifying the project, Torfaen County Borough Council that the derelict manor house provided an unique opportunity to renovate an iconic building that had strong linkages to rural development as well as sending out a strong message of pride in our rural heritage and a demonstration that conversation was at the heart of rural activity in Torfaen.

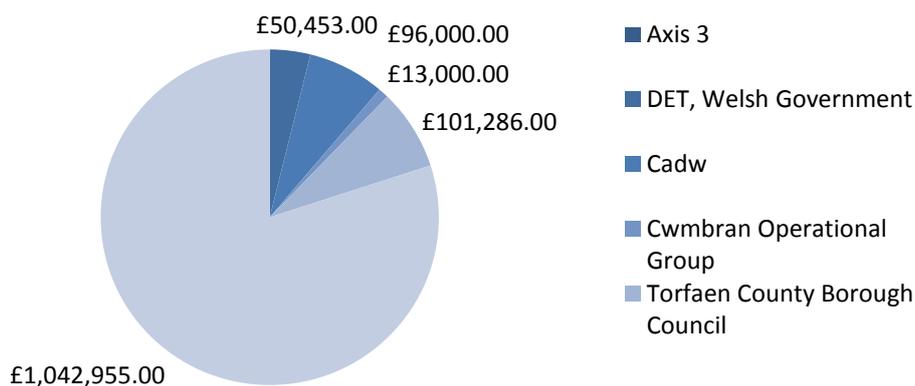


This project has implemented the first phase of the restoration of Llanyrafon Manor (completion of all works which do not require planning consent). It also provided all the necessary documentation to obtain Planning and Listed Building Consent, develop the grounds as a tourist attraction in their own right; commission feasibility studies to establish Llanyrafon Manor as tactical hub and nerve centre for the delivery of the RDP, as well as a gateway visitor centre.

The Manor is a Grade II\* Listed building complex with an associated 2.8 acres of land located in the Llanyrafon South Ward in Torfaen. The Manor was derelict and the grounds were overgrown. It is located in a prominent position close to major road links and in an attractive area considered to be the gateway to Torfaen and the Valleys Regional Park.

The Axis 3 project received a grant of £1,042,955 from EAFRD.

Figure 12 - Restoration of Llanyrafon Manor - Funding Package



Source: Torfaen County Borough Council

## 4.1 LDS Fit

In relation to the Local Development Strategy Llanyravon Manor meets both spatial and thematic objectives in that it is on a key corridor into the County Borough and is a key demonstration project for rural working. Whilst Business Plan 1 did not involve the final interpretation, finishes and landscaping of the building site, the strategic project objectives did set out to develop tourism attractions, provide a hub for rural activities and to help stimulate land based production.

In reviewing the Local Development Strategy themes, the site whilst not large in size does provide the opportunities to “*establish network links between land-based producers in Torfaen and surrounding areas to promote food and create closer working links with producers*” through its land based production theme. There is also planned activity outside of Business Plan 1 activity to use the Manor as place to network and develop opportunities around specialty foods and with the benefit of its proximity to a large residential population there is a significant opportunity to “*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*”.

A key theme that this specific project links to is to “Conserve Local Heritage” with the main focus of developing “*Llanyrafon Manor into the Rural Heritage Centre for the Borough*”. Whilst not specifically part of the initial restoration works the finished restoration and facilities provided have the opportunity to become part of a physical rural network of projects that links biodiversity, garden tourism and training opportunities.

## 4.2 Activities Undertaken

The £2.7 million project was initiated in 2008 with Business Case 1 providing a package contribution of £2.4 million. The main focus of the project activity has been detailed design and conservation studies to bring the building up to shell and internal restoration stage.

The project was managed by the Council with Rebecca Hartley acting as the client project manager in Torfaen County Borough Council. Rebecca has led on some major regeneration projects in the County Borough including the regeneration of Blaenavon which includes the interpretation and visitor information related to the World Heritage site. Rebecca's role focussed on the development of the funding package which included contributions from Cadw, Welsh Government, Cwmbran Operations Group, Torfaen County Council and the Rural Development Plan for Wales. She also had budget management responsibilities, quality control and end-user development.

Austin Smith Lord (ASL) were appointed as lead conservation architects who supported Rebecca with initial studies and investigations including structural, archaeological, ecological as well as drafting plans, drawings and specifications. ASL supported the procurement of the main contractor, site supervision and completion of the initial phase of works.

Figure 13 - Internal restoration of Llanyravon Manor



Source: John Weaver Construction

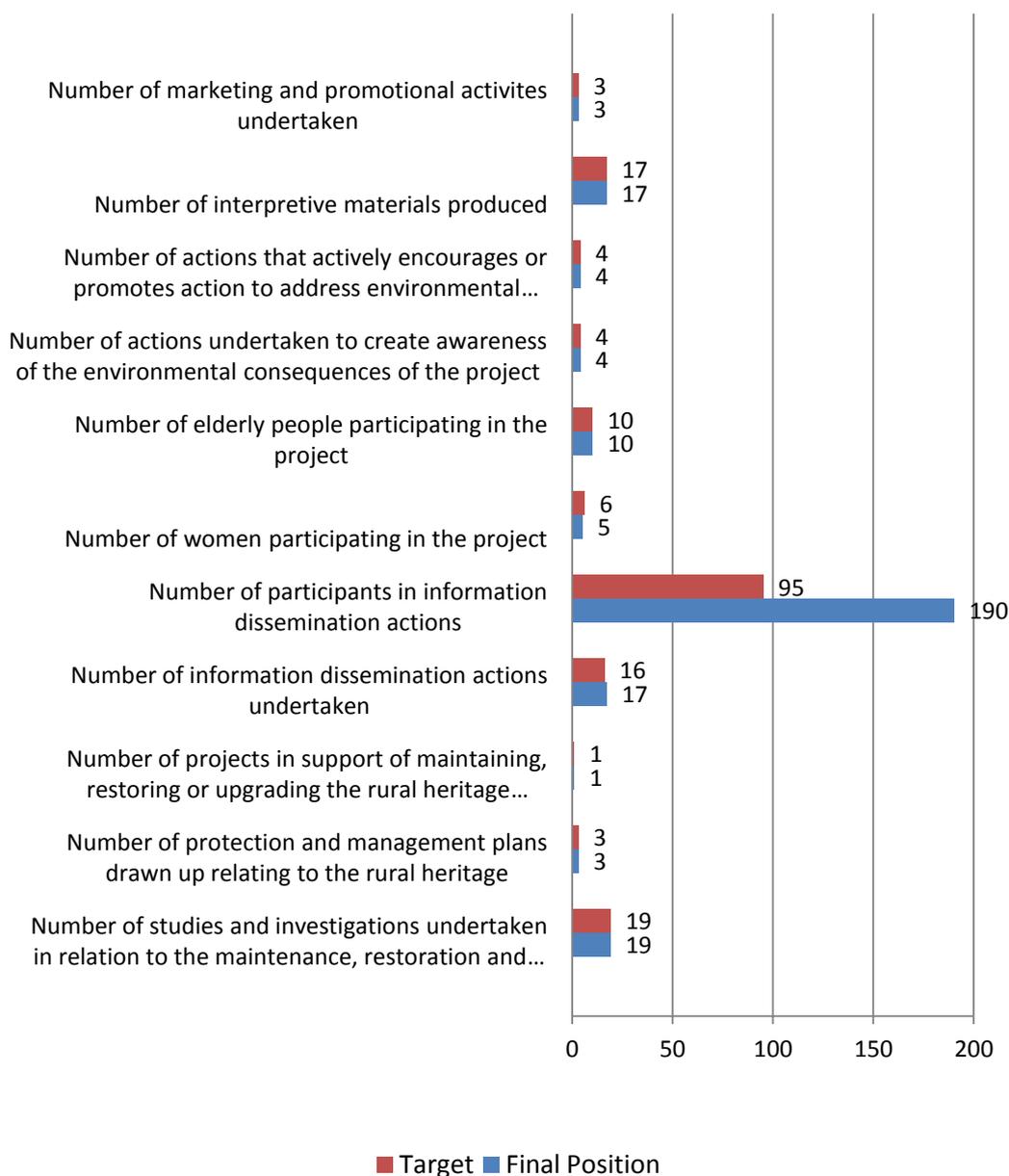
The programme of works commenced in September 2010 with a 12 month contract anticipated. As with older restoration projects there were some unforeseen problems with lesser horseshoe bats found in the building which were relocated to the neighbouring cottage structure. Nevertheless the initial restoration phase was completed in September 2011.

Some lessons learnt or areas for improvement from a project delivery perspective included the need for a more fast-track way of obtaining decisions from the Welsh Government Rural Development Executive which at times was "very bureaucratic". The micro-management was perceived to be unnecessary on a project that had faced problems with the weather, re-housing of the bats, in addition to delivering a conservation heritage project.

A key benefit that was generated from developing the project has been the involvement of Llanyrafon Community Group. Rebecca stated that the group was initially formed as a campaign group that had been complaining about the disrepair of the manor house with them soon becoming part of the design team. This role led the community group to help develop the garden design as well as developing the biodiversity and hay meadow aspect of the site. The involvement of the group has helped with planting and maintenance on site, and with wider community ownership. A case study from the perspective of Llanyravon Manor Community Group is described further on.

## 4.3 Performance

Figure 14 - Final Position on Outputs from Axis 3 Project



Source: Performance Indicators – Final Position – Axis 3, August 2011

Figure 14 shows the final monitoring return for August 2011, with a commentary on outputs and outcomes below.

### 4.3.1 Outputs

#### **ECO.323.1.1 – Studies and investigations undertaken in relation to the maintenance, restoration and upgrading of the rural heritage**

19 studies were commissioned and completed in order to obtain Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent. This includes fully drawn elevations/plans/sections, design

statement, access statement, schedule of works, damp/structural survey, ecological surveys and other technical requirements.

#### **WOA MEASURE 7.4 – Number of information dissemination actions undertaken**

17 dissemination actions took place (target of 16) which included:

- RDP Local Action Group meetings
- Llanyrafon Manor Community Group meetings, and
- Awareness Raising events for the general public.

#### **WOA MEASURE 7.5 – Number of participants in information dissemination actions**

Linked to WOA MEASURE 7.4 190 participants (100% more than target) attended the information dissemination events/meetings which was gathered through attendance sheets.

#### **ECO.323.1.4 – Projects in support of maintaining, restoring or upgrading the rural heritage financially supported**

This was the main physical output which was the phased restoration of Llanyrafon Manor, the creation of an historic garden and an information focal point for the general public to view the plans for the proposed use of the Manor during the restoration phase.

#### **ECO.323.1.2 – Protection and management plans drawn up relating to the rural heritage**

3 no. feasibility studies, management plans and strategies have been completed which link to the future activity for the Manor. These include Tourism Marketing, Conservation Management Plan and Garden designs.

#### **WOA Measure 9.1- Number of actions undertaken to create awareness of the environmental consequences of the project**

This has involved awareness raising actions through on-site interpretation and information at the Manor, as well as through press releases. This has included energy efficiency measures, promotion and use of locally sourced and sustainably produced materials, water conservation measures and preservation of an important bat roost for lesser horseshoe bats.

#### **WOA Measure 9.2 – Number of actions that actively encourages or promotes action to address environmental sustainability**

These actions were linked to phase 2 of the works in that they provide the infrastructure, site layout, linkages and waste facilities so that the following has been supported in Business Plan 2. This includes:

1. Access to be encouraged by sustainable transport; cycling, walking and easy access to public transport.
2. Farm to support sustainable rural businesses
3. Reduce, reuse and recycle to be mainstreamed
4. Project to act as a key local resource for innovative sustainable living and quality of life ideas.

#### 4.3.2 Results

##### **ECR.323.1.1 – Population in rural areas benefiting from improved services provided by supported projects**

Through strong community engagement through Llanyravon Manor Community Group and its proximity to this rural ward the project will benefit 2,664 residents.

The Group has 50 volunteers from the community that support the maintenance of the garden and development of land based projects.

#### 4.4 Summary

The restoration of Llanyrafon Manor has succeeded in a number of ways:

1. Restored a building of local and historical interest situated close to a rural community;
2. Developed trust with its community in terms of the Llanyravon Manor Community Group which has led to volunteering, skills development and a sustainable future for the project;
3. The restoration phase has created the foundation to the internal fit out of the building which has local economic development, heritage, food tourism, training/skills development and demonstration site for land based activities;
4. Its project delivery has been integrated, multi-disciplinary and has ensured ownership within the local community as well as delivery partners.

##### Case Study – Restoration of Llanyravon Manor

Llanyravon Manor is a Grade II\* Listed building complex with an associated 2.8 acres of land located in the Llanyrafon South Ward in Torfaen. The Manor was derelict for some years with the grounds overgrown and the building in a poor condition. The Manor is located in a strategic location within south Torfaen being close to a major neighbourhood as well as being on a main corridor and gateway into Torfaen and the Valleys Regional Park.



This Axis 3 project was identified due to the restoration opportunity, its location and the need for a centre for rural excellence and gateway visitor centre with a strong focus on the rural aspects of Torfaen.

The main activities of the project within Business Plan 1 were:

- To undertake a number of studies, investigations, protection and management plans

- To undertake a number of feasibility studies, management plans and strategies;
- To use RDP funding to help breathe new life into the currently derelict Llanyrafon Manor;
- To develop the Manor as a visitor attraction and visitor information centre;
- Using the Manor House as the centre for the implementation of the Rural Development Programme;
- Make the Manor House a sustainable building for the future.

The initial phase of the project was on the restoration of the Manor with the fitting out, interpretation and landscaping undertaken within Business Plan 2. In terms of identifying the project for rural development support, Torfaen Council had an awareness of the Manor for a long time due to it having a chequered history within the local community. A key player in the development of this project has been the Llanyrafon Manor Community Group, which this case study specifically centres on in terms of their role and involvement in the project.

One of the main community representatives on the group is Ray Evans who has been central to the campaign to restore the building to its former condition and role within the local community. This case study is presented from a community perspective in terms of how the Manor has been restored and how the community is working to ensure its sustainability.

The Manor was a farm once owned by the Willis family who still trade in Llanyrafon as butchers as well as being a well known business in Cwmbran and Torfaen. When the family moved out of the farm, the Council bought the whole estate with a Museum based trust operating a farm/agricultural based resource for some time which displayed farming tools, had re-enactment days. The museum was unsustainable to run with it eventually closing.

In 1996 after many years of the build becoming derelict and redundant a public meeting was held with over 100 people attending to help decide the future of the Manor. Ideas ranged from complete demolition to the site being redeveloped for housing. There was a unanimous decision to “*save the farm*” with advice from community councillors on the need to establish a community based approach if the project was to obtain funding. Seven complete strangers formed the Llanyravon Manor Community Group who met in peoples’ houses as well as meeting with the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bob Wellington to take forward their proposal.

In 2007, the groups learned of Torfaen being designated for rural development funding with Llanyravon South deemed as an eligible rural ward. The community group immediately saw that this programme would work “*hand in glove*” with their aims and objectives and also saw synergy with what the Council wished to achieve from the Manor.

In 2008 the group with the help of Torfaen's Rural Development Programme applied for funding within Business Case 1. Ray said that “*Nikki (RDP Manager) was brilliant and helped us fill in complex documents.*” Ray and fellow group members attended several meetings at County Hall with key officers such as Rebecca Hartley with the group ecstatic with the news of the grant which was one of the biggest grants for the RDP



programme in that round. In scoping the aims of the project, Llanyravon Manor Community Group had a number of priorities they wish to see achieved through the grant. Ray speaking about their aims firstly wanted *“to see the Manor restored as a place for people in Llanyrafon to enjoy, including special events, educational, sitting out in nice gardens and learn about the history of the house”*. She continued by saying that *“the community group were quite specific about the Manor not being a museum but a place that celebrated the periods of the house from the Stewarts, the Tudors through to World War 2”*.

Hywel, a member of the community group attended LAG and development meetings, with a feeling that *“the group were involved with the delivering the project”*.

The community group did not directly get involved the physical restoration of the structure due to the conservation status as well as risks associated with physical works in terms of health and safety etc. The volunteers within the group mainly focussed on the clearance of the immediate site with them walking into a place that had saplings up to their neck. Their work therefore involved ground clearance, lopping trees and removal of weeds. The community groups attended regular meetings with the project delivery group and contractors with then have a sense that they had an *“equal place around the table”* and the Council saying *“we want you there!”* This relationship has led to real trust and an honest working relationship.

In terms of the physical planning of the landscaping, Ray singled out Andrew Neville at the Council who was the landscape officer. Andrew worked with the community group to prepare the groundwork for the Manor gardens helping with design and planting specifications. As part of this phase, the community group went on a number of field study visits including Llancaich Fawr, Dewstow House gardens and Tretower Court. Tretower Court was insightful as it helped the project and the community group in choosing herbs and suitable fruit trees.



**Llanyrafon manor**  
Rural Heritage Centre

In terms of skills development, Ray and her volunteers at Llanyravon Manor Community Group feel that they have developed their skills and expertise in technical and more generic areas of physical garden restoration. This has ranged from biodiversity awareness, creating vegetable plots for the future Manor cafe outlet, dry stone walling skills and the planting and production from fruit trees such as apples and pears. The group also has much greater appreciation of the application process and how funding is secured. They have also had the opportunity to watch other craftsman involved in conservation heritage/restoration of the Manor building as well as understanding about local ecology such as the bats that had to be rehoused to the neighbouring cottage.

In terms of the next phase of work for the Manor they are working on a new website, supporting the future cafe outlet with produce grown from the site and continue to support the maintenance and management of the site as well as supporting the restoration of the workshop buildings. The group now has 40 members engaged and it is seen by Ray as a *“place that everyone can enjoy it”*.

In terms of legacy Ray sees that *“the process has been about passion and about the community being at the centre of it”*. The completed project has generated *“pats on the back for all involved”* with Ray also seeing that the project has been cross generational with young people involved in stone walling as well as the local primary school involved in terms of learning about history, place and memories. This involved a costumed story of the Manor through costumed ages of the Manor exhibition with the school which took people from the Tudor age to World War 2. The primary school engagement activity has led to the community group having their own logo with educational programmes to the Manor programmed.

Finally, Ray feels that the project has been a *“real partnership”* between all organisations. When asked how she feels about the project now it is completed she said *“passion and dream achieved!”*



## 5 Axis 4

### 5.1 Overview

Axis 4 of the Rural Development Plan (RDP) for Wales 2007-2013 has a clear objective: "building local capacity for employment and diversification". To meet this objective, Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) were successful in securing four projects under Business Case 1 of the RDP. They are:

- Business Creation and Development;
- Farm Diversification;
- Rural Tourism, and
- Rural Skills

Three of the projects were grant schemes and were branded under the title 'branching out fund'. They are business creation, diversification and rural tourism. The fourth project 'rural skills' was a training project.

To meet the objective of building local capacity, Axis 4 uses the 'LEADER' approach which involves extensive consultation of the local community to ensure the funding is used in the best possible way.

### 5.2 LDS Fit

The Axis 4 projects clearly reflect the key challenges highlighted in the Local Development Strategy (LDS)<sup>4</sup>. The LDS proposes to create a vision that addresses the following concerns, identified through extensive research:

- A decline in income from conventional rural activities
- Ageing population engaged in farming
- Effects on the rural landscape and the environment
- Absence of diversification initiatives
- Low levels of sustainable economic activity
- Low levels of educational achievement
- Lack of skills and training
- Health and wellbeing

Clearly, the Axis 4 projects aim to address many of these issues. For example, the branching out fund has a distinct focus on stimulating business performance through innovative projects. Furthermore, the branching out fund has three elements which are closely aligned to the issues noted. The Business Creation and Development, and Rural Tourism funds aim to support and create sustainable economic activity and stimulate diversification initiatives. The Farm Diversification grant clearly aims to mitigate the decline

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the LDS was updated in November 2011, during the delivery of the approved business case 1 projects.

in income from conventional rural activities by stimulating diversification and sustainable business practices. Finally, the Rural Skills project hopes to improve skills and training and educational achievement among Torfaen residents. The contribution of the Axis 4 projects to the key challenges noted in the LDS is summarised in Table 1. The rating in the table refers to the extent to which the individual projects contribute to the key challenges. A primary rating indicates a close link between the project and the key challenge. A secondary rating indicates where a project indirectly contributes towards mitigating a key challenge. And an n/a rating indicates minimal or no contribution.

Table 1 Extent to which Axis 4 Projects Contribute to LDS Key Challenges

Key Challenges	Branching Out			Rural Skills
	Business Creation and Development	Farm Diversification	Rural Tourism	
A decline in income from conventional rural activities	Primary	Primary	Primary	Primary
Ageing population engaged in farming	Secondary	Secondary	n/a	n/a
Effects on the rural landscape and the environment	Primary	Primary	Secondary	n/a
Absence of diversification initiatives	Primary	Primary	Secondary	Primary
Low levels of sustainable economic activity	Primary	Primary	Primary	Primary
Low levels of educational achievement	n/a	n/a	n/a	Primary
Lack of skills and training	n/a	n/a	n/a	Primary
Health and wellbeing	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary

A number of additional issues are noted in the LDS which are directly related to the objectives of the Axis 4 projects. They include a lack of enterprise and innovation which it is claimed is present in the rural wards of Torfaen which are lacking “a *community culture of entrepreneurship where looking for entrepreneurship opportunities over the widest range of activities and resources has become a way of life for local people*”. There is a clear theme across all of the projects under Axis 4 to stimulate diversification and enterprise by supporting businesses and individuals. Therefore, clearly aiming to address this issue. Also, it is noted that there is an under-developed tourism potential in rural Torfaen despite it being home to a World Heritage Site. The Rural Tourism project is a clear attempt at addressing this issue. Finally, the lack of sustainable development issues is noted in the LDS and the rural skills project, which aims to leave a legacy of skilled individuals, plus the grant schemes which aim to stimulate business opportunities to improve the future

prosperity of businesses are obvious attempts to up-skill and built local capacity among Torfaen's residents.

## 5.3 Activities Undertaken

### 5.3.1 Branching out Fund

The branching out fund was a grant scheme which aimed to add value to new and existing rural businesses through innovative projects. The outcome was to develop profitable and sustainable organisations. Applicants of the branching out fund were encouraged to develop their skills through participation in the rural skills project.

The fund offered 80% grants up to the value of £5,000 for projects under the three headings; business creation, diversification and rural tourism. Support and advice was also offered as part of the project ranging from assisting applicants in drafting business plans to offering advice on planning criteria. Eligible projects were required to derive income from non-agricultural trading.

In total, the branching out projects cost £72,925.03 including £58,341.02 in EAFRD grants. The distribution of these funds among the three projects is shown in Table 2. The largest proportion of the fund was allocated to Rural Tourism projects (43%). The Business Creation and Development fund attracted a little more than the farm diversification fund with each accounting for 31% and 27% of the total amount respectively.

Table 2 Branching Out Fund Budgets

Fund	Total Amount	EAFRD	Percentage
1. Business Creation and Development	£ 22,439.12	£ 17,951.29	31%
2. Farm Diversification	£ 19,376.41	£ 15,501.13	27%
3. Rural Tourism	£ 31,109.50	£ 24,888.60	43%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£ 72,925.03</b>	<b>£ 58,341.02</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 shows the distribution of grant funds by project under each fund heading. It shows that grants ranged from £830 to £6,250. Further analysis of project performance can be found in the subsequent section. Below, each project is explained in greater detail.

Table 3 Branching Out Fund Budget by Project

Project	Total Budget	EAFRD	Percentage
<b>1. Business Creation and Development</b>	<b>£ 22,439.12</b>	<b>£ 17,951.29</b>	<b>100%</b>
All Creatures Great and Small	£ 830.00	£ 664.00	4%
Cwmynyscoy Community Action Trust	£ 1,121.25	£ 897.00	5%
Pet Plus	6,192.64	£ 4,947.42	28%
CoStar Partnership	£ 4,495.88	£ 3,596.70	20%
Artists and Artisans	£ 6,250.00	£ 5,000.00	28%
Woodwise	£ 3,554.54	£ 2,843.63	16%
<b>2. Farm Diversification</b>	<b>£ 19,376.41</b>	<b>£ 15,501.13</b>	<b>93%</b>
Mountain View Produce	£ 4,150.00	£ 3,320.00	21%
Pentre Bach Farm	£ 5,573.00	£ 4,458.40	29%

	Cwrt Henllys Farm	£ 4,440.00	£ 3,552.00	23%
	Pen Tranch Farm	£ 3,763.41	£ 3,010.73	19%
<b>3. Rural Tourism</b>		<b>£ 31,109.50</b>	<b>£ 24,888.60</b>	<b>65%</b>
	Edlogan Bed and Breakfast	£ 6,000.00	£ 4,800.00	19%
	Oakfield Bed and Breakfast	£ 5,367.50	£ 4,294.00	17%
	All Saints Church, Llanfrechfa	£ 2,755.11	£ 2,204.08	9%
	Lower Pen Tranch Farm	£ 6,200.00	£ 4,960.00	20%

### Business Creation and Development

The total project budget was a little over £22,000<sup>5</sup> of which just under £18,000<sup>6</sup> came from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). There were six successful projects under this arm of the branching out fund. They were;

- All Creatures Great and Small Animal Sanctuary** – an animal sanctuary based in Llanfrechfa which specialises in the care and re-homing of abandoned or abused dogs, cats, and other animals. The organisation which is a registered charity is managed by volunteers and relies on donations, legacies and grant funding. The sanctuary had existing plans to develop an educational, training and community facility in a derelict barn and used the branching out fund to commission a planning application for the proposal which included a bat survey. The project cost £830, which included a £664 BOF grant. This accounted for 4% of the total business creation and development fund. Match funding was raised through the businesses own funds.
- Cwmynyscoy Community Action Trust** – is a community trust dedicated to regenerating the Cwmynyscoy ward by attracting investment to address social issues faced by residents of the ward. The trust has supported physical improvement projects, provided fresh fruit and vegetables for residents and supported projects to address cultural differences. The trust used the branching out grant to commission a feasibility study to support future funding bids for two renewable energy projects; a wind turbine in the Local Nature Reserve and a hydro-electric system in the Afon-Llwyd River. The project cost £1,121.25 which was funded with a BOF grant of £897. This project accounted for 5% of the total business creation and development fund.
- Pet Plus** – is a global sales distribution business selling nutritional supplements for cats and dogs. The branching out grant enabled the Torfaen based entrepreneur to purchase inventory from its predecessor in the USA and to restore two derelict farm buildings to store the product and run the business. The project cost £6,192.64 which included a grant of £4,947.42. The remaining costs were met by the businesses own funds. The project accounted for 28% of the business creation and development fund.
- CoStar Partnership** – is a registered charity which delivers local projects that increase access to education, training and employment among residents. Based in Cwmbran, the partnership used the branching out grant to establish a domestic

<sup>5</sup> Actual figure = £22,439.12

<sup>6</sup> Actual figure = £17,951.29

gardening service which would offer affordable horticultural services to the community. The project cost £4,495.88 which included a grant of £3,596.70. The 20% match funding was sourced through other funding routes. In total, the project accounted for exactly one fifth of the total business creation and development fund.

- **Artists and Artisans** – is an arts and crafts company which specialises in the production and sale of unique, natural wool felt products and which also produces design work and teaches the art of felt making. The company used the branching out grant to purchase new machinery and materials and to support in the general growth of the company. The project cost £6,250 which comprised a £5,000 EAFRD grant. The remainder was matched through private sources. The project accounted for 28% of the total business creation and development fund.
- **Woodwise – Garnsychan Partnership** – is a charitable partnership which is committed to improving the lives of socially disadvantaged members of the community through social enterprises. The branching out grant was used to purchase new equipment and repair existing tools for the 'woodwise' recycling scheme which transforms waste wood products into new projects. The project cost £3,554.54 which included a £2,843.63 grant. The remaining funds were sourced through other funding routes. The project occupied a 16% share of the total business creation and development fund.

#### Farm Diversification

The total project budget was approximately £19,000<sup>7</sup> which included £15,500<sup>8</sup> of EAFRD monies. The project aimed to provide funding support for new enterprises to support the income of the farm and was available to all farm household members. Eligible applicants needed to earn the majority of their income from farming and have an agricultural holding number. There were four successful project applicants. They were:

- **Mountain View Produce** – Based on a small holding which farms goats and sells the milk, meat and breeding stock, Mountain View Produce is an enterprise which utilised the branching out fund grant to utilise farm produce to make goat milk soap. The grant was used to cover the costs of production and marketing – including a new website to increase the customer base. New equipment was purchased which enabled the soap to be made in-house and a market stall and van has made the enterprise mobile facilitating attendance at events and markets. The project cost £4,150 of which £3,320 was received via an EAFRD grant. The remaining project costs were met by the farm's own funds. In total, this project accounted for 21% of the total farm diversification fund.
- **Pen Tranch Farm** – is a small farm in Pontypool which produces home reared meat for sale in the local market. They utilised the branching out fund to realise their ambitions to diversity their activities into ground care services such as felling, clearing and land reclamation services. They used the grant to buy machinery and personal protective equipment. They also made use of the rural skills training grant to undertake complementary skills for their new venture. This included spraying and chainsaw safety. The project cost a total of £3,763.41 which was funded by a

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<sup>7</sup> Actual figure £19,376.41

<sup>8</sup> Actual figure £15,501.13

£3,010.73 grant and £752.68 from the farm's own funds. The project occupied a 19% share of the overall farm diversification fund.

- **Pentre Bach Farm** – is a partnership of two organic farms totalling 135 acres. The farms produce organic beef from 35 cattle. They used the branching out grant to start a new enterprise – a mobile saw mill. The saw can be hired out and they also sell processed waste wood. This was the most expensive project within the farm diversification fund at £5,573. Of this, £4,458.40 came from the EAFRD grant. The remainder was sourced from the farm's own funds. The project benefitted from the largest share of the farm diversification fund at 29%.
- **Cwrt Henllys Farm** – is a third generation family farm that raises livestock and since 1934 has had a successful plant hire and groundwork business. Following dwindling performance of the plant hire business, the branching out grant was used to re-brand the company. A new logo and website were designed and promotional material developed using the grant. The project cost £4,440 in total and received ££3,552 from the grant. The remaining funds came from the farm itself. Overall, this project accounted for a little less than a quarter of the overall farm diversification fund.

### Rural Tourism

The rural tourism project attracted a total budget of £31,000<sup>9</sup> with nearly £25,000 of that coming from the EAFRD. This project was added after the initial launch following consultation with the community. A reallocation of funds from the other Branching Out Fund projects was approved in order to fund this project. The grant was directed at any tourism business in rural Torfaen wishing to improve its service or develop new products. Four grants were awarded as follows:

- **Edlogan Bed and Breakfast** – is a new B&B in Blaenavon, serving visitors to the World Heritage Site as well as existing customers from the owners existing business Paraventure Airsports which offers tuition in hang-gliding. They used the branching out fund to renovate and furnish the guest area of the B&B in order to achieve accreditation with Visit Wales. The total cost of the project was £6,000 of which £4,800 was awarded as a grant and the remainder through the B&Bs own funds. This was approximately one fifth of the overall rural tourism fund.
- **Oakfield Bed and Breakfast** – is a B&B in Blaenavon which used the branching out fund grant to improve access to the property to contribute towards their pursuit of 5 star accreditation from Visit Wales. The grant enabled them to buy a new gate, re-design the entrance to the property and also to resurface the car park. The project cost £5,367.50 which included a £4,294 grant. Using its own funds to meet the full project cost, the project occupied 17% of the total grant available within the rural tourism fund.
- **All Saints Church, Llanfrechfa** – is a church that serves the parish of Llanfrechfa and Llandewi Fach which is open to visitors throughout the summer months and which also holds events. The branching out fund grant was used to hold a five day flower festival in May 2010. The total cost of the project was £2,755.11 which was just under one tenth of the overall fund allocation.

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<sup>9</sup> Actual Figure £31,109.50

- **Lower Pen Tranch Farm** – is an 8 acre smallholding which produces rare breed pork, chicken and lamb. The branching out fund was used for a feasibility study for a diversification proposal to construct a holiday home. The project cost £6,200 in total and accounted for one fifth of the overall fund.

### 5.3.2 Rural Skills Training

The rural skills and training project offered 100% funding to those living and working in rural Torfaen to gain new qualifications and skills. The outcome of the training was expected to be improved employability, occupational mobility and earning potential among participants. Training was delivered under three main headings:

- **Management, Administrative and Marketing Skills** – which included the hospitality course 'Croeso Cynnes' or 'Warm Welcome' to enhance the tourism sector's visitor welcome.
- **ICT Skills** – which primarily focussed on training in online marketing delivered through seminars and workshops by a Torfaen based trainer. It attracted participants from local businesses, public organisations and charities.
- **Maintenance and Enhancement of the Landscape** – included training in hedge laying, dry stone walling, fencing and sheep shearing. The training was delivered by several Torfaen based training providers.

## 5.4 Performance

### 5.4.1 Branching Out Fund

#### Business Creation and Development

The objectives of the Business Creation and Development project were:

- To raise awareness of the RDP and to actively promote and market the Business Creation and Development element of the associated grant programme;
- To develop projects, led by entrepreneurs/individuals which:
  - will have a positive impact on the local economy;
  - will enhance the current rural economy;
  - will attract additional tourists to the area;
  - will support local food producers;
  - will support land owners, encouraging sustainable and traditional land management;
- To provide opportunities for micro and small enterprises to grow their businesses with connections in other areas of Torfaen;

To monitor progress a number of performance indicators were established and achievements recorded. The final performance results are shown in Table 4. Approximately half of the performance indicators have exceeded the targets. An additional half of the original targets were realised for two important indicators. They were the number of new

and existing micro enterprises advised or assisted, and those financially assisted. Only two targets were not met. They were the number of young people participating in the project and the number of enterprises introducing new or improved products, process or services. Based on the results given, the project has performed well and has delivered on the majority of its outputs and results.

Table 4 Project Performance - Business Creation and Development

<b>Performance Indicators</b>	<b>Ref. Number</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achievements</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>Outputs</b>				
Number of new and existing micro enterprises advised or assisted	ECO.312.1.1	10	20	10
Number of new and existing micro enterprises financially supported	ECO.312.1.2	3	6	3
Individuals or groups advised or assisted to set up or develop ideas for new micro enterprises (pre-start)	WO.312.1.1	20	25	5
Individuals or groups financially supported to set up or develop ideas for new micro enterprises (pre-start)	WO.312.1.2	3	6	3
Number of actions undertaken to create awareness of the environmental consequences of the project	WOA.312.9.1	7	7	0
Number of actions that actively encourages or promotes action to address environmental sustainability	WOA.312.9.2	1	1	0
Number of enterprises introducing changes that enhances the environment or improves sustainability	WOA.312.9.3	2	2	0
Number of studies commissioned in the development of a project	WOA.312.7.1	1	1	0
Number of information dissemination actions undertaken	WOA.312.7.4	10	21	11
Number of participants in information dissemination actions	WOA.312.7.5	20	20	0
Number of young people participating in the project	WOA.312.8.2	20	11	-9
Number of women participating in the project	WOA.312.8.3	3	6	3
Number of individuals from 'under-employed groups' participating in the project	WOA.312.8.7	10	10	0
<b>Results</b>				
Number or enterprises created	WR.312.1.1	2	4	2
Gross number of jobs created	ECR.312.1.1	2	4	2
Gross number of jobs safeguarded	WR.312.1.6	3	6	3
Number of enterprise groups, cooperatives or formal networks created	WR.312.1.4	2	2	0
Number of enterprises introducing new products and/or techniques	WR.312.1.2	5	4	-1
Number of new or improved products, processes or services launched	WR.312.1.3	3	3	0
Number of new markets being supplied by supported enterprises	WR.312.1.5	1	2	1
Number or individuals returning to work as a result of support provided	WR.312.1.6	2	3	1

Further analysis was undertaken on a qualitative nature to understand the softer impacts of the project on the beneficiaries themselves. This was achieved through a sample of case studies as follows:

### Case Study - Woodwise

Woodwise is a community recycling scheme that utilises waste wood by creating new products such as bird boxes, children's playhouses and garden furniture out of unwanted items such as old wardrobes and bed frames.



(C) Adrian Reilly Photography 07745581910

The project aimed to provide opportunities and work experience to socially vulnerable people in North Torfaen in a bid to reduce social exclusion and increase economic activity. It is one of five projects delivered by The Garnsychan Partnership, a registered charity committed to assisting and improving a socially disadvantaged area within the County Borough.

The project is located at Circulate based within Blaenavon and is coordinated by Kate Burton who took the reins of the scheme following the departure of Susan Brown. Kate is operational project manager of Woodwise and three other Circulate projects. The Garnsychan partnership initially became aware of the Branching Out Fund through their close relationship with Torfaen CBC namely Nikki Davies and Emma Davies. They were looking at ways to find funding to maintain volunteer placements and purchase new equipment and make repairs to old tools in order to retain orders coming in and create a sustainable future for the Woodwise project. In addition to covering the purchase and refurbishment of tools and visitor placements, the grant funding also financed a number of marketing events and promotional materials within the local community.

*"The grant funding definitely sped up and aided Woodwise's development".*

Since obtaining the grant the project has continued its initial success and in some areas has exceeded expectations.

Woodwise is now a self sustaining business with regular orders coming in and a pretty much constant flow of volunteers coming to obtain work experience from Coleg Gwent, Torfaen Training and other employment agencies and areas of the community.

The Wood wise project has far reaching benefits, not only improving economic activity within the county of Torfaen by increasing volunteer's employability through the enhancement and provision of skilled trade experience, but also by reaching those hard to reach groups and increasing people's confidence people skills providing them with a sense of purpose and direction. The project also has considerable environmental benefits by recycling wood which would otherwise go to landfill therefore indirectly reducing the demand for new timber and positively impacting upon the issue of deforestation.

In terms of its future, Wood wise is increasing to expand and plan to explore new avenues in which to recycle wood and train local unskilled men and women. According to

Kate the work is very seasonal and so Wood wise have began tackling new areas for different seasons such as planters and hangers in spring and summer, in autumn bird boxes for local schools made from scrap wood and in winter Christmas themed items such as Santa signs and decorations. As a result of the success of the Wood wise project Circulate have launched a further four recycling type projects such as a clothes swap shop as well as refurbishing old unwanted computers and ICT equipment.

When asked if the project would have been a success without the support of the Branching Out Fund, Kate replied by stating the grant enabled Wood wise to cover resources, tools, marketing and visitor placements which in turn led them to win tenders and ultimately become self sustaining. She outlined that the project was already in operation, however the grant funding definitely sped up and aided its development.

Overall Wood wise is a fantastic example of how Rural Development funding can contribute on a number of wider social levels, not only reducing social exclusion, but also impacting positively upon the environment and the local economy.

### Case Study – Pet Plus

Pet plus is nutritional supplement aimed at the pet market. The business is run by experienced holistic veterinary surgeon Suzi McIntyre located within the Henllys who developed Pet Plus to promote good health in cats and dogs.

The product was originally manufactured and distributed in the United States and when the opportunity arose to take over the business Suzi approached the Branching Out fund to help make her dream come true.



Suzi received £4947 through the Business creation and development element of the grant which enabled her to ship the remaining stock over from the US, in addition to help secure some outbuildings located on her property for storage. It also covered the relabeling of the brand and a number of promotional materials such as leaflets and compliment slips. Suzi became aware that funding was available through Emma Davies at Torfaen CBC who was visiting local farms in the area to discuss possible opportunities and business ventures.

*“The financial support has been a major success and has enabled the business to really take off”*

The financial support has been a major success and has enabled the business to really take off, not only providing a safe and accessible storage facility for large quantities of the product leading to business expansion, but it also has helped with the promotion and overall reputation of the brand. Suzi highlighted that the grant has had considerable benefits on both a personal and wider social level stating that her income has nearly doubled in recent years and that Pet Plus actually promotes healthy living in both pets and humans through the promotion of eating the right nutrients.

Suzi was very happy with the grant and support she received from members of Torfaen CBC

and outlined that without the funding the business would not have been as much of success in the short timescale. As a result of getting involved in the Branching Out programme, Suzi has now become a member of the Local Action Group and is well experienced in RDP activities. She also indicated that her participation in the project has led her to explore new avenues of funding and that grants such as Axis 4's Branching Out are well worth applying for and would definitely recommend it to anyone. With regards to future activities, Suzi hopes to continue to develop the business and ultimately expand internationally.

#### Case Study - Cymynsycoy Community Action Trust (CCAT)

CCAT is a community organisation based in Cymynsycoy, one of the most deprived wards within the County Borough of Torfaen. The trust formed to develop projects which will help to regenerate an area which receives very little in terms inward investment and hopes to improve facilities, increase income levels and employment opportunities and ultimately provides a better future for the people who currently live within the ward.

CCAT currently run a wide range of projects from reducing cultural difference between travellers and the community to educating families about the benefits of eating fresh fruit and vegetables. The Trust approached the Branching Out Fund to begin developing two micro-energy projects as sustainable social enterprises which they hope will generate a regular source of income to benefit the community and create employment opportunities for local residents. The first project incorporates plans to generate wind power at a local nature reserve whilst the second is a hydro electricity project on the Afon Llywd River.

*"Achieved goal, but not ultimate goal"*

*"RDP phase 1 grant has kick started the project"*

Project coordinators John Killick and Jacky Rue became aware of the grant through their involvement with the Local Action Group and Torfaen County Borough Council. Jacky works within the council and is in charge of the Cymynsycoy area. She and John also have a passion for sustainability and renewable energy and saw the opportunity to implement a hydro electricity plant on a local weir in Cymynsycoy which could potentially benefit the local Communities First area.

The grant funding was obtained through the business creation and development aspect of the Branching out Fund and set the ball rolling helping to finance a pre feasibility study exploring the projects economic viability, the most suitable technologies on offer in addition to the creation of an overall feasibility report including project designs. The project received a total grant of £975 and has laid the foundations in which to take the community energy project to the next level.

According to Jacky, the main benefit of the grant has been that the planning aspect of the project is now complete and that they can now turn attention in turning ideas into substance. She did however outline that the project has since encountered a number of problems for example there is a dispute over ownership of the weir with both the environment agency and

British Waterways denying ownership which has prevented any real developments from taken place. She outlined that CCAT could make an offer and purchase the weir however it is too much of a financial burden and responsibility for a small community group to adopt and therefore the project may never come to fruition.

In terms future activities, Jacky intends to continue to pursue and solve many of the problems the project has encountered by looking for alternate funding means. Overall she feels the Branching Out Fund is a brilliant scheme which provides people with opportunities to achieve goals that previously they would not have otherwise achieved.

### Farm Diversification

The objectives of the Farm Diversification project were:

- To raise awareness of the RDP and to actively promote and market the associated Grant Programme with particular emphasis on the diversification element of the scheme;
- To provide opportunities for farmers to diversify, creating rural employment opportunities;
- To develop diversification projects, led by community enterprises, mainstream businesses, farmers and individuals that will:
  - have a positive impact on the local economy;
  - enhance the current tourism offer, and will attract additional tourists to the area;
  - support local food producers;
  - support land owners, encouraging sustainable and traditional land management, and
- To provide opportunities for micro and small enterprises to grow their businesses with connections in other areas of Torfaen.

The performance of this project was recorded against a pre-determined set of indicators. The results are shown in Table 5. Targets were met for all but three indicators. The reason for the shortfall in achievement was primarily due to the reduction in grant scheme necessary to fund the tourism project. As a result, fewer grants were distributed and so the impact on jobs created was less than expected. The indicator for the number of enterprise groups, producer groups, cluster groups or formal networks created did not achieve its target. This was mainly because although informal targets were established they are still being developed and have not matured to formal networks. It is expected that these networks will be developed further in Business Case 2. To further assess the impact of the farm diversification project on a more qualitative basis a number of case studies were carried out.

## Case Study – Lower Pen Tranch Farm

Smallholder owners Deborah Edwards Lowe and Richard Edwards received £4,960 through RDP's Branching Out scheme to commission a feasibility study, business plan and architect plans for a proposed holiday home which aimed to complement and diversify from their current farming business.



Deborah and Richard run the Lower Pen Tranch Farm near Pontypool producing rare breed pork chicken and lamb. They were looking at adding another element to their business and came up with the idea of extending an already existing barn to construct a holiday home which would provide facilities for guests to bring dogs and horses.

*“It has a lot of potential...such as business diversification, regional tourism, in addition to enhancing local skills and promoting local artisan produce”.*

Deborah heard about the availability of RDP funding through her associations with the Local Action Group and members of Torfaen County Borough Council and decided to get in touch with Emma Davies, Rural Diversification Officer to discuss her potential ideas.

The Branching Out grant financed the creation of a business plan, a feasibility study and architect plans, however the project failed to obtain planning permission and has since entered a period of stagnation. Although the grant fulfilled its initial purpose by laying the foundations for the project, Deborah and Richard cannot help but feel disappointed as they felt the project fitted in well with many of the overarching aims of the RDP. They felt the process could have been avoided if there was an increase in communication between RDP awarding body and offices within Torfaen County Borough Council.

Deborah had planned to involve local producers by providing welcome gift hampers and stocking regional produce.

She also hoped to make links with the local equestrian centre allowing people to bring their own horses and ride at the centre.

Deborah and her husband also intended to offer short training courses such as pig keeping, dry stone walling and fencing therefore improving the skills base within the area. The project has a lot of potential and supports many different aspects in rural development such as business diversification, regional tourism, in addition to enhancing local skills and promoting local artisan produce.

Deborah aims to appeal the planning decision and hopes that the project will come to fruition in the upcoming months.



### Case Study – Pentre Bach Farm

Steve and Sara Warman applied through Axis 4's 'Branching Out fund' to receive financial support in order to obtain a mobile saw mill. The project aimed to complement and offer new scope to their already existing wood work and farming businesses by providing an onsite service to recycle wood which would otherwise go to landfill.



The mobile saw mill presented an environmentally sustainable means in which to create a high value product from something which in its original state is seen as waste. Income from the mobile sawmill is achieved through its onsite hire which is considerably cheaper than investing in new timber.

Since its purchase, the mobile sawmill has been used on a range of community and private projects helping to create reading areas and sculptures for local schools and community groups, in addition to securing a contract with Torfaen CBC to create signposts directing tourist and residents around the County Borough of Torfaen.

The project has been extremely beneficial not only on an environmental level by recycling wood which would otherwise be left unused, but it has also enhanced the local setting by providing aesthetically pleasing objects for the public to enjoy. The project received a total grant of £4458 from the RDP Axis 4's Branching Out scheme and is a business which continues to flourish helping to show how diversification in the right setting and direction can complement the rural economy.

*"Another string to our bow"*

*"Change something from nothing to into something"*

Table 5 Project Performance – Farm Diversification

<b>Performance Indicators</b>	<b>Ref. Number</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achievements</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>Outputs</b>				
Number of farming household members advised or assisted to diversify into non-agricultural activities	ECO.311.1.1	46	46	0
Number of farming household members financially supported to diversify into non-agricultural activities	ECO.331.1.2	4	4	0
Number of actions that actively encourages or promotes action to address environmental sustainability	WOA.9.2	2	2	0
<b>Results</b>				
Gross number of jobs created	ECR.311.1	6	2	-4
Gross number of jobs safeguarded	WR.311.3	8	4	-4
Number of new non-agricultural products or services launched by a farming household member	WR.311.2	4	4	0
Number of enterprise groups, producer groups, cluster groups or formal networks created	WR.311.4	5	0	-5
Number of new markets accessed by supported farming household members	WR.311.2	4	4	0

## Rural Tourism

The following objectives were set at the project outset:

- To assess what potential increased tourism may have to provide sustainable economic activity in the rural areas of Torfaen;
- To implement a series of projects that build a better quality network of rights of way and cycle-paths across the rural areas of Torfaen, paying particular attention to the provision of bridleways;
- To implement a Garden Tourism route by assisting various locations to develop gardens of distinction;
- To support the development of accommodation ventures to draw in visitors;
- Increase potential for Green Tourism through developing tourist gardens and biodiversity trails through rural areas of Torfaen, raising awareness of local people and investing in habitat creation, and
- To undertake physical improvements to identified areas to enhance the appearance of the landscape and encourage visitors.

The performance of the project against a set of indicators was recorded by the lead body and the results are shown in Table 6. As the table shows, all targets were exactly met. Further analysis in the form of case studies was carried out.

### Case Study – Oakfield Bed and Breakfast

Local accommodation provider owner Paul Scourfield received grant funding through the RDP Axis 4's Branching Out scheme to help develop the Oakfield Bed and Breakfast set on the doorstep of the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre, Big Pit, Blaenavon. Paul obtained financial support through the rural tourism element of the grant to improve his newly created bed and breakfast.



The property initially comprised of two attached terrace houses which Paul combined to create the Oakfield Bed and Breakfast. The grant funding acquired from the RDP helped to improve the property by redesigning and resurfacing the rear of the Bed and breakfast, in addition to helping enhance the building visually through the design and purchase of a gate which blends in with the local historic landscape of the area.

Paul became aware of the grant through sitting on the local tourist association where the Torfaen Tourism Association Newsletter documented its availability. He later got in contact with Emma Davies, the Rural Diversification Officer who *“got the ball rolling and helped put together a business plan and funding application”*.

“Incredible”

The enhancements to the property have had a wide range of benefits, not only providing a safe access and off road parking for guests staying at the hotel, but they have also helped to improve the bed and breakfast visually which is hoped to ultimately increase trade and attract visitors to the County Borough of Torfaen. The developments have had a considerable impact helping Paul and the Oakfield Bed and Breakfast to achieve a 5 star accreditation from Visit Wales which clearly highlights the overarching benefits of Rural Development Plan in improving Tourism within Wales.

Table 6 Project Performance – Rural Tourism

<b>Performance Indicators</b>	<b>Ref. Number</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achievements</b>	<b>Variance</b>
<b>Outputs</b>				
Number of small scale tourism infrastructure projects financially supported	ECO 313.1	4	4	0
Number of projects to develop and / or market a rural tourism product or service financially supported	ECO 313.3	1	1	0
Number of individuals advised or assisted to develop and / or market tourism projects	WO 313.2	5	5	0
<b>Results</b>				
Gross number of jobs created	ECR 313.1	2	2	0
Number of enterprises created	WR 313.2	2	2	0
Number of new products or services launched	WR 313.3	2	2	0
Number of new or improved processes introduced by a supported enterprise	WR 313.7	2	2	0
Number of feasibility studies undertaken	WAO 3	1	1	0
Number of projects aimed at environmental enhancement / sustainability	WAO 19	2	2	0
Number of awareness raising events held	WAO 9.1	0	0	0

## Rural Skills

The project objectives were:

- To provide training opportunities to farmers and young people by:
  - Implementing a concerted drive to reach out to people living in rural areas to explain to them what learning opportunities they can access and support them in doing so.
  - Providing training opportunities which are specific to traditional methods such as hedge-laying, and focusing on sustainable management systems with consideration for the bio-diversity in Torfaen. The need for higher levels of skills and new kinds of skills will be addressed.
  - Providing training opportunities in running social enterprises/cooperatives/commercial businesses, targeting both individuals and groups of people who come together around community-focused initiatives. Proactively working towards protecting biodiversity in Torfaen.
  - Offering all residents of working age in the rural areas of Torfaen the opportunity to engage in learning to enhance their qualifications.

Performances against objectives are displayed in Table 7. They show that all targets were either met or exceeded. The popularity of the training project meant that workshops were carried out to accommodate all learners. As a result the target number of participants in training was exceeded. Similarly, the number of courses also significantly exceeded expectations. A sample of training participants was undertaken to understand the impact the course had on individuals. Individuals interviewed carried out a range of training which included:

- Environmental courses, e.g. hedge-laying, dry stone-walling and vegetable gardening
- Provision of skills that will keep farms running
- Skills for social enterprises, cooperatives and commercial businesses
- ICT training

On the whole, the responses to the training were very positive. All respondents rated the content and quality of training as either good or excellent. The main impacts from the training among the individuals interviewed were that it helped businesses to diversify, supported business growth, led to new product development, supported a more effective use of ICT and made the business more environmentally sustainable. Specific example included one individual who applied the training they received to undertake online marketing through social media. Another respondent mentioned that the training enabled them to start a small general grounds maintenance business. All respondents felt more confident about the future of their rural business as a result of receiving training support. Suggestions for improvements included more advanced content where possible and further training to allow progression.

Table 7 Project Performance – Rural Skills

Performance Indicators	Ref. Number	Target	Achievements	Variance
<b>Outputs</b>				
Number of training courses held or supported	WO.331.1.1	5	5	0
Number of participants in training	ECO.331.1.1	48	74	26
Number of actions that actively encourages or promotes action to address environmental sustainability	WOA.9.2	2	2	0
Number of training courses held		4	12	8
Number of training courses supported		3	15	12
Number of marketing and promotional activities undertaken		23	24	1
<b>Results</b>				
Number of participants that successfully ended a training activity by achieving a formal qualification	ECR.331.1.1	9	9	0



## 6 Key Findings - Summary

### 6.1 What have been the key challenges for Rural Torfaen?

There has been a significant learning curve for Create, Torfaen's Rural Development Programme in terms of becoming familiar with the requirements for the programme - particularly concerning management and monitoring requirements.

In relation to the Axis 4 Branching Out fund there was a need to raise awareness amongst the farming and rural business community, with at times a slow take up of grants and support. This slow, incremental approach is not unusual to any community focussed development programme but a key challenge has been to understand and project Torfaen's rural identity within a County Borough that is focussed around some key urban settlements and is relatively small in relation to other rural areas in Wales. This be an advantage in terms of resource management but is a challenge in terms of critical mass and building networks.

The need for joined-up and a corporate response to emerging project ideas from statutory and local authorities has been identified by beneficiaries in their experiences in working through physical feasibility projects with planning identified as an area for improvement in terms of understanding rural issues and supporting rural economic development through diversification in tourism and agriculture.

The development of rural partnership working within an environment that had a mature series of networks facilitated by the local authority still needs further work in terms of equitable representation and groups/organisations having a better understanding their roles and responsibilities. The formative years of Create has seen the Lead Body taking a prominent role with the need for the LAG and Rural Partnership to be more action based and accountable. Challenges for the future include extending the membership of the LAG and Rural Partnership to engage with rural communities of interest and to continue to link land based networks through the process.

### 6.2 What have been the main successes?

Figure 15 represents words suggested by members of the LAG and Rural Partnership in relation to how success has been visualised by them in terms of rural development activities.

*"Foundation"* and *"Opportunity"* are most frequently used with people seeing the first three years of the rural development programme building the legacy and as one respondent to the on-line survey commented *"creating a strong network of local people who are keen to maximise opportunities for enterprise development"*.

Specific activities that have been identified as effective include the rural audit/mapping process, training programmes which have *"enabled entrepreneurs to make more progress with their ideas, turning ideas into reality"*.

Llanyravon Manor is seen as physical and tangible output that is a rural flagship that can host, stimulate and extend rural activity within the rural area. The challenge within Business Plan 2 is to ensure the project is outward facing and inclusive.

The Axis 4 projects have largely achieved their target outputs and when targets have been met there have been genuine and unavoidable issues or there have been plans to achieve

targets in future business plans. From a beneficiary point of view, the projects have been very well received with the majority of participants satisfied with the outcome of their involvement in business case 1.

In summary of the extent to which the Branching Out Fund met the original objectives, it is clear that the Business Creation and Development fund and the Farm Diversification fund achieved what they set out to. There was a focus on raising awareness of the RDP and giving participants the opportunity to impact on and support the local economy. However, the achievement of the Rural Tourism in terms of meeting the objectives set out in the original applications was less evident. As a whole, it was felt that the mix of projects was not sufficient to significantly achieve some of the objectives. Notably, three of the four projects were accommodation based grants which addresses one of the objectives, namely *'to support the development of accommodation ventures to draw in visitors'* and the fourth project, which was to support the delivery of a flower festival – which partly contributed towards two objectives *'to implement a Garden Tourism route by assisting various locations to develop gardens of distinction'* and *'to increase potential for Green Tourism through developing tourist gardens and biodiversity trails through rural areas of Torfaen, raising awareness of local people and investing in habitat creation'*. However it was felt that having only this project did not entirely achieve these objectives and more projects were needed to fulfil the expectations. Furthermore, the objective *'To implement a series of projects that build a better quality network of rights of way and cycle-paths across the rural areas of Torfaen, paying particular attention to the provision of bridleways'* was not met by the Rural Tourism project. Nevertheless, on the whole it was felt that the Rural Tourism project has begun to build local capacity and represents a good starting point from which further gains can be made. Furthermore, as a whole it was felt the Branching Out Fund had been a success. Nearly all targets were met or exceeded and the alignment of the projects with the LDS meant that the key challenges were being addressed.

Similarly, the Rural Skills project has clearly been a success. Targets for number of people trained and courses delivered were met, as was the number of course and all feedback from participants was positive and skills are being used in the workplace.

Figure 15 - Create - 2008-2011 - Key Successes



Source: Comments from LAG and Rural Partnership Meetings

## 7 Recommendations

### 7.1 Management and Governance

1. To review the membership of the LAG and the Rural Partnership in terms of:
  - a. Specific skills and experiences and commitments.
  - b. Outline membership requirements in terms of relationship building, alignment of other activities, being rural ambassadors, thematic leads, etc.
2. To refresh LAG and Rural Partnership members on Rural Development Programme:
  - a. Training in principles of Rural Axes, role of LAG and Rural Partnership.
  - b. To support members in understanding the role of the Local Development Strategy in setting context, driving key objectives, monitoring activity and impacts and to understand how activity is working towards a coherent set of outcome.

### 7.2 Communication

1. To work towards a Create vehicle for communication specifically in relation to:
  - a. A Create website and linked social media – this could consider a dedicated membership login area for LAG and Partnership members. This would enhance members' sense of being a part of the project and would ensure up to date information can be shared with members.
  - b. Greater awareness of Create rural activity through local media and community networks.
  - c. To develop LAG and Rural Partnership members as “rural champions” with them having specific thematic leads and known within their rural communities as conduits for information, ideas and promotion of rural opportunities.

### 7.3 Knowledge Sharing

1. To develop live case studies of successful grant beneficiaries and include site visits for the LAG and Partnership – this will facilitate knowledge sharing, would showcase best practice and would lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of the impact of the grants to members.
2. To undertake visits with other Rural Partnerships and LAGs – to understand how other Local Authorities manage their RDP and to share best practice and share knowledge. Case studies could be delivered as a way of showcasing best practice within each area.

### 7.4 Going Forward

Business case 1 has provide an initial focus on capacity building, forming relationships and providing a focus for rural development with restoration of Llanyravon Manor and a suite of diversification activity for land based, tourism and rural SMEs. This approach has been

based around finding out and understanding the key strengths and opportunities within rural Torfaen.

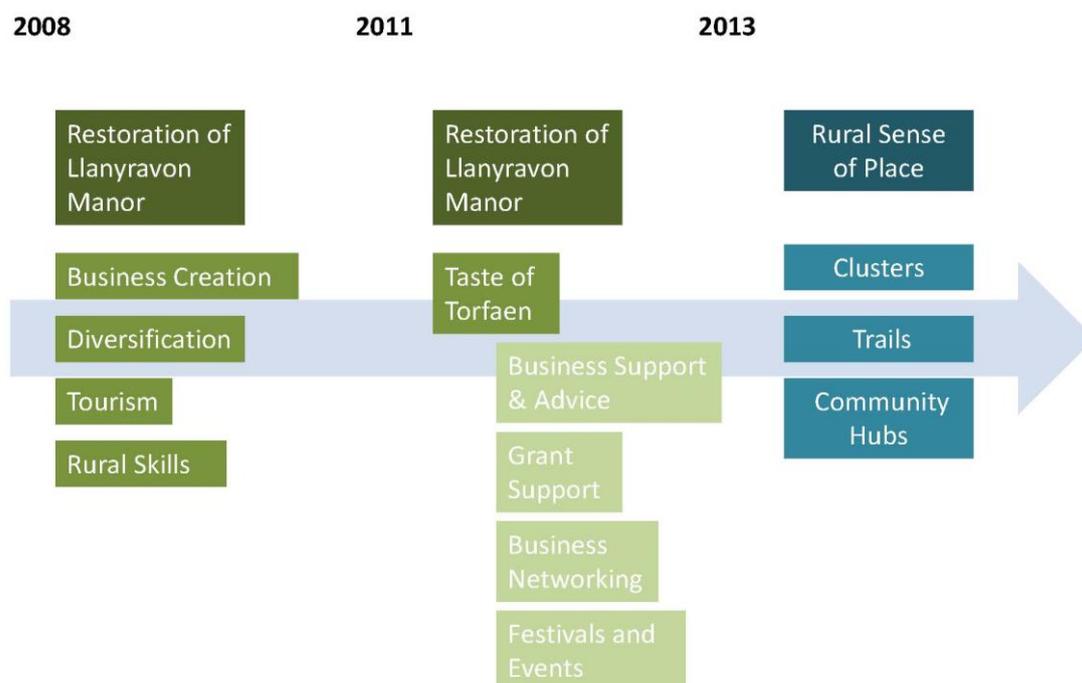
Business case 2 has built on the physical investment in terms of building an activity programme within Llanyravon Manor and that engages communities in education, skills development and establishing the Manor as a focal point for events, showcasing rural products and an incubator for rural enterprise. A more strategic approach has been taken to supporting its land based producers with 'Taste of Torfaen' which appears to be more targeted and creating an identifiable network of producers with its brand more customer facing through events and festivals. It is felt that Taste of Torfaen is a key element going forward to capitalise on the capacity building which took place under business case 1.

Going forward beyond business case 2, Create should consider how rural products re-enforce Torfaen's rural sense of place in terms of:

- Developing sustainable rural enterprises;
- Localising the supply chain;
- Developing co-operatives;
- Initiating diversification activities and;
- Developing tourism hubs.

This can be achieved by supporting communities which have an association within rural crafts, traditions and land based activity. This could include the development of trails (e.g. food trails, tourism trails etc.), building clusters of activity and developing associations within communities through neighbourhood shops, services and rural attractions for example. A diagram of these next steps is offered in Figure 16.

Figure 16 - Rural Development in Torfaen - Next Steps



Source: Miller Research (UK) Ltd

# Appendix

### **Torfaen Rural Partnership Terms of Reference**

- To ensure the proper running of the Partnership, including appointing a Chair, Lead Body and Finance Coordinator.
- To develop the Local Development Strategy (LDS) before submission to the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and review it as necessary over the life of the programme.
- To develop the Business Plan before submission to WAG.
- To approve systems and procedures for the day-to-day running of the Partnership and the financial management of any funds.
- To monitor and approve reports on the progress in implementing the LDS and identify gaps in provision.
- To be responsible for any sub-contracting to other appropriate and competent local delivery organisations, including the Local Area Group (LAG), and for monitoring the activities of any such delivery organisations.
- To ensure that robust, good value for money and well developed projects are put forward and selected for appraisal and funded.
- To promote the programme locally.
- To ensure synergy between the Rural Development Plan and the Convergence Fund programmes in Torfaen.

### **Local Action Group Terms of Reference**

- To assist with the development of the Local Development Strategy (LDS), focusing in particular on Axis 4.
- To develop innovative projects that fit with the aims and objectives of the LDS and which follow the LEADER approach.
- To assist in building community consensus behind the LDS.
- To monitor Axis 4 expenditure and the preparation of grant claims, working closely with the Finance Coordinator.
- To promote cross-sectoral working, e.g. with Monmouthshire LAG.