



Torfaen Rural Development Strategy 2014 – 2020

Key Themes and Priorities





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Overview of the Wales Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

The RDP is a 7 year investment programme, which aims to improve resilience and promote transformational change in agriculture, forestry and rural communities. Bringing nearly a billion pounds to rural Wales, it will support a wide range of activities which:

- improve competitiveness in the agriculture and forestry sector
- safeguard and enhance the rural environment
- foster competitive and sustainable rural businesses and thriving rural communities.

This joint EU/Welsh Government-funded investment programme demonstrates the benefits of EU membership and displays Welsh Government's ongoing commitment to rural areas by providing circa £400 million in co-funding.

Rural Development Priorities

Activities eligible for financial support from the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014 must align with the following six European Rural Development Priorities of:

- fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas
- enhancing competitiveness of all types of agriculture and enhancing farm viability
- promoting food chain organisation and risk management in agriculture
- restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry
- promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors
- promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

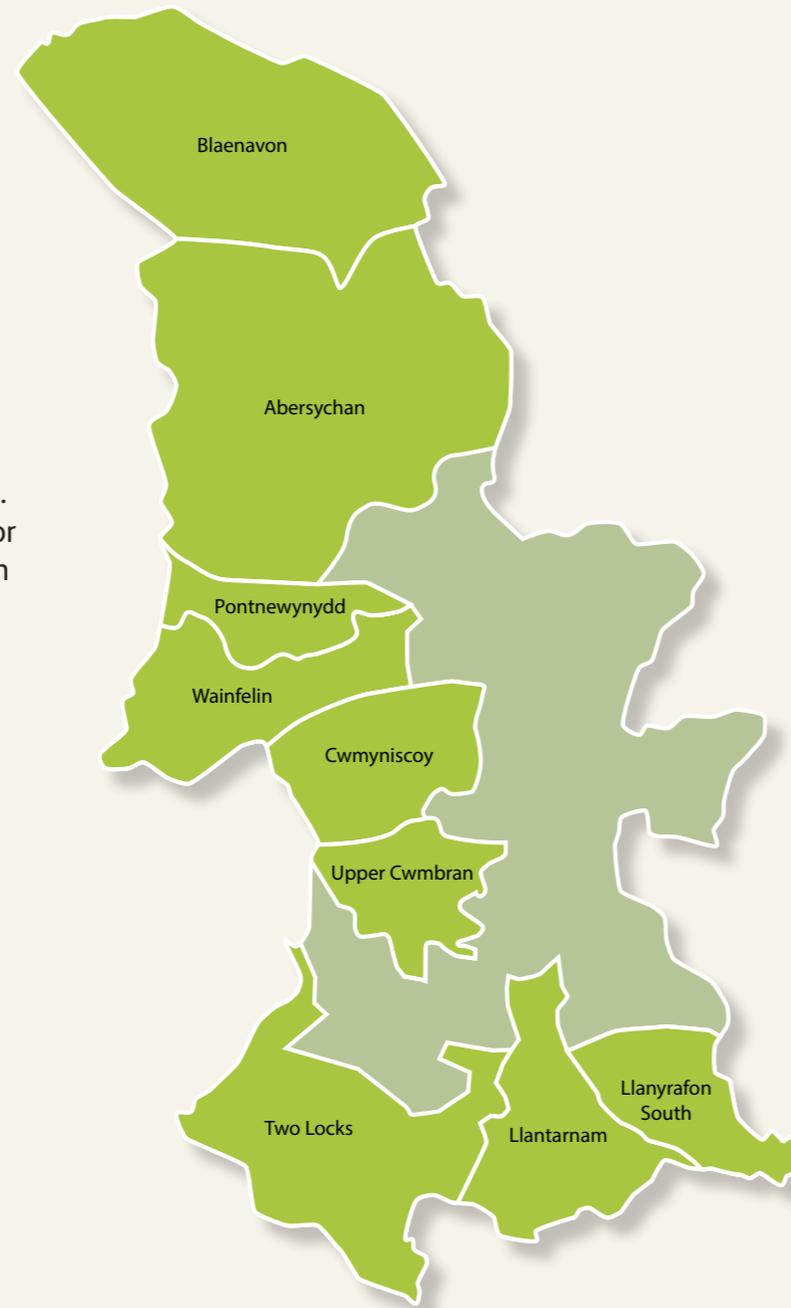
The new Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 is a fantastic opportunity to support the sustainable management of natural resources, grow rural business and improve the wellbeing of rural communities. It is designed to be innovative, adaptable and integrated in order to ensure maximum value from Rural Development Programme investments.



Rural Development in Torfaen

Torfaen joined the Rural Development Programme in 2007; it quickly became evident that it was essential to build opportunities to help regenerate the declining rural wards in the borough. While parts of the borough are actively involved in community and economic development, the majority of its rural wards are struggling to engage in this type of activity. Support is needed on the ground to help mentor and develop this activity. The strategy has been designed to build upon the strengths of the rural communities, and to exploit the social, environmental and economic opportunities.

The Local Action Group (LAG) Area in Torfaen covers 9 wards and just over 71 % of the borough's geographical area. The rural wards in Torfaen comprise a varied hilly landscape, including open upland moorland and through grazing, mixed agriculture, woodland and post-industrial land. The LANDMAP17 survey of the Borough was first published in 2002 this analysed the landscape under headings of Geological, Landscape Habitats, Visual and Sensory, Historic and Cultural.



The landscape of the County has been summarised in a recent report¹⁸ as follows: “The physical and cultural landscape of the area reflects the industrial legacy associated with iron and coal production, together with their associated extractive industries. The resultant manmade landscapes are interspersed with the surrounding countryside. Over the past twenty years there have been a number of reclamation schemes that have removed much of the dereliction that existed, however affected areas still remain.

The County Borough contains a range of distinctive landscape types ranging from the open, exposed uplands to the north of Blaenavon to the rolling, agricultural landscapes to the south and west of Cwmbbran where the landscape runs over into the lower Usk Valley. There are areas of both coniferous and broad leaved woodland throughout the area. The north and eastern boundaries of Torfaen abut the Brecon Beacons National Park and this indicates the underlying qualities of this northern section of the County Borough. This is complemented by the designation of the historic industrial landscapes around Blaenavon as a world heritage site as well as on the Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales produced by Countryside Council for Wales, Cadw, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites.”

Torfaen the eligible wards, the area covered and their full population figures are as follows:

Name of Ward	All Usual Residents	Area (in hectares)	Density (number of persons per hectare)
Rural Ward			
Llanyrafon South	2708	444.16	6.1
Blaenavon	6055	1782.98	3.4
Two Locks and Henllys	6212	1251.64	4.96
Service Centre			
Abersychan	7064	2476.25	2.85
Wainfelin	2434	765.68	3.18
Cwmyrniscoy	1438	668.03	2.15
Llantarnam	5526	775.03	7.13
Upper Cwmbbran	5228	474.44	11.02
Host Ward			
Pontnewynydd	1492	360	4.13
Totals	38,157	9,442.37	44.92

Torfaen Rural Local Action Group - CREATE

The Local Action Group has an area based Local Development Strategy (LDS) focused on the 9 eligible wards in Torfaen, covering a population in excess of 38,000 people, which offers a good critical mass to support its vision. The membership is made up of representatives from the public, private, third and community sectors working in partnership.

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

The LAG will network with neighbouring LAGs and its staff will play a full part in Wales and UK wide networking opportunities. The development of local networks and partnerships will be fore-grounded in its approach.

There is an integrated Local Development Strategy based on the principles set out above. The LAG represents partners from the socio-economic sectors in the eligible wards. More than 75% of the members of the LAG are farmers, rural women, and other social partners.

The LAG has directed how the LDS has developed and will work with the lead body on evolving projects that meet the aims and objectives detailed in the LDS, ensuring it is multi sectoral in design and implementation. Helping to create interaction between the sectors and project actors, the LAG has been a key player in all consultation undertaken to draft the LDS, including a workshop which focused on the SWOT analysis.



Main Duties of a LAG Member	
Attend quarterly meetings of the LAG	Engage with those that you represent in order to gather their views on rural projects
Active participation in project design and on-going direction	Maximise the involvement of those that you represent in rural projects
Make consensus decisions on the allocation of funds	Share information from the LAG with those that you represent
Procure delivery bodies for rural projects	Ensuring sound financial management of RDP funds is maintained
Publicise the work of the LAG	Monitoring and evaluating programme outcomes
Make unbiased decisions that fulfil the aims and objectives of the LDS	Adhere to the terms of reference of the Local Action Group
Act in the best interest of the beneficiaries of the LDS	



Details of the Administrative Body

Torfaen County Borough Council has been selected by the LAG as its administrative body. It will be responsible for the LAG budget. The Council, will act as the project sponsor and be responsible for the overall delivery of the programme and will ensure that all LEADER funding is appropriate and developed to project activities set out in the LDS.

How the LAG can improve and develop the area

The priority areas for action have been identified in consultation with local communities and will therefore tackle local needs. The LAG can help in the implementation and delivery of the LDS and associated projects to tackle the key issues through creating an ethos of innovation, encouraging people to pilot actions with a tolerance of risk, nurturing grass-roots initiatives, developing assets not previously exploited. Developing business knowledge and skills, supporting small businesses or micro-businesses, promoting local produce and rural tourism. Detail of potential for delivery on the ground is contained in the intervention logic table.

Hierarchy of objectives

The aim of the Torfaen Local Development Strategy 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.”

The strategy highlights rural issues and how they will be addressed. The key issues have been built upon over the past 6 years and incorporate the ability to grow and sustain the rural economies of Torfaen.

This Local Development Strategy offers the opportunity of delivering an innovative programme across the rural parts of Torfaen. It will ensure that LEADER funding is used to develop and implement innovative approaches to achieve successful outcomes, through trial and testing ideas, competing research schemes and developing community and business capacity to help create a sustainable future for Rural Torfaen.

Key Issues to be addressed

The problems which need to be addressed in the rural areas of these wards include the following:

Declining Farming Incomes	Under-developed Tourism potential
An ageing population engaged in farming	Lack of attention to biodiversity
An aura of decline, evidenced in the neglected appearance of the rural landscape	Lack of Sustainable Development initiatives
Illegal Activities/Threat of Crime	Isolated producers
Erosion of Community Infrastructure	Low skills in some areas
Lack of investment	Climate Change
Lack of enterprise and innovation	

The SWOT analysis has been produced as a result of consultation with the community, Local Action Group and Partnership Board. Key Strategies have also been analysed to produce the table below:

Strengths	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
Farmers wishing to strengthen their business	Decline in traditional farming	Support for larger rural businesses	Current economic position
A developing tourism sector	Lack of opportunities for unskilled and/or unqualified people	Support for smaller rural businesses and the art and craft sector	Increase in unemployment
Increase in local produce	Lack of support for smaller rural businesses	Developing Tourism attractions and accommodation	Further decline in employment opportunities
Emerging arts and crafts sector	Lack of support in developing local produce	Increased demand for local produce	Global Market
Developing small holders	Loss of cultural traditions	Promotion of alternative land use, including energy and production of bio fuels	Climate change
Increase in diversification activities	Unemployment	Potential to capitalise on the natural environment	Slow development of community participation
An establishing and professional voluntary sector	Disjointed communities		Development of out of town retail
Transport links to the M4 corridor	Lack of rural identity		
Beauty of the environment			
Strong community links			

Key Themes and Objectives

Our 5 key themes for priority are set out below, listing the key objectives to be achieved through the delivery of this strategy.

Enhancing the local environment

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

Developing local produce

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

Promoting tourism

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

Encouraging enterprise

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

Community action

- To achieve self sufficient rural community leadership, which is well supported and also skillful in championing rural interests in Torfaen.

The following table sets out the types of activities that will be delivered against each themed priority;

Theme	Objective
Enhancing the local environment	Develop training and mentoring schemes for farmers and landowners, with a focus on upland areas.
	Broaden the understanding of opportunities to create a sustainable local environment through protecting and enhancing the natural landscape.
	Improve on farm training to increase rural skills, enhance the local environment.
	Develop opportunities for land based production, i.e timber supply, wood fuel.
	Assist households and farms in the rural areas of Torfaen to increase the use of micro-renewable sources of energy.
	Increase opportunities to recycle land waste products.
Developing local produce	Develop links and potential areas for co-operation between land owners and producers.
	To build a locally based, sustainable food industry, through creating opportunities in production, processing and distribution of locally grown food.
	To build upon the mapping exercise undertaken in past programme.
Promoting tourism	To identify whether there are any new areas of produce for which the land can be used which could be sustainable in the future.
	Establish network links between land-based producers in Torfaen and surrounding areas to promote food and create closer working links with producers.
	Assist producers to develop speciality foods which can contribute to the market.
	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.
	Establish opportunities for direct sales of local produce through developing a series of festivals and events, including the development of Llanyrafon Manor Food and Craft Market.
	To create a sustainable infrastructure for land-based food production in Torfaen, well-linked to sub-regional networks and markets, that improves supply chains and strengthens customer base.
	Develop working inks between producers to develop co-operative working practices.
Encouraging enterprise	To assess what potential increased tourism may have to provide sustainable economic activity in the rural areas of Torfaen.
	To support the development of accommodation ventures to draw in visitors by linking in with Food Tourism Initiatives.
	Undertake physical improvements to identified areas to enhance the appearance of the landscape and encourage visitors.
	Develop a series of local festivals and events to celebrate Rural Torfaen and educate local communities.
Community action	Further exploit cross boundary links to develop regional tourism activities.

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Theme	Objective
Encouraging enterprise Create opportunities to develop sustainable enterprises by encouraging networking, training and mentoring.	To develop the skills of the population living in the rural areas of Torfaen so that they can engage in sustainable economic activity.
	To implement a programme of training and mentoring for businesses and individuals.
	To support business start up and growth in the rural areas of Torfaen with in emerging sectors e.g. food, arts and craft, forestry, renewables.

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



Rural innovation

Torfaen's LDS will enable new methods, new systems and new ways of working for beneficiaries of RDP funding during the period 2014-2021. Collectively the findings from the whole consultation period have led to a series of 10 recommendations to enable innovation in Torfaen that will encourage sustainable practice whilst also providing a foundation for a co-ordinated supply chain for Torfaen's land based producers. Torfaen's LAG have defined and agreed its interpretation of 'innovative actions' as being those that have not taken place in Torfaen previously.

The key areas of rural innovation in this LDS are:

Developing sustainable rural businesses

Reducing environmental impacts through energy efficiency measures, preventing food and packaging waste and recycling water, building better relationships with customers and local communities, working together with businesses and suppliers are all actions that forward thinking businesses can take to create stronger more resilient supply chains.

Establish a business to business mentoring

To offer LAG help to other farmers organisations and businesses to develop practical and affordable strategies for change. Mentoring is proven to be a valuable way of helping motivate and inspire others. Businesses respond well to other businesses and farmers are accustomed to learning by doing.

Develop toolkits and guidance for rural business innovation

Specific challenges that Torfaen rural businesses face when trying to innovate along their supply chains have been identified; these challenges represent barriers to growth. These can be overcome through the development and provision of toolkits and guidance that can be developed specifically to meet the needs of land based producers and rural businesses in Torfaen.



Activities that will stimulate innovation in the rural wards of Torfaen stem from collaborative approaches for distributing produce to customers, marketing and promoting goods, and developing niche products and services.

Support for young farmers

The decline in numbers of traditional farms is a problem that exists not just in rural Torfaen. Younger generations are less inclined to take over responsibility of running a family farm. Rural skills that are possessed by older generations are at risk of being lost if this trend continues. Conversely this trend is in part due to a lack of entrepreneurial skills that the younger generations may be more likely to possess (such as market awareness and computing). Farmer forums could be established by the LAG to bridge the gap in skills that vary through different generations.

Re-localising the supply chain

A growing population and an insatiable consumer appetite has led to technologies being developed that enable goods and services to be produced to short lead times and on a mass scale. This has brought significant economic benefits and provided convenience to many people, but there have also been consequences.

Many farmers and producer businesses have seen their livelihoods squeezed by buyers demanding more for their money, whilst competition has grown to provide more choice. Torfaen rural businesses need to adapt or they will fail.

One way they can adapt is by operating in a local market place, essentially simplifying and taking ownership of their supply chain. This is about marketing and selling their produce direct to consumers.

Farmers and producers markets

Farmer and produce markets have for a long time been an important means for farmers and smallholders to sell directly to consumers. When successful they can be a very good way of supplementing their income.

The recently renovated Llanyrafon Manor has offered a good space to hold an outdoor market, being close to the large urban population of Cwmbran, having parking facilities nearby and potentially offering space to producers at council subsidised rates. This now needs to be developed further.

Producer directory and catalogue

Farmers and small producer businesses often lack the resources to market their produce. These needs can be supported by establishing and managing a directory of Torfaen producers.

A more dynamic producer directory could be developed as a live and online system to allow self-editing and enable product lists, with descriptions, indications of volume available and pricing. Following this a next step is to work with private sector partners to develop a local produce catalogue.

Social enterprise models

Re-connecting people with food and farming is an important aspect in bringing about positive change in rural areas. The concept of social enterprise provides innovative ways for business and communities to collaborate in their decision making. This needs to be explored and co-ordinated in the RDP Programme.

Food co-operatives

Food co-operatives are an important way to get food to urban groups with no direct access to farms and the countryside. There is a parallel opportunity for co-operatives working with in this area, through taking advantage of the wider market place and supply chain and linking to regional areas.

Community Growing and Community supported agriculture (CSA)

CSA is a partnership arrangement between producers and consumers. The basic model is simple: consumers provide support for growers by agreeing to pay for a share of the total produce, and growers provide a weekly share of food of a guaranteed quality and quantity. They also reconnect people to farming because people get to know where their food comes from and become more aware of the seasonal implications of food production.

These actions will create new products and services for Torfaen, making the most of its assets through building collaboration between different actors and sectors. Much of this work will be linked into co-operation developments.

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