

Taskforce Theme	<i>Valleys Regional Park</i>
Prepared by	Phil Lewis (VRP Strategic and Operational Lead)
Date	2nd October 2019
Action, as stated in “Our Valleys, Our Future” November 2017	Explore the development of a Valleys Landscape Park (now called the Valleys Regional Park). This will help local communities to work with the public, private and third sectors to celebrate and maximise the use of the area’s natural resources and heritage.

Purpose

This paper provides the Taskforce with an update on progress on the Valleys Regional Park based on the actions and milestones published in the 2018 Delivery Plan.

Milestone	Progress
2018 Delivery Plan Milestones	
VRP1 – Governance	
January 2019 – A governance structure is created with agreed terms of reference and operating procedures. (VRP1)	<p>Following discussions with the leaders of the Valleys local authorities, the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport asked the Capital City Region (CCR) to consider how the VRP ambitions set out in the VRP Prospectus published in October 2018 can be delivered through a partnership of local authorities. His expectation was to learn from the regional approach adopted by the Cardiff and Swansea City Deals.</p> <p>The proposed approach was agreed and a grant was awarded to Bridgend CBC to act as the host for the VRP starting in September 2019. Current funding covers the period through to the end of the 2020/21 financial year.</p> <p>The VRP will be overseen by a VRP Board. This board will be made up of political representatives from all participating Local Authorities. Meetings will be scheduled to dovetail with meetings of the CCR Cabinet.</p> <p>Cllr Anthony Hunt, will chair the VRP forum, made up of officer representatives from all 13 Local Authorities covered by VRP along with key partner organisations including Health Boards, NRW, the Third Sector and private sector. The first VRP Forum meeting will take place on 24th October at Dare Valley Country Park.</p> <p>A legal agreement has drafted and has been sent by Bridgend CBC to all Local Authorities for signature.</p>
VRP2 – Creation of a dedicated, skilled team	
November 2018 – Bid for funding through the Co-operation and	The invitation to submit a full bid to the Rural Development Fund (RDP) was withdrawn following a review of RDP

<p>Supply Chain Fund submitted. (VRP2)</p>	<p>procedures. This now requires a bid through a competitive process. The Valleys Taskforce team submitted an expression of interest for funding under the Co-operation and Supply Chain Fund on 16th September. This covers the ongoing provision of funding for the VRP ‘guardian’ scheme. If successful we expect to receive an invitation to submit a full bid before Christmas.</p> <p>Through the VRP Support grant, Bridgend CBC have been asked to propose medium term funding options (beyond 2020) for consideration by Welsh Government and to potentially act as lead applicant should appropriate funding streams be identified. If the RDP bid is considered appropriate the full application can be transferred to be led by Bridgend CBC or one of the VRP partner authorities.</p> <p>The alignment of the VRP with the city deals, taking a regional partnership approach set out by the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, was done to ensure longevity. To take advantage of this we need to ensure that we make the most of opportunities such as HLF funding, Challenge Funds, synergies with clean growth to extend the approach in time and other opportunities through which we can lever in new investment.</p>
<p>January 2019 – Call for expressions of interest in hosting the Valleys Regional Park team. February 2019 – Decision about the hosting of the Valleys Regional Park team. (VRP2)</p>	<p>As stated above, through discussions with the Valleys local authority leaders and with the CCR Cabinet, the taskforce team invited Bridgend CBC to submit a proposal for hosting the VRP support team. This resulted in the award of £892K covering the period to end March 2021 through the VRP Support Grant.</p> <p>The Purpose of the Funding is to host the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) project working in partnership with Welsh Government and the local authorities within the Capital City Region as well as Neath Port Talbot CBC, Swansea City Council and Carmarthenshire County Council.</p>
<p>April 2019 – Support team in place (VRP2)</p>	<p>The structure of the core team and job descriptions were developed by the VRP Working Group led by the taskforce team. Phil Lewis has been appointed to the VRP Strategic and Operational Lead role for the period to end March 2021.</p> <p>Four posts to be hosted by Bridgend CBC on secondment basis were advertised on 1st August 2019. Unfortunately there was a poor response and they have required re-advertising with amended job criteria. The closing date for this is 16th October. With successful recruitment, these posts are expected to be filled at the end of November.</p> <p>Partner organisations and stakeholders have been asked to raise awareness of the roles. There has also been a focussed</p>

	<p>social media campaign.</p> <p>A challenge we face in filling the roles is the short term basis and the need to recruit on secondment to mitigate the risk of Bridgend CBC incurring redundancy costs.</p> <p>All staff will be supported to hot desk across the VRP area and in particular to work closely with the CCR office, which will provide dedicated space and leadership support alongside Bridgend CBC, in order to maximise connections and links across both programmes.</p>
VRP3 – Theme 1: Landscape, Culture & Identity	
<p>November 2018 – Select and announce the first phase Discovery Gateway sites. (VRP3)</p>	<p>Completed.</p> <p>9 Discovery Gateway sites were confirmed in the Written Statement published 11th December. 2 additional sites, Parc Penallta (Caerphilly) and Cefn Coed Mining Museum (NPT) have been added following the grant award process.</p>
<p>December 2018 – Criteria for Discovery Centres agreed. (VRP3)</p>	<p>Completed.</p> <p>Discovery Gateway quality criteria were developed and agreed through several workshops across the Valleys and with the VRP Working Group involving all Valleys local authorities.</p> <p>Work was done to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Discovery Gateway with the local authorities, site operators and Natural Resources Wales. This was used to inform the bids for the capital grant.</p>
<p>January 2019 – Launch of the catalyst capital investment fund (£7m over two years) to support the development of Discovery Gateways. (VRP3)</p> <p>May 2019 – Catalyst funding awarded and Discovery Gateway Development plans in place. (VRP3)</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Bids from all 11 sites were submitted and assessed by a panel made up of colleagues from the Valleys Taskforce, NRW, Visit Wales and the Welsh Government Environment Division. Funding awards were announced on 11th September. Details of the awards are shown in the press release attached as annex 1.</p>
<p>February 2019 – Discovery Trails identified and aligned with expectation for development plans. (VRP3)</p>	<p>An initial evaluation and mapping exercise covering the trails and links between Discovery Gateway sites was completed with the support of Natural Resources Wales as part of the development and connection of the sites.</p> <p>The continuation of this work is included in the VRP delivery plan attached as annex 2.</p>

<p>February 2019 – A Valleys Regional Park website covering the first phase Discovery Sites and outlining Valleys Regional Park developments and opportunities in place. (VRP3)</p>	<p>The VRP website will be developed as part of the delivery plan.</p>
<p>April 2019 – Information points reflecting Valleys- wide locations and activities installed in co-branded phase one Discovery Gateways. (VRP3)</p>	<p>A review of branding and marketing commissioned by the VRP Working Group and conducted by marketing company SBW concluded that there was no ‘one size fits all’ solution for all of the Discovery Gateway sites. The terms of the investment in Discovery Gateway sites requires the sites to work together to develop the approach to connecting across the Valleys and delivering improvements in line with the agreed criteria. This work will be delivered as part of the VRP plan through the local authority partnership.</p>
<p>VRP4 – Theme 2: Recreation and Wellbeing</p>	
<p>November 2018 – Align the Valleys Regional Park work on trails and cycle paths with Metro developments and wider transport plans. (VRP4)</p>	<p>The VRP team has discussed plans with transport colleagues and also liaised with Sustrans Cymru. Sustrans have produced a discussion paper around extending and improving the Valleys Cycle Network. A focus on active travel has been reflected in the VRP delivery plan.</p> <p>Work is continuing with TfW to consider how the VRP can support the development of community links with the station developments planned as part of the announced £194m station improvement programme.</p>
<p>February 2019 – Green Social Prescribing network identified and initial development workshop held to explore opportunities. (VRP4)</p>	<p>A Workshop was held on 29th March 2019 to explore VRP opportunities to contribute to enhanced well-being in the Valleys. The workshop;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disseminated information on the ambitions and aims of the Valleys Regional Park, particularly its Recreation and Wellbeing theme. ▪ Highlighted some existing and emerging good practice and initiatives to explore and develop with delegates the opportunities to improve health and wellbeing. In particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How the proposed VRP Discovery Gateways can support and develop opportunities for ‘green’ social prescribing; ○ using Gateways as catalysts for enhancing natural resources; and, healthy nutrition opportunities; ○ How the VRP will support more informal wellbeing activities in communities, e.g. Social Strollers in the upper Rhondda Fawr; ○ What the challenges and opportunities for supporting wellbeing are in the primary care sector including the role for existing and emerging initiatives. <p>The workshop concluded that there was widespread support</p>

	for landscape based wellbeing activities. The challenge was to understand the opportunities that exist and the quality and benefits of the activities on offer. This work will be taken forward by the Recreation and Wellbeing convenor once the new team is in place. Key to its success will be effective engagement with GP clusters and Primary Care providers.
VRP5 – Theme 3: Communities and Enterprise	
December 2018 – Identify and engage with community-based organisations, including heritage groups through an effective communications strategy. (VRP5)	Initial mapping was completed to inform the development of the community showcase event in February 2019. Further mapping and engagement will be required as a priority once the role of Communities and Enterprise Convenor is filled. This will built on the engagement work that has been led by the taskforce team.
March 2019 – A peer-to-peer network to support and sustain community groups. (VRP 5)	Community groups were invited to a community showcase event on 14 th February. This initiated the creation of a peer-to-peer network to support the development of skills within groups leading on community-based landscape projects and to share best practice and support coaching and mentoring. This network will be co-ordinated, facilitated and supported by the VRP team.
March 2019 – Project Skyline supported by appropriate mapping and logistical support. (VRP 5)	The VRP team has supported Project Skyline, hosting a number of meetings and providing appropriate mapping though colleagues in NRW. The Project Skyline report is expected to be published shortly. Learning from Skyline, particularly around community land stewardship is expected to support the ambitions of the VRP going forward.
VRP9 – Support and guidance on funding	
December 2018 – The Valleys Regional Park team will work with Welsh Government departments to reflect the desired outcomes in relation to funding programmes (Visit Wales, Healthy and Active, Active Travel and Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing), and have input in evaluating future bids. (VRP9)	<p>VRP team has worked closely with colleagues in Tourism and Environment to influence the focus of policy to reflect the aims and vision of the VRP. In particular the team have been involved in the assessment of grant application for the TIAS and ENRaW grants.</p> <p>Discussions have taken place with colleagues across Welsh Government who have agreed that the VRP team will be involved in assessment of appropriate grant schemes.</p> <p>The support team that will be put in place will have a role to bring together information on funding sources and support partners and communities to secure appropriate funding.</p>
February 2019 – A database of funding programmes and organisations is in place and shared with the Valleys Regional Park engagement network. (VRP9)	<p>The VRP team have met with collages leading on relevant funding within Welsh Government as well as external funding organisations such as The National Lottery Community Fund and the Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund.</p> <p>The VRP Support team will develop proposals for sharing funding information.</p>

<p>March 2019 – A role is developed in the new Valleys Regional Park support team with a focus on funding. This will work with all sectors to explore and develop funding and investment opportunities for Valleys Regional Park-related activities. (VRP9)</p>	<p>This will be taken forward once the support team is in place. Further consideration is needed on what existing advice is available. The VRP team will work with partners to agree how this support function can best be delivered.</p>
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Annex 1 – VRP Funding 11th September 2019



Press Notice - VRP
Funding - 11 Septem

Annex 2 – VRP Delivery Plan for inclusion in the Taskforce Delivery plan update to be published in November 2019.



Valleys Regional Park
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