



**Valleys Regional Park  
Strategic Delivery Framework  
2012 – 2020**

**Consultation Draft for Partners**

## Executive Summary

Valleys Regional Park was established in 2007 as a collaborative service planning and delivery partnership for environment, heritage and tourism services in the Valleys. The approach aims to maximise the environmental, social and economic potential of the Valleys' outstanding natural and cultural heritage assets, so helping regenerate the region as a highly-desirable place to live, work, invest in, and visit.

The concept was developed following extensive consultations with more than 30 organisations and involving over 500 individuals culminating in the publication of the 2007 strategic framework prepared by Ian Parkin *et al* and funded by the Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Programme. Since then considerable progress has been made facilitated by the development of the £25M Convergence Programme and €4.13M Interreg programmes. There has also been greater realisation of the contribution that the natural environment together with the pre and post industrial and cultural heritage can play in terms of regeneration. Indeed whereas in the past the Valleys environment provided raw material resources for the industrial revolution and previous economic growth of the region, that same environment offers new opportunities utilising the network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. Managed as a multifunctional resource, through a strategically planned and delivered approach, this resource is capable of delivering a wide range of economic, social and environmental challenges in a coordinated fashion, thereby enhancing the regeneration potential of the area.

Experience in developing the VRP approach to date, wide recognition within Europe and the UK of the importance and fundamental role that the environment plays in sustaining human life, and the current economic climate make this an opportune time to review progress to date and develop an updated delivery framework.

The new framework is set out within the context of the Natural Environment Framework – A Living Wales, adopting an ecosystem services approach to the delivery of the programme. It sets out practical opportunities through the environment and heritage to support the wider social, economic and environmental needs and aspirations of the citizens and visitors in the Valleys.

Particular emphasis is placed on the role that VRP can play in developing and delivering the following:

<b>Supporting Services</b>	The Natural Environment & Biodiversity
<b>Cultural Services</b>	Community Regeneration Heritage Activity Tourism and Infrastructure Health and Well-being/Community Food Growing Sustainable Transport
<b>Regulating Services</b>	Environmental Quality Flood Attenuation

**Provisioning Services**     Sustainable Energy Production  
Economic Opportunities and Business Support  
Life Long Learning/Education, Jobs and Skills

Through this approach VRP is able to demonstrate the practicalities of delivering regeneration through an ecosystem services approach in a way that could be replicated elsewhere. We are keen to maximise the way in which the programme is able to contribute to:

- the effective management of green space which provides a hinterland for our towns and villages.
- town centre regeneration by increasing footfall and visitor spend linked to wider tourism activities, countryside recreation and attractions.
- the regeneration of rural communities by promoting and supporting outdoor adventure provision and developing rural skills.
- improved social cohesion by engaging deprived communities in practical activities and events.
- improving the health and well-being of the population
- developing enterprise and providing a quality location for corporate business.
- Providing and supporting community based food production
- The development and promotion of a sustainable transport network
- educational and life long learning given the conducive learning environment that the outdoors provide
- mitigating against the potentially damaging effects of climate change

A major focus of the VRP approach is the cross sector and cross boundary approach to environment heritage and tourism service planning and delivery across local authorities in the south Wales Valleys which was set out in the 2007 framework as the pre-requisite for achieving the overall vision. A number of themed cross boundary groups have been established to facilitate this, and there has been progress within and between some partner organisations, but the progress is variable across the Valleys. However the current economic climate makes the need for this even more pressing. This framework commits to placing greater efforts on encouraging the development of more shared services between and across the Valleys, with greater emphasis on partnering with private sector organisations.

<b>Contents Page</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. VRP Concept and Progress to Date</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Strategic Context</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Supporting Services</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1 The Natural Environment & Biodiversity	8
<b>5. Cultural Services</b>	<b>9</b>
5.1 Community Regeneration	9
5.2 Heritage and Culture	10
5.3 Activity Tourism and Infrastructure	10
5.4 Health and Well-being/Community Food Growing	11
5.5 Sustainable Transport	12
<b>6. Regulating Services</b>	<b>12</b>
6.1 Environmental Quality	12
6.2 Flood Attenuation	13
<b>7. Provisioning Services</b>	<b>13</b>
7.1 Sustainable Energy Production	13
7.2 Economic Opportunities and Business Support	14
7.3 Life Long Learning/Education, Jobs and Skills	16
<b>8 Operating Principles</b>	<b>17</b>
8.1 An Ecosystem Services Approach	17
8.2 Cross Sector and Cross Boundary Collaboration	18
8.3 Communication, Promotion and Marketing	18
8.4 Governance	19
<b>9. References</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendices:</b>	
Appendix 1: VRP Overview Leaflet	
Appendix 2: NEF Basic Tool	
Appendix 3: VRP Governance and Administration	
Appendix 4: WECAN Project Overview	

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Valleys Regional Park was established as a framework for the collaborative planning and delivery of environment, heritage and tourism services in 2007 based on a framework produced by Parkin Heritage and Tourism. Since then considerable progress has been made in terms of developing the concept, appropriate management arrangements and securing significant levels of funding for practical project delivery.
- 1.2 The strategic, public service and financial resource context has changed significantly during the last three years and in light of this, the progress made in developing the initial concept and the 2008-2013 Action Plan, this is an opportune time to review the Action Plan and establish a new framework for delivery.
- 1.3 This delivery framework outlines the progress made to date, and the future management, operational principles and framework actions in the current context and economic circumstances, with particular focus on adopting an ecosystem services approach to service planning and delivery within the wider sustainable development context.

## **2. VRP Concept and Progress to Date**

- 2.1 A Valleys Regional Park Framework was prepared for the Greening the Valleys Partnership in July 2007, by a consortium of consultants led by Parkin Heritage and Tourism and funded by the Heads of the Valleys Programme. As a result of the Framework the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) initiative was established comprising the partnership of organisations previously known as Greening the Valleys. Developing the VRP was identified as a specific aim in the Heads of the Valleys "Turning Heads Strategy. The vision of VRP as set out in the Framework is:

***The Valleys Regional Park vision is of a high quality, sustainable network of greenspace offering outstanding recreational opportunities which will change the image and perception of the Valleys for ever, improve the quality of life, health and well being for local people, generate pride in their area, create an environment that stimulates inward investment and becomes an attractive destination for visitors.***

- 2.2 A leaflet outlining the VRP concept and progress to date is attached as Appendix 1.

## **3. Strategic Context**

- 3.1 There have been some significant strategic policy developments since the preparation of the original VRP Framework:

- **Programme for Government**

The Programme for Government is the Welsh Government's roadmap for the current Assembly term. It represents a real commitment to delivery, and a move away from an approach to measuring success that placed too much emphasis on the amount of money spent, or the number of policies implemented, rather than the impact government is actually having on people's lives.

The document emphasises the outcomes the WG is working towards underpinned by a commitment to sustainable development: healthy people living productive lives in a more prosperous and innovative economy; safer and more cohesive communities, with lower levels of poverty and greater equality; a resilient environment with more sustainable use of our natural resources and a society with a vital sense of its own culture and heritage.

There is recognition that the WG cannot deliver these outcomes alone. This Programme for Government is not just an agenda for the Welsh Government. It is an agenda for Wales with a clear commitment to work with leaders across the public sector, private sector and third sector to recognise this agenda and take it forward in partnership with us. The VRP approach embraces this through its partnership approach.

The priorities set out within this delivery framework are intended to contribute to delivering the Programme for Government which itself highlights opportunities related to tourism, access to the countryside, health and well being, healthy ecosystems, heritage and culture, energy and sustainable transport.

- **Economic Renewal:**

The Welsh Government's economic renewal strategy is set within the context of the Programme for Government and recognises Wales as a country with a wealth of natural and cultural assets that we need to celebrate and promote. The natural beauty of the countryside and coastline, strong sense of community, and unique heritage and language all mean that Wales is able to present itself as a distinctive and diverse nation that provides a rich quality of life for those who choose to work, live, do business and invest here.

There is recognition of the need to develop the conditions which not only allow, but actively help, people and businesses to flourish sustainably – by making the most of our assets and by getting the balance right between environmental, social and economic objectives. Wales is a great place to live, work, visit and invest – but it can be even better. Building the image and reputation of Wales as an attractive place to do business is vitally important.

***The vision set out for economic renewal is of a Welsh economy built upon the strengths and skills of its people and natural environment; recognised at home and abroad as confident, creative and ambitious; a great place to live and work.***

- **Framework for Regeneration Areas**

In October 2010, a framework for regeneration areas was published by Welsh Government, which includes a commitment to continue to run the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) project within regeneration supporting our Natural Environment Framework, operating across and beyond the Western Valleys and Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Areas.

Hosted within the Regeneration Division, through its collaborative partnerships, funding mechanisms and established delivery approach, the Valleys Regional Park Programme provides the primary strategic opportunity to maximise the potential of the Valleys environment and heritage as a regeneration driver stimulating economic and social recovery. It will complement a new approach to regeneration focusing on key settlements maximising the return on investment in these areas by making the surrounding environment work economically and socially. Working with other WG sectors such as environment, communities and health, it can complement a whole government approach to regeneration.

- **A Living Wales**

***'A Living Wales'* is a major statement of policy by the Government. It is about more effective governance of environmental resources in Wales within the context of sustainable development, which is the Welsh Governments central organising principle. It sits below the Sustainable Development Scheme and above the Environment Strategy and the individual environmental policies which set out current detailed actions. It seeks an integrated approach to managing Wales' environmental resources and integration with economic and social outcomes.**

In September 2010 the Welsh Government launched the Natural Environment Framework (NEF), 'A Living Wales', to get the best long term environmental, social and economic outcomes from our natural environment for the people of Wales.

Following the consultation and wider discussions, plans to adopt a new 'ecosystem approach' were published in February this year. The Welsh Government and its partners will look at the environment as a whole and set out a more integrated approach to managing the natural environment to ensure that Wales has increasingly resilient and diverse ecosystems that are managed to optimise the balance between economic, environmental and social benefits now and in the future.

The Welsh Government recognises that our environment:

- is our life support system,
- is a finite source of raw materials and resources,
- underpins our economic development,

- has an intrinsic value and
- is central to our quality of life, sense of place, health and wellbeing.

## **4. Supporting Services**

### **4.1 The Natural Environment and Biodiversity**

4.1.1 The natural environment of the Valleys and its associated biodiversity provides a wide range of ecosystem services that are being utilised to stimulate the regeneration of the area, and is the basis on which the original VRP concept was conceived. Visually the natural environment provides a quality setting for living and working and an opportunity to develop the tourism economy. It provides a quality location to attract business, and an opportunity to improve the health and well being of the local population. It is essential therefore that we protect and enhance the natural environment and biodiversity of the Valleys. There are several specific opportunities in development to achieve this:

- A £11.5M programme of landscape enhancements associated with the development of visitor facilities within the convergence programme.
- Securing funding through the forthcoming 2014 – 2020 EU Cohesion programme subject to programme details and criteria that have yet to be agreed.
- Enhancing and promoting local nature sites for biodiversity particularly where these will result in increase visitor numbers.
- Through the WECAN Project, develop species and habitat sponsorship programmes with private businesses to help secure the future of at risk species, raise their profile and utilise opportunities to attract visitors.
- Work with the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) through their VRP Officer, to develop a new approach to the allocation of CCW grant support across the Valleys, examining the opportunities for more strategic activity programmes. Through the WECAN Project, develop partnerships with the private sector to increase the level of funding available.
- Develop the role and importance of country parks in terms of delivering a range of ecosystem services linked to Green Flag accreditation and strategic promotion.
- Develop proposals and seek resources to maximise the economic potential of bring our Valleys upland areas by bringing them into favourable management for biodiversity, whilst at the same time developing the rural economy in partnership with landowners and tackling anti-social problems such as arson.
- Working in partnership with WG Rural Affairs, we will support and assist in the development of strategic partnerships with landowners and farming organisations to support sustainable land management.
- VRP will develop a closer working relationship with the Rural Development Plan Team in WAG to maximise the synergies of that and other funding programmes in the Valleys.



- Demonstrate the practical application of an ecosystem services approach through appropriate partnership structures that can be replicated elsewhere.
- Through joint partnerships established with Registered Social Landlords, we will assist in the management of environmental assets as part of a programme to engage communities, develop confidence and skills, and manage green space.

## **5. Cultural Services**

### **5.1 Community Regeneration**

5.1.1 A quality environment to live in is an important contributor to the regeneration of communities. The environment has also traditionally provided opportunities to engage communities as part of regeneration programmes. A community development plan has been produced as part of the VRP convergence project, with community tourism officers appointed to encourage local people to become ambassadors for their local area. This part of the programme is supported by a training programme.

- We will work with community coordinators and community based organisations to stimulate and help activities that encourage pride and develop confidence.
- We will establish community ambassadors to improve the perception of the Valleys for locals and visitors, and promote the opportunities the area provides for tourism and recreation.
- VRP will work with others to encourage volunteering as a potential route to employment.
- Through the WECAN Project we will encourage community regeneration organisations and groups to adopt an entrepreneurial approach to help sustain community-based activities.
- We will develop opportunities with private business to secure sustainable funding solutions for community based environmental and heritage activities.
- VRP will support and where appropriate and seek funding for environmental and heritage projects that have the potential to help community regeneration.
- Annual Community Tourism Conference
- As part of a whole government approach we will work in partnership with the Communities First Team within the Department of Local Government and Communities to deliver activities which support the regeneration of communities.

### **5.2 Heritage and Culture**

5.2.1 The Valleys have a rich historic, cultural and industrial heritage with some important designations including Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site, Registered Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales and the built heritage covering the whole spectrum of human occupation from

Neolithic times to the present day. The heritage tells the story of the colonisation by man over thousands of years, provides many of the walking and cycling trails, and associated with the natural environment, provides tourism attractions, jobs, venues for major events and opportunities to engender pride in local people.

- VRP will continue to enhance and develop new heritage facilities, features and trails across the Valleys through the Convergence funded programme.
- We will encourage interest in and encourage citizens to become actively involved in the Valleys heritage and environment through the VRP Ambassadors training programme.
- VRP will support the development and promotion of the Blaenavon World Heritage Site through the Forgotten Landscapes Project, and support projects/areas that seek similar or other designations.
- We will explore opportunities to help promote and sustain the European Route of Industrial Heritage.
- VRP will support the development of projects that celebrate and promote the Valleys heritage.
- Encourage the use of different and innovative media to interpret and aid better understanding of the Valleys heritage.
- VRP will support the use of traditional methods and materials in both building and land management, particularly encouraging partners to maintain and introduce traditional field boundaries.
- We will encourage community pride and stimulate tourism visits by developing opportunities to celebrate the wide range of famous cultural “heroes” that came from the Valleys.

### 5.3 Activity Tourism and Infrastructure

5.3.1 With 620km square of open access land, 4500km of public rights of way and a great number and variety of environment, heritage and outdoor pursuit attractions, tourism provides one of the greatest potential areas to stimulate sustainable regeneration in the Valleys. VRP will continue to enhance tourism infrastructure across the Valleys supported by European funding. This will include:

- Investment of £5M in the Valleys Cycle Network with Sustrans.
- £5.5M improvements to walking trails.
- Enhancing the visitor experience in terms of quality and variety of activities at our country parks and other visitor attractions, including a £1.3M contribution to events within the Convergence programme.
- Undertaking an audit of outdoor activity opportunities and providers.
- Establishing and developing a partnership of outdoor activity providers.
- Working with private sector operators to maximise the opportunities for revenue generation to enhance and maintain the tourism infrastructure through sponsorship.
- Developing methodologies to secure funding through visitor payback schemes.

- Developing promotional opportunities for activity tourism via the Valleys Heart and Soul Campaign. This will include working with our partner organisations to develop a more consistent range of promotional literature and focusing (initially at least) on a limited number of high quality strategic routes which link key activity centres, environment, and heritage facilities.
- VRP will support projects and where possible, help to secure funding for projects that create new or improve existing tourism infrastructure or promote activity based tourism in the Valleys.

#### 5.4 Health and Well-being/Community Food Growing

5.4.1 The role that green infrastructure plays in delivering key benefits for health and well-being is well recognised. Numerous studies have shown clear evidence that green infrastructure reduces health inequality, encourages healthier lifestyles through physical activity in the outdoors and has a positive effect on an individual's psychological health and mental well-being. However whilst studies suggest a clear association between good mental health and physical activity, and access to good quality green space, there are vast areas of the Valleys where this is not necessarily the case. The 2007 VRP Framework identified that 60% of the most deprived wards in Wales (according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation) lie within the VRP area. It also refers to national research which suggests that 43% of deprived communities do not have a relationship with, or recognise, the environment or countryside on their doorstep. Clearly given the proximity of natural environmental assets to the majority of the population of the Valleys, there would appear to be great untapped potential to capitalise on the opportunities that these assets offer for health improvement and general well-being.

5.4.2 VRP will utilise the opportunities presented by the natural environment for health through the following activities:

- Projects being delivered as part of the convergence programme are subject to a sustainable development appraisal which includes a statement on community involvement provision, equal opportunities and health and well-being to ensure we maximise the health and well-being opportunities.
- Working through the VRP Access and Health sub group, we will support the development of additional countryside access improvement projects and work with our partners to actively promote the health benefits of walking, cycling and adventure sports.
- The physiological benefits of physical activity in the outdoors will be assessed through the KESS (Knowledge Economy Skills Sector) PhD project undertaken in partnership with Groundwork Wales and UWIC.
- Through the VRP Access and Health Group, we will promote and develop community food growing initiatives, and establish a framework for organising, supporting and promoting community food growing initiatives across the Valleys.
- We will encourage practical volunteering involving physical activity to develop fitness.
- VRP will support and where appropriate seek funding for environmental projects that have the potential to improve the health of citizens.

## 5.5 Sustainable Transport

5.5.1 The VRP area is able to make a significant contribution to encouraging more sustainable modes of transport. Indeed the dense network of public rights of way (4500km total) associated with the Valleys Cycle Network, are identified in local transport plans alongside other transport facilities. Within the period of this framework, we will undertake the following:

- Work with Sustrans and the local authorities to construct at least 57km of new or improved Valleys Cycle Network which although primarily designed for recreational use, can equally be used as commuter routes.
- Improve a further 20km of walking trails.
- Work with Cardiff University to investigate necessary interventions to promote more sustainable transport use across some of our Valley towns and visitor centres.
- VRP will support projects and where possible, help to secure funding for projects that create new or improve existing walking and cycling trails.

## 6. **Regulating Services**

### 6.1 Environmental Quality

6.1.1 Litter, fly-tipping and arson can undermine our efforts to enhance the area and develop tourism opportunities, and have a negative impact on the quality of life of our citizens. In our partnerships with Environment Agency Wales, Keep Wales Tidy, Groundwork in Wales and British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, we will continue to work with communities to reduce these problems.

- Through the convergence funded programme we will support Fly Tipping Action Wales where it operates in the Valleys and utilise the Cleaner Greener Communities Programme in the Heads of the Valleys Area to encourage community led activities that tackle litter and fly-tipping.
- We will work with the Fire and Rescue Services to reduce the incidence of wildfires. As stated in paragraph 6.1 above, subject to funding, the Upland Management Project will provide the framework to deal with this in the upland areas.
- The Forgotten Landscapes Project is a constituent part of the VRP Programme, which through its seconded police officer, aims to develop mechanisms to tackle landscape crime that can then be promoted across the VRP area. We will be looking to support the expansion of this approach across the wider Valleys.

### 6.2 Flood Attenuation

6.2.1 The flashy nature of the rivers in the Valleys tends to create flooding problems in some areas. Through appropriate land use interventions, landscape and habitat management, there are opportunities to make the Valleys more resilient to flooding.

- VRP will work with the Environment Agency Wales and local authorities to identify and develop interventions that can reduce run off from upland areas, and develop practical land management projects that will reduce the impact of flooding.
- As part of a sustainable and holistic approach to the management of our ecosystems, we will help promote the pro-active inclusion of well managed and maintained Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems in regeneration and development projects.
- We will support and where necessary, work to secure funding for projects that have the potential to contribute to flood attenuation.

## **7. Provisioning Services**

### **7.1 Sustainable Energy Production**

7.1.1 The natural environment of the Valleys provides an exciting range of opportunities for sustainable energy production. Feasibility work in relation to some of these opportunities is already ongoing. VRP is committed to working with appropriate partners to assess the feasibility of and establish frameworks to facilitate delivery of the following:

- We will work with Forestry Commission Wales through their VRP officer and Coed Cymru to support the development and sustainable supply of wood fuel for a new generation of wood chip boilers.
- Subject to feasibility work, we will work with landowners to encourage biomass production to ensure continuity of wood fuel.
- VRP will investigate opportunities to establish a framework for community led small scale energy generation projects ensuring that the financial benefits accruing from such schemes are ring fenced to fund sustainable community environmental projects.
- We will work with partners such as the British Geological Survey to explore opportunities for community led energy projects.
- VRP will develop partnerships with green energy suppliers to facilitate the development of local opportunities for energy production, through for example wind or ground source heat.
- VRP will support and assist in the development of programmes and where possible secure funding, for projects that have the potential to generate green energy where there is payback for communities in the Valleys.

### **7.2 Economic Opportunities and Business Support**

7.2.1 The natural environment is undoubtedly one of the Valleys' major assets, which can and must be a driver of sustainable economic growth and social regeneration in the region. However, despite overwhelming evidence from previous studies in the UK and elsewhere, demonstrating positive links between the environment and the economy, we have yet to maximise its potential for the benefit of our communities and businesses.

- 7.2.2 The value of wildlife-based activity to the Welsh economy was estimated as £1.9 million in 2007 (2.9% of Wales' national output and 3% of employment). A 2001 study estimated that the environment contributed £8.8 billion of goods and services annually to the Welsh economy, 9% of Welsh GDP and 1 in 6 Welsh jobs. These jobs were mainly in the leisure and tourism, agriculture & forestry, water abstraction, conservation and waste management sectors. It also found that the environment is relatively more important to the Welsh economy than is the case for the other UK nations.
- 7.2.3 The economic and social benefits arising from countryside recreation are now widely acknowledged. Walking in Wales alone has been estimated as being worth over £500m per annum to the Welsh economy. The foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 demonstrated that trips to the countryside by local residents and visitors make a huge contribution to the rural areas. During the outbreak, the economic losses to UK businesses dependent on tourism were estimated as ranging from £2.7bn to £3.2bn.
- 7.2.4 The value of recreational angling to Wales is now estimated at more than £100m (WAG, 2008, p39). Lakes, rivers and seas are being targeted for the expansion of recreational services. Environment Agency Wales is aiming for a substantial increase in water-related leisure activities by 2013.
- 7.2.5 Vegetation in urban areas can reduce particulate air pollution with woodland removing three times the amount as grassland (NUFU 2005). In Wales, existing urban trees absorb each year between 45 and 73 megatonnes of particulates and between 91 and 165 megatonnes of sulphur dioxide (Small, 2009). The health effects of this pollution absorption are significant, delaying deaths and preventing hospital admissions related to air quality causes, and these benefits could be enhanced through further urban tree planting. Willis et al (2003) valued the benefits at £124,998 for each death avoided by 1 year due to this absorption *service* from trees, and £602 for an 11 day hospital stay avoided due to reduced respiratory illness, totalling an annual value of £0.04 million in Wales in 2002.
- 7.2.6 The production value of pollination as a contribution to UK crop market value in 2007 was £430 million. Unfortunately, figures for Wales are unknown at present as data are not collected due to the relatively small amount of arable crops in Wales compared to other parts of the UK. However, insect pollinators are known to be essential for the maintenance of many vegetation types in Wales (and the valuation of pollination services in Wales is therefore an important area for future research). Honey bees are the most common pollinators of commercial field crops across the UK, they have shown a 23% decline in Wales between 1985 and 2005, with this trend continuing at present (Klein et al., 2007, Potts et al., 2010).
- 7.2.7 The business development opportunities and assessment of economic activities undertaken as part of VRP will be carried out through the following:
- The economic outputs resulting from tourism visits created by the VRP Convergence funded activity will be measured as part of a monitoring and

evaluation contract with the Welsh Economic Research Unit within Cardiff University.

- Working with partners in Belgium and France, and with businesses and communities in the Valleys, the WECAN Project will provide a framework for developing and assessing wider economic impact by determining how well planned, sustainable usage of the natural environment can create more economically and socially prosperous communities, especially in areas which have suffered post-industrial decline, such as the valleys. It will take an ecosystem services approach in doing this and:
  - > Develop and test transferable techniques to assess the economic potential of the natural heritage in densely-populated post-industrial areas.
  - > Establish working partnerships with private sector business.
  - > Develop, promote, establish and evaluate innovative exemplars of responsible corporate sector interaction with the natural heritage.
  
  - > Evaluate 'visitor payback'-mechanisms for the natural heritage to develop appropriate schemes for post-industrial regions and test their effectiveness in order to create guidelines for implementation in other regions.
  - > Identify those conditions and factors that enhance community participation in the natural heritage to boost employability and create opportunities for employment, thereby stimulating the social economy in our communities.

### 7.3 Life long learning/education, jobs and skills

- 7.3.1 The natural environment provides a range of opportunities for learning. Such learning is a pre-requisite for skills development and maximising job creation if we as a country are to maximise the economic benefits related to it.
- 7.3.2 The Foundation Phase Education Curriculum (Early Years 3 to 5) and Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum (5 to 7 years) places great importance on staff using the outdoors as another classroom where children can work on a daily basis. There are many reasons for encouraging children to use the outdoors such as:
- > Children's health and fitness benefit from running, jumping and skipping outside and using toys and equipment that can not be used inside.
  - > Children can experience nature at first hand, - how the weather changes and how plants and animals react to the different seasons.
  - > Problem solving can relate to real experiences such as, how to move logs from one area to another.
  - > Children can experience aspects such as conservation and sustainability at first hand.
  - > They can develop a love of nature and undertake activities out of doors.
  - > Children are made aware of the impacts of crime on wildlife.

7.3.3 Managing the natural environment requires a great many professional technical and practical skills and as such provides employment opportunities. The natural environment also offers confidence building and skills development opportunities to prepare people for the workplace. At its broadest, the environment is linked to around 21 million jobs in Europe. Opportunities to grow skills in the Valleys relate to construction, forestry, landscape, countryside and grounds management, country crafts, community food growing, biodiversity, tourism development and guiding, adventure sports, healthy living and green energy production.

7.3.4 Training programmes in the natural environment provide an opportunity to tackle the worklessness agenda, which in itself is a combination of low confidence and mental health issues, lack of basic skills and social skills, practical skills, time management skills, low skill level, etc. Programmes in the natural environment can offer solutions to all of this as well as providing more accredited skills. It can also provide people with future proofing skills - e.g. growing own food, sustainable transport solutions, energy awareness and global environmental awareness - which can help people reduce living costs and in itself tackle poverty whilst contributing to a low carbon economy.

7.3.5 Working with education specialists and organisations, VRP will encourage a more coordinated approach to the provision of environmental education across the Valleys, and support citizens to gain environmental skills through the following, with relevant constituent partner organisations:

- Undertake an audit of environmental education activities and develop a strategic plan based on collaboration and replication of best practice.
- Local tourism ambassador training will be made available through the VRP Convergence funded programme, promoted and supported by the VRP Community Tourism Officers.
- The VRP Education and Skills sub-group will prepare a skills development plan for the Valleys to enhance and maximise the potential economic benefits outlined in paragraph 8.2.
- VRP will examine the feasibility of operating the Blaenau Gwent Landscape and Access Management Skills Project model across other areas of the Valleys.
- We will work with relevant organisations, to identify skills development opportunities.
- We will develop partnerships with training providers.
- VRP will support the development of pro-active approaches to dealing with wildlife crime through education.

## 8. Operating Principles

### 8.1 An Ecosystem Services Approach

8.1.1 The **Living Wales** framework is based on the ecosystem approach<sup>1</sup>. The guiding principle is

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/principles.shtml>



*To ensure that Wales has increasingly resilient and diverse ecosystems that are managed to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits.*

The ecosystem approach is defined by the International Union for the Conservation of nature as: 'A strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way and which recognises that people with their cultural and varied social needs are an integral part of ecosystems.'

8.1.2 The goods and services we receive from ecosystems include:

**Provisioning Services** such as food, water, timber and fibre

**Regulating services** that affect climate, floods, waste disposal, air and water quality

**Cultural services** which include recreational, aesthetic and spiritual activities

**Supporting services** such as soil formation, photosynthesis and nutrient cycling, which underpin the operation of the system as a whole and are therefore crucial to the long term provision of the services above

The ecosystem approach requires holistic management and integrated approaches that recognise the diversity and complexity of the environment and our interdependency with it.

8.1.3 The Valleys Regional Park Programme has potential to demonstrate the practicalities of delivering the NEF and this framework should set the parameters for taking the initiative forward in this way. Through the various programmes and projects and using the recently produced NEF Basic Tool (Appendix 2), partners will encourage the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promote conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. VRP will join up plans and policies and coordinate delivery in the Valleys. It will provide a link with local authorities, private business and voluntary organisations to coordinate activities.

## 8.2 Cross Sector and Cross Boundary Collaboration

8.2.1 The VRP concept is based on a partnership approach involving more than 40 organisations working together across sectors and boundaries towards a common goal. Whilst significant progress has been made in this approach, the current economic conditions will require the development of systems to increase the extent of collaboration. The approach is in keeping with the Welsh Government's public service reform agenda incorporated in the Programme for Government, which Carl Sargeant Minister for Local Government and Communities recently issued a progress report on. VRP will work with its constituent partner organisations to identify opportunities for greater cooperation in project management, delivery and marketing, thereby

developing greater consistency, less duplication and a more unified service to the public and visitors. For example opportunities exist to increase the extent and number of shared service arrangements between local authorities and between local authorities and other public and third sector bodies facilitated by the VRP Core Team and themed sub groups. This will help to develop a more consistent approach to relieve capacity issues within some of the organisations and help to retain important technical skills, ensuring that these are made available more widely across the Valleys.

- The VRP will work with its constituent partner organisations to develop joint initiatives. Where funding is made available to partners through grants or procurement, specific criteria will be set to encourage collaboration involving multiple organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors.
- The VRP will continue to use themed groups involving appropriate partner organisations to develop strategic projects.

### 8.3 Communication, Promotion and Marketing

8.3.1 The Valleys Heart and Soul Campaign will provide the primary mechanism for promoting the facilities, activities and events across the Valleys Regional Park area to the general public. All publicity, marketing and promotion of the Valleys Regional Park programmes and projects will adopt the agreed Valleys brand taking advantage of the holistic approach to marketing the Valleys.

8.3.2 Communication across the partnership of organisations in terms of operational activities and project development will continue to be undertaken through the partnership web site [www.thevalleys.org.uk](http://www.thevalleys.org.uk) and a six monthly e-newsletter.

8.3.3 Working with the regional tourism partnerships and local authorities, we will develop options for the marketing campaign beyond March 2012 including:

- The preparation of a promotional plan to ensure an appropriate balance of internal (within the Valleys) and external promotion, particularly maximising promotional opportunities in Cardiff Newport and Swansea.
- Developing consistency in terms of the branding and style of local interpretation and promotional material across the various partner organisations
- A review of the approach to managing the websites ([www.thevalleys.co.uk](http://www.thevalleys.co.uk) and [www.thevalleys.org.uk](http://www.thevalleys.org.uk)) and their content with a view to bringing the information onto a single site and ensuring the most cost effective way forward.
- Developing a sustainable funding model for the Campaign.

### 8.4 Governance

8.4.1 Day to day operations will be undertaken by a core management team, consisting of staff (Appendix 3) working with seconded officers from specific

partner organisations. This team will report to a Strategic Group that meets three times a year. The Strategic Group will comprise senior officials from a range of VRP partner organisations (Appendix 3) and Welsh Government officials.

- 8.4.2 A number of thematic cross boundary development groups will meet on a quarterly basis to develop and oversee innovative projects and programmes that meet the objectives set out in the framework for action. The sub-groups will work to maximise the potential benefits of VRP and the opportunities it affords through the provision of appropriate strategic and technical advice and guidance on collaborative working and practical project implementation (Appendix 3).
- 8.4.3 An Implementation Group will continue to meet three times a year to guide and monitor the delivery of approved projects that form part of the strategic VRP programmes (currently the Convergence and Interreg programmes). This group is very much about the practicalities of project delivery and comprises partner organisations that have been awarded funding from the VRP programme (Appendix 3).
- An independent review will be commissioned to develop a sustainable funding model for the VRP Programme which will also examine the most appropriate Welsh Government department or alternative organisation to host the programme in the future.

## 9. References

Parkin Heritage and Tourism (2007) The Valleys Regional Park Framework

Welsh Assembly Government (2005) Turning Heads, A Strategic Framework for the Heads of the Valleys  
Welsh Assembly Government (2009) One Wales One Planet; A New Sustainable Development Scheme for Wales

Welsh Assembly Government (2010) Economic Renewal A New Direction

Welsh Assembly Government (2010) A Framework for Regeneration Areas

Welsh Assembly Government Consultation Document (2010) A Living Wales – a new framework for our environment, our countryside and our seas

Pavan Sukhdev for TEEB (2009) The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity

ECOTEC (2008) The Economic Benefits of Green Infrastructure. Report of the Natural Economy Northwest (NENW)

Wales Environment Hub: Sample of Evidence Underpinning the Framework

Convention on Biological Diversity: Ecosystem Approach  
<http://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/principles.shtml>

# **Appendix 1**

## **Valleys Regional Park Brief Overview Document**

# THE VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK

## PARC RHANBARTHOL Y CYMOEDD

Y Cymoedd  
Calon ac Enaid Cymru  
The Valleys  
Heart and Soul of Wales



### Unlocking the potential of The Valleys environment and heritage...

The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) initiative aims to maximise the social and economic potential of the outstanding natural and cultural heritage assets of the south Wales valleys. The VRP partnership comprises over 40 partners from across the public, including Welsh Government and the local authorities, private, academic, and third and community sectors.

It seeks to develop and co-ordinate environment and heritage projects and activities across the valleys as a catalyst for regeneration working in conjunction with the Welsh Government's Heads of the Valleys and Western Valleys Regeneration Programmes. The initiative aims to develop the region as a highly-desirable place to live, work and visit, associated with marketing through the Valleys 'Heart & Soul' campaign.

Its activities cover the former south Wales coalfield, defined as the Valleys Regional Park in the Wales Spatial Plan, stretching from the western borders of Monmouthshire in the east to the former anthracite-mining valleys of Carmarthenshire in the west. It covers an area of over 200,000 hectares and is home to over 1 million people, about a third of the Welsh population.

The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) concept was the result of more than 3 years' research and collaborative development and planning with over 30 partner organisations and a stakeholder group of over 550 people, which was funded by the Heads of the Valleys Initiative. The background and evidence of need were established by the Valleys Regional Park framework document published in July 2007.

The aim is to create a high-quality, sustainable network of green space which will:

- Create an attractive environment for residents, businesses and visitors to stimulate enterprise and investment.
- Offer outstanding recreational opportunities to change the image and perception of the Valleys for ever.
- Improve the health and well-being of communities and generate increased pride in the area.
- Utilise the economic, tourism and community regeneration potential of our natural, and pre-industrial and industrial cultural heritage.

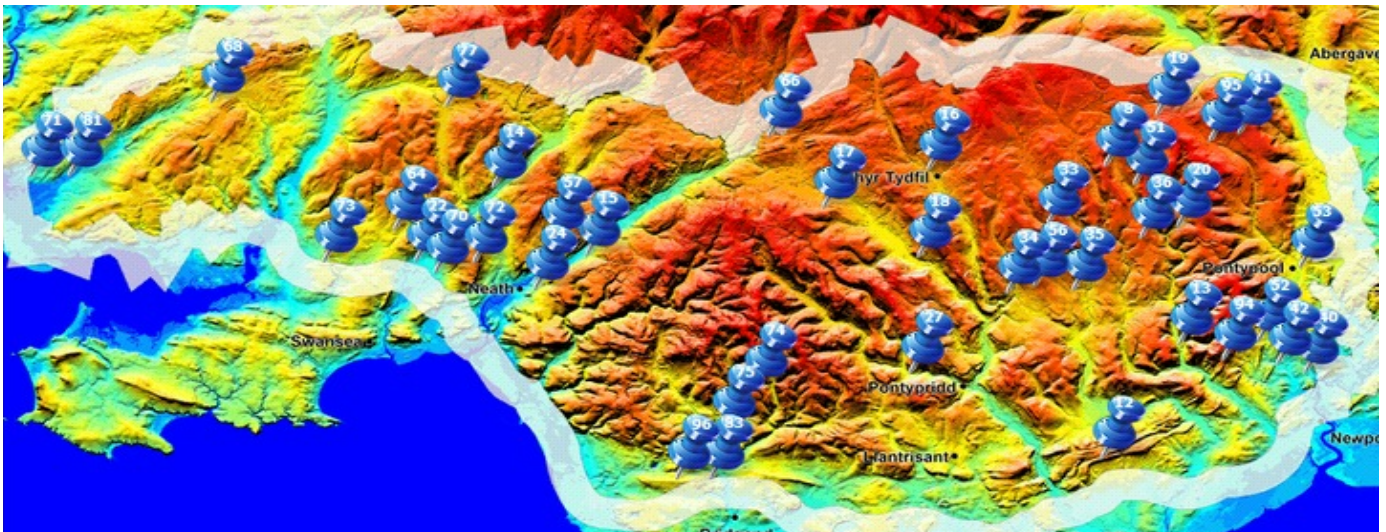
[www.thevalleys.org.uk](http://www.thevalleys.org.uk)

## Economic development through improved tourism and promotion...

The major infrastructure development project for the Valleys Regional Park initiative is its ERDF Convergence 'Environment for Growth' (E4G) Valleys Regional Park project with a gross value of approximately £25.7 million, match funding coming through Welsh Government, project sponsors and other partners. The projected outputs include:



- (Direct) Jobs - 200
- Increasing visitor numbers - More than 100,000
- Creating and improving access trails - 80 km
- Improving Visitor Centres, Country Parks and Landscape Destination enhancements
- Creating 200 Community Tourism ambassadors, 150 with qualifications
- Focused campaign to tackle environmental blight
- Marketing and promotion through the Valleys 'Heart & Soul' campaign



Since April 2009, 41 infrastructure projects have received approval in principle, with nineteen having been completed. These include:

- The Environmental Resource Centre for visitors and the local community at The Works in Ebbw Vale (right top)
- New access and horse riding trails at Garth Farm near Swansea
- A new trail with canal access and environmental improvements at Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct (bottom right)
- Improved gateways to Parc Taf Bargoed
- Enhanced access and landscaping at Kidwelly Quays to improve heritage and wildlife tourism
- Trail and access improvements at Cwmcarn Forest Centre
- Improvements at Cwmbran Riverside Park
- Enhanced access from Aberdare town centre to Dare Valley Country Park
- Planned improvements to Tondy Ironworks and Bryngarw House

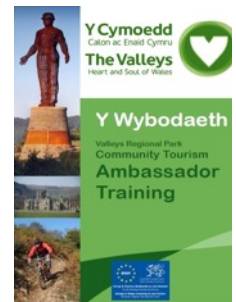


In addition, over 40 interpretation projects and events have now been approved under the ERDF project, marketing these through the Valleys 'Heart & Soul' campaign including the interpretation at the new heritage centre at Ty Ebbw Fach, Six Bells, Abertillery, officially opened by HRH Prince Charles in November 2011. The economic benefits of the VRP investments, including events are being assessed by Cardiff Business School: [www.e4g.org.uk](http://www.e4g.org.uk)

## Community regeneration and skills...

Valleys Regional Park is working with communities to help develop tourism opportunities through its Community Tourism Officers (CTOs) who have been liaising with and supporting community groups across the valleys.

Since February 2011, over 135 community tourism ambassadors have been now trained with four local 'embassies' established as hubs for local information. The ambassadors include teachers, taxi drivers, rangers, green badge guides, students, and visitor centre staff.



Two very successful annual Community Tourism conferences have been held showcasing some of the excellent community projects and activities across the valleys and running workshops to improve and inform developing initiatives.

The CTOs have recently worked with Visit Wales to create and develop an online interactive toolkit on community tourism and the Community Tourism Ambassadors training programme.

## Environmental protection involving communities and businesses...



Fly-tipping Action Wales has an enhanced programme of activities in the valleys as a result of VRP ERDF support. The project is focused on stamping out fly-tipping in the valleys to protect the environment in order to attract visitors and business, and to support local communities.

Fly-tipping causes unwanted blight and costs Welsh taxpayers over £2 million to clean up every year. The experienced team works with local authorities and other partners to tackle fly-tipping through intelligence-led approaches using a combination of education, enforcement and community engagement activities.

The project has already delivered successful focused campaigns in 2011 in Merthyr Tydfil, Torfaen, Caerphilly, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot. More details are available at: [www.flytippingactionwales.org/en/valleys.php](http://www.flytippingactionwales.org/en/valleys.php)

## Deriving and understanding the health benefits of green exercise...



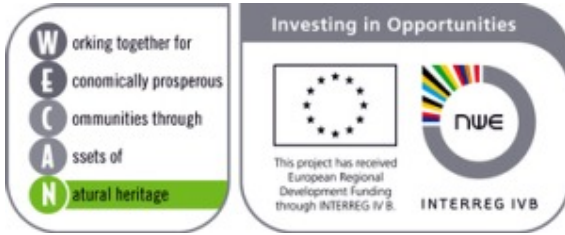
Getting people more active in their natural environment can be hugely beneficial for health and well-being. Through one of its partners, Groundwork Wales, Valleys Regional Park is sponsoring a KESS PhD studentship with Cardiff Metropolitan University (UWIC)

The project was initiated with the university through the VRP 'Health and Wellbeing' subgroup and aims to gain greater understanding of the mechanisms for physiological and psychological benefits of being active in the natural environment, which can help combat mental ill health, obesity, and Type II Diabetes, amongst other conditions.

Early results of some pilot studies working with the Pontlloftyn Walking Group and others have shown that vascular age and blood pressure improved amongst subjects.



## Developing enterprise opportunities through the environment...



The WECAN (Working together for Economically-prosperous Communities through Assets of Natural heritage) project aims to develop and maximise the economic and social potential of the natural environment.

Funded through the Interreg IVB (North West Europe) 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' programme we are working with partners based in the former heavy industrial areas of Limburg in eastern Belgium and northern France.

The project aims to gain a greater understanding of how the natural environment can support sustainable economic development and community regeneration, and to put this into practice working with the public, private and third sectors, and local community partners in the valleys.

We are evaluating the economic contribution of the natural environment, how businesses can develop and benefit from the natural environment, how visitors might contribute to supporting the local environment and economy through innovative visitor-payback mechanisms, and how greater community engagement in the environment can support enterprise activities to stimulate the local economy. Pilot projects in focus areas of the valleys will provide practical exemplars and evidence for innovation and development of a new economic approach to create sustainable, resilient, and vibrant communities.

## Maximising the potential of The Valleys green infrastructure...

Through a revised delivery framework, VRP will plan and deliver activities related to Green Infrastructure in accordance with the Welsh Government's Natural Environment Framework (NEF)- 'A Living Wales', developed to encourage more effective governance of environmental resources within the context of sustainable development. VRP will provide a practical opportunity to implement the NEF approach in order to:

- Create a sustainable high-quality environment for residents, business and tourism
- Support the revitalisation of vibrant Valleys town centres
- Promote use of the natural environment to provide enhanced outdoor opportunities for education and training
- Develop the tourism potential of the region
- Develop sustainable transport
- Support health and wellbeing through support of local food initiatives and enhanced use of the natural environment
- Ensure sustainable resource management safeguarding ecosystems and their regulating services

**Mae fersiwn Cymraeg o'r daflen hon ar gael - Gofynnwch i ni am gopi.**

## **Appendix 2**

# **Natural Environment Framework Basic Tool**

**Welsh Government  
July 2011**

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT FRAMEWORK

## BASIC TOOL – July 2011

In keeping with the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development duty, the Natural Environment Framework (NEF), seeks to secure a more integrated approach to managing our natural environment to ensure that Wales has increasingly resilient and diverse ecosystems that deliver a range of social, environmental and economic benefits

The approach is about ensuring that all our actions are based on an appropriate understanding of ecosystems and the services that they provide.

This tool sets out the key questions which need to be addressed in order to build consideration of ecosystems and their services into new (or existing) proposals, policies, plans, programmes or projects. Central to this approach is the integration of the issues and opportunities raised by these questions into earliest stages of our decision making.

The tool is based around the four pillars of sustainable development:

- A sustainable natural environment
- Prudent use of natural resources – reducing our ecological footprint
- Social progress which meets the needs of everyone
- A sustainable economy and prosperous society.

The tool should be used alongside the list of NEF Ecosystem Services presented at the end of this document. The list of services is set out under the headings of, supporting, regulating, cultural and provisioning ecosystem services. These can be related to and used to think about the four pillars of sustainable development, as indicated in the tool. For further details see papers under current work at: [www.wales.gov.uk/livingwales](http://www.wales.gov.uk/livingwales)

We are currently seeking suggestions for new (or existing) proposals, policies, plans, programmes or projects on which stakeholders would like to help us test the tool. We will also be testing the tool on a number of pilot projects to demonstrate how a NEF ecosystem approach can be applied, and will develop further advice and guidance based on this learning.

In parallel we are considering how the tool can be directly incorporated into existing processes and mechanisms in ways that add value to decision making without adding an extra layer of bureaucracy.

### Guidance for use

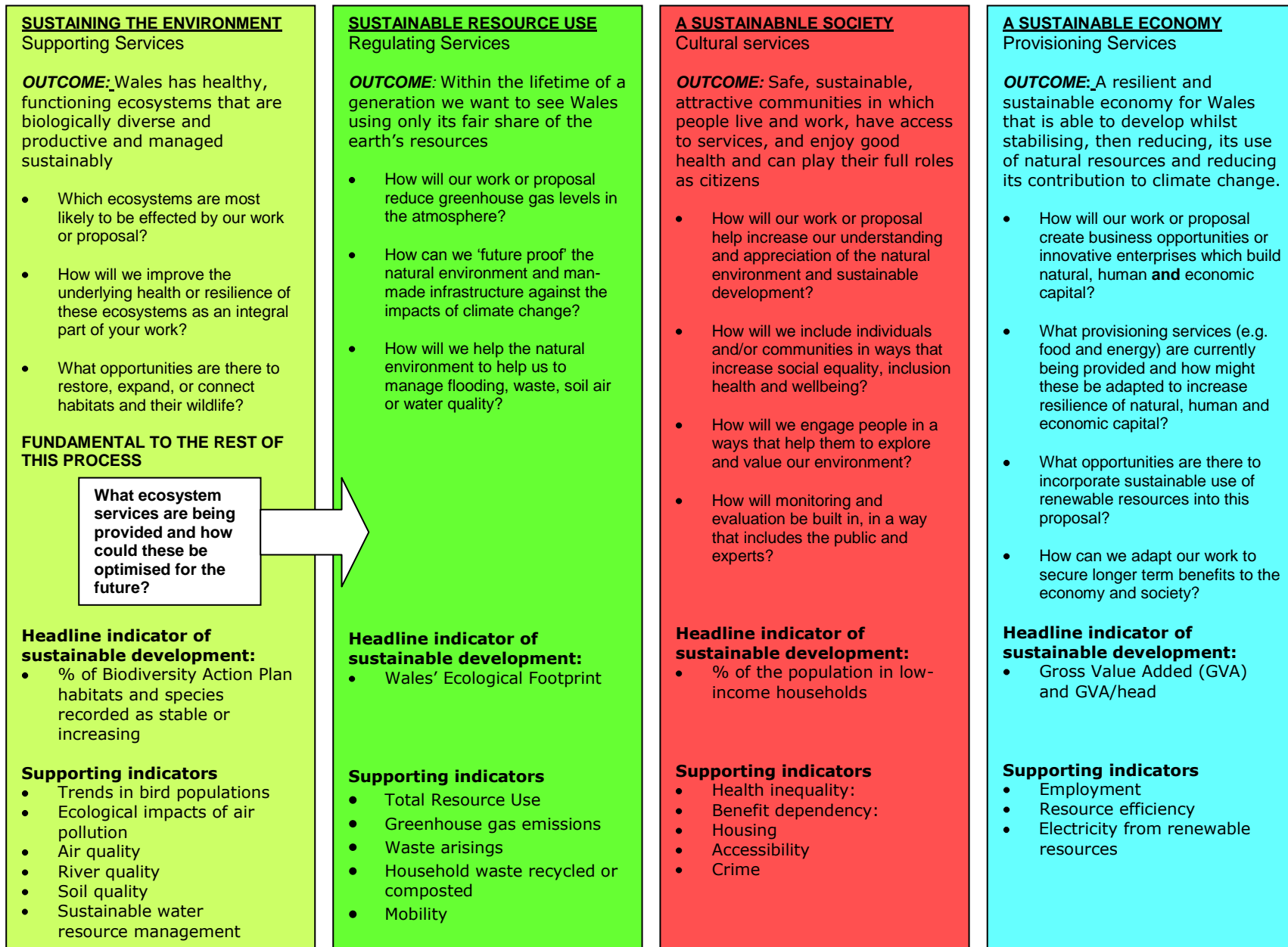
- Talk to the NEF team about using the tool.
- Apply the tool at the earliest possible stage in development of your proposal.

- Arrange to get the help and expertise that you might need with particular questions – the NEF team can suggest suitable sources.
- Ensure the issues and opportunities raised by this approach are discussed and developed as far as possible by a relevant mix of environmental, social and economic stakeholders
- Make sure that you are fully aware of your legal responsibilities towards ecosystems; see: [http://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/legislation\\_guidance-20.aspx](http://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/legislation_guidance-20.aspx)
- Check to ensure that you also meet any existing requirements such as Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) linked to European Protected sites. This approach can be readily built into these. More detailed guidance for such cases will be developed through the suite of Pilot Projects.

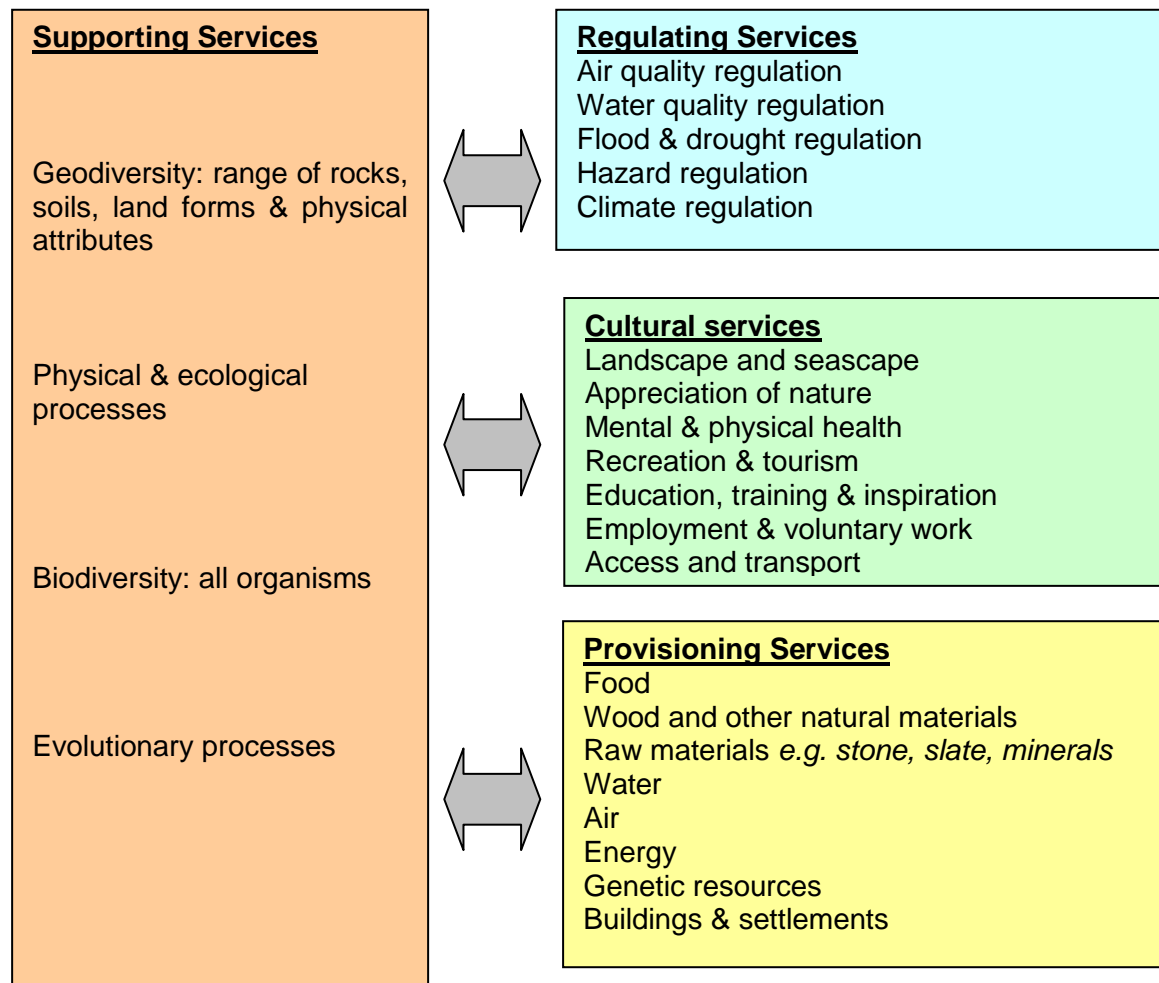
**If the tool works you should find yourself changing your proposal for the better.**

Report back on how you got on by providing brief answers to this feedback list:

- To what proposal did you apply the tool?
- How did you go about using the tool?
- How did the tool change or add value to your original proposal?
- Do you have any suggestions from your experience for good or bad ways of using the tool?
- Your contact details if you'd like to help further and/or be provided with updates.



## Key NEF Ecosystem Services



For full details see papers at the bottom of this webpage:  
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/nef/currentwork/evidencebase/?lang=en>

## **Appendix 3**

# **Valleys Regional Park Governance & Administration**

**PARC RHANBARTHOL Y CYMOEDD  
VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK**

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## **VRP Governance and Administration**

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Successful establishment and implementation of the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) initiative requires effective collaborative partnership working across sectors and organisations.

The VRP partnership now comprises more than 40 organisations ranging from the Welsh Government and local authorities in the valleys through to third and community sector organisations.

The activities of these organisations in developing and delivering the Valleys Regional Park vision are coordinated through a governance structure comprising a Strategic Group, an Implementation Group and themed development sub-groups.

Day-to-day operations related to the Valleys Regional Park are carried out by the VRP Management Team.

### **VRP Strategic Group**

#### **Role:**

The Strategic Group is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the overall VRP vision and drive its future direction through effective strategic working.

It meets on a three-monthly cycle and is chaired by Chris Warner, Head of Regeneration Policy, Welsh Government

#### **Functions:**

- Oversee implementation of the overall VRP vision and strategy
- Develop and agree annual action plans
- Influence appropriate policy development and decisions within their organisations
- Corporate governance, due diligence and performance monitoring of VRP

#### **Membership requisites:**



- Senior level decision-makers in own organisation
- Commitment to VRP vision
- Commitment to cross-boundary and cross-sector working
- Commitment to regular attendance at meetings

### **Current Membership:**

WG (Regeneration)	Chris Warner (Chair)
CCW	Sue Maberley
FCW	Dai Jones
EAW	John Harrison
WLGA	Lowri Gwilym
Local Authorities	Alison Ward
Local Authorities	Louise Fradd
CRT	Peter Cole
SWWTP	Gary Davies
WAG Rural Affairs	Terri Thomas
Community/Third Sector	Ian McIntosh
WG (Sustainable Development)	Steve Spode
WG Health	Maureen Howell
Heritage (CADW)	Judith Alfrey
Business	Simon Harris
RSLs	Jen Barfoot

### **VRP Implementation group**

#### **Role:**

The implementation group is responsible for ensuring and monitoring successful delivery of VRP projects, the sharing and promotion of best practice across partners, and more effective collaborative working within and across organisations.

It meets on a four-monthly cycle and is chaired by Louise Fradd, Communities Directorate, Bridgend CBC.

#### **Functions:**

- Monitor progress and ensure VRP projects are delivered to specification, on time and to agreed budgets.
- Communicate the progress of all VRP projects and make recommendations to the Valleys Regional Park Strategic Group where appropriate.
- Ensure collaboration within their own organisations and with other partners as appropriate to deliver the VRP projects and action plan.
- Communicate with and provide guidance to the Valleys Regional Park Strategic Group through the VRP manager and team

#### **Membership requisites:**

- Officers responsible for delivery of projects and appropriate funding within VRP partner organisations
- Commitment to VRP vision
- Commitment to cross-boundary and cross-sector working
- Commitment to regular attendance at meetings

**Current Membership:**

Chair – Louise Fradd

Other members as determined by Joint Project Sponsors

**VRP Sub-groups**

**Role:**

The subgroups will work to develop and maximise the potential and benefits of VRP and the opportunities it affords through the provision of appropriate strategic and technical advice and guidance on collaborative working and practical project implementation.

**Functions:**

- Identify opportunities within VRP projects for adding extra value
- To develop and foster more effective relationships to deliver added value to VRP activities
- Devise ideas and assess the feasibility of new projects and areas of work
- Make appropriate policy recommendations to the Strategic Group

**Membership requisites:**

- Where relevant, the ability to report on their organisation’s strategic vision, projects and delivery in relation to VRP
- Commitment to VRP vision
- Commitment to cross-boundary and cross-sector working
- Commitment to regular attendance at meetings

**Membership:**

The following groups have established membership, although this can be varied as necessary:

Tourism Development and Heritage  
 Outdoor Activities  
 Health and Wellbeing  
 Education, Skills and Training

Specific opportunities related to the environment will be developed through the South Wales Countryside Managers Group.

Community regeneration activities will be coordinated through specific area-based coordination task and finish groups

**Meeting Frequency:**

Quarterly.

**VRP Management Team**

Manager  
Partnership Co-ordinator  
Environmental Projects Manager  
Tourism and Heritage Projects Manager  
Community Tourism Officers  
Finance Officer  
Administration Officer  
WECAN Projects Manager  
WECAN Project Officers  
WECAN Administration Officer

**Seconded/associated staff**

CCW Officer  
EAW Officer  
FCW Officer

## **Appendix 4**

### **Valleys Regional Park WECAN Project Overview**



## WECAN PROJECT OVERVIEW

### Working together for Economically-prosperous Communities through Assets of Natural heritage (WECAN)

#### PARTNERS

Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland [RLKM] (Belgium)

#### **Valleys Regional Park (Wales, UK)**

Parc Naturel Régional de l'Avesnois (PNRA) (Nord Pas-de-Calais, France)

Espaces Naturels Régionaux (ENR) (Nord Pas-de-Calais, France)

Parc Naturel Régional Scarpe Escaut (PNRS) (Nord Pas-de-Calais, France)

#### OVERALL AIM

To generate sustainable economic and social benefits for our disadvantaged communities by determining how to unlock and maximise the economic potential of the natural landscape in our areas (*defined in the proposal as natural heritage*) in order to create greater prosperity, pride, confidence and social cohesion in our regions.

#### BACKGROUND

All of the participating regions have suffered from a massive decline in heavy industry, especially coal mining (regions are defined in the proposal as “densely-populated post-industrial areas”). Consequently, our communities are enduring high levels of economic inactivity accompanied by social deprivation (*e.g. Gross Value Added [GVA] for the Valleys Regional Park area is just over 60% of the UK average*).

Each of the regions abuts and is enveloped by extensive areas of wonderful natural landscape. Unlike in more “traditional” rural areas, however, communities are often disconnected from this resource and neither they nor businesses have viewed or utilised it as an asset to stimulate economic growth and improve quality of life.

This project provides a unique opportunity for the partners to collaborate trans-nationally to produce a greater theoretical and, very importantly, practical understanding of how sensitive usage of the natural heritage can stimulate sustainable economic development across different densely-populated post-industrial areas of North West Europe (NWE).

## **TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATION**

Transnational collaboration on this specific issue has **not** been attempted before.

Working together within the framework of the NWE-programme, with access to the networks and experiences of the other partners who are addressing related issues, will allow the partnership to benefit from and build upon each other's experiences to maximise the joint benefits from the project.

Consequently, transnational collaboration will:

Develop a common understanding to address shared challenges against the background of different cultural environments in order to exchange knowledge.

Test the transferability of actions.

Reduce the risk factors in implementing the developed practice.

Save time and money.

Create innovative solutions through new combinations of different approaches to maximise benefits, break down barriers and facilitate sustainable co-operation post project.

Evaluate, create and test solutions according to an international, European standard to make the results, tools and schemes transferable to other regions in NWE as well as other regions of Europe.

## **PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

**The project has four distinct yet interlinked work packages that seek to:**

- 1) Assess, develop and test transferable techniques to assess the economic potential of the natural environment in densely-populated post-industrial areas.
- 2) Develop, promote, establish and evaluate innovative exemplars of responsible corporate sector interaction with the natural environment.
- 3) Evaluate 'visitor payback'-mechanisms for the natural environment to develop appropriate schemes for post-industrial regions and test their effectiveness in order to create guidelines for implementation in other regions.
- 4) Stimulate the social economy in our communities by identifying those conditions and factors that enhance community participation in the natural environment to boost employability and create opportunities for employment.

**(Valleys Regional Park is leading on this package)**

## **WHY IS IT TIMELY?**

- Each of the WECAN partners has developed crucial experience within their regions with connections to a wide spectrum of other key partners from government departments through to community groups.

*e.g. in Valleys Regional Park, as a result of four years of development work, more than 30 partners are involved, from key strategic partners such as the Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for*

*Wales, Forestry Commission and Environment Agency, as well as all the Local Authorities through to private businesses, development trusts and community organisations. This partnership enables us to deliver the project on all levels and ensures that best practice and knowledge is shared and utilised appropriately.*

- The partners in the WECAN proposal have developed a crucial common understanding of the shared and distinctive issues they face with a determination to work together and drive this project forward and succeed in its aims.
- The current global economic crisis makes it imperative that we explore and develop alternative ways to address the economic and social problems within our regions.
- With regard to Valleys Regional Park specifically, we have recently successfully obtained ERDF convergence funding (equating to £25.7M gross) to improve the 'environmental' infrastructure in the south Wales valleys ([www.thevalleys.org.uk](http://www.thevalleys.org.uk)). Consequently, the WECAN project is perfect in its timing in that it complements the ERDF project and underpins it by further developing community involvement thus contributing greatly to the sustainability

## **BENEFITS TO WALES AND THE UK**

Gross Value Added for the Valleys Regional Park area is just over 60% of the UK average. This project offers us a unique opportunity to address this situation in an innovative way and capitalise on our undeveloped natural assets.

We are somewhat behind our European partners in that they began addressing this issue through this approach before us, so the project will help us enormously in learning and implementing best practice from them.

However, conversely, we have more experience than them in terms of community development and engagement and so we will be able to impart that and learn from how transferable our approaches are and how they can be improved for the benefits of all the partners.