



Rural Neath Port Talbot 2007 - 2013

Working together to make our valleys more accessible,
vibrant and enterprising.



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu
Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development: Europe Investing in
Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure as the current Chair of Neath Port Talbot's Local Action Group, Regenerate NPT, to write the introduction for this booklet which gives a glimpse of the investment, activities and outcomes of the County Borough's first Rural Development Programme during the period 2007 to 2013.

The Rural Development Plan is the mechanism by which the Welsh Government delivers activities to support the countryside and our rural communities. These activities encourage the sustainable management of agriculture and the environment.



Over the term of the programme so far we have had the pleasure of working with many dedicated community groups, businesses and individuals from rural areas who have succeeded in improving the quality of life in these areas by promoting the rural economy, supporting village renewal, encouraging tourism and improving basic rural services.

The projects undertaken so far have meant a great deal to those communities, groups and businesses involved because they were undertaken by them and with their total participation rather than for them. The collaborative efforts directed towards improving their environment, business opportunities and lifestyle have reaped significant benefits and at the same time successfully marketed our facilities to a wider audience and it has been a privilege to be part of such a worthwhile programme.

The following pages highlight just a glimpse of the projects that the direct investment into our rural areas via RDP funding has facilitated since 2007 and I hope you enjoy reading about them.

Cllr A J Taylor

Anthony Taylor

Chair of Regenerate NPT

Regenerate Neath Port Talbot

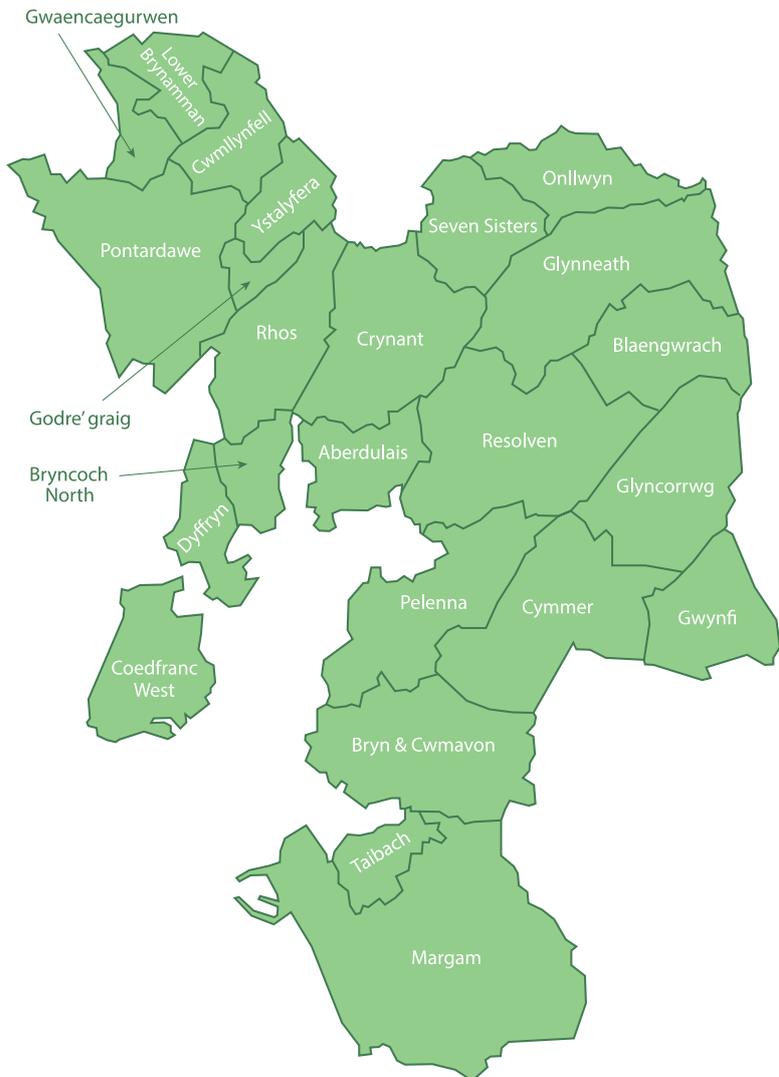
is the local partnership that is delivering the Rural Development Plan (RDP) in Neath Port Talbot County Borough. The RDP is jointly funded by the European Union (EU) as part of the Common Agricultural Policy through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and the Welsh Government. It has run since 2007.

The 'LEADER' approach is used to encourage people to become involved in improving and developing their own rural communities. The acronym LEADER comes from the French words "Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale" which means 'Links between the rural economy and development actions'. The idea was to enlist the energy and resources of people and bodies that could contribute to the rural development process by forming partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors. The term given to these newly formed partnerships was 'Local Action Groups' (LAG). In Neath Port Talbot the LAG is called Regenerate NPT and is responsible for overseeing our local LEADER programme. The LAG is made up of 25 representatives from a wide range of organisations throughout rural areas within NPT and each LAG is required to submit a Local Development Strategy (LDS) which outlines their priorities for development, outcomes and targets for the life of the programme.



The 24 Rural Wards

The LDS states that in 2007 the population within the Local Authority was 134,471, while the rural population was 68,546. Of the 42 wards in the county borough 24 are classed as rural.



Five Key Themes

From 2007 - 2013, five key themes were prioritised by the Local Development Strategy. The Local Action Group supported a number of project initiatives the rural wards of NPT that fitted in with these themes and as a result these community groups benefitted from direct funding. Many of these projects contributed to more than one theme and details of some of the successful projects can be seen on the following pages.

1. Tourism

- Accommodation Providers Grant Scheme Project
- Tourism Coordinator Project
- Conserving and Upgrading the Rural and Cultural Heritage in Neath Port Talbot project at Margam Park

2. Community Transport

- Transport for Communities Project run by DANSA
- Improving Basic Services in Rural Areas Project run by DANSA

3. Healthy Living (nutrition, lifestyle, health and wellbeing)

- Improving Basic Services in Rural Areas Project run by Neath Port Talbot Credit Union
- Improving Basic Services in rural Areas Project run by Calan DVS

4. Environment

- Community Gateway/CoRE Rural Improvement Projects run by Groundwork Bridgend & Neath Port Talbot
- Y Gronfa Wledig/The Rural Fund

5. Increasing Economic Prosperity (economic inactivity, skills, business support, social enterprise and entrepreneurship)

- Enterprise Support for Rural Businesses



1 TOURISM

PROJECT: Accommodation Providers Grant Scheme

Background

This project offered funding to hotels, B&Bs and other accommodation providers that allowed them to attain a better Visit Wales grading and/or to undertake work that would make their accommodation more appealing.

The main aim of this fund was to support these businesses in their endeavours to provide a first class service to visitors to the County Borough. To achieve this, the scheme provided funding for small scale capital projects to help develop new businesses or upgrade existing facilities.

Outcome

A part-time Grants Officer was employed from January 2009 until September 2011 to undertake the management and administration of the scheme and offer advice to potential applicants. By September 2011, 75 businesses had received advice, 29 grants had been distributed and 19 businesses, which included 7 new start-ups, benefitted from funding that totalled £96,000.

One business that benefitted was Cwmshon Cottages, owned and run by Fiona and Andrew Rickson. Planning permission for two purpose-built buildings to provide a drying room and secure cycle store with hose-down area for each cottage was granted as a priority to attract and cater for walkers, cyclists and mountain bikers.



PROJECT: The Tourism Coordinator

Background

This project facilitated the creation of two Tourism Co-ordinator posts and the development of four stakeholder groups, set up in Neath, Swansea, Dulais and the Upper Amman Valley to identify and deliver priority tourism projects through the development of individual action plans for each area. All four action plans identified projects with the aim of establishing a more holistic set of tourism activities and attractions in our valleys and rural areas.

Outcome

In total 79 organisations and individuals received 599 hours of assistance, ranging from business development advice to financial assistance for infrastructure projects. The project has raised the profile of the tourism sector in each valley and stakeholders now recognise tourism as a means to further develop the local economy. In particular, stakeholders have witnessed, first hand, how their local projects can feed into the wider tourism development of the area and the promotion of Neath Port Talbot as a place to visit. All stakeholders felt that the tourism action plans had been effective in directing investment into their valley.



Case Studies

“The grant funding from RDP via the Neath Port Talbot Accommodation Providers Grant Scheme was crucial in enabling us to go ahead with the improvements and indeed to our meeting and exceeding our visitor number and satisfaction targets. Cwmshon Cottages have been ranked as one of the best holiday cottages in Wales by TripAdvisor and received the Swansea Bay Tourism Award for Best Self Catering Accommodation in 2012 and 2014 and, of course, we are delighted with this outcome.”

FIONA RICKSON, OWNER - CWMSHON COTTAGES.

“This project, facilitated by grant funding from the RDP, has certainly been hugely successful in kick starting tourism development in the Neath, Dulais, Swansea and the Upper Amman Valleys - it's brought partners together to achieve good quality services to the tourism industry in Neath Port Talbot's rural wards”

EMMA WILCOX, FORMER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, NPTCBC

PROJECT: Conserving and Upgrading the Rural and Cultural Heritage in Neath Port Talbot

Background

In 2007 the Grade II Citrus House, at the Historic Margam Park in Port Talbot was declared dangerous and closed to the public. Without use, the building deteriorated rapidly and was only saved from complete collapse by internal scaffold supports.

More recently, a survey was undertaken which identified that the abbey remains (chapter house and infirmary) were in a serious state of decay and urgent repairs were required to avoid collapse and secure the structures from further deterioration.

Margam Park is an important site of architectural, social, historical and cultural significance.

Outcome

The derelict elements of the Citrus House were removed and replaced with a newly conserved facility which has had an immediate effect in improving the landscape and the environment within the conservation area. The Citrus House is now a vital resource for educational, business and tourist services in Neath Port Talbot. The addition of a toilet block, including disabled facilities, to the rear of the building has been an important benefit to visitors. New Interpretation Boards educate visitors about the history of the building.

Work was also undertaken to improve and make safe the Chapter House which is one of only two 12 sided Chapter Houses known in the UK and the Infirmary Ruins as further damage to these structures would have been inevitable without immediate investment.



Case Study

“The restoration of the Citrus House and adjoining Propagation House, through RDP funding, has given the gardens at Margam Park a major boost. The Citrus House has been restored to its former glory and is being used for its original purpose of growing citrus plants and the propagation house has provided us with another facility to grow our own replacement plants and provide training opportunities for volunteers. Joint funding from the RDP, Wren and Cadw also made it possible for conservation works to be carried out on the Chapter House and Infirmary and has saved them from collapse.

We have had very positive feedback from visitors, particularly from local people who remember what these structures looked like prior to restoration and we are delighted with the results which have undoubtedly saved these historically important buildings for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.”

MICHAEL WYNNE, MARGAM PARK MANAGER



2 COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

PROJECT: Transport for Communities

Background

Originally a scheme set up for rural communities, in response to a reduction in commercially operated bus routes and a lack of regular bus services within the rural wards of Neath Port Talbot, DANSA (Dulais, Afan, Neath, Swansea and Amman valleys) is a not-for-profit community transport organisation whose main aim is to bridge the gap between traditional community transport and commercial services.

Outcome

RDP funding enabled timetabled services to run on pre-determined routes and an analysis of services run by DANSA in rural wards of Neath Port Talbot shows the following:

- Service runs increased from 41,306 to 46,412 from April 2011 to March 2014.
- Dulais Valley passenger numbers grew from 62,321 to 73,581 from April 2011 to March 2014.



PROJECT: Improving Basic Services in Rural Areas:

Background

DANSA developed a door to door 'Ring and Ride' Scheme which is a more flexible, demand-responsive service to bridge the gap between existing public transport services offered by commercial operators and an unmet need for suitable accessible and affordable transport provision.

Outcome

The service is delivered through disabled-access buses and has developed to suit the needs of users with 17 'shopper' trips which include 2 'eat, chat and shop' trips per week and it is intended that all rural residents with a transport need would access the ring and ride service, including those requiring transport to access work or training, perhaps by simply providing connections to regular service routes.



Case Studies

DANSA would not have been able to expand their operations as greatly or as rapidly without the foundation that RDP funding has given them. The organisation has gone from strength to strength, has expanded its fleet of vehicles and increased its staff from 12 to 31 since 2009. Service users tell us they use the buses to reach their place of work, for social visits, health appointments and shopping.

ALISON OWEN, FINANCE & DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, DANSA

This service is considered a lifeline for many local people. Older people in rural areas risk social isolation and loneliness. The opportunities provided for social interaction through the ring and ride bus services have had a profound effect on the lives of some users.

ALISON OWEN, FINANCE & DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, DANSA

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HEALTHY LIVING (NUTRITION, LIFESTYLE, HEALTH AND WELLBEING)

PROJECT: Improving Basic Services in Rural Areas (run by Neath Port Talbot Credit Union)

Background

Neath Port Talbot Credit Union (NPTCU) sought to expand the provision of a member-run, safe savings and affordable loans facility to the residents and employees of rural wards and to increase the numbers of school based credit pay points in Neath Port Talbot County Borough with the aim of reducing major personal indebtedness and incidents of new indebtedness particularly amongst young people.

Outcome

NPTCU established a network of 22 community collection points manned by volunteers and invested in a customised van to serve as a mobile office in order to reach areas where no community space was available - the van also acts to advertise the service.

It expanded its payroll saving scheme to workplaces in the County Borough's rural wards and increased its programme of financial education to primary and secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot and is now the most successful schools saving scheme initiative in Wales. The schools savings scheme has allowed whole groups to save for school trips and young individuals to aspire to break a cycle of family debt.

An estimated £1.5m has been injected into local communities as a result of affordable loans being utilised by those communities, rather than loan sharks and high interest rate moneylenders.

PROJECT: Improving Basic Services in Rural Areas (run by Calan DVS)

Background

Calan DVS is an organisation that supports individuals who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence and abuse and campaigns to end its practice. It provides refuge and aims to empower women, children and young people who have experienced the effects of domestic violence or abuse in the home to take greater control of their lives and to give them the opportunity to address the effects of domestic abuse.

Outcome

A Family Worker was employed to provide learning opportunities, help develop skills and knowledge to encourage young people to address personal issues. Activities looked at rebuilding family relationships, helping children and young people explore their feelings about keeping the family unit together and how to recognise a healthy family relationship. The activities also aimed to encourage children and young people to become more involved in their community by increasing opportunities to develop their social networks. Sub-project activities included an after-school club attended by both children and mums to encourage positive interaction and build social networks a family fun day, baby yoga course, book club for mums and one to one support sessions with children and young people, siblings and mums, identifying referrals to further support if necessary.

Case Studies

NPTCU wanted to reach areas where the provision of mainstream financial services is sparse or non-existent and where, for one reason or another, people are financially excluded. It is in these areas that people's legitimate loan needs are often met by lenders charging exorbitant levels of interest. NPTCU also wanted to ensure that its services were available to older people, less well-off people, and especially young people in order to foster the habit of saving, and to develop responsibility in financial matters early on in life. School savings schemes and financial/budgeting awareness programmes were an integral part of the project and the legacy that has been left in place is a more financially aware community that has benefited from sound basic budgeting advice to improve its overall financial wellbeing. Without the RDP funding NPTCU would have been limited to offering its services from two offices in Port Talbot and Neath.

STEVE MALLINSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, NPTCU

With the help of RDP funding, more has been done in Neath Port Talbot to help Calan DVS bring victims of domestic abuse together to form their own support networks, which is very important where mothers and children may have fled to refuges in the relative isolation of a rural ward. The funding has also allowed us to deliver additional services to women and children in alternative ways.

SHARON WILLIAMS, TEAM LEADER COMMUNITY AND
CYP SERVICES, CALAN DVS



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ENVIRONMENT

PROJECT: Community Gateways

Background

This project aimed to improve heritage and conservation sites in Neath Port Talbot whilst working with rural communities to raise awareness and deliver changes in attitude towards the local environment. Groundwork Bridgend & Neath Port Talbot, a not for profit organisation, ran its CoRE programme of activities which was founded upon the facets of "Community, Regeneration, Environment". It aimed to deliver an inclusive programme of environmental activities to rural wards in Neath Port Talbot with an emphasis on community participation as a way of benefitting an individual's health and their local environment.

Outcome

The project delivered over 50 activities, ranging from creating small bowl planting areas to planting community orchards and to designing and constructing a £20,000 natural playground.



PROJECT: Y Gronfa Wledig/The Rural Fund

Background

The main aim of Y Gronfa Wledig is to support projects run by not for profit organisations. These projects have to create a sense of pride in the rural communities of the County Borough and heighten their sense of local identity.

Outcome

A part-time Grants Officer was appointed to offer advice and guidance to potential project applicants and to monitor a scheme which provided funding for new and innovative community projects that promoted culture and heritage under the following broad headings: Cultural events, Promoting civic pride, Supporting rural heritage, Environmental projects and Projects that market local attractions and initiatives.

Voluntary/community groups, social enterprises, registered charities, town and community councils were able to apply for capital and revenue grants of £8,000 towards project costs and Y Gronfa Wledig was successful in assisting 25 grassroots community organisations to deliver 38 culture and heritage projects during the lifetime of the project.



Case Studies

With the help of RDP funding the Groundwork team were able to engage and work with community groups, school groups and individuals in Neath Port Talbot rural wards to encourage people to see, use and value the natural environment around them in a ways they may not have done so before, as well as giving them the opportunity to improve their local environment.

RICHARD WALTERS, PROJECT MANAGER, GROUNDWORK BRIDGEND NEATH PORT TALBOT

This grant scheme has allowed community groups to apply for small amounts of funding for projects that may not have been able to attract mainstream funding. The wide remit for this funding has meant that local communities have benefitted from environmental enhancements, promotion of local facilities and support for local events.

ANGELINE SPOONER-CLEVERLY, STRATEGIC OFFICER, NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

5 INCREASING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY (Economic Inactivity, Skills, Business Support, Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship)

PROJECT: Enterprise Support for Rural Business

Background

This scheme followed on from a similar, previously successful Local Authority run project called Rural Ward Support for Entrepreneurial Activity, which received considerable positive feedback and was run in partnership with Centre for Business Neath. The project continued to provide free business support to individuals who were considering self employment and existing business, with up to 10 employees, in Neath Port Talbot rural wards.

Outcome

RDP monies funded Business Advisors who visited rural wards to hold regular advice surgeries, covering general business queries, grants, loans, business plans, marketing and website issues.

The project supported 217 micro enterprises, assisted 66 new businesses, supported the creation of 110 jobs and contributed to the safeguarding of 77 jobs.

The project provided advice to support the creation of new business start ups and the development of existing micro enterprises which has helped promote the benefits of self employment, improve employment opportunities as well as develop entrepreneurial skills within the rural wards of Neath Port Talbot. This has resulted in significant job creation and/or safeguarding of local jobs within many deprived communities.

Supporting Local Producers

RDP has also funded various Local Produce Fairs at the Princess Royal Theatre in Port Talbot in 2012 and 2013 and in 2014 funded a stall at the hugely successful Neath Food and Drink Festival for three local producers, Baked with a Cwtch, Sam Helen Preserves and Daffodils Emporium.



Case Studies

“The advice I received from the RDP funded Enterprise Support project enabled me to successfully apply for Neath Port Talbot Council and UK Steel Enterprise funding which has been invaluable in establishing my landscaping and house maintenance business.”

DEAN JAMES, FOOT OF THE ROCK LANDSCAPING

“As a small business, just getting off the ground, the opportunity to have a presence at this high profile event, at no cost to myself, was extremely beneficial. I was more than happy with the number of sales I made along with the orders that were placed as a result of an increase in awareness of my business.”

SUSAN CHILCOTT, OWNER, DAFFODILS EMPORIUM

RDP: the future

PROJECT: Think Links, Think Rural, Think Sustainability

Background

This project was put forward by Neath Port Talbot's Local Action Group, Innovate. The project sought to undertake a complete community needs audit of rural wards in Neath Port Talbot and carry out a specific Action Plan for future activity, and identify support required in rural wards through engagement and communication with those living and working in rural areas. The aim of the project is to break down barriers and improve links between all of the rural communities including residents, organisations working within the rural wards, Community, Voluntary, Private and Public sectors of Neath Port Talbot, and to make wider links with other rural and non rural areas in order to facilitate community capacity building & empowerment, and to share best practice. The project



will gather information for an action plan which will identify the gaps in provision and the potential for further development in rural wards by recommending the types of projects that should be funded in the future based on the feedback received from local residents, farmers, businesses, young people and community groups.

Outcome

A project officer was employed to carry out the community audit and produce the action plan. The audit was carried out through engaging those living and working in the rural areas of Neath Port Talbot, mainly through meetings and questionnaires. A host of issues were identified as cause for concern and improvement, including lack of transport, building on rural tourism, employment in rural areas, local business support, broadband speed/connection, youth facilities and exploring new practices in farm diversification. Questionnaire responses were received from 455 residents, 65 businesses, 24 farmers and 110 young people and meetings with various stakeholders, community groups and organizations contributed to the final report for Neath Port Talbot's Local Action Group, Innovate, to carry forward into their next Local Development Strategy, which outlines their priorities, outcomes and targets for the life of the next RDP Programme.

Case Study

"LEADER funding has enabled this hugely important project to take place, and the benefits will be far reaching. Through engaging with over 750 people, highly detailed feedback has been gathered which will inform and guide future rural development strategies. The wide variety of topics covered will ensure that future projects are based on evidenced need, meaning that all future funding is utilised in the most efficient and effective manner."

**BEN RISEBOROUGH, PROJECT DEVELOPMENT OFFICER,
NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**



RDP 2014 - 2020

Regenerate NPT has been allocated £2.156m under the new round of LEADER funding. A new Local Development Strategy for NPT has been approved by Welsh Government that pinpoints 8 priority areas for development that were identified from the research carried out under the "Think Links" project.

Funding will be available for innovative projects that can demonstrate outcomes around:

- green energy for rural businesses
- further promotion and development of mountain bike activities
- cycle and walking trails
- encouraging local produce markets and shops
- tourism support services
- broadband exploitation
- skills development for rural residents
- improvements in transport on evenings and weekends

Funding will be available from September 2015. Further information on the application process can be obtained from the RDP Team, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council on 01639 686077 or rdp@npt.gov.uk