

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

23 JULY 2019

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on work to develop a Valleys Regional Park and to seek Cabinet approval to accept the invitation from Welsh Government for Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) to act as host for the programme team and enter into appropriate financial and legal agreements with Welsh Government and the Local Authorities that form the Valleys Regional Park. BCBC will work with public, private and third sector organisations involved across the 10 Local Authority areas of the Cardiff Capital Region along with Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and potentially other authorities at a later date to develop and deliver the next phase of the Valleys Regional Park as set out in the Valleys Regional Park Prospectus.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1. This report supports the following corporate priorities:

- Supporting a successful economy – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
- Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

3. Background

3.1. The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) has been developed through the Welsh Government Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys in partnership with the Valleys local authorities (Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Neath Port Talbot), Natural Resources Wales, Visit Wales and Welsh Government policy colleagues in Health and Environment Divisions. It reflects the views of stakeholders from Valleys communities, the Third Sector, Public Health Wales and feedback received through a series of engagement events held over the last 18 months. The VRP prospectus was published on 18th October 2018.

3.2. The aim of the VRP is to maximise the social, economic and environmental potential of Valleys' natural, cultural and heritage assets.

- 3.3. It is intended that the VRP will provide and sustain the improvement and management of a highly visible network of uplands, woodlands, nature reserves and country parks, rivers, reservoirs and canals, heritage sites and attractions across the Valleys, linking with the towns and villages.
- 3.4. Based on previous experience, best practice research, and extensive engagement through the Valleys Taskforce, the Valleys Regional Park has three interlinked delivery themes:
- Landscape, Culture and Identity
 - Recreation and Wellbeing
 - Communities and Enterprise
- 3.5. In 2018 Welsh Government announced a series of Valley Gateway Sites - Dare Valley Country Park (Rhondda Cynon Taff), Caerphilly Castle (Caerphilly), Cwmcarn Forest (Caerphilly), Blaenavon World Heritage Visitor Centre (Torfaen), Cyfarthfa Park (Merthyr Tydfil), Ynysangharad War Memorial Park (Rhondda Cynon Taff) , Parc Bryn Bach (Blaenau Gwent CBC), Parc Slip Nature Reserve and Bryngarw Country Park (both Bridgend). All sites were invited to submit proposals direct to Welsh Government for capital funding, outlining options for delivery against the ambition of the VRP prospectus. Welsh Government will determine allocations of capital resources and directly manage any funding agreements in relation to Gateway Sites. Alongside this Welsh Government have made resources available for the VRP delivery team.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

- 4.1. On 29th April 2019 discussions took place between the partner local authorities and the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport. The Deputy Minister expressed a desire for a local authority to act as host for the delivery team element of the next stage of the VRP – to March 2021. Bridgend County Borough Council was invited to be the host authority.
- 4.2. Welsh Government are seeking a host organisation which will, in line with the host's policies and procedures, for a period from August 2019 to March 2021:
- Establish an appropriate and acceptable form of legal agreement between the local authorities within the Cardiff Capital Region with the addition of Neath Port Talbot CBC and Swansea City Council and potentially other authorities at later stages to develop the next stage of the VRP for the period to March 2021 and as set out in the prospectus published in October 2018.
 - Establish and manage the core VRP team. This will include acting as a host for a Welsh Government employee in the role of Strategic and Operational Lead. A separate form of appropriate agreement will be put in place between Welsh Government and BCBC in relation to the management and performance of this role.
 - Establish and support appropriate governance processes and structures for the VRP. This is currently considered to include an overarching Board made up of the leaders of the partner local authorities and a VRP forum involving local authority officers and key stakeholders to oversee the operation of the VRP.

- Work with partners to oversee an on-going review and update of the VRP delivery plan to reflect priorities. BCBC will manage the process of reviewing, updating and proposing forward plans to Welsh Government. Welsh Government will be ultimately responsible for agreeing forward work plans.
 - Propose medium term funding options for consideration by Welsh Government and potentially act as lead applicant should appropriate funding streams be identified. Any further funding proposals would require necessary processes and procedures to be followed in line with relevant grant procedures.
 - Report progress at regular intervals against a set of agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to Welsh Government.
 - Be required to meet with Welsh Government officials to review progress on a bi-monthly basis for the period August 2019 to March 2021, and report on issues or concerns in the interim periods.
- 4.3. The delivery of the VRP will be based on a partnership approach. It will be overseen by a Board made up of the leaders of the partner authorities based on the approach to regional working developed through the Cardiff Capital Region. An operational level group, to be called the VRP forum, will operate below the Board level involving officers from the VRP partners and other key stakeholders to oversee the operational aspects of the VRP.
- 4.4. BCBC will enter into a funding agreement with Welsh Government. A suitable form of legal agreement between BCBC and partner local authorities will be finalised once the terms of the grant are finalised. A parallel document relating to the Welsh Government employee to be hosted with BCBC will also be finalised once the terms of the grant are finalised.
- 4.5 Based on the information provided by Welsh Government to BCBC the posts that will be advertised are:
- Business & Compliance Co-ordinator
 - Communities & Enterprise Theme Convenor
 - Landscape Culture & Identity Convenor
 - Recreation & Wellbeing Theme Convenor
- The VRP Strategic & Operational lead will remain as a Welsh Government employee but be hosted by BCBC.
- 4.6 All posts will be offered on a secondment only basis on the clear understanding that where posts are filled they will return to their organisations at the end of the funded period, currently up to March 2021. This will offer potential to get the team up to speed in a timely fashion.
- 4.7. Jobs will only be offered once approval has been provided by Welsh Government in the form of a funding offer, partner local authorities have all endorsed the approach and indicated support for the legal agreement with BCBC, and BCBC Cabinet have accepted the invitation to host.
- 4.8 Alongside the core team it is proposed that VRP Guardians are established. The VRP partners have indicated a desire to explore whether the 'Guardian Capacity'

can be delivered via commissioning, seeking to add value to existing provision in this area, rather than a direct recruitment exercise. This will be discussed further before a firm proposal is developed with the Forum and Board before seeking Welsh Government approval.

- 4.9. Welsh Government have stated that the VRP at this stage is focused on developing the structures and partnership work with the intention of the VRP being a long term commitment. The Strategic and Operational post will lead the work with the European funding teams in Welsh Government and look for other funding opportunities to present a medium term funding options appraisal. This options appraisal will be developed through the VRP Forum and VRP Board.
- 4.10. An early priority will be the revision of the VRP delivery plan reflecting the project funding window and the ambitions set out in the VRP prospectus. This will be done with a working group involving the local authority officers and will include engagement workshops involving stakeholders including Health, National Resources Wales, community groups and Third Sector. Welsh Government have proposed that the Valleys Taskforce team are involved in this work and that a revised plan is presented for approval for inclusion in the revised version of the taskforce plan to be published in November 2019. This will require the new plan to be drafted by early October.
- 4.11 Welsh Government have informed BCBC that Leaders of the partner local authorities have committed officer time to the delivery of this project.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

- 5.1. There is no direct impact on the Council's policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1. Initial screening carried out and shows no negative impact. As required, future proposals will be subject to further EIA.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment Template has been completed and a summary of the implications from the assessment relating to the five ways of working is below:
 - Long-term: The activities that form part of the scheme have been identified by the partners that will take part and are closely aligned with the long-term ambitions set out in the VRP prospectus. A regional collaborative approach, linked to regional working as part of the Cardiff Capital Region area works towards long-term delivery.
 - Prevention: On their own none of the partners or participating Counties would be able to achieve the scale of impact that such a partnership approach offers. Therefore delivering in this way offers the opportunity to build on success to date and prevent a deterioration of the value that the development of the VRP brings to the region.

- Integration: The scheme will achieve this way of working by recognising the approaches that are proposed for support are those that have been identified by partner organisations due to their synergy with local, regional and national priorities.
- Collaboration: The proposals have been developed and will be delivered through a strong partnership between BCBC and those partners that will form part of the delivery.
- Involvement: The scheme will be delivered in close partnership with a range of local stakeholders in each area. Discussions and development with neighboring Counties has taken place through BCBC's Economy, Natural Resources and Sustainability team and relevant officers from neighbouring Councils as well as representatives from a range of private and third sector partners.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1. Welsh Government have made available funding of £342k for 2019/20 and £550k for 2020/21 to be allocated to this work and paid via a grant to BCBC. No match funding is required and the posts will be advertised as secondment only to reduce potential redundancy cost liability. Any costs incurred by BCBC through hosting the VRP will be covered by the grant funding available.
- 8.2. The Section 151 Officer will ensure that the grant funding provided is used solely for the purposes outlined in the grant offer letter. Expenditure of the grant will comply with all statutory requirements for accounting and internal audit (including supporting records and all systems of internal checks and control), and will be included with any internal or external audit of the Council's funding.

9. Recommendation

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 9.1. Note progress to date in developing the VRP.
- 9.2. Accept the invitation to host the VRP delivery team resource.
- 9.3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Head of Legal and Regulatory Services, to enter into any appropriate funding and legal agreements necessary to fulfil its role as host the VRP delivery team.

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Chief Executive
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Background documents:

Valleys Regional Park Prospectus