

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

17 SEPTEMBER 2019

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK – AWARD OF FUNDING IN RELATION TO THE VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK DISCOVERY GATEWAYS CAPITAL GRANT 2019- 2021

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on applications for funding to the Valleys Regional Park Discovery Gateways Capital Grant, 2019-2021, and to seek Cabinet approval to accept funding offers and enter into agreements with delivery partners Awen Cultural Trust and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales, to support the delivery of activities as part of the Valleys Regional Park at Bryngarw Country Park and Parc Slip.

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. In 2018 Welsh Government announced a series of Valley Discovery 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).
- 3.5 In April 2019 Welsh Government invited proposals for funding for Discovery Sites. 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. Officers from Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) worked with officers from Awen Cultural Trust and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales, to finalise and submit proposals.
- 3.6 The Valleys Regional Park Discovery Gateways Capital Grant, 2019-2021 is managed centrally by Welsh Government. The revenue funding made available to BCBC to host the Valleys Regional Park delivery team, which was approved by BCBC Cabinet on 23 July 2019, is separate to this capital grant although both seek to deliver the aim on the VRP.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

- 4.1. BCBC has received notification from Welsh Government that the proposals in relation to Bryngarw Country Park and Parc Slip have been approved.
- 4.2 The proposal for Bryngarw Country Park has been offered £500,000 capital funding and Parc Slip has been offered £400,000 capital funding.
- 4.3 Welsh Government has structured the Valleys Regional Park Discovery Gateways Capital Grant in a way that requires funding agreements directly between WG and Local Authorities. Where activity will be delivered by a third party the Local Authority is required to enter into appropriate agreements to support this.
- 4.4 The proposal for Bryngarw Country Park will seek to deliver the following:
- Develop a partnership approach between BCBC and Awen Cultural Trust.
 - Invest in the quality of the visitor experience whilst also increasing the potential of the park to cater for greater numbers of visitors, events and school groups, allowing more people than ever to reconnect with their natural /cultural heritage whilst reaping the many associated health and wellbeing benefits.
 - Make access improvements, upgrade interpretation throughout and create a new education building for use by visiting schools and other user groups.
 - Invest in solar panels for the visitor centre and new energy-efficient LED lighting throughout.
 - Make habitat improvements such as pond creation and tree-planting which will improve the biodiversity value. New green-roofed bike shelters will encourage and promote active travel.
 - Develop new natural play equipment to compliment recent investments in inclusive play by offering a diverse range of play opportunities for children of all abilities.

4.5 The proposal for Parc Slip will seek to deliver the following:

- Develop a partnership approach between BCBC and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales.
- Restore some of the ponds and deliver improvement to one of the large, grazed fields to plant a fruit and nut community orchard.
- Develop areas around the visitor centre with wildlife gardens, a rain garden, wild kitchen and herb gardens.
- Link marketing, communications and promotional work with Bryngarw Country Park, and use engaging and innovative visitor interpretation to encourage and signpost visitors and residents to explore Parc Slip, Bryngarw, the Lynfi Valley and wider VRP.
- Create green-roofed cycle shelters will encourage more cyclists to use this route.
- Develop a partnership approach to future options in relation to Sustrans Route 4 and Sustrans route 84.
- Improve the disused entrance on the western boundary.
- Installation of electric car and bicycle charging points which will encourage use of more sustainable transport.
- Repair estate furniture, facilities and infrastructure to encourage people to stay longer and comfortably enjoy the wildlife on the nature reserve.
- Share more information about the ethos of the sites food with visitors, including use of ingredients from the kitchen/ herb garden, and showcase other quality, local food producers.
- Run events, walks, talks and activities and support those run by the VRP rangers.
- Align activity with health and wellbeing goals, perhaps including an element of social prescribing for which easy-access facilities would be ideal.
- Improve the facilities provided within and outside the visitor centre so that it can be run more efficiently and sustainably, cope with increased throughput of visitors and enable use by a greater diversity of individuals and groups.
- Host peer-to-peer community networking events and activities and encourage local people to use the flexible facilities to support their own small businesses.
- Purchase an electric buggy for access around the site by volunteers and staff for maintenance work and monitoring, to reduce the carbon footprint and provide improved accessibility for reduced-mobility visitors during events and organised activities.

4.6 Activity on both sites is expected to:

- Deliver added value by working collaboratively across the Discovery Gateways and with the central VRP team, including sharing lessons learned and best practice.
- Involve local communities and social groups wherever appropriate in the development and delivery of this funded activity.
- Deliver an enhanced health and wellbeing offer for local people.
- Link to existing services wherever possible.
- Fully consider protected characteristics and accessibility, including languages and formats.
- Undertake marketing and press to publicise the work of this grant and promote links to the other Discovery Gateways, the Valleys Regional Park and the Valleys as a region.

- Use appropriate co-branding for the Discovery Gateway and the appropriate Welsh Government logo.

4.7 BCBC will act as the grant recipient and is invited to enter into grant agreements with Welsh Government. Awen Cultural Trust and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales will be delivery partners and will be invited to enter into appropriate agreements with BCBC.

4.8 BCBC will require funding agreements with Awen Cultural Trust and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales. Those funding agreements shall mirror the requirements of the Welsh Government grant agreements and will pass on the obligations contained therein and hold the grant recipients liable for any breach of the terms of the grant funding agreements caused by their default. These will be developed by BCBC legal department in line with required policies and procedures and to ensure that the grant of funding to Awen Cultural Trust and the Wildlife Trust is made on a State aid compliant basis.

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 An initial assessment has identified that there are no equality issues related to this report.

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, Awen Cultural Trust and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales, that will take part and are closely aligned with the long-term ambitions set out in the VRP prospectus. A regional collaborative approach with other Discovery sites works towards long-term delivery.
- Prevention: On their own none of the partners or participating Discovery sites 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 of these sites.
- 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 – Awen Cultural Trust and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales.

- Involvement: The scheme will be delivered in close partnership with a range of local stakeholders in each area. Discussions and development with neighboring Authorities has taken place through BCBC's Economy, Natural Resources and Sustainability team and relevant officers from neighbouring Authorities as well as representatives from a range of private and third sector partners.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 Welsh Government have offered £500,000 for delivery of the proposal at Bryngarw Country Park and £400,000 for the delivery of the proposal at Parc Slip.
- 8.2 If spend in relation to either site exceeds these grant offer values or is incurred in a way not in line with the terms and conditions of the funding then Awen Cultural Trust have committed to providing match funding for Bryngarw Country Park and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales have committed to providing match funding for Parc Slip. Therefore, at this stage there is no match funding requirements for BCBC.
- 8.3 The financial profiles for activity in relation to the capital grant offer at Bryngarw Country Park is £249,057 in 2019/2020 and £250,943 in 2020/2021.
- 8.4 The financial profile for activity in relation to the capital grant offer at Parc Slip is £329,000 in 2019/2020 and £71,000 in 2020/2021.
- 8.5 Welsh Government have indicated that at this stage any funding indicated in financial years is fixed and there is no scope to vary between years. Delivery partners therefore have to manage and spend the resources in line with this and will be liable for any costs resulting from over or under spend not in line with the profile.
- 8.6 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.
- 8.7 The projects will be included in BCBC's Capital Programme in the next update to Council scheduled for 23rd October 2019.

9. Recommendation

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 9.1 Accept the grant offers for the delivery of activity at Bryngarw Country Park (£500,000) and Parc Slip (£400,000) through the Valleys Regional Park Discovery Sites Capital Grant, 2019-2021.
- 9.2 Authorise the Head of Operations – Community Services, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Head of Legal and Regulatory Services, to enter into agreements with Awen Cultural Trust and the Wildlife Trust, South and West Wales for the delivery of their respective aspects of the project in accordance with paragraph 4.8 above.

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Background documents:

Valleys Regional Park Prospectus