“...Towards improved Quality of Life”
City and County of Swansea

A Tale of One City…

…and a Diverse, Culturally rich County by the Sea

…Swansea

We began our Rural Development Plan journey with Swansea’s vision for economic regeneration:

By 2020, Swansea will be an internationally competitive economy. It will be Wales’ leading centre for the Knowledge Economy, with an economically active population above the UK average. Swansea will be known for its high skills levels.

Swansea will be a proud, vibrant and ambitious City, at the heart of a wider region where people want to live and work.

Swansea will provide a Rare Quality of Life…
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The Rural Development Plan 2007-2013

The Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013, funded by the European Union and the Welsh Government, has enabled over £5m of investment in Swansea’s rural areas.

This has helped to start delivering the vision in our Rural Strategy:

‘By 2020 we want to see vibrant, empowered and connected local communities delivering innovative and sustainable solutions to current and future economic, social and environmental challenges to enhance individual and community well-being, and in doing so contributing to the success of the wider Swansea Bay region.’
What has been achieved?

Swansea’s rural areas were already a lively, vibrant focus for tourism.

We boast the first designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the world famous Gower Peninsula. The coastline is a massive tourism draw, with stunning beaches and breathtaking views.

*Rural Business Plan 1* made some further improvements to our offer, including additional walking routes, helping to meet demand for support from young people, and the untapped potential of food and crafts sectors.

*Rural Business Plan 2* saw a major increase in investment in our rural wards. In the following pages you can find examples of the many ways the *Rural Development Plan for Wales* has helped local communities and groups to improve quality of life in their local areas.
Our Rural Development Strategy

After looking at the characteristics and issues in our rural areas, the Swansea Rural Development Partnership prepared a Strategy. The Strategy is designed to help address some of the problems, and exploit the opportunities for people, groups and businesses in Swansea’s rural economy. Because of the huge social and economic potential, this was done with Swansea’s 2020 Economic Regeneration Strategy in mind.

We had five basic aims with our Rural Development Strategy:

- To support rural businesses
- Building Sustainable Communities (through improving buildings and environment, capacity building and services)
- Helping to reduce economic inactivity
- Helping people develop their skills
- Developing sustainable transport

The Strategy enabled us to access funding from the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013, administered by the Welsh Government. Funding for projects was through 3 year ‘Business Plans’. The next few pages explain what has been achieved through the second Rural Business Plan for 2011-2013. The programme was extended to, and concluded in December 2014.
Business Plan 1 laid the foundations

The Strategy was not just words.

Although modest in scale, this was the first major package of investment covering all Swansea’s rural areas through a single Strategy.

In our first Rural Business Plan, the **Swansea Rural Development Partnership**, working closely with the local authority, third sector and local communities, started to show the potential of the ‘County’ in City and County of Swansea.

Swansea is a rare experience, where true rural living happens just minutes from the thriving urban heart of Swansea.

Five projects ‘tested’ ways that quality of life and economic opportunity can be improved in Swansea’s rural areas. This was just a taste of the range of activities that went on to form Business Plan 2...
Promotion of Walking and Cycling…

Walking and Cycling are a great way to enjoy the beautiful landscapes flanking our City.

A new Walking and Cycling Campaign was created to help local people and visitors alike to make the most of the beautiful landscapes with opportunities for walking and cycling across rural Swansea.

Naturally Gower features strongly in the marketing leaflet, as it is well known as a destination, but it also takes the opportunity to put some of the hidden treasures of northern Swansea ‘on the map’. Over 130,000 leaflets had been distributed by March 2011. Hopefully the increase in visitor numbers as a result will help support local businesses, particularly very small tourism companies. Download from www.visitswanseabay.com.

This initial campaign showed what could be done to promote the walking and cycling ‘offer’ of rural Swansea.
... and Opening up new walking opportunities

Encouraging more visitors to make the most of our open spaces is important, but there is a lot of work to be done to open up a maze of interesting walking routes. Work to complete two walks in the Mawr area at Cwm Cerdinen and Cwm Clydach has been completed under Business Plan 1, with both routes supported by an accompanying leaflet. One is a circular route, with the other following the line of the local RSPB reserve. Visit [www.swansea.gov.uk/countrysideaccess](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/countrysideaccess).
Our young people

Young people living in Swansea’s rural areas are now benefiting from vastly improved, much needed youth support services.

Services provided through Business Plan 1 helped to give young people a voice, giving them the support and confidence to run their own groups, to access funding in their own right, and to explain their needs.

Different age groups can help each other. With help and support from the Rural Youth Project team, young people in older age groups have been learning how to volunteer and create sustainable local activities in their communities.

Working with *Rural Swansea Action* and the range of local skills and crafts has opened up interesting possibilities for young enterprise. Longer term this work has the potential to begin to reverse the trend of de-population of rural areas, strengthening the rural economy, which is the fundamental reason for the existence of the Rural Development Plan.
“As an advocate, on behalf of young people living in Rural Swansea, I am able to ask people and services to remember that outside the city and urban area is a whole network of rural communities.”

Suzy Mayhew, Lead Rural Youth Worker
Local food, arts and crafts

Local connections between local food producers, and demand from, for example, local restaurateurs and markets, is being actively worked on by the new Rural Swansea Action team. Extensive research across rural Swansea will update local knowledge of who can produce what on the one hand, and who will sell, buy and use it on the other. A small start, but with huge potential.

“Support is offered to work with local groups of producers and ‘end users’ to help networking between small businesses in rural communities to make them more competitive and celebrate their unique identity.”

Local businesses working in arts, crafts and natural products have an opportunity to work together and try out new ideas, perhaps to break into larger markets.

By involving local people, Rural Swansea Action is helping to raise the profile and build a much better understanding of the true needs of the rural area, which can then be addressed to allow possible solutions to be put forward.”

A meeting of the Gower Crafts & Artisans Group
The Second Rural Business Plan

Swansea Rural Business Plan 2 was substantially larger than its predecessor. Five major ‘umbrella’ projects were funded under the Rural Development Plan for Wales, including investment of around £5m.

The second Plan has run from March 2011 to December 2013, and was recently extended to December 2014. Over £5m of investment has provided a major opportunity to make a real difference to Swansea’s rural communities, to enable them to be part of, and contribute to the wider Swansea 2020 vision.

There are few places that can boast a combination of city life, stunning beaches, backed by rolling hills and countryside, all within 20 minutes travel from the Centre.

With major investment visibly transforming the City Centre, Rural Business Plan 2 has provided the funding to make the most of the rural quality of life just minutes away from Swansea’s vibrant heart.

The following pages give a flavour of what Business Plan 2 has achieved over the past three and a half years...
Encouraging tourism potential

An exciting combination of activities to help encourage tourism in rural Swansea, with a particular focus on the northernmost wards of rural Swansea.

Building on the success of the first Walking and Cycling Marketing Campaign for rural Swansea, further related materials have been developed to promote and open up further unexplored or underutilized routes.

Following the visitswanseabay.com branding, five new leaflets have been prepared:

- Walking in Rural Swansea
- Cycling in Rural Swansea
- Pontarddulais Heritage Trail
- Penlle’r Castell
- Mawr Heritage Trail

Short films will help promote the area via social media.
The Scratch the Surface project has developed a number of innovative leaflets demonstrating geological features in the landscape of rural Swansea. A number of audio trails are available electronically.

Improvement of Walking Facilities 2 has enabled further footpath access to be opened up in Mawr ward. Three new leaflets have increased the interpretation materials available, as well as a new overview map of all the walking routes available to the public in Mawr ward.

The Barham Centre has made available a new app promoting Three Cliffs, as well as making information available via their website: [www.barhamcentre.org](http://www.barhamcentre.org).

Footpath access to the Llandeilo Talybont Churchyard has been improved, with an accompanying leaflet and interpretation panels produced to highlight the history of the site.

The Rural Accommodation Grant Scheme has enabled a number of micro-businesses in rural Swansea to upgrade their accommodation offer across all the rural wards. All are reporting increased business as a result of the improvements made.

Countryside Connections enabled the ‘Love your Countryside’ festival to take place in September 2015, and supported several organisations to run experiential conservation activities to help link people from urban areas with the countryside.
Improving basic services

This was the biggest strand of work under Business Plan 2, investing in a range of facilities and services identified as needed during Business Plan 1.

A small Information Technology centre was created in Parkmill.

The Mechanics Institute building in Pontarddulais was refurbished and made more accessible.

The Canolfan y Bont centre was staffed to enable access by the community and has become a thriving centre for community learning and a location of services for the community.

Two Multi-Use Games areas were upgraded in Mawr and Pontarddulais wards.

Sunday bus services to Gower were highly successful, to the extent that ways of securing further funding for the service are being actively sought.

Welsh language support services were being made available by Menter Iaith Abertawe, primarily translation support for smaller organisations.

The Rural Youth Project was taken into a new phase with additional staff support to engage more effectively across the rural wards. Parts of the project will continue with support from local communities, driven by the young people themselves.
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Email us at: Gysylltwch â ni trwy e-bostio:
youth.service@swansea.gov.uk
or phone:
nau ffonio:
01792 450830
Development of Business Plan 2 highlighted demand for improvements to community buildings and specific improvements to villages and small towns in rural Swansea.

A range of small grant schemes and support was made available under this strand.

Village Enhancement and Community buildings grant schemes provided small grants to make improvements to local buildings and facilities and small scale infrastructure across rural Swansea.

A Rural Regeneration Officer supported these regeneration activities.
Conservation and upgrading of rural heritage

Swansea is rich in historical and cultural heritage, and these features are particularly strong in the rural wards, albeit they have been under sung to date.

Interpretation and site improvements have been made at Gower Ancient Mill, Cheriton and Pontaruddulais Railway Station to help local residents learn more about the history of their area. The Gower Landscape project, now expanded with Heritage Lottery Fund support is a major initiative to engage local communities in the rich historical and cultural features of the peninsula.

Menter Iaith worked in local communities to make the most of cultural aspects of the Welsh language.

The Countryside Connections project increased volunteering opportunities, supported around a dozen community organisations with grants to undertake conservation projects, and enabled a wide range of interpretation materials to be produced and installed across the rural wards.
Using the iPads on the "Our Community" Project - Film stars of the future!
Rural Swansea Action built on the work done around local food and crafts under phase 1, as well as investigating potential for sustainable tourism using similar approaches, including development of a draft sustainable tourism strategy and action plan to support the Swansea Bay Destination Management Plan. This included development of further interest groups for example local bee keepers and wool producers. A range of evening local produce markets were trialed, along with space at the annual Swansea City Centre Christmas market for rural producers.

Community Development Workers in Mawr and Pontarddulais underpinned many of the projects supported in their wards, working with the community to ensure their views were taken on board and engaging communities on new ways of working together.

The Transition Initiative Grant Scheme supported a range of small projects to demonstrate different aspects of sustainable energy use and pursuit of transition ideals.

The ‘Positive Energy’ programme run by Groundwork Neath Port Talbot & Bridgend will provided a comprehensive advice and support around energy and fuel poverty issues.
Moving forward to 2014-2020...

Visit [www.swansea.gov.uk/rdp](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/rdp) for more information on how you can get involved in the next phase of rural development in Swansea.

The format for the next programme is changing from 'business plans' to a more streamlined approach focusing more on .

We want to build on this first successful major investment covering all Swansea’s rural areas. To do this, we need your ideas and support to ensure Swansea’s second *Rural Business Plan* achieves its full potential to the benefit of the rural communities.

Early discussions are beginning for the European Union’s 2014-2020 programming period, so if you have potential project ideas, keep up to date via the Swansea RDP website and *Swansea Rural Development News* for updates on future funding programmes.
Possibilities for the new programme could include...

Supporting **rural businesses**

Involving **Young People**

**Village enhancement** schemes

How to make best use of new **Tourism products**

Helping communities adopt **basic services**

The **Leader** approach

**Sustainable Transport**

**Heritage** interpretation

**Climate** change and energy

Building sustainable rural **Communities**
Developing the **County** in City and County of **Swansea**

For more information on how you can contribute to, and benefit from the rural dimension of Swansea’s 2020 vision please call:

(01792) 635094 or 636858, or visit:

www.Swansea.gov.uk/rdp
www.Swansea.gov.uk/dmp
www.SwanseaBayCityRegion.com
www.SwanseaCityCentre.com