



Feasibility assessment

Title of research: Rural Workshop: Carno July 2nd 2019 (Presentation Slides and Workshop Notes)

Publication date: July 2019

Short summary of report

The rural workshop was organised by a new network of organisations and individuals with many decades of experience living and working in rural Wales. It was held on July 2nd 2019 at Carno Community Centre, Montgomeryshire.

Earlier in 2019 the network had launched a paper called “Grasping the Potential: Thoughts on a Charter for rural Wales”. The Carno event built on this paper to celebrate the work of independent organisations. 44 people attended the workshop, representing a wide range of public, private and third sector organisations across rural Wales.

Feasibility assessment by panel of how this will feed into the project work

The event was an opportunity to showcase the work of independent organisations with experience of LEADER and other independent and community-based organisations currently running community led local development initiatives.

Discussions in the afternoon session focussed on opportunities within rural Wales, the key characteristics of the LEADER approach and LEADER’s contribution towards rural prosperity.

The slides and workshop notes provide a record of a wide range community led local economic development taking place in rural Wales. Much of this work is centred around LEADER and supports entrepreneurial activity. The slides and notes provide a snapshot of a wide range of other non-LEADER activity. Arsyllfa can draw on this record as an overview of local economic programmes, good practice and joint discussions within the context of a future vision for rural Wales.

Participants recognised the need for a rural platform that can highlight the rural dimension of future policy and programmes and advocate for rural concerns to be taken account of. Such a platform would also be a useful mechanism for making organisations aware of what projects were being delivered and where the gaps in provision were.

What are the key points and how can they be applied to this project?

Tom Jones, mid Wales farmer, vice president of WCVA and a Welsh member of the European Economic and Social Committee began the day by setting the scene and stressing the need for organisations to work together to get the rural voice heard. He contextualised discussions within the move towards SMART Villages in European policy and highlighted that, whatever the UK's relationship with the EU going forward, lessons could be learnt in a rural Wales.

Presentations followed from:

- Severn Wye Energy Agency that delivers the Lottery funded Rural Futures Project. This is a rural poverty initiative. The potential of small-scale energy generation in rural areas was also highlighted
- Agri Academy presented their work with the next generation of farmers. The programme which has a Business and Innovation section as well as a Junior programme (for 16-19yr olds) supports entrepreneurs from within the agriculture sector
- Cardigan Town Partnership showcased a range of innovative projects aimed at reviving the town centre. These included town access to Wi-Fi, the setting up of a Town App and the use of analytics to help town businesses create joint marketing campaigns, special offers and targeted information

Impacts of LEADER were outlined in presentations from existing LEADER Groups, Cadwyn Clwyd, Menter Mon and PLANED. Antur Teifi delivered LEADER in the early years of the programme. Every organisation was able to showcase a range of innovative activity, some of which had grown into sizeable business ventures e.g. Morlais Energy. It was clear that these locally based organisations are able to bring real impact through quick response to opportunities and challenges and innovative solutions. Their proactive approach is very different to the passive grant programme culture. Organisations are able to move faster on things that are changing in communities. LEADER has promoted a problem-solving attitude. Each organisation stressed the importance of a people-based approach, community engagement, community ownership and collaboration.

The key points from the presentations on community led local development were:

- Not one size fits all
- The importance of locality
- Innovation (key to the LEADER approach)
- Support for entrepreneurial individuals

It was clear from the wide range of innovative grassroots activity that independent organisations are able to achieve reach into rural communities, nurture and support entrepreneurial activity.

Speakers in the afternoon session were able to pull together some key principles about how rural policy should be framed. Matthew Quinn Distinguished Visiting Fellow from Sustainable Places Research Institute, Cardiff University led participants through a thought-provoking journey contrasting popular conceptions of the rural with the modernism of the urban. Rural is so much more than “failed urban”.

How can these principles and values interact with fostering an entrepreneurial culture?

The presentations from LEADER Groups and other independent enterprise agencies demonstrates a wealth of possibility for entrepreneurial activity within rural Wales if the support structures are in place. It is recognised that the current LEADER programme is excessively bureaucratic, in stark contrast to the flexible, dynamic approach under the early LEADER Programmes (from 1992).

Nevertheless, examples of innovative initiatives ranged from technology, energy, town centre retail, agricultural diversification as well as support for businesses using local distinctive products.

The approach championed by the workshop was asset based. The characteristics that workshop participants cherish about rural Wales were listed as:

- The people
- Open green spaces - a contrast to urban
- Slower pace of life
- Real/ intense sense of community
- Integrated and diverse area
- 'Cynefin' a sense of belonging
- A rural local knowledge

These are some of the reasons people choose to stay in rural Wales or move to develop businesses. The workshop did not explore the barriers to entrepreneurial activity, choosing to instead focus on the positives of doing business in rural Wales.

The workshop highlighted the importance of locally based organisations that are able to reach rural businesses, react in an agile way to local opportunities and support entrepreneurs.

Key findings

The purpose of the workshop was to raise the profile of community led local development in rural Wales.

The main themes to emerge from the day were:

- Organisations must work together, across sectors, to raise the profile of rural Wales
- Locally based organisations are vital in order to engage potential entrepreneurs and support entrepreneurial activity
- New technology presents new opportunities for rural Wales. Communities feel that they get dragged into the digital world, but digital means that individual can work and live in rural areas
- The profile of rural Wales needs to be raised at national level. Participants recognised the need for some kind of organisation which can drive the case for rural development. This organisation must be independent from government and local councils in order to

have the maximum flexibility and ability to respond to opportunities and issues as they arise

Conclusions

The feasibility of a support structure for people starting up and operating innovative businesses in rural Wales has been demonstrated through the wide range of examples showcased at the workshop.

The workshop highlighted the importance of locally based organisations that are able to react in a flexible way to the potential for entrepreneurial activity in rural Wales.

A joined-up approach was seen as vital in order to raise awareness of the particular circumstances of operating in and from rural Wales.

Appendices

See appendix a for the workshop slides at the Rural Wales Carno event.
