

A Communications Strategy for the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

This communication strategy aims to set out a clear, concise and effective communications framework to support the work of the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership and help it achieve its aims, which are, in summary, to:

- Invest in a wide range of projects over five years which will conserve, protect and enhance the landscape (natural, built and cultural) of the Dearne Valley starting April 2014
- Increase people's awareness, understanding, appreciation, use and enjoyment of the Dearne Valley (locally, regionally and nationally)
- Improve the economy of the Dearne Valley by making it a place where people want to live, work and visit
- Support the Dearne Valley community by providing a range of training, skills, education and volunteering opportunities
- Involve the Dearne Valley community in projects to improve and develop their landscape
- Establish the basis of a long term partnership that continues to have a positive impact on Dearne Valley after the five years of the programme.

The Communications Strategy must focus on supporting the successful achievement of the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership's aims.

1.2 WHY DO WE NEED THIS STRATEGY?

Good communication is a key component of effective project management – especially one involving more than one organisation in a partnership arrangement. This communications strategy will support successful delivery of the DVLP's aims by identifying key messages and setting out roles and responsibilities; methods and means by which the DVLP will communicate with key stakeholders and audiences. Good communication supports CLARITY and CO-ORDINATION and GUARDS AGAINST any potential MISUNDERSTANDING, CONFUSION and even CONFLICT.

This strategy is needed to:

- * establish, present and promote a clear sense of identity for both the Dearne Valley and Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership brand(s)
- * raise awareness and understanding of the programme's aims, activities, achievements and outcomes amongst stakeholders and audiences
- * enhance and protect the reputation of the DVLP
- * enhance and improve perceptions of the Dearne Valley
- * inform, engage and involve more people in the DVLP's activities and opportunities
- * ensure efficient, co-ordinated and inclusive communication supporting best delivery of the programme
- * avoid duplication, mixed-messages, poor co-ordination and any waste of time and resources.

1.3 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AIMS:

The DVLP's Communication Strategy, therefore, has the top-line aims to:

- Launch the DVLP programme and establish a clear and strong identity for - and understanding of – its work
- Promote and communicate the work of the DVLP – highlighting what's new, what's improved, what's been achieved, what's available, what's happening
- Raise and enhance the profile of the Dearne Valley – develop its 'sense of place' and its reputation as a great place to live, work and visit
- Inform, inspire and encourage more active participation in the Dearne Valley and the opportunities afforded by its landscape - across all audiences and all relevant geographical communities (local, regional, national) and communities of interest (eg cycling, arts, rambling)
- Protect the reputation of the DVLP by managing expectations, dealing with any issues raised, preparing for any adverse attention
- Establish effective communication processes across the DVLP to develop and maintain relationships with all stakeholders and facilitate sustainable partnership working and community-wide involvement for the Dearne Valley going forward.

1.4 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OBJECTIVES:

In order to achieve these aims, this Communications Strategy will:

- Identify key messages (in support of the core Dearne Valley 'brand' and associated DVLP 'brand', its aims, projects and activities)
- Identify key stakeholders and audiences (active and potential including partners, ambassadors, residents, businesses and visitors)
- Identify potential key media and communication tools (including owned, earned and paid-for media such as promotional material, PR, online resources advertising)
- Outline communication processes - the rules, roles and responsibilities (eg for the publication and distribution of materials, writing of press releases, contributions of spokespeople, online and social media management, promotional events etc)
- Suggest means of monitoring the quality of communication activity; evaluating and reviewing its impact upon, and contribution to, the DVLP's aims

2.1 KEY MESSAGES:

The identified key messages at the heart of all DVLP's activity – whether the partnership is communicating the launch of a newly-signed trail, creating a landmark sculpture, protecting biodiversity or delivering a training course – will be:

* The Dearne Valley is a great place to live, work and visit

* The Dearne Valley landscape is being improved and enhanced through a five-year Heritage Lottery supported programme delivered by the DVLP

* There are lots of opportunities to enjoy and get involved in the Dearne Valley landscape – in areas such as outdoor pursuits, leisure, training, education, volunteering, culture and special interest activities such as archaeological digs!

* The future of the Dearne Valley landscape and its economy is being enhanced by the DVLP programme and its HLF-supported investment.

(There will be plenty of 'TRIGGERS' prompting and requiring proactive communication activity during the course of the DVLP's varied programme of works – all these activities will advance the DVLP's key messages.)

2.2 KEY AUDIENCES:

The audience for the DVLP is made up of ALL its STAKEHOLDERS which includes all known partners / funders / ambassadors / businesses / community groups / volunteers and so on who may actively or potentially interested and involved in DVLPs work and all its public AUDIENCES ie sections of the 'general' public – such as local residents, families, visitors and communities of interest - to which the DVLP aims to deliver its key messages about the Dearne Valley and its improved offer.

Here is a comprehensive, but probably not exhaustive, list of stakeholders and audiences which DVLP communications must target:

DVLP board members and partner organisations – councils, RSPB, the Environment Agency, Natural England, RSPB and Groundwork Dearne Valley

All DVLP funders including the National Lottery's Heritage Lottery Fund, and local funders

DVLP dedicated staff / associated staff within all three local authorities

Public bodies and organisations in the Dearne Valley – police, doctors surgeries, parish councils, public transport providers

MPs and councillors (across three local authorities and all relevant constituencies)

Residents of the Dearne Valley – people of all ages, families, people who have moved in to the area, people with a long association with the area (those already active in the Dearne Valley landscape and those potentially active)

Dearne Valley businesses - including big employers such as ASOS and Capita, many of whom are relatively new to the Dearne and SMEs such as Manvers Engineering and Denise Moody Hairdressing, some of whom have long histories in the Dearne – (active or potentially active in their support and involvement the with the DVLP)

Sports centres, golf clubs, leisure facilities, visitor attractions, bars, social clubs, cafes and restaurants - visitor economy and leisure industry businesses and hubs of activity

Schools, colleges, nurseries and children's centres

Dearne Valley special interest groups - such as community associations, social groups, sports clubs, voluntary organisations, 'Friends of..' groups, churches, scouts and guides, event organisers, cultural and arts organisations eg Wath Folk Festival, Mexborough and Swinton Astronomical Society and Wath Morris Men, Dearne Valley Camera Club

Day trippers / visitors to the Dearne - from across the region and especially neighbouring areas including Sheffield and Leeds (existing day trippers and potential day trippers)

Wider communities of interest - such as anglers, walkers, runners, cyclists, bird watchers, water sports enthusiasts, environmentalists, history and archaeology enthusiasts (existing and potential visitors to the Dearne Valley landscape on a local, regional and national scale)

Tourists and the Tourism industry – existing and potential visitors to the Dearne Valley up to national scale plus their facilitators such as coach companies, tour companies, hotels, restaurants, Welcome to Yorkshire, residents of the Dearne and their own visitors

Media – journalists on regional media and special interest media.

3.1 KEY COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA AND TOOLS:

Specific stakeholders and wider audiences are best communicated with through a range of methods and means. To deliver effective communications management we suggest the following tools are employed. Some communication tools are owned by the DVLP (ie paid for resources such as websites, leaflets and promotional display materials) some are earned (eg coverage in newspapers, interviews on radio and TV) some are supplied by others and paid for (eg advertising in publications or on posters in public places.)

A good mix of communication methods makes for a comprehensive and cost effective communications strategy which combines all of these professional tools for maximum cumulative impact. For example, a new DVLP directory about artisan food producers in the Dearne Valley may be launched with a press release which is issued to all professional media; shared and promoted via the DVLP's social media and website and supported by paid advertising placed in key media.

Here is an overview of suggested communications media and tools which the DVLP can use:

Printed materials – the DVLP's projects and innovations may be supported and promoted by a portfolio of publications which promote the Dearne Valley as a whole and/or promote individual developments (eg new routes, the launch of an app, new cycle hire facilities) or fresh

interpretations and themes (history, arts, nature, walking). All printed materials MUST be presented and produced within a clearly defined and distinctive DVLP brand – provided by the DVLP’s professional designers - to ensure they have consistent authenticity and impact. Also, these publications must have excellent distribution processes in place to ensure they reach the audiences for which they are intended.

Online resources – The DVLP brand needs a partnership website which presents the Dearne Valley and the DVLP partnership to the online world (of local, regional and national significance). The website should inspire interest and confidence in the Dearne Valley brand and carry all the necessary information, contact details and directions, needed to help people discover the area. It can be home to downloadable versions of DVLP resources (where applicable) and news’ releases. It should be the portal to other online resources; could carry a blog – if desired - and have excellent live links to partner websites and the DVLP’s interactive social media platforms.

Social media – An authoritative, interactive and lively social media presence is key to engagement with much of the public in today’s increasingly digital world. We’d suggest the DVLP establishes a Facebook Page and Twitter account for the Dearne Valley programme. Other tools such as Youtube, Pinterest, Tumblr and blogs may also be employed to share lively and engaging film, copy, images and audio promoting the Dearne’s offer. Social Media is an increasingly important method of inspiring, informing and, crucially, engaging with stakeholders and audiences. It is an essential element of a strategy which can connect with and extend the return on investment in all other communications activity. It requires timely input of content and responsiveness to posts from others – maintained by the DVLP with PR support as required.

Public relations – The published and broadcast media - including newspapers, magazines, radio, television and associated news websites – are key vehicles to reach a range of audiences both within the Dearne Valley, regionally, nationally and across specialist interest areas. For example PR for the DVLP could target horizontal media (ie those that geographically cover the Dearne Valley such as Barnsley Chronicle, Doncaster Free Press, South Yorkshire Times and Radio Sheffield) and vertical media (ie those which target specialist interest audiences such as Great Outdoors Magazine, Anglers’ Mail and Cycling World). Positive news stories about key developments supporting the DVLP’s key messages can raise awareness of the Dearne Valley, enhance and protect its reputation; support greater engagement and attract more visitors – all of which helps audiences to develop positive perceptions of the Dearne Valley. Editorial in the media has the advantage of credibility as is seen as a third party endorsement. The reach of media coverage can be extended by sharing coverage via the DVLP’s social media. PR support can also protect against and prepare for any adverse media attention – for example, any criticism or concerns raised.

Media spokespeople / ambassadors - Opportunities to explain, promote and champion the Dearne Valley and the DVLP through media interviews and public appearances are extremely valuable and a very good way to deliver key messages - if handled well. We recommend the strategy identifies a few key spokespeople for the DVLP - from across the partnership – and this ‘squad’ receives training in handling media interviews and delivering key messages. (This media training development opportunity may be extended to DVLP community ambassadors and volunteers to extend the team of spokespeople if desired.)

Advertising – Paid-for advertising can have a role in the marketing mix to promote the Dearne Valley and what it has to offer. Advertising campaigns must be timely, focused, professionally-presented and co-ordinated with other communications activity. For example, to promote an event or launch the new Dearne Valley 'image' through a tourism campaign. Advertising options may include bus advertising, street display board posters, printed media display adverts, radio advertising. The DVLP may also consider sponsorship, for example of a Dearne Valley-based football team or brass band, as one type of advertising genre.

Promotional events / merchandise - the DVLP may organise its own events or have a presence at other people's events. This activity would require investment in good DVLP branded display stand materials – a generic 'stand' could be used at events and at special days in busy places, eg markets, both within the Dearne and in external areas to attract day trippers. These communications opportunities allow for face to face promotion to spread key messages, distribute leaflets, seek two-way feedback etc. Relevant merchandise such as branded cloth bags, water-proof map covers, kids' stickers, bug catcher jars, water bottles etc may be considered if budget allows.

3.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The communications function should be regarded as an integral part of the DVLP's management programme. The processes the DVLP puts in place to disseminate key messages and news through its communications media and tools must be efficient, practicable and rigorous to ensure high quality, consistent, unambiguous, accurate and timely communications are produced and issued.

Co-ordination and clearance - Communications activity is always best managed by a nominated person taking lead responsibility as the central co-ordinator - and final authoriser - of all outputs. The partnership's communications lead can then identify and liaise with all the internal and partner stakeholders, funders and DVLP consultants who need to be involved in the creation of each DVLP communication – for example a specific press release, promotional publication or advert. Identified key stakeholders may be copied into draft communications either for their comment and approval or simply for their information and advance notice of issue. It is vital that all communication is part of a co-ordinated system which ensures all funders and partners are clear about what is happening. This is vital to good partnership working and a shared sense of ownership of, and confidence in, the DVLP programme.

Communications planning - To facilitate forward planning, this communications strategy should lead to a practical COMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN – a forward planning schedule which correlates with the DVLP's planned programme of activity and identifies triggers for proactive communication - eg announcements of work to begin on a new foot bridge or landmark sculpture, or completion of landscaping work carried out to reveal a new vista of the river. The Action Plan can assist in planning ahead about how each development will be communicated.

The plan must also be flexible and able to respond to changes, unexpected media opportunities and the need for any reactive communications work eg sparked by a third party's activity or a project change.

Essential preparation - Some groundwork for effective DVLP communications management will include the development of clear branding guidelines governing use of the DVLP logo and identity etc; the writing of a standard press release format for the DVLP with consistent 'notes to editor' and contact details; and the creation of a database list of stakeholders who will be sent all press releases and other communications directly via e-mail (this list may be revised and updated)

Day-to-day communications activity, especially online and social media - the communications lead may work with a team of internal DVLP colleagues and external consultants who have delegated authority and responsibilities to, for example, add content to the website, Tweet or post on Facebook and respond day-to-day to any social media activity.

Any external communications relating to the DVLP – It is important for the DVLP to have clear, concise and helpful 'publicity guidelines' to govern mentions of the DVLP in any possible communications by external but associated organisations and partners. This does not have to be onerous but is necessary to prevent any mixed or contradictory messages and promote consistent use of the branding. It may involve (a) the DVLP communications lead being sent any draft communications product for comment and, essentially, clearance of its content directly relating to the DVLP (b) guidance on use of the DVLP logo/identity being issued to all partners and (c) a standard 'note to editors' defining the DVLP to be added to external press releases/publications which mention the programme being given, where appropriate.

See attached outline of a possible Communication Action Plan grid at Appendix A

Please see attached the suggested draft press release format at Appendix B

3.3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Below is a summary of the proposed key components of the Communication Strategy with indicative costs for the supply of each component for consideration. Please note these are indicative costs only. They may feed into the HYPOTHETICAL premise of one year's communications activity assuming the possible:

- Creation of one website
- Set up and maintenance of Facebook and Twitter

- Preparation and production of approx. 18 press releases
- Media training for up to five spokespeople
- Design and production of, say, three promotional publications (promotional leaflets / brochures)
- Investment in one extended poster campaign (buses, pavements lollipop display boards)
- Media buying for one major advertising campaign (across posters, buses, print and broadcast media)
- Production of DVLP events 'stand' resources for outreach at events
- Investment in digital, online and social media communication

Please note, all these suggestions, are ball-park figures. Once actual remits are decided, the communication actions will need to be costed accurately at tendering and commissioning stage.

Communications Activity / Product	Overview – example of possible input	Indicative Cost
Design and development of a 'Discover Dearne Valley (working title!)' / DVLP-owned website	Website design Website programming, build and hosting (source The Cafeteria)	£6,000 £5,000
Media Relations – professional PR input to deliver press releases and media relations and support social media work	Suggested two days a month PR input	Between £300 - £500 plus VAT a day
Media Interview Training	Suggested one day's intense and customised DVLP training event for up to five people	Approximately £1,100 plus VAT
Promotional leaflet design and production	Design of a 16 pp A5 brochure Print cost for 50,000 copies (source The Cafeteria)	£3,000 £4,500
Display advert / poster	Design (The Cafeteria)	£1,500
Bus advertising	Poster on the back of Dearne Valley bus services (source CBS Outdoors)	£200 for unspecified number of weeks
Bus stop advertising	One Poster at one stop for one week (source Sign Kick)	£179 per week per poster
Membership of Welcome to Yorkshire -	Membership gains DVLP access to their marketing, allows DVLP to use their logo as endorsement, networking opportunities etc	£300 per year plus VAT
Leaflet distribution	Distribution of a DVLP leaflet to 30 sites and	£300 for one leaflet

	maintenance of supply for four weeks (source Display Information via Welcome to Yorkshire)	across 30 sites for four weeks
Merchandise	Branded cloth bags	£354 plus VAT for 300 bags
	Pull-up stand	£85 plus VAT
Radio Advertising	Dearne FM advert – 56 x 30 second commercial campaign	£511 plus VAT

3.3 QUALITY CONTROL AND EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATIONS INPUT

Investment of time and funding in communications activity should always clearly support DVLP's programme aims - ie no un-read promotional publications or investment in expensive resources which do not get used to serve a purpose.

A carefully-planned communications strategy which identifies each communications product and its remit across a co-ordinated campaign will protect against this.

Return on investment in communication activities – collectively and in some cases separately - can be assessed through various tools looking at communications outputs and at DVLP business outcomes, including:

- Monitoring increase in social media activity – on Facebook and Twitter
- Monitoring of traffic to DVLP's website
- Media monitoring of coverage of DVLP releases
- Counting numbers of people attending promoted Dearne Valley events/activities/training opportunities
- Partners' visitor figures (eg RSPB Old Moor, Conisbrough Castle, Maurice Dobson Museum, Darfield)
- Number of leaflets distributed / picked up
- Simple face-to-face survey questionnaires of DVLP stakeholders at events
- Formal surveys of DVLP stakeholders / partners

The DVLP may also want to consider conducting a major BEFORE and AFTER (and DURING) survey about perceptions and/or usage of the Dearne Valley landscape. The DVLP may invest in an anonymous online 'brand tracking' and/or 'campaign awareness' survey through a service like, [YouGov](#) or [Onepoll](#) or [Survey Monkey](#). This is an evaluation idea which would need further investigation, but, for example, you

may ask if people have heard of the Dearne Valley, know where it is; have visited the Dearne Valley, would consider visiting it; think the Dearne Valley is a good / not good place to live, work or visit? Yougov and One Poll are suppliers who make a charge and employ their own resources to survey a random list of contacts. (For an idea, a South Yorkshire-wide survey of 300 people asking four questions could cost £1,600 and a nationwide survey of 1,000 randomly-selected people could cost £1,000. (source: YouGov)) Survey Monkey is a free, DIY option through which you invest time in inputting your own stakeholder contacts and conducting your own survey through this database.

Ultimately, the communications must clearly contribute to improvement of the economic and social experience and 'feel-good factor' perceptions of the Dearne Valley

4.1 CONCLUSION

This Communications Strategy aims to lay the foundations for a successful communications framework which will help communicate, celebrate and promote the key messages of the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership. It aims to encourage greater awareness, appreciation and active usage of the Dearne Valley's historic, cultural, natural and built environment.

The Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership's five year project to invest in all aspects of the Dearne Valley landscape will provide plenty of triggers for positive communication. Through effective and integrated management of these communications, the partnership can support and advance all its core aims and especially:

- * build and protect the reputation of the DVLP brand
- * improve perceptions of the Dearne Valley and its 'sense of place'
- * inspire, inform, engage and involve people, in order to encourage them to actively explore and enjoy the Dearne Valley landscape
- * boost the economy of the Dearne Valley by facilitating and attracting more people to live, work, learn, visit; spend time and money and invest here
- * establish an information-sharing and partnership-working legacy which supports the future development of the Dearne Valley as a geographical entity.

4.2 APPENDIX

A: Here is the suggested skeleton of a future Communications Action Plan to support delivery of the DVLP programme

SAMPLE DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN (WITH HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLES)

Trigger (from DVLP programme)	When	Key Message (s) – (all implied, lead ones here)	Target Audience(s)	How Communicated	Who by	Notes
Landmark Sculpture commissioned		The DV is being enhanced and improved, great place to live work and visit	All	Media release Social Media promotion Website Spokespeople	To come	Images to feed into future DVLP publications
Schools invited to DVLP launch event at RSPB		DV is great place to live, learn, work and visit. DV offers opportunities to learn and enjoy landscape	Schools DV Residents Media	Invitations (printed/digital) Media Release Social Media Website	To come	Event an opportunity to develop ambassadors, volunteers
Publication of a new cycling guide to the DV		DV a great place to visit. DV opps to enjoy landscape	Cyclists who live locally, regionally, nationally Local residents	Distribution of the printed guide Media release - local and specialist cycling media Online and social media esp linked to cycling forums	To come	Of primary specialist and secondary general interest
New footbridge taking Trans-Pennine Trail over road		DV landscape is being improved for people to enjoy landscape	All Walkers, cyclists, families	Media release Spokespeople Social Media	To come	This is the kind of project which will be news-worthy
Launch of a summer 'Day Trip Dearne Valley' campaign		DV is a great place to visit. DV landscape is being improved, what to do here	All People living in region Residents and their visitors	Posters Adverts Social media / website What's on publication? – associated media release	To come	When you are happy with offer

B: Here is a suggested format for all DVLP press releases. (All text suggested only and to be discussed and approved.)

DVLP LOGO HERE

PRESS RELEASE

TITLE

- NEWS STORY HERE -

Standard paragraph within every release: This project is delivered by the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership as part of a programme of developments designed to enhance and improve the natural, built and cultural environment of the Dearne Valley.

The Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund. Barnsley Council is the lead partner, with a partnership that includes Doncaster Council, Rotherham Council, RSPB Old Moor, the Environment Agency, Natural England and Groundwork South Yorkshire and the Garganey Trust.

Notes to Editor

The Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership (DVLP) is a partnership led by the three local authorities covering the Dearne Valley area – Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham – with their key partners RSPB Old Moor, the Environment Agency, Natural England and Groundwork South Yorkshire and the Garganey Trust.

The Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership (DVLP) has secured £1.9 million from the National Lottery's Heritage Lottery Fund to support investment in a five year programme of projects focusing on the heritage, physical environment and biodiversity of the Dearne Valley.

The Dearne Valley, as defined by the DVLP for this project, is 154km² triangle of land, with the River Dearne and associated rivers, canals, wetlands and water features at its heart, which lies between Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham in South Yorkshire.

For further information about the DVLP, contact Landscape Partnership Development Officer Richard King, on 01226 772131 or richardking@barnsley.gov.uk

Heritage Lottery-funded landscape partnerships are bringing together people and organisations across the UK to deliver schemes which benefit landscapes and communities. Visit www.hlf.org.uk

LOGOS – up to you if you include all PARTNERS’ logos on release – if too many (all partners are mentioned in Notes to Editor), suggest just include the FUNDERS logos here.

C: Here are a few quotes relating to some of the issues facing the Dearne Valley landscape which effective communications can help tackle:

“Communities, visitors and potential investors...are unaware of the revitalised landscape and fantastic wildlife at the end of their street.” Dearne Valley Interpretation Study (Page 4)

“...two of the biggest barriers to visiting the Dearne Valley are information (knowing what to do and see) and signage (getting around once you are here). These would be key issues to address when working to attract and consolidate this new audience (ie visitors from the wider region)” DVLP Audience Development and Engagement Strategy

“The Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership aims to raise awareness of the area’s significance...and encourage people to benefit from the Dearne’s built and natural assets.” *An introduction to the DVLP*

“The Dearne Valley is a unique living landscape but it overlooked or misunderstood.” *Cllr Linda Burgess of Barnsley Council at launch for the partnership*

“The Dearne Valley is a landscape that has been heavily shaped by industry and then its subsequent loss...the Landscape Partnership programme will help conserve its built, natural and cultural heritage and offer lots of excellent opportunities for people to benefit from and connect with their local environment.” *Fiona Spiers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Yorkshire and the Humber*

“There is a sense that this area shares the common thread of the river, the valley and its heritage, which binds the different parts together to form a cohesive district. However, the perception that the river is the binding thread is not strong. ...It could be made stronger, through interpretation and opening views” Dearne Valley Interpretation Report.

Stephanie Pollard, Capital B Media, October 31st 2013

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