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1.0 Introduction

Sandwell Valley is owned and managed by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and is located in the heart of the West Midlands urban conurbation, five miles north of Birmingham City Centre. Consisting of 260 hectares of Country Park and a further 500 hectares of green space containing a variety of attractions, Sandwell Valley is managed as a major facility for local people to enjoy and to act as an attraction for day visitors to Sandwell.

This Development Plan aims to summarise the developing role and function of Sandwell Valley as Sandwell’s number one visitor attraction, attracting as it does in excess of 1 million visits per annum. It is SMBC’s aim to build on the existing success and excellence of Sandwell Valley and develop and improve the offer to reflect the changing needs and expectations of local people and visitors from across the region and nationally. SMBC invests almost £1,000,000 per annum in Sandwell Valley and needs to demonstrate that value for money is being delivered and consistently improved upon.

Sandwell Valley is a major resource for local Sandwell people and also serves as a sub-regional and regional attraction. Given the excellent transport links i.e. M5 / M6 / Rail and Metro, Sandwell Valley has the potential to act as a national attraction following further enhancement and development of the current offer. It is important that the needs of these different audiences is recognised and catered for to assist Sandwell Valley in optimising its potential in terms of quality of experience, visitor numbers, biodiversity and business model.

Sandwell Valley makes a major contribution to Sandwell’s Declaration on Climate Change and contributes to the new Performance Framework as follows:

- NI 185 CO2 reduction from LA operations.
- NI 186 Per capita CO2 emissions in the LA area.
- NI 188 Adapting to climate change
- NI 194 Level of air quality – Nox etc.
- NI 198 Improved local biodiversity – active management of local sites.

There is a real challenge in delivering this Development Plan, which will potentially require additional capital investment to secure the desired improvements. Opportunities need to be explored which could include; commercial investment; land ownership and disposal; maximising existing income; and new partnerships. A new financial model and business case should be developed that will ensure that this Development Plan becomes a reality.

This Development Plan will change over time as further research and analysis identified within the current plan comes on stream and informs our view of Sandwell Valley.
2.0 Vision, Aims and Constraints

2.1 Vision

The vision towards which this Development Plan strives is:

“To provide a high-quality, environmentally sustainably run Country Park which serves as a beacon of excellence in providing a ‘countryside experience’ for Sandwell people and regional and national visitors.”

2.2 Aims

Sandwell Valley is the number one visitor attraction in Sandwell and it is the variety of experiences and activities already on offer which makes it unique: a green oasis in urban West Midlands. The high quality of Sandwell Valley is reflected in the Red Rose Award, which was awarded in 2007, and the Green Flag Award, which was awarded in 2009.

This consistent excellence does not mean that there is not room for the development of the Sandwell Valley offer and the aims of this Plan reflect this. The six aims of the Development Plan are:

1. Develop the Countryside Experience in line with the ‘Sandwell Valley Country Park Management Plan’, with the vision, “to provide access to local people and visitors to a high quality countryside experience, promoting, improving awareness and understanding of environmentalism and ecology.”

2. Develop the Sport and Recreation offer which Sandwell Valley provides in line with the ‘Physical Activity, PE & Sports Strategy 2009 – 2014’, with the vision, “to provide opportunities for a range of outdoor sports and recreation activities in a safe and green environment.”

3. Develop the History and Heritage of Sandwell Valley with the vision, “to record and interpret the history of Sandwell Valley, including the Priory, the Sand Well and the history of occupation, mining and farming techniques.”

4. Develop the Shows and Events on offer at Sandwell Valley with the vision, “to provide large scale events and open air shows which complement the Country Park setting.”

5. Develop the Visitor Experience offered at Sandwell Valley

6. Develop the Marketing of Sandwell Valley to attract, new unique visitors whilst retaining current ones

2.3 Constraints

There are a number of constraints that must be considered when exploring any development option. Protection is afforded to Sandwell Valley as it enjoys Green Belt status. There are also Local Nature Reserve areas, sites of importance for nature conservation and sites of local importance for nature conservation within Sandwell Valley. Sandwell Valley also currently holds Green Flag status. Therefore, there is potential tension and conflict in terms of
development aspirations and what can be done in terms of physical development is very tightly regulated.

3.0 Development Options

3.1 Countryside Experience

“To provide access to local people and visitors to a high quality countryside experience to promote and improve awareness and understanding of environmentalism and ecology”

Current Offer

Sandwell Valley’s outstanding and most dominant feature is its countryside, a great deal of which is very important for nature conservation. These areas will only remain ecologically important with the correct management. The ‘Sandwell Valley Country Park Management Plan’ has been developed to ensure that these areas are managed in a co-ordinated way.

Sandwell Valley is a fantastic educational resource with the potential to increase people’s awareness and understanding of farming and ecology. To help achieve this Sandwell Valley has the following resources available to its visitors:

- Sandwell Park Farm and Visitor Centre – situated close to West Bromwich Town Centre, the visitor centre is fully restored as a working Victorian farm which offers visitors the opportunity to see a historic farmyard, tea rooms, visitor facilities, gift shops, and blacksmith and wheelwright workshops. Additionally, the visitor centre has a museum and display area which depicts the history of the Country Park estate.
- Walled Kitchen Garden – the Walled Kitchen Garden, which is accessed through the Sandwell Park Farm Visitor Centre, demonstrates the methods of gardening used during the Victorian Period.
- Forge Mill Farm and Visitor Centre – this modern dairy farm offers a contrast to the Victorian farming operation demonstrated at Sandwell Park Farm and is situated 1.5 kilometres to the north east of Sandwell Park Farm. The facilities include a farm shop, a small animal area, a farm trail, a children’s playground, vending area and car parking. Visitors are also able to watch the milking of the pedigree jersey dairy herd, to which the farm is home to, every afternoon from a glass fronted viewing gallery.

As well as these visitor attractions Sandwell Valley also includes four Local Nature Reserves (LNR):

- Forge Mill Lake – the lake was originally constructed to reduce flooding along the River Tame and is now home to a variety of wildlife, including visiting wildfowl. The lake has a circular footpath with links to the RSPB and Forge Mill Farm.
- Priory Woods – this reserve has numerous footpaths linking a range of habitats, including woodlands and pools.
- Sots Hole – this is the oldest area of woodland in Sandwell Valley.
- Sandwell Valley RSBP Reserve – this reserve is adjacent to the Forge Mill Lake LNR and consists of 25 acres of land that is leased from SMBC by the RSPB.
Development Options

The following actions have been identified to assist in the development of the Countryside Experience within Sandwell Valley:

- Achieve LNR designation for a further area of Sandwell Valley
- Improve facilities and displays at Sandwell Park Farm and Visitor Centre
- Improve facilities and displays at Forge Mill Farm
- Reduce the ‘carbon footprint’ of Sandwell Valley by investigating sustainable energy resources
- Investigate the potential for a Countryside Interpretation Centre
- Investigate the potential for a horticultural training centre, to include arboriculture, in partnership with Environmental Services, to be based at Sandwell Valley

Developing these areas will enhance the Countryside Experience of visitors to Sandwell Valley. This list of development options is not exhaustive and may develop over time. More detailed actions relating to these development options can be found in section 4.1 of this document.

3.2 Sport and Recreation

“To provide opportunities for a range of outdoor sports and recreation opportunities including: football, golf, walking/running, cycling, tennis, swimming, water sports and horse riding in a safe and green environment”

Current Offer

Being a large open green space within the urban West Midlands, Sandwell Valley is the perfect place to take part in a wide variety of sporting and recreational activities. Sandwell Valley currently offers a wide range of sport and recreation activity opportunities:

- Cycling – Sandwell Valley hosts part of the Sustrans National Cycle Route (Route 5) as well as having a number of paths and trails which cyclists can make use of.
- Walking – there is an extensive network of walking paths around Sandwell Valley and it also hosts the end point for the Beacon Way, a 25 mile route starting in Gentleshaw, Staffordshire.
- Football – there are a number of football pitches available for use on site which are supported by the King George V Pavilion; this houses changing and shower facilities, and public toilets.
- Horse Riding – as with the Walking offer within Sandwell Valley, there is an extensive network of bridleways available for use.
- Golf / Crazy Golf – an 8-hole public mini golf facility is available on the site along with a ‘Crazy Golf’ course.
- Tennis – there are tennis courts within Sandwell Valley which are available for use by the public.
- Water Sports – Swan Pool is the main focus for water based outdoor pursuits and leisure activities and is used by a number of water sport clubs. Currently, boating and wild swimming activities take place.
• Angling – again at Swan Pool, there are a large number of fishing platforms which are used by anglers in Sandwell Valley.

Development Options

The development of sporting and recreational facilities need to balanced against the opportunities to enhance biodiversity and nature conservation, as part of a larger area with potential for “zones” to be designated as Local Nature Reserves.

As part of the ‘Physical Activity, PE & Sports Strategy 2009 – 2014’ for Sandwell, 9 focus activities have been agreed upon. These are:

• Football
• Swimming
• Walking
• Running / Jogging
• Dance
• Group Exercise
• Green Gym
• Fitness Gyms
• Cycling
• Badminton

Utilising this development plan is an ideal opportunity to investigate the development options available to improve facilities for the focus activities which are already or can be hosted at Sandwell Valley. It will not be possible to include all of the 9 focus activities. Options for those activities which can be hosted at Sandwell Valley and are not already should be investigated.

In line with the above, there is the opportunity to take advantage of the London Olympics 2012 to drive up enthusiasm and participation in physical activity and support SMBC’s ‘Time to Get Active 5 x 30’ initiative which supports the NI 8 performance indicator.

This development plan is also an ideal opportunity to build upon the other sport and recreation activities which take place at Sandwell Valley and are not included in the 9 focus activities.

The following actions have been identified to assist in the development of the Sport and Recreation offer within Sandwell Valley:

• Investigate the opportunities available to build upon the facilities which support the 9 focus activities by:
  • Promote and develop existing walks
  • Promote safe cycle trails
  • Investigate opportunities for an off-road mountain bike trail
  • Investigate opportunities to introduce commercial cycle hire
  • Improve playing pitch surface and changing facilities
  • Investigate opportunities to support those of the 9 focus activities which are not currently hosted at Sandwell Valley which could be
  • Investigate opportunities for a ‘high ropes course’ to be sited at Sandwell Valley
• Investigate opportunities to offer an increased range of outdoor experiences and educational activities within Sandwell Valley
• Investigate developing flag-ship Play Pathfinder ‘play barn’ at Sandwell Valley
• Investigate the potential for an Outdoor Activities Centre to be based at Swan Pool
• Investigate the opportunities for an Equestrian Centre / horse rides / carriage rides to be available at Sandwell Valley

Developing these areas will enhance the Sport and Recreation offer available to visitors to Sandwell Valley. This list of development options is not exhaustive and may develop over time. More detailed actions relating to these development options can be found in section 4.2 of this document.

3.3 History and Heritage

“To record and interpret the history and heritage of Sandwell Valley, including the Priory, the Sand Well and the history of occupation, mining and farming techniques”

Current Offer

Within Sandwell Valley lies the site of Sandwell Priory, a scheduled ancient monument, and the ‘Sand Well’ or ‘Holy Well’. The location of the Well, in a beautiful and secluded valley, suited the religious purposes of a hermitage or priory and, during the 16th Century, Sandwell Priory was established with patronage from the Earl of Dartmouth. The remaining site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (S.A.M.) and is in need of some improvement.

The site is accessed via a partially surfaced path which leads from Sandwell Park Farm car park and there is limited visitor interpretation currently available.

Development Options

The “Sand Well” or “Holy Well” is of utmost importance to the borough of Sandwell, its residents and to all visitors to Sandwell Valley and it is vital that its current presentation is radically improved. New interpretation is required for both the Well and the Priory to maximise its potential to raise civic pride and its visitor potential.

As well as the Sandwell Priory and ‘Sand Well’ site the whole history of Sandwell Valley should be investigated as it has a long and varied one.

The following actions have been identified to assist in the development of the History and Heritage offer within Sandwell Valley:

• Improve the presentation and interpretation of the Sandwell Priory site

Developing these areas will enhance the History and Heritage offer available to visitors to Sandwell Valley. This list of development options is not exhaustive and may develop over time. More detailed actions relating to these development options can be found in section 4.3 of this document.
3.4 Shows and Events

“To provide large scale events and open air shows which complement the country park setting”

Current Offer

There is currently a programme of events offered by both the Shows & Events Team based within Cultural Services and the Sandwell Valley Management Team which takes place throughout the year. Two major events which are hosted at Sandwell Valley are the Sandwell Show and the Classic Car show; both take place on an annual basis. Many other successful events take place within Sandwell Valley some of which are organised by agencies external to SMBC.

Development Options

Through this development plan there is the opportunity to review the annual programme of events to help optimise attendances, potentially considering the relocation of existing events and bringing in new ones and to develop a USP for Sandwell Valley. As with all of the development options highlighted in this plan, it is necessary to balance the competing demands of the countryside setting and minimise any detrimental impact on the site. There may also be a need to modify the events programme to accommodate operating restrictions imposed by the Dartmouth Part Restoration Project.

The following actions have been identified to assist in the development of the History and Heritage offer within Sandwell Valley:

- Investigate the potential for a Music Festival to be host at Sandwell Valley
- Review the programme of shows and events and develop a USP for Sandwell Valley, ensuring that audience development is socially cohesive

Developing these areas will enhance the Show and Event offer available to visitors to Sandwell Valley. This list of development options is not exhaustive and may develop over time. More detailed actions relating to these development options can be found in section 4.4 of this document.

3.5 Visitor Experience

Current Offer

There is road signage directing visitors to Sandwell Valley although some can be confusing; some road signs direct visitors to Sandwell Park Farm whereas others to Sandwell Valley. Parking is available at Sandwell Valley for visitors but there can be a shortage on busy days and access to the site via the road network can prove to be a challenge. There is no direct bus service to Sandwell Valley.

Being only a twenty minute walk from West Bromwich Town Centre, Sandwell Valley can be accessed by foot through Dartmouth Park. With the current regeneration programme for West
Bromwich taking place, including the restoration of Dartmouth Park, this link to West Bromwich is a valuable asset to Sandwell Valley.

At Sandwell Park Farm and Forge Mill Farm there is the option for visitors to buy a limited range of foodstuffs and merchandise. The range of foodstuffs on offer are mainly sugar based and could be considered to be at odds with SMBC strategies on encouraging healthy eating.

**Development Options**

A Transport Assessment should be carried out for Sandwell Valley, including the assessment of all road signage directing visitors to Sandwell Valley and providing sustainable transport to and from Sandwell Valley. Also a Rights of Way Improvement Plan should be developed. Both the Transport Assessment and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan should then inform a Access Management Plan for Sandwell Valley which should help improve access to, from and around it.

Another area which should be considered for development is the provision of more amenities to visitors as, in a number of satisfaction surveys which have taken place, lack of amenities has been highlighted as a problem with the site.

The following actions have been identified to assist in the development of the Visitor Experience offered by Sandwell Valley:

- Develop spatial analysis of Sandwell Valley
- Improve access into and around Sandwell Valley by:
  - Carrying out a Transport Assessment – to include a review of road signage and sustainable transport options
  - Develop a Rights of Way Improvement Plan
  - Develop an Access Management Plan
  - Specifically improve access between Sandwell Park Farm and Forge Mill Farm
  - Specifically improve access between West Bromwich Town Centre and Sandwell Valley, via a ‘green bridge’ through Dartmouth Park
  - Investigate options for a ‘land train’ from and to West Bromwich Town Centre
- Review layout and use of Sandwell Valley Park Farm and Forge Mill Farm; to include improved reception, catering and people flows to increase income.
- Investigate the potential to change the range of foodstuffs and merchandise available at Sandwell Park Farm and Forge Mill Farm

Developing these areas will enhance the experience available to visitors to Sandwell Valley. This list of development options is not exhaustive and may develop over time. More detailed actions relating to these development options can be found in section 4.5 of this document.

### 3.6 Marketing

**Current Offer**

Although there is a wide range of promotional activities programmed and promotional information available, there is currently no coherent Marketing and Communication Strategy available for Sandwell Valley.
Development Options

The main action for marketing Sandwell Valley should be the development of a Marketing and Communications Strategy which focuses on increasing new, unique visitors to Sandwell Valley whilst retaining the current ones. The Marketing and Communication Strategy should be developed in line with SMBC’s ‘Corporate Branding Protocol and Guidelines’ and ‘The New Sandwell Corporate Identity – Usage Guidelines’. The Strategy should include the guidelines on producing all promotional information and a standard approach to signage across Sandwell Valley (linking in with developing the Visitor Experience.)

Once the Marketing and Communications Strategy has been completed a Marketing and Communication Plan should be developed and then implemented.

The following actions have been identified to assist in Marketing Sandwell Valley:

- Develop a Marketing and Communication Plan
- Develop and identity / logo for the whole of Sandwell Valley
- Produce single promotional leaflet encompassing the complete Sandwell Valley offer
- Produce a ‘Guide to Sandwell Valley’; to include flora and fauna

Developing these areas will enhance the profile of Sandwell Valley and attract new unique visitors. This list of development options is not exhaustive and may develop over time. More detailed actions relating to these development options can be found in section 4.6 of this document.
4.0 Development Action Plan

4.1 Countryside Experience Development Action Plan

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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<th>Completion Year</th>
<th>RAG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Achieve Local Nature Reserve designation for a further area of Sandwell Valley</td>
<td>Chris Moore</td>
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<td>Red</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Improve facilities and displays at Sandwell Park Farm and Visitor Centre</td>
<td>John Stokes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Improve facilities and displays at Forge Mill Farm</td>
<td>John Stokes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Reduce the ‘carbon footprint’ of Sandwell Valley by investigating sustainable energy resources</td>
<td>Paul Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5 Investigate the potential for a Countryside Interpretation Centre</td>
<td>John Stokes, Frank Caldwell</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.6 Investigate the potential for a horticultural training centre, to include arboriculture, in partnership with Environmental Services, to be based at Sandwell Valley.</td>
<td>John Satchwell, Martin Brayford</td>
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## 4.2 Sport and Recreation Development Action Plan

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<tr>
<td>2.1 Promote and develop existing walks</td>
<td>Paul Smith</td>
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<td>2.2 Promote safe cycle trails</td>
<td>John McIllroy</td>
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<td>2.3 Investigate opportunities for an off-road mountain bike trail</td>
<td>Matt Darby</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.4 Investigate opportunities to introduce commercial cycle hire</td>
<td>Alan Goodman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amber</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5 Improve playing pitch surface and changing facilities</td>
<td>David Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.6 Investigate opportunities to support those of the 9 focus activities which are not currently hosted at Sandwell Valley which could be</td>
<td>Jayne Piller</td>
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<td>Green</td>
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<td>2.7 Investigate opportunities for a ‘high ropes course’ to be sited at Sandwell Valley</td>
<td>Chris Jones</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.8 Investigate opportunities to offer an increased range of outdoor experiences and educational activities within Sandwell Valley</td>
<td>Chris Jones</td>
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<td>Green</td>
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<td>2.9 Investigate developing flag-ship Play Pathfinder ‘play barn’ at Sandwell Valley</td>
<td>John Satchwell</td>
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<td>Amber</td>
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<td>2.10 Investigate the potential for an Outdoor Activities Centre to be</td>
<td>Keith Heyes</td>
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### 4.3 History and Heritage Development Action Plan

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<td>Based at Swan Pool</td>
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<td>2.11 Investigate the opportunities for an Equestrian Centre / horse rides / carriage rides to be available at Sandwell Valley</td>
<td>Chris Moore</td>
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### 4.4 Shows and Events Development Action Plan

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<td>4.1 Investigate the potential for a Music Festival to be hosted at Sandwell Valley</td>
<td>Tony Potter</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Review the programme of shows and events and develop a USP for Sandwell Valley, ensuring that</td>
<td>Tony Potter</td>
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4.5 Visitor Experience Development Action Plan

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<td>audience development is socially cohesive</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Develop spatial analysis of Sandwell Valley</td>
<td>Chris Jones</td>
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<td>5.2 Carry out a Transport Assessment – to include a review of road signage and sustainable transport options</td>
<td>Steve Handley</td>
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<td>5.3 Develop a Rights of Way Improvement Plan</td>
<td>John McIlroy</td>
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<td>5.4 Develop an Access Management Plan</td>
<td>John McIlroy</td>
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<td>5.5 Specifically improve access between Sandwell Park Farm and Forge Mill Farm</td>
<td>Chris Moore</td>
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<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.6 Specifically improve access between West Bromwich Town Centre and Sandwell Valley, via a ‘green bridge’ through Dartmouth Park</td>
<td>Alan Goodman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Investigate options for a ‘land train’ from and to West Bromwich town</td>
<td>Chris Moore</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>
### 5.8 Review layout and use of Sandwell Valley Park Farm and Forge Mill Farm; to include improved reception, catering and people flows to increase income

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### 4.6 Marketing Development Action Plan

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<tr>
<td>6.1 Develop a Marketing and Communication Plan</td>
<td>John Stokes, Manjit Kaur</td>
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<td>6.2 Develop and identity / logo for the whole of Sandwell Valley</td>
<td>John Stokes, Manjit Kaur</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3 Produce single promotional leaflet encompassing the complete Sandwell Valley offer</td>
<td>John Stokes, Manjit Kaur</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4 Produce a ‘Guide to Sandwell Valley’; to include flora and fauna</td>
<td>John Stokes, Manjit Kaur</td>
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