

# Linking Communities and Woodlands

Llanhilleth Miners Institute, Blaenau Gwent

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2009



## Workshop - Community Woodland networking and support

As people introduced themselves and the groups they represented, the wide range and depth of experience of those present emerged.

The interests, activities and concerns raised included:

- What to do with an under-managed woodland resource – and how to do it
- Need for funding to carry out maintenance work following the completion of access improvement works
- Developing a new wildlife centre
- Working with young people in the village to develop parameters for the use of newly improved woodland space and access paths
- Woodland activities developed by a schools cluster as a transition activity – having created a ‘book in the box’, the next goal is to set up a woodland garden at the Royal Horticultural Show at Chelsea.
- The use of time banking as an incentive to become actively involved in a local woodland project
- Leasing a woodland area
- Broadleaved woodland restoration
- Ways of getting people involved in woodlands through wildlife surveys such as recording and monitoring bird nesting sites
- Networking, tool hire and the need for a strategy for a designated area (e.g. a valley) to avoid duplication and disjointed activities
- Where to find out information about funding opportunities – big organisations can allocate staff time to this, but for the small group finding the appropriate funding source and then filling in the forms is a major drain on resources.
- Sharing experience – big groups can help smaller ones by joining them and sharing experience and resources.

- Making use of Keep Wales Tidy who offer training and small grants (up to £1,000 for revenue costs) which can be applied for on an annual basis
  - Where to get help doing physical work which you haven't the resources to undertake yourself – try the Probation Service
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Discussion followed around three themes:

## **1. How do you get information (especially about funding opportunities)**

Sources of information identified included:

- Keep Wales Tidy
- Communities First
- CVCs
- WCVA website
- Grantfinder
- Local Biodiversity Partnership
- Local Community Councils (for small amounts of money)
- Websites

Many people seemed to be setting about raising funds on their own but said that it would help to:

- have someone who knew their way around
- have examples of what is working elsewhere
- bounce ideas off against others
- know the current buzz words to put in grant applications
- know the current themes for attracting funding

Other information needs identified were:

- what constitutes 'best practice' and what this means at different project phases e.g. start, middle and continuation
- where to get best value (e.g. insurance)
- how to decide on a company structure which is 'fit for purpose'
- opportunities for partnership working (this is now a requirement for some funding)
- information specifically relevant to community woodlands and the needs of community woodland groups
- match funding and how to use volunteer hours (Environment Wales has some helpful information about costing volunteer time)

## **2. Engagement with Welsh Assembly Government and influencing policy makers and others.**

Various issues were raised:

- Need for reference to appropriate policies/strategies in grant applications – this can be very time consuming and it would be helpful to have someone to 'join up the pieces'. *It was suggested that people make use of contact points in relevant documents – a good source of help for picking out appropriate phrases.*

- Trying to get political support for a project – knowing which Assembly Member might take a (political) interest in your project
- Is this something which is already being done effectively by the big organisations who talk directly to politicians? Might Llais y Goedwig be ‘treading on toes’ by undertaking these activities?  
*The discussion indicated that most groups had very limited resources and invested these in making things happen at the local level. However, there were messages from those involved with community woodlands which needed to be got across to Welsh Assembly Government (e.g. funding for maintenance such as fencing and bracken control, not just for new initiatives). The messages would be reinforced if delivered by different organisations.*
- Seek to work directly with organisations such as Big Lottery to make the application process more accessible

### **3. Networking and Communications**

- Website please – featuring such things as: regular newsletter (avoid paper copies wherever possible); information pages; case studies/examples of things that work; ‘help needed’ page; opportunities for sharing resources; information about useful organisations and what they do.
- More networking events – the value of such events is in the sharing of local knowledge, problems and best practice (but they shouldn’t be held too often)
- But there were concerns about the need for bilingualism – it was requested that there be separate Welsh and English pages