



Notes from Policy group meeting

21 July 2011

Attendance

Present:

Nick Barnes (Coppicewood College)
Mike Bithell (Moelyci Coppice Group)
Jo Cooper (Llais y Goedwig)
Roger Davies (Golygfa Gwydyr)
Barbara Goodwin (Coppicewood College)
James Kendall (Groundwork North Wales)
Alasdair Kilpatrick (National Trust – Faenol)
Ben Roberts (National Trust – Faenol)
Fay Sharpley (Pobl y Fforest)
Carol Thomas (Tir Coed)
Dai Williams (Transition town, Holywell)
Jenny Wong (Coetir Mynydd)

Apologies:

Mel Chandler (Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust)
Tim Cummins
Adrian Farey (Elwy Woods Co-operative)
Anna Jenkins
Adam Thorogood (Coetiroedd Dyfi Woodlands)
Greg Wilkinson

‘Customers’ for the manifesto

Before starting work on the manifesto it was suggested that it would be useful to think about who the manifesto was for as each potential ‘customer’ is likely to need material presented in different ways and may even have differing priorities. It was agreed that for policy makers in particular the manifesto would need to be presented in terms of where it compliments or strengthens delivery of existing government policies. It was proposed that there are three distinct ‘customers’ or audiences for the Manifesto these being:

- 1) Welsh Government
- 2) Communities – with regard to inclusion and cohesion
- 3) Business – because we would like them to be partners in achieving the manifesto – they may also be a source of funding and we may be able to help them enhance their corporate social responsibility.

Brainstorming

Everyone wrote out their ideas of what the forests could mean to life in Wales in the future. The intention was to use these to develop a vision for the future. Similar ideas were put together and five groups emerged. The headings that emerged were (the full listing of the unedited ideas is given in the Annex):

Forests in Wales should:

- be a component of a healthy and biodiverse landscape
- be a source of material resources, used to meet local needs
- support local employment

- contribute to personal well-being (e.g. an experience of nature, self-worth, income)
- be a focus for community well-being and development (inclusion, cohesion and empowerment)
- contribute to learning and education

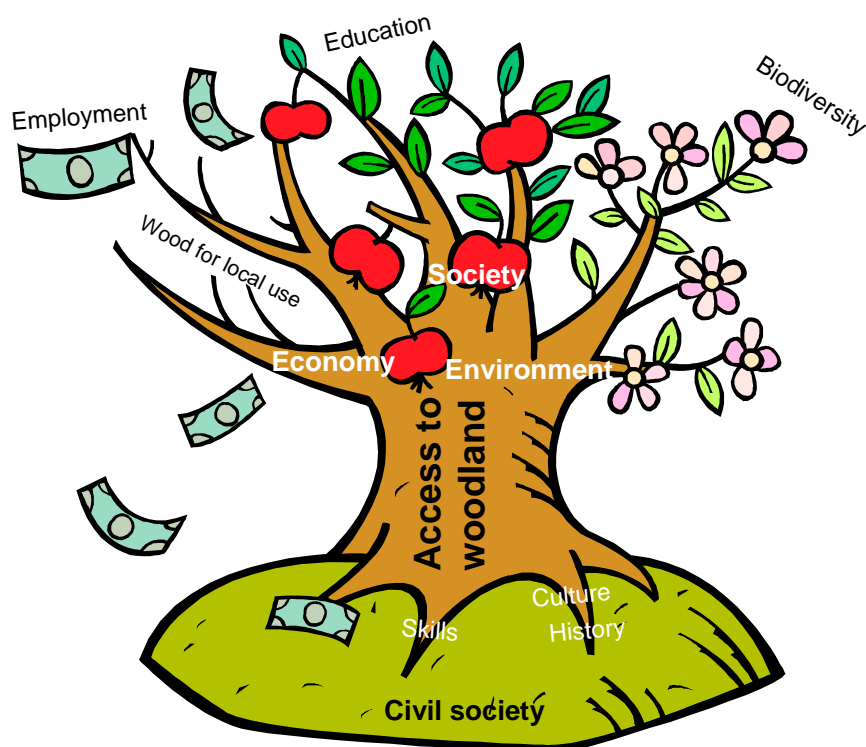
The discussions related to the ideas and groupings highlighted the degree of interdependence and overlap between them.

Visualisation

In order to create a high impact concept to convey a vision for woodlands in Wales we spent some time looking at various ways we could visualise the relationships between woodlands and people. We came up with two ideas each of which has some merit as a metaphor for the contribution community woodlands can make to future sustainability.

Tree

A tree is a powerful and obvious symbol and there are various ways this can be used as a metaphor. The canopy can represent a cloud of outputs such as ‘employment’, ‘education’, ‘biodiversity’ etc, we could have these supported by three main branches to represent ‘environment’, ‘social’ and ‘economic’ pillars of sustainability. The soil could be civil society with the roots of the tree representing resources within the community such as ‘skills’, ‘history’, ‘culture’. The trunk is the most important part and allows people to create the benefits represented by the canopy. Several alternatives for the trunk were suggested including ‘right to manage’, ‘assets’, and ‘local empowerment’ – after some discussion we thought the critical point in all of these was ‘access’ ie the ability to make use of a woodland. Pushing the analogy further, leaves falling from the tree such as learning, mulch the soil by creating skills which feed further growth of the tree. Seeds falling from the tree, fall into the soil and germinate as new community woodland groups which grow up to form a wood. As a powerful and appealing metaphor, a tree may be most appropriate image for conveying our message to civil society and communities.



Egg

Several of the concepts we elucidated were expressed in terms of well-being or can be conceptualised in this way. Well-being as a concept is currently being explored by policy makers in the form of the 'Happiness index' being developed by the Office for National Statistics and also within the Natural Environment Framework (A Living Wales). Prescott-Allen visualised well-being in the form of an 'egg of sustainability' with the white as the environment which nurtures and contains the yolk of human society:



In this model community access to woodlands will improve both human and environmental well-being and thus help to create a more sustainable future. Unlike the previous 'three-legged stool' of sustainability this model does not explicitly include economics as it is not a separate force but part of human society and simply one of many ways of valuing human action. Many community groups are voluntary in nature and many benefits are economically intangible and perhaps we need a new way of quantifying exchanges between people and their environment.

Interestingly we also observed that well being is something which applies at a range of scales. For example, a walk in the woods contributes to personal well-being by a fulfilling a desire for quiet contemplation, represents recreational use by the local community and a (tiny) improvement to national health. All are a positive contribution to human well-being. Likewise, we can conceptualise environmental well-being as starting with a healthy tree through a better managed wood to a ecologically diverse and healthy landscape. Into this model we propose that linking these elements together: having people plant trees, allowing a community to work in a wood and putting in place government incentives for landscape scale action are what is required to achieve sustainability. This is more of a conceptual model than a metaphor and is harder to visualise as a simple image but is a more powerful tool for identifying opportunities and barriers to action.

Identifying barriers

Having gone some way towards putting together a vision the next step was to identify what actions we think are needed to make it happen. Action is obviously required at many levels but in this session we focussed on identifying barriers which require a change in policy or action at national level which could be facilitated by the Welsh Government. This is because we find ourselves at a unique time of opportunity with the government just being granted new powers coupled with the introduction of the ecosystem approach and a renewed emphasis on community empowerment.

Forestry is also high on the political agenda with the recent furore over the proposal sale of state forests in England.

Two groups were formed to consider messages to policy-makers to include in the manifesto.

Group 1

This group focussed on 'wellbeing' and the contribution woodlands can make towards an increase in community wellbeing across Wales.

For a community to work (to have high levels of well-being) it needs to have the following attributes:

- sense of belonging
- social
- self-esteem
- combat isolation
- involvement
- skills
- team working
- environment
- employment
- enterprise opportunities

These attributes can be approached in two ways: firstly via employment, so creation of employment and enterprise opportunities is critical; and secondly through community actions, eg support groups, project groups, community learning.

A successful group needs to have common goals, objectives and purpose to tackle each of the above attributes. Some of the barriers that communities face include:

- Engagement of community members – volunteering and conflicts with employment and unemployment (rules and beliefs)
- Instilling a 'can-do' belief in community action
- Current perceptions about woodlands – exclusion, commercial, unsafe
- Time commitments of individual community members
- Physical access to woodlands – roads, tracks, slopes, private land restrictions
- Transport – getting people into the woods, getting resources out
- Future focus on urban woodland creation seen as non-beneficial to rural Wales
- Lack of cohesion in forestry industry

In order to tackle barriers a manifesto needs to address:

- A mechanism to help communities approach woodland owners to explore potentials for wellbeing.
- Establishment of a 'common right to woodland' – a means for enabling community access for community benefit
- Identify woodland stewardship regulations (eg like building regulations) for owners and communities.

Barriers to working in the woods:

- Regulations related to employment and the work place

- Insurance – public liability and employers liability
- Chainsaw regulations and the cost of compliances etc
- Responsibility of owner of woodland towards individuals and groups operating on their land, eg liabilities

The manifesto should propose a toolkit, aimed at communities, which proposes engagement pathways with woodland owners (large and small woodlands) and provides models of cooperative working or land agreements to cover specific and generic community uses.

Conflicting uses of woodland which will need to be addresses include:

- crime
- foraging
- accessibility
- extraction of firewood
- tourism
- recreation

For communities to benefit from engagement with woodland management their approach must:

- be economically viable using correct management practices
- take account of cultural memory of woodland uses and practices
- accept that changes to woodland (thinning, harvesting, building community resources) affects views, rights, access and will have environmental impacts that will need to be identified and addressed.

For a manifesto to be successful education is needed:

- on woodland management
- woodland skills
- entrepreneurship
- good practice in woodland management

More barriers to successful community engagement with woodlands:

- Planning permission is a significant barrier to many activities especially those that require structures or individual/families living in the woodland where this is a requirement of the action plan
- Materialism is a barrier as it undervalues non-market valued outcomes, eg increased happiness
- Financial contribution - all parties need to be involved at the outset to agree costs and contributions. We need to explore cooperative/mutual working and exchange of services/benefits in place of cash, eg time banking, skills exchange
- Need examples of well managed community woodlands– how do they work, what are their management practices?

Example of Coppicewood College: woodland owner is a plumber/engineer who has granted the group a 10 year lease to manage wood for the future with a right to use the woods for educational purposes. This has created income for 3 people (instructing courses) and a social network to share experiences. The exchanges are benefits rather than cash.

Group 2

This group worked by identifying critical broken links on the community/woodland interface at a range of scales with suggestions for how these might be remedied.

Silviculture links trees to woodland and is badly broken: use of wood for energy is increasing and we anticipate increasing future demand for building materials which means we need to diversify products from the woods. This will require a greater range of species including naturally durable timbers and a move away from a one-size fits all approach to silviculture to introduce more resilience and variety. Products should be grown to meet local demand and feed into local mills.

Suggestions:

- Increase species mix
- Encourage variety in silviculture

Woodlands are a valuable resource but it can be very difficult for local people to access them either because they are not able to bid to purchase the timber or because there is no physical access (tracks) to the woods.

Suggestions:

- Create access tracks in new and existing woodland
- Facilitate access to standing timber market for small enterprises and local buyers (break down large contracts into smaller lots)

People as individuals need employment, experience and skills to make the most of the opportunities presented by woodlands. There are already several ways this is being addressed through formal education initiatives e.g. Pathways to learning, apprenticeships and woodland visits for school children but little integration of forestry in the formal curriculum. Nevertheless, there is a need for more vocational courses in line with the vision of active community woodland groups and provision for adult learning and skill development.

Suggestions:

- Incorporate forestry into the secondary school curriculum
- Provide post-school (25+) free or subsidised learning in woodland skills

Communities need to be able to access woodlands. The easiest way of achieving this is if the Welsh Government permits groups to use (grant usufruct) and manage woodland and purchase timber from it's own woodland estate. The Natural Environment Framework makes much of local environmental stewardship – the best way to do this would be to bring together all local owners and communities.

Suggestions:

- Make the Welsh Government woodland estate available for local communities to use, manage and purchase timber
- Create local woodland fora to include all communities and woodland owners within a landscape unit e.g. a valley

Woodlands within a landscape need to individually be in good condition and work together. We need to know more about the frequency and nature of changes in woodland ownership which suggests a survey of woodlands for sale. Continuity of management both in time and across the landscape is essential in woodlands especially where invasive species need to be controlled. Where possible new plantings should join up adjacent woods.

Suggestions:

- Introduce a duty of care for woods to ensure their future health and production

- Make management plans a condition of grant support for woodland creation and management

We also discussed planning regulations as they pertain to living in woodlands. Under existing rules, homes in the woods are only allowed if the prospective resident can demonstrate they need to be on site and obtain a high proportion of their income from woodland activities. More people would be able to live in and use woodland if these rules were relaxed. But if they were relaxed so it became possible for any owner to build a holiday cabin in the woods then there is a risk woods will be fragmented and fill with holiday cabins. This may be great for the individual people but would this be a good thing to happen? This is a difficult issue we were not able to resolve and further information was needed before we could suggest what would be best in terms of planning control in woodlands (TAN6).

Written submissions

Two people who gave apologies submitted ideas for consideration by the meeting. These were circulated and many of the ideas were endorsed by the group. The main points raised in these submissions are reported here.

Supply of wood products for local use

One of the key aims of the Welsh Government should be to promote enterprise and jobs in the timber sector. This is about re-establishing the woodland economy within Wales which could be the main driver for economic regeneration of rural areas. This needs to work alongside capacity building – training/skills development. Also needs to encompass local private and community based social enterprises and promote partnership working between them, FCW and other timber related agencies (compatible aims could be better realised, eg CCF).

FCW's Wales Harvesting and Marketing (WHAM) team need to consider their selection and contracting arrangement to encourage and prioritise local contracts over larger national contracting of commercial scale forestry operations. A weighting scheme could be applied (as tested in the 2010/11 firewood contracting) where local benefit (income, jobs, needs) was demonstrable.

A weighting towards local contracts would stimulate small-scale forestry techniques which are better suited to social enterprises and would increase working in inaccessible woods (avoided by the big machinery/contractors). Reduced requirements for track laying would reduce costs. Share schemes between local contractors for tractors, forwarders etc could be considered or local contractors could pick this up as a business opportunity. Local product placement and delivery within 5 miles from source would really help with carbon emissions and reduced costs.

We need to source and plan for high value Larch/Douglas for construction materials. At present within large scale commercial forestry such timber gets eaten up within large scale contracts for posts/chipboard which does not require or command higher quality or valued timber. Good quality material does exist but needs selecting for construction and selective harvesting (by local enterprise). What is the demand for such material, how can this be met?

FCW and other agencies need to help with stimulating the small scale (domestic) wood fuel market.

Non-productive woodland parcels need bringing into management and this is where local enterprise could benefit. Ways and means of engagement and encouragement of such woodland owners needs to be considered – case studies.

Ability to process timber on-site will be important for small enterprises. Security issues and techniques (eg stacking half-cut timber lengths of 1.5 m) need exploring. This will reduce transport costs and requirement for a central storage/processing yard.

Woodlands and education

There is a huge opportunity for collaboration between local woodland owners and woodland educationalists to provide **integrated and joined up service provision for** appropriate and truly supportive basic skills education and training for young people and identified adult groups.

This training / education programme could be the basis of a **social enterprise based business** providing a variety of basic and professional training in outdoor activities and services and a peer and intergenerational mentoring and volunteering scheme.

Services and advice provided:

Woodland management services , timber based products and coppice crafts for sale to local and national outlets.

Sustainable land management services to: private businesses and local schools etc.

Wildlife conservation and habitat management .

Qualifications - provided to develop trainees learning 'journey'

A programme of (person centred) , personal development modules

OCNs -

Woodland Management

Countryside and Wildlife Conservation

Sustainable land management and design

Forest School Leaders and Assistants and of course Volunteers

Outdoor Leaders

Health & Safety

First Aid Training

Admin and website development and media marketing

CPD Training - delivered to teachers and other professionals

Outdoor play training programme

Outdoor youth work programme

School grounds development training and advice

Permaculture and Sustainable school grounds

Emotional Intelligence

Editors note: there are several providers of woodland education already operating as social enterprises. What would be useful would be to examine this business model in more detail to provide structured advice to new entrants but also to consider (a) how many enterprises of this type are appropriate for Wales so we don't saturate the market, (b) fuller integration and 'mainstreaming' of woodland education provision and (c) careful consideration of the scale and type of employment/volunteer opportunities for people who have undergone training.

Annex – List of ideas arising from the brainstorming session

Part of healthy and biodiverse landscape

- Healthy Landscape- functions at many levels, biodiversity- habitats
 - Social
 - Cultural
 - Economic
- Haven for biodiversity / tourist attraction / improve “feeling” of surrounding area
- Opportunities for diverse wildlife/ flora, including wild areas
- Sensitive to landscape and biodiversity
- Stable environment
- Welsh forests as fantastic examples of a wide range of biodiversity enjoyed in a sensitive way by an inclusive and wide range of people

Material resources .. for local use and to meet needs

- Recreation that can co-exist with other woodland uses
- Woodlands in Wales are accessible to opportunities to develop social, economic and environmental projects in a sustainable way by small and large organisations.
- Access/ ownership
- Serve the people of Wales
- Trees for life/ breathing/ CO2 reduction etc
- Community resource
- Self sufficiency?
- Raw materials to provide for people’s needs
 - Building
 - Firewood
 - Employment
- Fuel, food, wood products for the local community
- Useful management of available wood as a resource
 - Fuel
 - Craft
 - Coppicing
- A future sustainable source of building materials and energy source to fuel buildings.

Employment

- Opportunities for traditional skills where health is improved naturally
- Delivering economic benefit to local communities
- Rural employment/ life in woods/ keep it local
- Opportunities for involvement/ employment
- Provide employment/ contribute to economy/ income generation
- Employment/ meaning of life
- Providing **real** (paid) jobs and career structures- directly and indirectly

Experience of nature (connecting people with the natural world)

- A valued part of the community and landscape bringing employment, pleasure and environmental benefits. People should have the opportunity to **connect** with their woodlands.
- Awareness of natural processes and interdependency.
- Sense of place, recreation

- A natural place near your home.
- Feedback with nature
 - Healing
 - Creativity
 - Growth and nurture

Community well-being

- Contributing to a sense of well-being
- Sense of history (cultural continuity)
- Linking with local communities- a sense of place- a feeling of connection and belonging rather than ownership- distance of 'absentee landlord'
- Community cohesion
- Woodlands contribute to social development
- Woodlands should be inclusive and have something for the **all** in the community e.g. covering
 - Enterprise
 - Social
 - Public
 - Private
 - Employment
 - All ages/ backgrounds
 - All needs
 - Learning
 - Welfare
 - Leisure etc

Sometimes projects tend to be too niche and the community doesn't engage. "Every woodland is for everyone". Business approach- find customers needs first then develop

Education (curriculum outputs)

- Education for future generations to appreciate and continue sustainable woodland use.
- Education, knowledge, skills
- Recreation, education, community focus
- Woodlands should be familiar to children and young people so they understand how they work and how they **could** work.
- A place for learning (about nature, environment, skills)