

Advisory Note 3

Defining objectives (Deciding what to do)

Following on from Advisory Notes 1 and 2, *Getting to know your community* and *Getting to know your woods*, the next step is to pull this information together and define objectives for your community woodland. This is a key step in putting together your woodland management plan. The purpose of this Advisory Note is to demystify this process and give some practical examples of how some community woodland groups have arrived at objectives for their woodland.

What is an objective?

Objectives are simply statements of what you want to do, achieve or aim for; they are goals and way markers. In a community woodland there may be a wide range of objectives, for example:

- **Amenity** – the availability of the site for people to use and enjoy
- **Recreation** – the use of the site by the community and wider public for activities such as walking, running, biking or bird watching
- **Conservation** – the preservation and enhancement of wildlife habitats, species and historic features
- **Social services** – this can encompass a wide range of activities such as green gyms, education and youth activities
- **Community development** – a focus for co-operation and joint action
- **Commercial** – providing an opportunity for income and employment through sales of tree and woodland products

Objectives should be time-linked; it is usual to have a set of long, medium and short term objectives, where success in the short term contributes to achieving your longer term goals.

Why set objectives?

Setting objectives allows you to decide what you are going to do, when it is going to happen and how long it should take. The process of agreeing on objectives is particularly important when undertaking community woodland management as it is the key to creating a sense of purpose and cohesion. It will help ensure that individual projects and activities, often from a diverse

group of people, contribute to the shared goals of the group. Organising ideas into objectives can prevent you from feeling overwhelmed by the amount of things that need to be done and it can help you see how you are progressing towards your longer term goals.

The trees that make up your woodland will live for a long time; hopefully the woodland itself will grow and develop indefinitely, and people will continue to enjoy and look after the woodland well into the future. It is therefore important to have long term objectives whilst having realisable activities that bring you step by step towards these long term goals.

How to set objectives?

Step 1: Identify the users and stakeholders

These include anyone involved in or affected by the management of your woodland and the activities that take place in it, e.g. people who live close by, neighbouring land owners, local biodiversity experts, local enterprises and conservation volunteers.

Our experience has been that it is really important to identify all the stakeholders who currently use or have an interest in the woodlands. The more people are involved and the greater your connection to your local community, the better. For more details see the Advisory Note 1 *Getting to know your community*.

Step 2: Identify objectives and activities

Where do the ideas come from? Based on the experience of Llais y Goedwig members, here are some ideas of how objectives can be set:

- community meetings
- questionnaires
- visiting concerned stakeholders to ask questions to draw out their issues and aspirations
- making use of existing documents and literature
- speaking with people passing through the woodland
- stakeholder workshops to discuss and reach a consensus on different ideas

- using the findings of surveys undertaken when getting to know your community

Different things work for different groups and communities and it depends on what resources you have, how much time, and who is doing it. If you have tried to 'get to know your community', do try and link the wider concerns and needs of your community with your future woodland hopes and aspirations.

Blaen Brân community woodland chose to use several ways to generate a list of objectives. Whatever methods you choose, the key is to write everything down.

One really simple but effective idea is to invite contributions on large 'Post It notes' – these are easy to display on a large board and to move around or to re-write.

Step 3: Structuring your objectives

Once the fun bit has been done and you have a long list of ideas and aspirations, the next step is to try and organise these. Stating objectives effectively isn't straightforward and with planning terms such as 'goal', 'vision', 'purpose', 'objective', 'output', 'target', 'mission', 'strategy', 'tactics'... it is easy to see where confusions can arise. There is a whole 'management speak' out there but don't get put off by this; choose words that have meaning for you and the people in your group and community.

Once phrased, it can be helpful to write each objective on separate sheets of paper or cards. You can then lay out the objectives in sequence with the long term or higher objectives at one end and the short term or lower objectives and activities at the other end. Ideally, this is done together with a group of stakeholders, as people will often bounce ideas off each other and challenge assumptions, with the resulting product being richer, more rounded and logical, and helps to ensure no interest group is left out.

Except for the very long term statement (the 'vision'), the language you use should be strong and achievable, e.g. "Will maximise", "will manage", "will involve", rather than "should increase", "will try to enlarge".

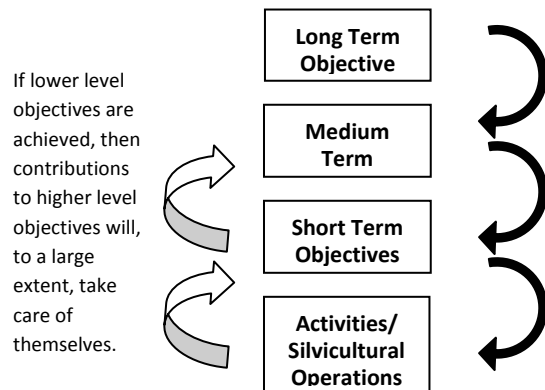
For the structure to begin to work, it is important that the objective statements at the lower levels contribute to the objectives at the higher levels.

Meeting to set objectives



Photo: Nick Roche

A cascade of objectives



David Williams, secretary of Blaen Brân community woodland group in South East Wales, describes how their group identified objectives for their community woodland:

"we started with a board discussion, followed by an initial public meeting. We also did an exercise where we went out to the woodland one weekend with a questionnaire, and spoke to people using the woodland to get their views and ideas. I think we spoke to around 25 different people/groups over a span of ages from 10 to 80.

We also sent the questionnaire out to our members. To get ongoing feedback we have an 'open forum' session at each of our AGMs to hear ideas, suggestions and views, which brought out things like riding access, having some joint social events with other organisations, and having a series of different walks."

Fay Sharpley, of Pobl y Fforest community woodland near Brechfa, reflects on the difficulties encountered when objectives are not set effectively:

“Pobl y Fforest emerged from meetings over a two year period, initially people coming together in a fairly informal way sharing ideas and opinions about access to and management of Brechfa Forest and latterly more formally with well attended open meetings, resulting in the setting up of the constituted group.

Objectives were never set as such - it was more a matter of crystallisation around a wide range of ideas which people wanted to take forward. As result of this, the de facto objectives were those which were backed by the most forceful personalities. This led to a failure to harmonise the aims into an overall plan and a lack of cohesion between projects, and less has been achieved than might otherwise have been hoped for.”

Roger Davies, secretary of Golygfa Gwydyr in North Wales, describes how their group identified objectives for their community woodland:

“Golygfa Gwydyr came into being after the community got together to stop the commercial development of an area of natural outstanding beauty. Members of the action group each expressed ongoing community needs which were discussed and expanded at an open meeting and agreed as objectives for a formally constituted group.

At a later community appraisal event the objectives were once again tested against proposals for community action put forward by community members. These actions were then prioritised by the community and formed the basis of the group’s action plan.”

As a general framework, the objectives can be organised in the following way:

- Very long term – 40 years + (sometimes called ‘vision’)
- Long term objectives – 20 to 40 years
- Medium term objectives – 10 to 20 years
- Short term objectives – 5 to 10 years

Jenny Wong, Secretary to Coetir Mynydd in North Wales, describes how their group identified objectives for their community woodland:

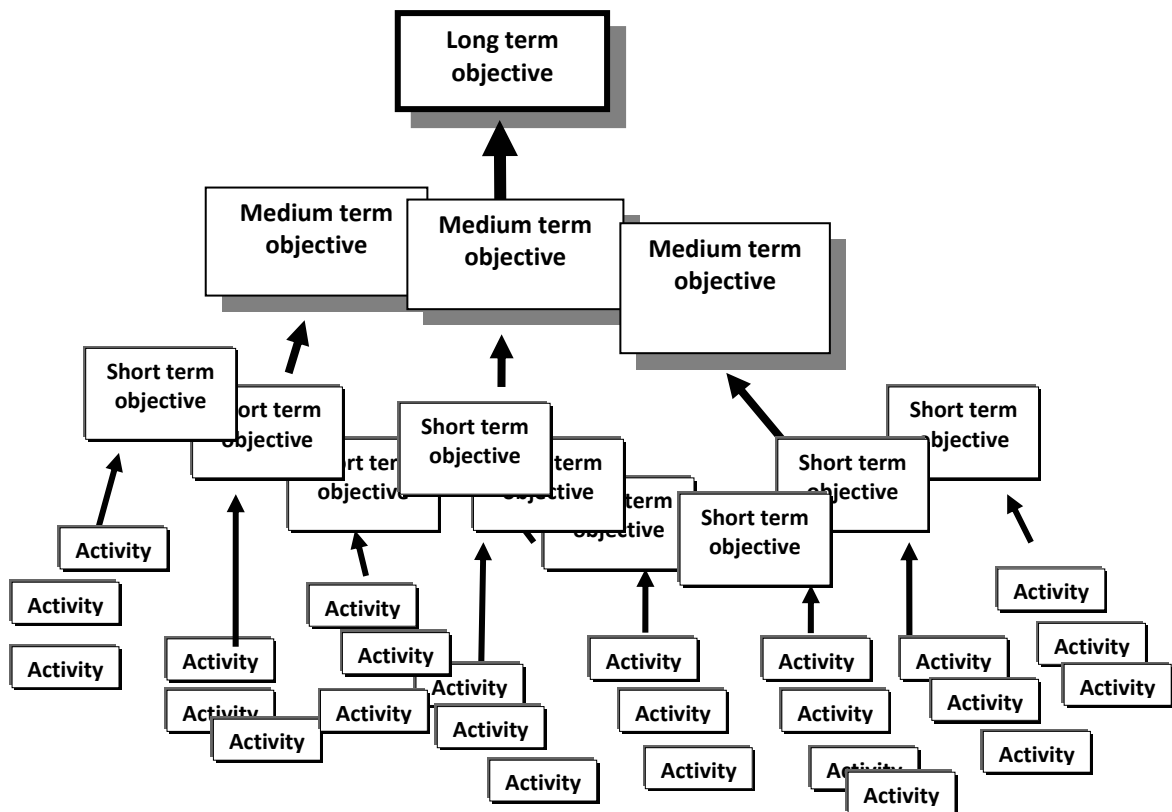
“Coetir Mynydd was a new community woodland group and one of the first things we did, even before we had bought the woodland was to start work on the management objectives. We had a public meeting in the village hall and this generated lots of ideas, many of which conflicted. This was followed up with a walk in the woods with many members of the local community as well as experts in woodland conservation. The most frequent comments during the walk were ‘just leave the woodlands as they are’ and ‘it’s a beautiful, natural place’. We interpreted this as a long term hands-off conservation objective which meant medium and short term objectives were mostly concerned with remedial work to boundaries and paths.

These objectives were then presented to the village at the summer fête. It was interesting to note that rather than endorsement of acceptable ideas we got a negative reaction to ideas people didn’t want – so we ended up whittling down objectives to those that no-one objected to.”



- Activities – the programme for the next 5 years

Once objectives have been categorised by timescale and importance, lower level (short and medium term) objectives that relate to a single higher level objective should be grouped together. The emerging structure would then look something like the roots of a tree – as shown below.



Long Term	The provision and maintenance of the Coed Gwaun-Y-Ffeiriad area of Upper Cwmbrân, to advance education of the public in good forest management, provide recreational facilities, and to encourage good forest practice through consultation and environmental assessments		
Medium-Term	Increase involvement of local schools and youth groups	Improve access for recreational use of the woodland	Improve flora and fire reduction by controlling bracken
Short-Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construct an area suitable for a forest school and youth camping area Designate areas for adoption by schools or youth organisations Construct educational trails with information on web 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thin larch to improve access for walkers and create viewpoints Upgrade top forest road and make it suitable for wheelchair use Create a number of viewpoints with log seats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular bracken bashing volunteer days

Source: Adapted from the Management Plan of Blaen Brân Community Woodland (2007)

Thus in order for medium and long term objectives to be realised, they must have supporting lower level activities. You may find that not all short term activities you have thought of actually contribute to a longer term objective. If this is the case, you may need to abandon 'floating' activities to focus resources on those that support your long term objectives. Once your set of objectives has been developed it should be transferred to a more formal table (as in the example provided by Blaen Brân community woodland) and shared with interested parties for comments.

How to deal with conflicting objectives?

Not all objectives are compatible or complementary e.g. mountain bikers and horses or commercial and conservation objectives. It may be necessary to 'Zone' the woodlands, provided it is a large enough site, into areas that can be given over to specific activities e.g. a less frequented area that benefits conservation or quiet enjoyment.

It is really important to include all stakeholders from your local community to help find a balance and eventual consensus.

Not all objectives are to do with forestry

A fresh start to life with forest project

A FORMER drug addict has turned his life around thanks to a revolutionary training project running in the Gwydir Forest in the Conwy Valley.

Reformed addict Bob Atkins, 42, has also been nominated for a Welsh Green Volunteer of the Year Award for his environmental work.

"I got involved with the Caledonia Environmental Project run by Golygfa Gwydyr and Making Tracks as part of my rehabilitation programme. My past life was chaotic and in order to get out of that way of life I needed a complete change," he said.

"Although I am originally from London I was born in Wales and returned here when I spent six months in a rehabilitation unit in Bangor.

"When I moved to Colwyn Bay to live independently I was told about the Making Tracks project by a good friend as I had mentioned that I enjoyed doing up the garden back at the rehab centre.

"Through the work in the forest I have gained skills and qualifications that will

By **Samantha Castle**

set me on my way to a better life and hopefully into employment in the environmental field. This project has given me the opportunity to turn my life round for the better.

"There's no substitute for the experience this course has given me and by helping to do these outdoor facilities I feel I've given something back to the community."

The project was based at the Caerdroia labyrinth near Llanrwst and concentrated on pond reclamation and building two compost toilets. The 14 volunteers, including youth offenders, drug and alcohol rehabilitation clients and people with mental health issues, came from Llanrwst, Denbigh and Colwyn Bay.

Wyn Roberts, project manager, said: "Volunteers work with others in a safe, supportive and peaceful environment."

Over the 16 weeks the volunteers gained certificates from the Centre for Alternative Technology, Voluntary Hours Certificates, Certificates of Achievement, and worked towards six Open College Net-



JOB WELL DONE: Bob Atkins and the other volunteers who helped build compost toilets and a wildlife pond at the Caerdroia labyrinth near Llanrwst were recently awarded certificates by AM Eleanor Burnham for their dedication and hard work towards the environmental project.

work certificates.

Cultivations field development worker Tim Verga-Birtles added: "Growing plants, gardening and maintaining green

spaces can improve self-confidence and develop the potential for gaining future employment for these people."

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This Advisory Note has been prepared for Llais y Goedwig by Nick Roche (Freelance Forest Manager/Project Manager), Jane Gronow and Zena Wilmot who are associate members of LlyG.

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Llais y Goedwig is a voluntary association of community woodland groups that formed in November 2009 to provide a voice for community woodlands. We want to share experiences, support each other and enhance local woodlands to benefit the people of Wales. These are a growing series of Advisory Notes that focus on different aspects that we hope will be useful to our members and others interested in community woodlands in Wales.

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