

**This Advisory Note shows how AN1, AN2 and AN3 come together in the form of a community woodland management plan. The key to successful woodland management is good information and careful planning. This Note provides guidance on the types and sources of the information you will need and some ideas for how you might build up understanding of your woodlands from volunteer field surveys. This is set against the theoretical background of sustainable woodland management derived from internationally accepted good practice.**

## Management planning as a process

There is something of a mystical aura surrounding the subject of woodland management planning. Certainly, experience and good training help, but we need to debunk the process, because boiled down to its core principles, it can be a straightforward and logical process that is well within the capabilities of a community woodland group.

The 'management plan' is sometimes equated with a document (perhaps dusty and on a shelf) but it is better to think of it as a *process*. There is usually a central document with 'Management plan' written on the cover but this should be a clear concise record of what you will do NOW in the woodlands to move it closer to your long term vision.

Woodland management is a *process* which has to be current:

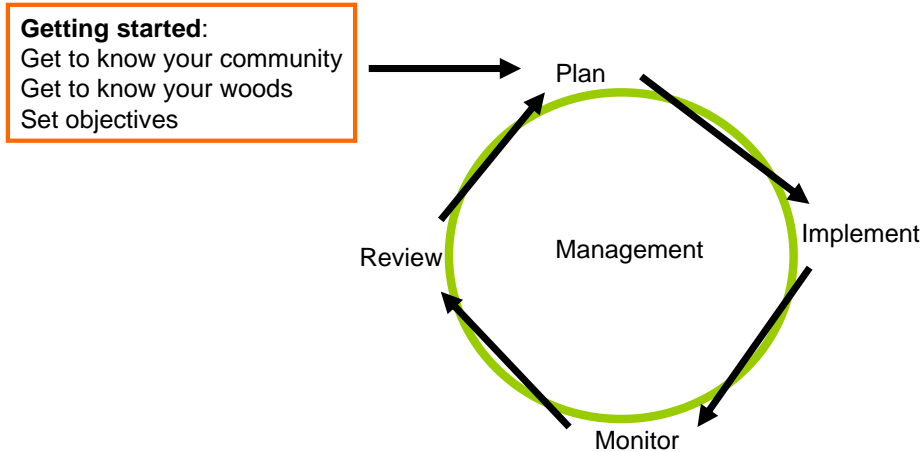
Time	Ask yourself:	Write down
Past	What have we already done? What worked and what could have been done better?	Reflect and learn
<b>NOW</b>	What can we do now with current resources?	Prescriptions, Action plan
Future	What type of woodland do we want?	Vision

This still may sound a bit bewildering – you might be wondering: learn what? I don't know enough to make decisions of what it is best to do and I'm not sure we have a 'vision' as such - we just want the woodland to remain as it is.

Good woodland management is cyclical in nature but you can't just jump on anywhere within the cycle. Think of it as a merry-go-round: just as in the fairground, you have to climb up some steps to get on and it needs to be stationary. Let's break down the process into simple steps:

1. Get to know your community (see Advisory Note 1) and put together a summary of what people need or could be provided from the woodland
2. Get to know your woods (see Advisory Note 2) so you have an idea of what you have to work with
3. Decide where you want to be (see Advisory Note 3)
4. Work out how you are going to get there. This is where you brainstorm about ways you could meet community needs in your woodland. Even on a brownfield site there will be many ways you can do this so you can quickly build up a long wish list. But a bag of wishes is not a plan. You need to map out the route you will take as described in Advisory Note 3.
5. DO what your plan says for the first planning period (usually 5 years)
6. At the end of the planning period - REFLECT on whether you are where you thought you'd be – to do this you will need to monitor your activities and also the condition of your woodland
7. REVIEW what you plan to do for the next planning period
8. Repeat steps 5, 6 and 7 – indefinitely

You can visualise this in the form of a cycle:



### Why make management planning cyclical?

Partly because sustainable woodland management is a long term undertaking and it makes logistics easier if this is broken down into short time periods. But this could be done without reflection – the inclusion of a **review** against long term objectives turns management into **action research**. This is termed **adaptive management** and is a central tenet in the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD).

The reasoning behind adaptive management is: Since we will never know everything about our woods, so we make decisions based on imperfect knowledge and apply the **Precautionary principle**. Which simply means we choose the least risky course of action – this is part of what we do when we devise our strategy for management. As we do the work prescribed by our strategy we need to:

- Monitor the impact of management actions
- Learn from the results so we improve our knowledge of the woods and hence our understanding of which actions move us in the direction we want to go
- Refine management actions for the next cycle

## Writing a management plan

All forest managers should prepare management plans for their woodlands – your extra challenge is to do this as a GROUP of people. This doesn't change what needs to be done but does add an extra layer of complexity in decision-making. You need to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for your members and other stakeholders (everyone else with an interest in your area or woods) to get involved, pitch in their ideas and help define the objectives, strategy and activities for the plan. However, since you can't write the actual plans in a large group, you might establish a mandate for someone, or better, a small group of people, to draft a plan. The planning group needs to have lots of information to hand as the plan needs to take into account the resources available for woodland management such as volunteer time, tools, money etc. and any other obvious constraints such as

logistics, nature of the woodland and legal requirements such as footpath maintenance and insurance cover.

### Deciding on a strategy

Once you have decided on objectives for your management plan (see AN4) you need to put this together with what you know of your woods and to decide on a strategy to get from where you are now to where you want to be. There is likely to be more than one way of getting there and each may have some pros and cons. Think of it as being invited to a meeting in Cardiff and you live on Anglesey – will you go by bike? Take the bus? or train? fly? or drive? To make this decision you may need to trade off different objectives such as reducing your carbon footprint and creating effective networks through face-to-face meetings, keeping fit and maximising use of your time. So bike looks good but would take too long, bus and train take almost as long which might suggest compromising and asking for a video conference. You could also decide not to go to the meeting at all – this is the 'do nothing' option which is a valid strategy and should always be considered.

In a woodland management context your objective might be: "Convert 20 ha conifer plantation to native species".

How? Either

1. Clear fell and replant next year
2. Clear fell and replant 5 ha every 10 years or
3. Heavy thin to encourage natural regeneration

To make this decision you will need to know something of the ecology of the site to identify viable silvicultural or biodiversity objectives. You will also need to consider other objectives such as generating revenue or activities suitable for your volunteers.

Your choice between these alternatives is your *strategy* for achieving this objective. In this case the application of the precautionary principle may prompt you to the thinning option as it is least likely to cause

harm to the integrity of the site as long as it doesn't expose the stand to higher risks of blowing flat in the next gale. In forestry terminology the actions you decide to do as are called *prescriptions*.

### Where do strategies fit in?

*A strategy at its simplest this is simply what you choose to do from a range of alternative ways to meet an objective. To be able to make this choice you often need to consider and even trade-off other objectives. So the first step is to draw up a list of alternative courses of action including the 'do nothing' alternative. The risks and opportunities presented by each need to be considered across all your objectives. Conceptually this process is akin to cost-benefit analysis but you don't need to be an economist to make these decisions! Just sensible*

*What you do need is a justification for why you chose a particular alternative and to document this in the interests of transparency and good governance.*

*Choices between Strategies are relevant at every level of your plan where you have to choose a course of action. So it applies when you are choosing objectives to meet your aim as well as actions to fulfil short term objectives.*

Putting together what you have so far will give you the bare bones of a management plan. For example:

- Vision – For the local community to enjoy a native broadleaf woodland for its amenity, education and conservation value
- Long term objective – to convert the woodland from conifer to native broadleaf species
- Medium term objective – to convert at least 20% of the area to native broadleaf by 2020
- Short term objective – fell and re-stock 2 ha of conifer with native broadleaves (this is the prescription)
- Action plan – apply for felling license; order local provenance native broadleaves in March 2011; fell 50 trees in 2011; plant site in January 2012

### Site management objectives for Ty Mawr<sup>i</sup>

#### **Maintain the extent of woodland**

*Achieved by: Maintaining stockproof fence*

#### **Improve the condition of woodland**

*Achieved by: Thinning and coppicing  
Increasing volume of deadwood*

#### **Produce a sustainable supply of mixed timber products**

*Achieved by: Creation of suitable work areas and an unsurfaced extraction route  
Coppicing in some cpts*

### Decide on activities

You now need to decide on your appropriate activities. Again, you may have a wide selection to choose from or your chosen strategy may lead naturally to the tasks you need to do. Think through the sequence of events and plan out a detailed programme of activities for your first planning period which is usually 5 or possibly 10 years.

### Action plan for Ty Mawr

*What follows is a list of actions in priority order. Depending on the number of man hours available some task may be deferred to future years. In addition to these detailed actions, general site management such as litter clearance etc may need to be performed*

#### **2010-11**

*Determine location of work area in cpt 1.  
Determine location of work area in cpt 8.  
Fell, coppice and crown lift to create extraction route  
Clear timber storage area in cpt 4  
Clear brash from cpt 6 and move to storage in cpt 4  
Prune, coppice and crown lift in cpt 10  
Gap up hedge with cut material in cpts, north boundary of cpts 7, 10 and 11*

#### **2011-12**

*Thin and coppice in cpts 1, 2 and 3a  
Determine coup size and boundaries in cpt 2 (3a considered one coup)*

#### **2012-13**

*Thin and coppice in cpts 3, and 4  
Determine coup size in cpts 3 and 4  
Thin in cpt 7 and increase volume of deadwood  
Clear powerline ride cpt6*

#### **2013-14**

*Thin and coppice in cpt 8  
Thin in cpt 9 and increase volume of deadwood*

It is also at this point (only now!) that you can look at the wish list generated by the brainstorming meetings at the beginning of the planning process. For each proposed activity, check whether it fits into your plan and contributes to the delivery of your hierarchy of objectives. You will need to prioritise: if an idea is great but wouldn't contribute directly to one of your objectives then put it on the 'not now' pile. An idea which only contributes in a minor way and could be a distraction should go on the 'nice to have' pile. What you are sifting through for is the key activities which will move you forward – the 'must have' pile. There is more information on defining objectives in AN3.

### **Reality bites**

This is the point at which you have to be very honest about what can actually be achieved.

Check all the details and be realistic about resources:

- Ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear, especially if there are a number of interest groups involved
- Harness all available resources – from within your group or community and also from outside e.g. advisors from forestry, conservation, Health and Safety, legal
- Determine how you will fund your plan – are grants available, from whom, to do what? Is there anything you could sell (e.g. firewood, guided walks). What about a sponsored walk? What might local business be able to donate?
- Check for ‘sustainability’ - the ideal is to have a business-like sustainable funding plan containing a mix of different sources of funding to back up your management plan.

You should now have all the elements of your plan and you need to start writing it down. You can write your plan in any way you please but it is probably easiest to adapt an existing template. There are several templates which could be a good starting point – a few are listed here and you can find a lot more by putting forest + management + plan + template into an internet search engine. Although most of these will be for America, the principles are the same for all forests. This is because they are based on the global management principles laid down in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The UK woodland assurance standard (UKWAS) is the national standard against which forest management is certified – it is therefore a useful benchmark for good quality management.

As a demonstration of intent use a language that says ‘In year 1 we will...’ and not ‘if possible...’. Once you have agreed on which activities will be taken forward it is usually a good idea to assign responsibilities or leaders for each one and they need to be mandated (or co-opted!) by the whole group. Then, get everyone who is mentioned in the plan to approve the draft and sign up to the ‘we wills’ – using this language will make them think about whether they can do it or not. If you find that anyone is not able to sign up then you need to find someone else or maybe re-think whether you will be able to complete this activity.

It is obviously difficult to get commitments or indeed to know the resources you may have available in 4 years time. So generally the five or more year management plan is broken down into one or two year action plans.

Once completed, the draft plan should be presented to the whole group to check everyone agrees with the activities (i.e. you obtain a consensus) or at least agreement dissenters won’t obstruct your work (i.e. everyone acquiesces to the majority view).

### **Contents of management plan for Ty Mawr**

*Ownership*  
*Right of access*  
*Habitats*  
*Main non-woodland features*

*Maps (boundary, previous planting, compartments, Extraction routes and work areas)*

*Overview*  
*Management history*  
*Site management objectives*  
*Management overview*  
*General actions*  
*Action plan (2010-2014)*

*For each compartment (12 in all)*  
*Description*  
*Vision*  
*Table of features, objectives, methods and frequency for activities within compartment*

*Total length of plan is 19 pages*

### **Communicating your plan**

Now your plan is complete, it is very important to be able to summarise what has to happen in ways that are easy to grasp. Conventionally, action plans are condensed into tables such as the following example. In this table the work that should be done in each compartment (management unit) of the woodland is itemised for each year of the plan. The other way of presenting your plan is to put it into the form of a map. Here you can indicate where activities are to take place.

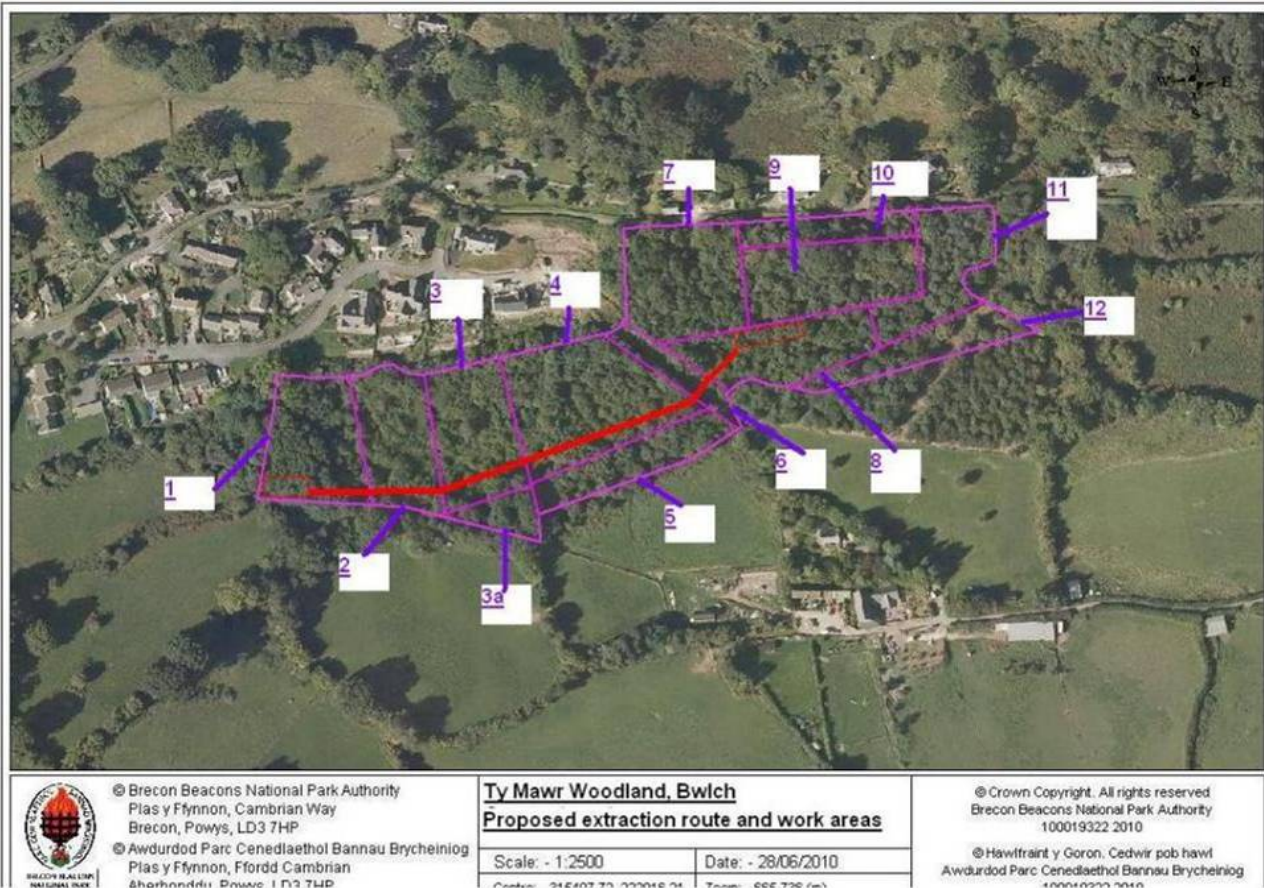
### **Implementing your plan**

You now need to start implementing the activities described in your management plan. There are many reasons why you need to keep a record of what you do; so you can account for expenditure to your funders, to report back to your group and in order to *monitor* your plan. Monitoring is more than just making a record of what you’ve done it involves *evaluating* your achievements. There are two aspects to monitoring – you need to assess your progress through the plan and also check whether you are on track to achieve your objectives. This latter aspect of your monitoring is critical.



**Five year activity table for Blaen Brân<sup>ii</sup> as prepared for BWW grant purposes**

Comp No.	Area (ha)	Activity	Year				
			2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1	5.46	Clear rhododendron 0.05ha	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
		Fence	0.05				
		Plant standards	0.05				
		Weed and beat up	0.05				
		Weed		0.05	0.05		
		Hedge creation	45 m				
2	4.71	Clean and selective fell			0.30		
		Plant lowland broadleaf mix			0.30		
		Weed and beat up				0.30	
		Weed					0.30
		Clear & underplant broadleaf mix	0.11				
		Weed and beat up		0.11			
		Weed			0.11		
		Rhododendron	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
		Hedge creation	89 m				
		Footpath development	550 m				
		Signage and interpretation	1				
3a	1.03	Thin favour native species			1.03		
		Cut willow to develop bed	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10
3b	0.28						
3c	0.22	Thin climax sp to maintain view	0.06				
3d	0.73	Thin climax sp to maintain view	0.09				
4	1.06	Thin favour native species		1.06			
5	1.10	Thin favour native species		1.10			
6a	1.04	Cut willow to develop bed	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05



### **Compliance with the plan**

This is a relatively straightforward process which need not entail large amounts of work if it is clearly thought out and incorporated into routine procedures (write reports up on time!) The process can be broken down into a few steps:

1. Identify targets for each activity (e.g. inspect 4 km of boundary every year)
2. Allocate responsibility for recording the work done– this could be the leader for the objective or someone who takes responsibility for organising all the activities
3. Set up a regular management plan review procedure. For groups with simple management plans this can take the form of a report to the AGM so members can raise questions about progress and endorse forward plans for the coming year. For more complex plans or where membership is large or dispersed, the Board or a special committee can take on this role. In either case, it is good practice to present a summary report to the AGM.
4. The management committee should review progress for each target – e.g.were 5 ha planted last year?
5. If the annual target was not met (or even exceeded) consider if changes are needed to the plans for the next year
6. At the end of your planning cycle i.e. after 5 years, review the targets for the short term objectives and map out the detailed action plan for the next five years based on experience of the first five years

### **Progress towards objectives**

Monitoring for the purpose of assessing progress towards the objectives of your plan is a fundamental part of adaptive management. It is also the part which is most often the weakest link in management so make sure it's incorporated into your management systems and not left to become a last minute bolt-on when a report is needed. The steps in monitoring are simple:

1. Select state indicators for objectives
2. Record indicators at start of plan to give you a record of your baseline state
3. Measure indicators at suitable intervals as part of management activities
4. Compare results with baseline
5. Interpret results – are the woods closer to your vision?

6. Incorporate the changes that need to be made

You should have a hierarchy of objectives and your monitoring needs to reflect this as shown in the following table. When you decide on your objectives you also need to fill in the blanks in the monitoring table. You only need to record your indicators at appropriate intervals to match the time-scale of the objective. So record indicators for medium term objectives every 10 years etc.. Don't forget monitoring is an activity and needs to be included in your action plans and properly resourced.

#### **Two types of monitoring**

*There is a difference between monitoring compliance with the action plan and your objectives. For example: the action plan says 'plant 5 ha of trees'. The indicator is the area of trees and the target is 5 ha. The management records show a receipt for purchase of the requisite number of trees and work sheets for the days spent planting – Great! However, a field inspection only finds 1 ha of young trees – which is way below target. What happened to the 4 ha of missing trees? Were they poor quality plants? Badly planted? Was there a drought? Did the sheep get in? What can be learnt so next time the target (5 ha of trees) is met?*

So, the management cycle is repeated off into the future and over different time scales. As shown in the diagram below from an external perspective this gives an impression of wheels within wheels all working together to harness labour, resources and knowledge towards achieving your vision.

Monitoring is often only considered when it is time to review progress – but if you didn't record the condition of your woods before you started management it will be difficult to provide objective evidence of the impact of your activities. Another common mistake is to simply repeat your baseline survey – but you may be able to record change faster and cheaper than a full status survey. Also be wary of proxy indicators i.e. those which give indirect measures of condition, for example you might monitor the occupancy of bird boxes as an indicator of habitat quality to find the species using them are migratory so a decline in numbers may result from problems elsewhere on their migration route. To be really useful you need to be convinced that your proxy is related to condition in a predictable and scalable way.

In many cases even if good baseline and repeat surveys are available, the results are often simply reported and not used to critically assess the effectiveness of what has been done and the lessons learnt to apply in the next cycle of activities. It takes committed leadership to open up the management plan for critical review. As with everything else, the review of progress needs to be participatory and

include your membership and other stakeholders. However, experience suggests that people if people are happy with what is happening then they are

inclined to trust the management group with most, if not all of the decisions.

### Monitoring the Parc yr Ocar<sup>iii</sup> management plan

At the end of the first five year planning cycle for Parc yr Ocar an assessment was made of what had been achieved over the five years and the condition of the woods now. The community was presented with these results and asked to evaluate whether the achievements were acceptable and to suggest what needed to happen next using the table below.

Objective	Indicator	Target	Achievement	How it looks now	What should we do next?
Extent	Extent of defined woodland area	6.3 ha	No change	6.3 ha	
Woodland structure	Tree canopy cover	> 90% tree canopy cover in Cmpt 1c-1e; > 60% canopy cover in cmpt 1b; 30% secondary woodland/regeneration in Cmpt 1a	Cover of largest trees declining as old trees fall apart. Replacement canopy at intermediate level. Canopy increasing in Cmpt 1a	Increase in tree cover from 2004 as compartment 1a fills with natural regeneration in response to lack of grazing	
	Native canopy composition	90% native broadleaves (10% mature Scots pine, sweet chestnut and beech)	Reduction in beech as trees < 30 cm removed	Greater than 90% native broadleaves	

### In summary.

Make your management plan a living document that describes where you want to go, how you want to get there and what progress you have made.

### Useful resources and reading

Simple template for semi-natural woodlands  
[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/guidancenote12.pdf/\\$FILE/guidancenote12.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/guidancenote12.pdf/$FILE/guidancenote12.pdf)

Template to meet UKWAS requirements  
[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/plan-template-guide.pdf/\\$FILE/plan-template-guide.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/plan-template-guide.pdf/$FILE/plan-template-guide.pdf)

Greenwood community woodland handbook  
[http://www.greenwoodforest.org.uk/images/content/pdfs/greenwood\\_community\\_woodland\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.greenwoodforest.org.uk/images/content/pdfs/greenwood_community_woodland_handbook.pdf)

Check [www.llaisygoedwig.org.uk](http://www.llaisygoedwig.org.uk) for case studies and members' websites

Visit nearby members' woods to see how they have approached managing their woods

This Advisory Note has been prepared for Llais y Goedwig by Jenny Wong (Coetir Mynydd) based on a presentation made by Nick Roche (Freelance Forest Manager/Project Manager) at the Woodland Management Roadshow at Troserch 17 July 2010.

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.

#### Contact us:

Llais y Goedwig  
 Unit 6, Dyfi Eco Park, Machynlleth, Powys, SY20 8AX  
 Tel: 0845 456 0342  
[www.llaisygoedwig.org.uk](http://www.llaisygoedwig.org.uk)



<sup>i</sup> The example management plan used in this Advisory Note is the Bwlch block of the Ty Mawr Woodland managed by the Llangattock Community Woodland Group. A longer description of the management planning process is presented in Case Study 3 available on the Llais y Goedwig website.  
<sup>ii</sup> Blaen Brân community woodland is featured in Case study 1 and is available on the LlyG website.  
<sup>iii</sup> Parc yr Ocar belongs to Coetir Mynydd – a case study on community consultation and the management plan review is planned for 2012