

## Advisory Note 6

# Managing your woodlands with a local community:

### A guide for landowners

**This advisory note gives information about how communities and landowners can work together. Most woodlands in Wales benefit from active management to improve the quality of the habitat and generate a sustainable source of timber. Many landowners struggle to find the resources to effectively manage their woodlands, but involving the local community can be an effective solution to the benefit of landowners, people and the woodlands themselves.**

### **Community woodland management: a growing movement**

There is a growing desire amongst communities across Wales to get involved in the management of local woodlands. Community members get to learn new skills, meet new people, get out and active, improve their local environment and gain a sense of achievement and personal satisfaction from interaction with their local woodlands.

Appropriately managed woodlands are valuable for wildlife, help to store water and carbon and can generate sustainable timber for local use. Unfortunately there are many woodlands across Wales that are no longer managed. Local authorities struggle to find the resources to manage their own woodlands in tough financial times. Businesses may own wooded areas as part of their premises and don't have the skills or desire to manage the woodland. Many small holders own woodlands that they might wish to manage, but are unsure of what work is needed and don't have the labour to do it themselves. Farmers of course own significant areas of woodland, but it can be difficult to find the time or financial incentives to manage woodland when running the busy, modern farm.

Community groups and landowners working together can bring woodlands back into management to the benefit of everyone involved.



Community working in a woodland *Photo: Gareth Ellis (GE)*

### **Why manage woodlands?**

The woodlands of Wales are the result of a long history of woodland management. They are not wilderness areas but are the product of cycles of growing and harvesting. This process of management created different conditions of growth, tree species and areas of open ground. Many native species of Welsh wildlife favour the conditions created by sustainable woodland management and well managed woodlands are home to a wide variety of species. Properly managed woodland also provides a local source of woodfuel and timber.



Garlic glade *Photo: GE*

## Problems of unmanaged woodland



Crowded growth in unmanaged woodland Photo: GE

Unmanaged woodlands can create problems for their landowners such as;

- Trees often develop poor growth and are prone to leaning and falling in wind, potentially damaging fences and property.
- Landowners have a legal duty to keep Rights of Way open and accessible – in unmanaged woodlands these become overgrown or blocked with fallen trees, resulting in walkers and horse riders straying off the path.
- Trees can also cause problems to neighbours by shading out the sun, dumping leaves in autumn or blocking views and TV signals.

All of these problems can be identified and addressed through your community becoming involved in managing woodland.

## Allowing access to community groups

Allowing access to community groups can be very flexible towards the needs of the landowner and the following points can all be discussed and agreed before work starts:

- All community groups have their own insurance, including cover to use power

tools like chainsaws – the landowner is indemnified to have the group work on their land.

- Woodlands are only managed in line with a brief written plan, agreed by both landowner and community group – this allows the landowner to have the final say in what will or won't be done.
- Access to the woodland can be at agreed times only as required by the landowner – for example not undertaking work during lambing season
- Allowing access to a community group is a private arrangement between landowner and community group – it does not mean that there will be open access to the general public or any new Rights of Way created.
- Agreements between the landowner and group can be short or long as needed – it's often best to agree access for a single year at first, giving both group and landowner a chance to review how things worked and decide whether to continue.
- Landowners that agree to lease their land to community groups for a period of 10 or more years would allow that community group to apply for grants for specific works such as replacing the fences around a woodland.
- Community woodland groups could put their skills to use elsewhere on a farm in exchange for access to a woodland by helping with tree planting, hedge laying or the management of individual trees.



Community group on lunch break Photo: GE

- Community groups can undertake woodland work under grant schemes such as Glastir, with approval from the Glastir scheme officers.
- Publically accessible woodland on local authority owned land can sometimes suffer from anti-social behaviour, littering and vandalism – bringing the local community on board can help address these problems and create a sense of ownership and responsibility within that community. It saves the local authority money too.
- Enhancing the woodland around a B&B, bunkhouse or hostel can create a real asset for that business, helping to improve the visitor experience they offer.

### Case Study

The Canal and River Trust (formerly British Waterways) manage the Brecon & Monmouthshire Canal in south Powys, including some wooded sections alongside the towpath. Canal & River Trust now work with the Llangattock Community Woodland Group to manage strips of woodland alongside the canal.

Work has included thinning and clearing windblown trees, control of non-native species including Rhododendron and Laurel, pruning and crown lifting of individual trees and removing overhanging branches from the towpath. Felled trees are allowed to regrow to form coppice and provide a sustainable source of local firewood.

The community group has benefited by gaining access to a high profile site in the middle of their community and has produced a significant quantity of firewood from the woodland work. The Canal & Rivers Trust benefit through developing links to the local canal side communities and have their woodland managed to benefit wildlife and access in lines with their own objectives.



Members of Llangattock community woodland group  
Photo: Llangattock

## Useful resources and reading

Visit [www.llaisygoedwig.org.uk](http://www.llaisygoedwig.org.uk) for other advisory notes examining different topics, as well a variety of other resources including community woodland group case studies, and briefing notes about the work of Llais y Goedwig.

**This Advisory Note has been prepared for Llais y Goedwig by Gareth Ellis from The Green Valleys Community Interest Company.**

**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. This resource is part of a growing series that we hope will be useful to our members, and others interested in community woodlands in Wales.**

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