

Manifesto for the forests of Wales

The trees, woodlands and forests of Wales play a crucial role in sustaining our communities, our economy and our environment. Communities across Wales want to play a greater role in managing woodlands to meet and develop basic needs and wellbeing. This manifesto brings together these roles in a way that reflects the aspirations, principles and intentions of the people of Wales.

Community woodlands are those which are used by group of people with a common purpose and can be public, leased, used with the consent of the owners or owned by the groups themselves. There is great potential for greater community involvement in woodland as the people of Wales, through the Welsh Government, own almost 40% of Welsh woodlands which cover 6% of the land area of Wales.

There are an increasing number of community woodland groups, individuals and organisations in Wales using woodland resources as a key to sustainable local development. This manifesto has been produced by representatives from many such groups who make up the members and board of Llais y Goedwig.

Woodlands sit at the heart of Welsh culture and society and this manifesto will help us to better realise the potential of these woodlands for community benefit and a stronger Wales. This starts with greater public and community participation in the management and use of our woodland resources.

Our message is that we, as Llais y Goedwig, want the forests and woodlands of Wales to:

1. Be part of a healthy and biodiverse landscape

We want the opportunity to use local forests and woodlands to:

- create an interconnected landscape at a local and personal scale
- create sites where wild plants and animals can find a home and flourish
- maintain, extend and connect natural habitats
- increase the scope for understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- create welcoming and accessible spaces in woodland for everyone to enjoy

2. Provide materials and resources to meet local needs

We want local forests and woodlands to provide us with:

- a sustainable flow of woodland resources to supply local enterprises and needs. For example: timber for sawmills, firewood, food products, seeds, bark, moss etc.
- opportunities to shape woodland management to grow the resources we will need in the future
- a way to create local markets and economy based on woodland resources
- opportunities for leisure, recreation and education

3. Offer opportunities for local employment

We want to see forests and woodlands able to make a contribution towards the sustainable economic development of local communities by providing: opportunities for

- tourism, recreation, leisure, life style and craft businesses
- small business using traditional skills to manage woodland
- development of social enterprises
- delivery of training & apprenticeship schemes for woodland skills
- use of woodland as a venue for delivery of social and personal services, e.g. GP referrals, rehabilitation, training and education
- long-term employment within the timber supply chain and woodfuel sector

4. Connect people with the natural world

We want to ensure that access to forests and woodlands is widely available so that communities can:

- experience wildlife in its natural habitat
- deepen our understanding of our place in the natural world
- engage with creative and nurturing activities
- develop a sense of place
- work together to increase woodland and community resilience to change

5. Be a focus for community well-being

We want our forests and woodlands to contribute towards the sense of wellbeing by providing:

- a context for exploring local history and culture
- activities for physical and mental health and wellbeing
- activities to raise self-esteem and build confidence
- volunteer opportunities
- opportunities to meet people through participating in community activities
- opportunities for community empowerment and cohesion – the ability to make decisions on behalf of our community and see them through

6. Contribute to learning and developing skills

We want to improve understanding of forest and woodland environments, and the skills needed to manage them, and engage people so they:

- know more about the natural world they live in
- have opportunities for apprenticeships and employment in a forest or woodland setting
- can add value to their forest or use of woodland resource
- can design and implement sustainable woodland management
- can manage woodlands for different purposes, e.g. training, learning and livelihoods
- can learn more about woodlands while learning and playing outdoors

7. Engage with civil society

We want to be able to inform decision makers about how the decisions they make impact on our activities, whilst recognising that sustainability is about more than our own communities.

The current concerns pertaining to our interests include:

- statutory protection of the public forest estate
- use of revenues arising from use of public forest on development of the estate
- local consultation with encouragement for community involvement in the management of the public estate
- involvement in non-governmental organisation/Welsh Government debate and decision making

To achieve this, it will be necessary to:

Recognise the contribution that community woodlands can make to local sustainable development and to a sense of health and well-being;

Give communities in Wales a voice in policy determination and the distribution of resources;

Embed the concept of 'localism' within planning processes at the scale of functional communities (i.e. within walking distance);

Gain a much higher level of co-operation between forest and woodland owners, local communities and users than is currently the case, with an increasing emphasis on long term partnerships as opposed to short term plans.

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.

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