

Community Uptake of the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) 'Woodlands and You' scheme

Summary of a Llais y Goedwig report, 2014



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The Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE) represents 37% of Welsh woodlands. NRW's Woodlands and You (WaY) scheme, launched in 2011, enables communities and social enterprises to operate long term projects through Management Agreements and Leases. In 2013 Llais y Goedwig learnt that the uptake of WaY by communities was 'low' – we worked with NRW and local communities to try to understand *why*.

Uptake of WaY for long term projects by communities:

The data held by NRW on WaY at the Forest District level is patchy and incomplete. Llais y Goedwig cannot say with certainty how many communities have entered into Management Agreements or Leases with FCW/NRW for projects on the WGWE since 2011.

Our 'best guess' estimate of community uptake of WaY is 13 management agreements and leases approved since the start of WaY and 6 management agreements currently in negotiation. These agreements include community woodland management projects, also a number of walking trails, cabins, toilet and car park management, play areas and social enterprises to improve youth employability.

Level of uptake across Wales:

Across Wales, the NRW Forest District staff interviewed by Llais y Goedwig described the level of uptake of WaY projects by communities as: 'low', 'disappointing', and 'reasonable'. Communities note that NRW district staff are generally helpful and accommodating. Many possible explanations for the low uptake were identified, including:

- It is not clear from the NRW corporate plan NRW's position on encouraging community involvement on the WGWE.
- There is no promotion/basic publicity of WaY or its benefits
- WaY is an NRW scheme (primarily for Permissions) not a programme. It is not adequately resourced or monitored, the support communities need has not been considered.
- There is no demand from communities for more responsibility
- Inconsistent advice on tangible benefits or management rights
- Lack of accessible local woodlands
- Limited staff with community development background

Conclusion:

WaY is an important initiative. But without changes to WaY, the level of community involvement in long term projects on the WGWE may not increase beyond a 'trickle' anytime soon. The report includes a set of 20 recommendations for NRW to review in order to maximise the potential of WaY for communities and social enterprises.