

# Blaen Bran Community Woodland Group

## Torfaen, Wales



***A peri-urban group working on a medium sized (40 Ha) woodland developing a variety of goods and services for local markets***

# BLAEN BRAN COMMUNITY WOODLAND GROUP

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This case study is one of a set written as part of a Forest Research project. Some case studies are written by the community group, others by researchers who visited and interviewed group members, but they have all been validated and endorsed by the community groups.

Forest Research developed a standard method for describing the case studies, outlined in Lawrence and Ambrose-Oji, 2013 "A framework for sharing experiences of community woodland groups" Forestry Commission Research Note 15 (available from [www.forestry.gov.uk/publications](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/publications)).

The case study comprises three parts:

1. The **Group Profile** provides essential information about the form and function of the community woodland group. Profiles were prepared following the methodology
2. The **Change Narrative** which documents key moments in the evolution of the community woodland group with a particular focus on the evolution of engagement and empowerment
3. The **Engagement and Impacts Timeline** documents milestones in the development of the community woodland group, its woodland and any assumed or evidenced impacts.

The case studies collectively provide a resource which documents the diversity and evolution of community woodland groups across Scotland, Wales and England. The method ensures that the case studies are consistent and can be compared with each other. We welcome further case studies to add to this growing resource.

For further information, and for the detailed case study method, please contact:

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## Group profile

**Woodland: Blaen Bran Community Woodland, Upper Cwmbran, Gwent**

**Map ref: ST 269 973** (Coed Gwaun - y - Fferiad)

**Webpage:** <http://www.blaenbran.org.uk/> and <http://www.cwmbranlogs.co.uk/blaenbran/home.php>

**Date of profile creation: August 2014**

**Resources:** [Llais Y Goedwig case study](#) case study in [Wales community woodland baseline study](#), BBCW management plan 2011, site visit, interviews

### 1. Institutional context (in August 2014)

#### 1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)

The woodland consists of two different blocks.

1. Blaen Bran Farm - (source of the Bran Brook)
2. Coed Gwaun - y - Fferiad - (Priest's Moor)

The woodland as a total holding is held on a 999 year leasehold basis (dating from 1933) by Blaen Bran Community Woodland Group (BBCWG). The annual lease payment is £13.50, the purchase price of the lease was £20k. The terms of the lease are to manage the woodland for forestry purposes and maintain the woodland boundaries.

The owner of the freehold Messrs Peterson and Roberts are private individuals who set up a company on the purchase of the freehold from Welsh Water in the early 1990s. All communication between the freehold owner and BBCWG is conducted through solicitors. The freehold owner maintains an interest in the reservoir which is not included in the leasehold. The reservoir presents a major liability, but conversely a potential opportunity. The owner of the freehold has previously had plans to develop the site into a tourism and leisure resource (log cabins and water sports).

The land on the approach to the woodland is owned by the local authority (LA) Torfaen County Borough Council. BBCWG use this as part of their entrance and for some car parking. This is informal use. There is a well established working relationship between BBCWG and the LA.

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	<b>Classification of Tenure: Ownership (leasehold)</b>
<b>1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)</b>	<p>There are public Rights of Way through to the adjacent common land and LA land surrounding the woodland.</p> <p>Under the terms of the leasehold BBCWG have rights to the timber and other woodland products, as well as use of the stone found on the site. Rights to water and other mineral resources remain with the freehold owner.</p> <p>BBCWG have decided to restrict public use of the woodlands to exclude motor vehicles, camping is not allowed, and fires are prohibited. MTB is discouraged. Horses are by arrangement. These rights have been written into the Articles of Association.</p>
<b>1.3 Regulations/responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)</b>	<p>The terms of the lease detail the major constraints and arrangements. The terms of the various grants provided for works, most particularly the Cydcoed grant management plan and the BWW grant stipulations around non-productive management actions, form an important second tier of direction.</p> <p>Other responsibilities include UK Forest Standard.</p> <p>Current biosecurity/phytosanitary regulations around larch require notification before felling and moving off site</p>
<b>2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise</b>	
<b>2.1 Group members, representation and decision making</b>	<p>Anybody with an interest in the group within the local area is eligible to join. Membership is by annual subscription currently set at £10. At present, group membership stands at 90% of the local community.</p> <p>There was no general characterisation of members. Feeling themselves to be a "community of place" the 'community' is perceived to be residents of Upper Cwmbran in particular, Cwmbran more widely and the residents of Griffithstown on the other side of the common adjacent to the woodland. BBCWG feels it has significant legitimacy amongst the local population and amongst interest groups such as walkers, horse riders, and educationalists. Engagement with the MTB community is more problematic.</p> <p>By and large the decision making is taken on by the Directors/Trustees, although their decision making is itself structured by the objectives of BBCWG and the management plan. Proposals are brought forward for discussion either at the annual general meeting or at other special meetings called by the group to discuss particular topics. The wider community are invited to comment on proposals from time to time.</p>

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<p><b>2.2 Communication and learning processes</b></p>	<p>Communication relies on the news section of the website, which is kept up to date with postings about the latest events and issues. There is also a Facebook page and Twitter. Social meetings and woodland activities are also used as opportunities to communicate.</p> <p>Learning within the group and by individuals within it has largely been “learning by doing”. Skills and knowledge have grown as the group has developed its management role and begun to get to grips with woodland management. The early period volunteering was an important building block in this process. The same has been true in terms of learning about group functioning and development.</p> <p>Membership of Llais Y Goedwig (LYG) - the community woodland association in Wales - was noted as being an important method of accessing knowledge and information and facilitating learning and communication across groups over all of Wales. Roadshows and meetings organised by LYG have been central to this. Some group-to-group visits have been organised through LYG as part of their annual meetings, and this has proved important for practical experience sharing.</p>
<p><b>2.3 Structure and legal status</b></p>	<p>The group is constituted as a company limited by Guarantee (CLG) (Company No. 05322374) and registered as a charity (No. 1120995). A new Community Interest Company (CIC) limited by guarantee has been established in autumn 2011 as a separate entity to develop the social enterprise Blaen Bran Woodland Services (BBWS) (No. 07753303). BBWS is wholly owned by BBCWG. The CLG and Charity are run as a ‘joint enterprise’. The CIC has a different set of articles and accounting system. The CIC was set up with social enterprise development grant funding accessed through the LA, £70k over 3 years (South East Wales Community Economic Development programme SEWCED)</p> <p>BBCWG’s objectives as a Charitable group are:</p> <p>(1) 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 without distinction of sex, sexual orientation, race, age, disability, nationality or of religious or other opinions.</p> <p>(2) To exclude the use of motor vehicles in the woodland area, other than those required for management or forestry purposes and access by designated user groups, in particular disability groups and individuals with a disability.</p> <p>(3) To carry out such other charitable purposes, for the benefit of those living or working in Torfaen, (“the area of benefit”), as the trustees in their absolute discretion from time to time decide.</p>

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	<b>Classification of legal form: Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee (+trading subsidiary)</b>
<b>2.4 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the group/ enterprise</b>	Company Law, Charity Law, H&S legislation and terms of Social Enterprise development funding.
<b>2.5 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</b>	<p>The specific management objectives for the woodland were initially formulated as part of the formal Cydcoed grant management plan. Public access and provision of recreation and an education resource sit alongside productive use of the 'commercial' compartments.</p> <p>The management plan was prepared with support from FCW through the Cydcoed programme, and significant help from the LA, but also with help from the land agent/forester who had been acting for the previous leasehold owner, as well as a retired forester within the group. Members of the group are all aware of the management plan. The plan is used as the strategic guide for woodland operations development. An additional conservation management plan was prepared in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust in 2005 which informed the overall woodland management plan – this was designed to account for group capacity and funding limitations. A partial refresh was done in 2011 as the group obtained Better Woodland for Wales support for a number of key maintenance functions around track repairs, creation of trails, and retaining a secure fence line.</p> <p><b>Overall aim of plan: Public access and productive woodland management</b></p>
<b>2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan</b>	<p>BBCWG undertake the implementation of the management plan themselves with the aid of volunteers, trainees and contractors. Training and chainsaw certification, and timber extraction costs are key issues. Volunteers and trainees have taken part in scrub bashing, tree planting and pond digging activities. Trainees and volunteers have undertaken halo and release thinning for the semi-mature broadleaves and are helping with some of the larch thinning and extraction.</p> <p>There are other arrangements applied as well. For example, there is a builder/fuelwood trader who fells and extracts his own wood, this helps BBWCG to implement the thinning plan, and the builder/fuelwood trader benefits purchasing timber lengths at a cheaper price.</p> <p>Funding the implementation of the management plan is now being taken on by the CIC – BBWS as part of the grant supported business plan.</p>

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<b>2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability</b>	<p>Overall sources of income for the group in Financial Year 2012 (i.e. all three legal forms taken as a whole)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Membership: 7-10% of total</li><li>Grant aid and matched funding: 70 to 75% of total</li><li>Revenue from woodland-based trading: 15 to 17% of total</li><li>Revenue from other activities: 5 -10% of total (social/fundraising plus wood as venue for training courses run by others)</li></ul> <p>There is conscious management of different money streams for different purposes because the group is mindful of the sustainability of both the group and the woodland. The approach is now strategic and medium term rather than tactical since the group has become more skilled and knowledgeable about woodland management and what is involved in maintaining woodland quality, as well as running the different activities they are involved with. The CIC – BBWS employs a part time woodland manager to concentrate on developing the enterprise. BBWS is expected to provide the financial sustainability the woodland requires.</p> <p>Services and products traded– income generation comes from two main sources. 1) The timber resource, and 2) training courses connected with the woodland. The main product is fuelwood from the larch thinnings, with a smaller quantity of beech boards, and some charcoal. Larch fuelwood logs are sold for about £60 a load. A load is a dumpbag. Some additional timber is brought in from a local tree surgeon as part of the fuelwood business. Beech boards at 1” thickness and above have a market value of between £100-200. Milling has been done on site using a portable sawmill borrowed from a local operator. Most of the boards milled on site are likely to be used for construction of forestry related structures, e.g. storage sheds, shelters.</p> <p>The fuelwood has a local market. The main costs are access and transport. There is a plan to open a sales point in Cwmbran from where fuelwood can more easily be marketed and sold. The training courses for a variety of learners including those not in formal education, employment or training (NEETs) are organised in partnership with local colleges and the University.</p> <p>Marketing of fuelwood at the moment is mainly through word of mouth, although BBWS has an active website</p> <p>There is a business plan which is linked to BBWS so there has been some consideration of the social</p>
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	<p>enterprise development over the next 3-5 years. BBCWG are scoping potential new products and services they can offer not only to the local market but to other community woodland groups, e.g. consultancy style service.</p> <div data-bbox="779 384 1738 967" data-label="Figure"> <table border="1"> <caption>2011/12 Income Sources</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Grant &amp; matched funding</td> <td>70%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Trading</td> <td>15%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Membership subs</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fundraising</td> <td>5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Public contracts</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loan</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Donations</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>	Category	Percentage	Grant & matched funding	70%	Trading	15%	Membership subs	10%	Fundraising	5%	Public contracts	0%	Loan	0%	Donations	0%	Other	0%
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<p><b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b></p>	<p>In this example the tangible benefits provided by the group and the woodland relate to public access and the enjoyment/wellbeing generated. The main stream of tangible benefits comprises the woodland products and the income stream from their sale. These are just beginning to flow. Initial plans are for reinvestment into the social enterprise for the benefit of the woodland. The enterprise arm has been able to undertake work that the community woodland wants done, and in one case, where grant funding has been obtained, they have been able to contract to do work and so receive some of the grant as income.</p>																		
<p><b>3. External linkages</b></p>																			
<p><b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b></p>	<p>BBCWG work with the Wildlife Trusts, with organisations supporting NEETS, the local Job Centre Plus, and the local Horse Trekking business. There is also a close working relationship with the LA and with the Community Council, and with the two local public houses who support/sponsor events.</p>																		



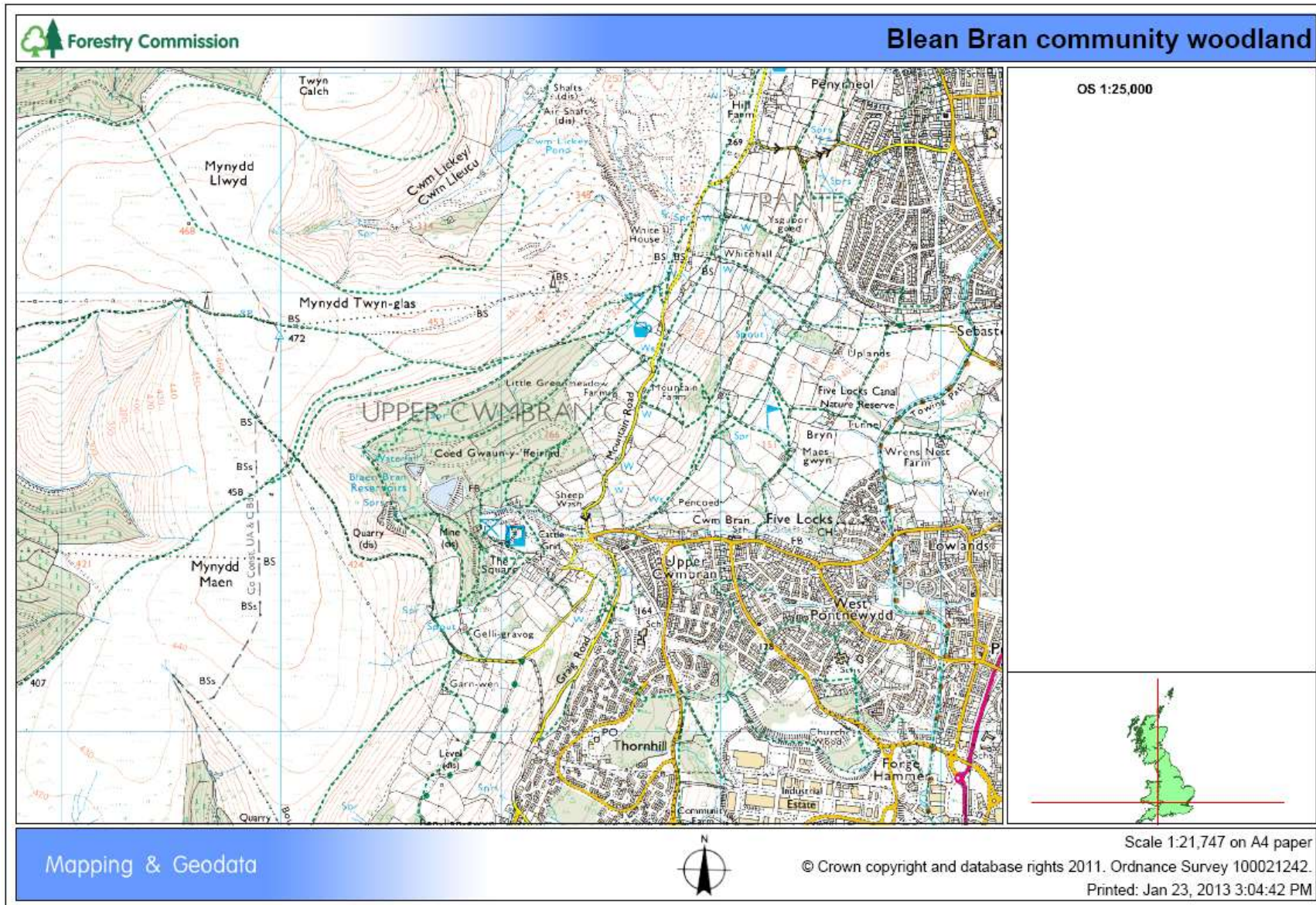
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<b>3.2 Associations</b>	BBCWG are members of LYG. BBWS are registered with Woodfuel Wales.
<b>4. Resources</b>	
<b>4.1 Woodland/Forest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blaen Bran Community Woodland is a mixed woodland of about 100 acres – 40 hectares with clearly demarcated management coupes (see attached aerial map). The woodland is on a hillside slope. Access to the site is difficult: the approach through Upper Cwmbran is through narrow lanes. An alternative approach across the common land to the west of the woodland is on an unmetalled surface to an entrance that has now been dry-stone walled. A new timber yard is being created below the stand of Scots pine. The woodland is now fully fenced/bounded by a stone wall.</li> <li>• The soil varies across the west and eastern sections. Overall it is intermediate depth, medium to light texture. It is acidic over volcanic rock on the western half and basic over limestone/mudstone on the eastern half. Apart from windthrow risk the site has good potential.</li> <li>• The majority planting in the more mature areas of the wood is Japanese larch with some Norway spruce and a sizeable area of Scots pine, planted initially 1937/38, felled and restocked in 1983-7. Much of the larch/spruce mix has been neglected, i.e. no thinning, so is a lower Yield Class</li> <li>• Broadleaves are mainly beech and some oak. Many of the beech trees form the woodland boundary and line the rides between compartments. Many of the beech trees are in poor condition.</li> <li>• In 1998/2001, there has been replanting of South East blocks with mixed broadleaves, Douglas fir and Sitka spruce where fire setting and sheep damaged trees. Sheep getting into the woodland and causing damage has been a particular issue.</li> <li>• <b>Classification of woodland type: Mixed mainly conifer</b></li> <li>• There is about two percent deadwood standing and fallen. There are two ponds in the wood, created or enhanced by the group and used as a source of water for forest fires as well as a conservation feature.</li> <li>• Several biodiversity surveys have been undertaken with the aid of the local Wildlife Trust.</li> <li>• Phytophthora was discovered in the larch in October 2013, a plant notice served and approx 30 acres affected, and subsequently clear felled.</li> </ul>
<b>4.2 Woodland and</b>	The main aim of BBCWG is to generate sufficient income from the CIC – BBWS to cover necessary

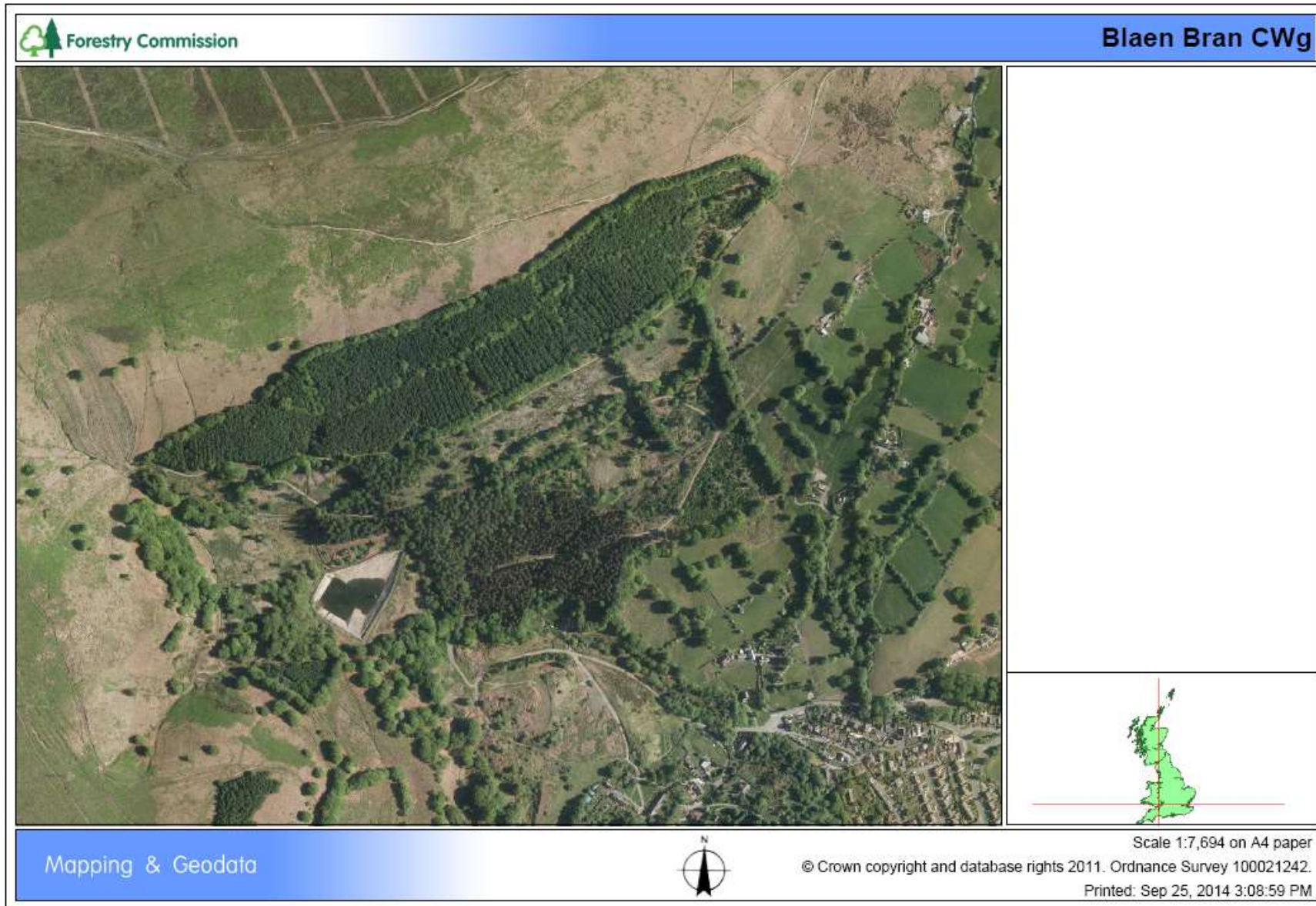
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<p><b>group funding sources</b></p>	<p>maintenance in the woodland. The social enterprise development money is the largest form of support at this time. Developing an income stream from the woodland is regarded as the most sustainable route forward as far as finance is concerned. A Better Woodland for Wales grant has been awarded but has yet to be implemented. Additional small grants for small project e.g. pond building, will continue to be applied for on a project-by-project basis. The group has applied to a range of different grant providers with a reasonable level of success – including Wales Millennium Stadium Fund, Wales Arson Grant, Welsh Church Fund, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Cwmbran (Girlings) Trust, Environment Wales and Big Lottery Awards for All. .</p>
<p><b>4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital</b></p>	<p>BBCWG has significantly developed its knowledge and skills base. The Directors in particular, as well as the membership, have acquired new woodland management knowledge and skills, as well as group and business management skills. External advice and expertise has been drawn from the Forestry Commission (Woodland Officer), retired foresters in the local area (including one of the Directors), and from the LYG roadshows. The group now employs a part time Woodland Manager who is a member of BBCWG, so the skills being developed are in-house. Specific advice drawn on relates to group organisation and constitutions, insurance and public liability, rules and procedures around group management and reporting, sources of grants and incomes, sources of forestry grants, business development planning, woodland management planning, woodland operations and risk assessments, practical woodland skills e.g. chainsaw operation, planning for climate change, biodiversity surveys.</p> <p>A good working relationship with the LA and local funding bodies has also been important and this has been facilitated by Director and member social and professional networks. These relationships are ongoing.</p>

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## 1. Change Narrative

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### 1. Group History. Moments of change, motivations and engagement

The key motivations for the group forming were to:

- i. respond to local demand for use of the woodland including the local school, and
- ii. realise an opportunity presented by the woodland lease owner for greater community involvement in woodland management.

There was general frustration in the local community that the woods were unloved, unkempt and generally not being looked after properly, while people wanted to access the place for quiet enjoyment. It was unclear to the community to what extent they were allowed to use the woodland and some even thought there were no Public Rights of Way. Key issues were anti-social behaviour (e.g., car burning, fire setting, litter).

After much local interest and demand for use of the woodland by residents from Torfaen and Cwmbran new town (a settlement of about 45,000), a community meeting was set including the LA and representatives of the woodland leasehold owner. The leasehold owner had expressed some desire for greater community involvement in woodland management because of the constraints and difficulties of managing the site. It was during this meeting that a number of people from the local community agreed to become trustees for a group that would become involved in the woodland on a voluntary basis.

The declaration of a Trust, initially called Coed Gwaun-y-fferiad Community Trust, was made in July 2003 with nine initial Trustees. The main objectives of the group at that stage were to help look after the wood and encourage community use of the woodland. The Trust was chosen as the most appropriate form to meet the objectives of the group at the time, and to fit with the level of responsibility and interest held by the members at the time. The degree of engagement during the first period of the Trust was the establishment of volunteer working groups to deal with some of the most pressing issues in the woodland. There was then a transition from **informal enjoyment** through **consultation** to **active engagement** (Volunteering) through the process of **group formation**.

Two years later in 2005, the group evolved into the Blaen Brân Community Woodland, a company limited by guarantee (CLG). Changing to a CLG was done on the advice of the FCW Cydcoed officer and was felt to be a more appropriate form for the group, now that they wanted to buy the woodland lease. A CLG was a more secure basis on which to meet the legal obligations the group would now hold towards the woodland. A Cydcoed grant to purchase the woodland lease (£20,000) and carry out a range of infrastructure improvements was secured in 2005. This stage in the narrative records changes in **group formation** (i.e.

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development of form and constitution), in response to opportunity, and a move from **active engagement** (Volunteering) directly to **full management** responsibility.

BBCW achieved Charity status in 2007. The advantage of this status has enabled the group to apply for additional sources of grant aid, and to develop the not-for-profit ethos of the group. This has also involved the group in Charity Commission reporting procedures which prompted further consideration of the income stream.

**Active engagement** meant BBCWG learnt what the implementation of the management plan formulated as part of the Cydcoed project actually meant in real terms rather than in the abstract. It has also taught BBCWG and some of the individual members woodland management at a very practical level. It was this learning implementing the management plan that precipitated the change from **full management** to the next stage in BBCWG development. This was the development of a **social enterprise** in the form of a CIC in 2011; Blaen Bran Woodland Services (BBWS) which is wholly-owned by BBCWG. The primary motivation for the formation of BBWS was to find a sustainable mechanism to develop woodland management, to find a suitable outlet for woodland products being produced as part of management operations, and to engage with the increasing numbers of volunteers, training courses and skills development opportunities hosted in the woodlands. BBWS has a part time woodland manager to develop the enterprise, currently concentrating on woodfuel, but which will hopefully expand into charcoal production, furniture, training events and woodland consultancy services.

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## 2. Challenges, barriers and opportunities for change: Key issues in evolution

The greatest barrier to engagement has been around woodland skills and knowledge. The BBCWG members began with a couple of Directors having professional forestry experience, but with the wider active membership having little or no understanding of, or practical skills in, woodlands and forestry. As the group began to **volunteer in Active management**, engagement with the woodland and experiential learning facilitated the change to **Full management** capability. A barrier that needed to be overcome was **finding the help and advice needed to support the learning**. LYG was an important resource and sharing experiences, contacts and support mechanisms with other community groups essential in building confidence to work in the woodland and begin to expand the kinds of operations and actions the group were involved in. The local authority countryside section was also a useful contact – using support from BBCW to access Valleys Regional Park funding to improve the car parking and access over their land adjacent to the community wood. Other local groups – Friends of the Earth, local scouts and the Torfaen Voluntary Alliance (TVA) have been useful and important contacts – the former two groups each supplying a Director to BBCW. In addition to this, another barrier was **learning how to deal with difficult user groups**, and keeping up group morale during such periods. **Understanding and training in woodland operations, equipment and equipment operation, along with dealing with woodland pests** (squirrels in particular) have presented a particular challenges.

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BBCW have a rich experience in terms of group development and woodland management evolution. Engagement has moved through the 'engagement pyramid' from passive consultation and informal enjoyment to the establishment and management of a social enterprise. The main opportunity for community engagement was provided by the lease hold owner recognising local demand for woodland access and the pressures of managing woodland for this purpose. Key facilitation of this change in ownership and effective community management was the link with **the LA and their ability to support a negotiation** process. This was an important relationship. **Community interest, available time and capacity** in terms of group and volunteer management as well as woodland management have dictated the rate of change and the degree of engagement different members have with the woodland. The current structure of BBCWG as a CLG/charity and the subsidiary BBWS is **increasing pressure on members** and **maintaining the core active group of members and post holders** is an on-going challenge. There is a general and increasing level of public awareness about the group and about the reasons for their work in the woodland – how this links into woodland quality and conservation – which has maintained general support for, and engagement with BBCWG and the woodland.

The establishment and evolution of the **group's legal forms has been a learning experience**. There was some **initial confusion** about the best form to take, because although there is advice available, there are many organisations with different views on the various forms and relative dis/advantages of them. Guidance on the development of a social enterprise is supported through the grant body, but is also proving to be a learning experience as **CICs are themselves an emerging form**. The **professional skills and knowledge of the Directors** and group members who have experience of running a business, in taking this initiative forward has been critical.

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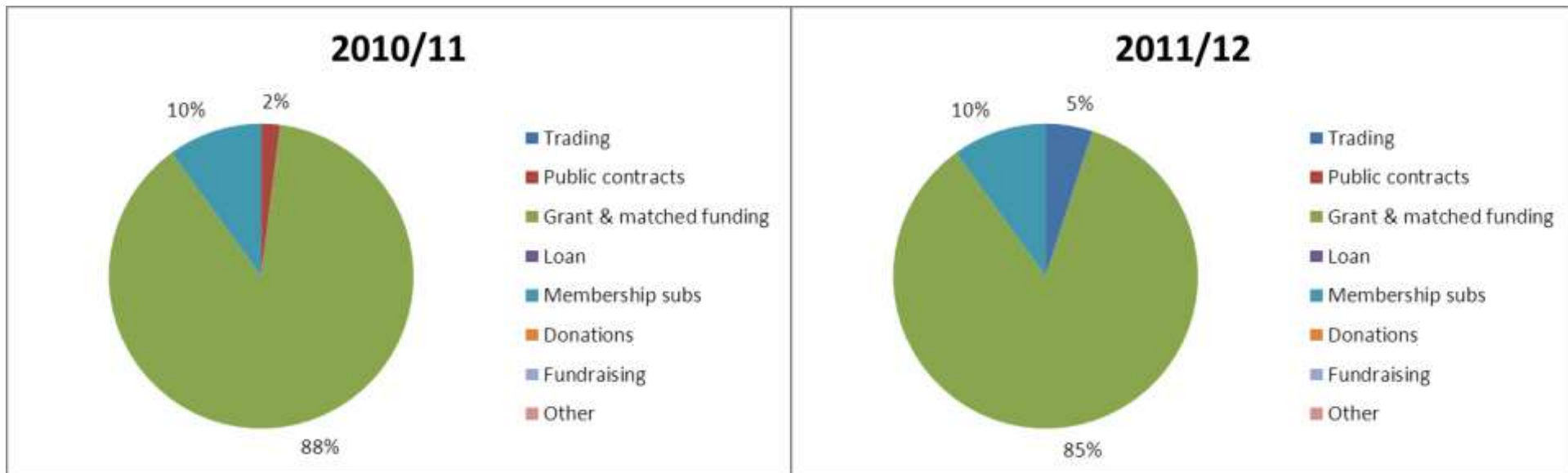
### 3. Evolution of income streams

**Grant aid** (capital spend and revenue spend) has been absolutely crucial to securing the woodland in the first place, as well as supporting the employment of woodland manager for social enterprise development. **Group formation, active management** and **enterprise development** have relied on the pump priming function of grant aid. There are barriers to development of the business model on the demand side. The switch to **"charged for goods and services"** such as advice offered through the new woodland consultancy service means some users benefitting from the informal provision of advice in the past will now need to pay for this service, and others using the woodland setting may need to pay for access, as BBWS and BBCWG look to realise the true value of all the goods and services the woodland can provide. Whilst informal demand for logs has already exceeded expectations, market development will rest on finding the most effective ways of **transporting the woodfuel and adding value added through sales in town**. This will require spend on a storage/sales site. Networking with other businesses and

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linking them with the enterprise planning has been important too, for example connecting with an arboriculturist in Cwmbran as an additional source of timber to ensure continuity of supply.

The initial income was predominantly grant – Cydcoed funding of £90k over 4 years, supplemented by approx £1,000 per year from memberships and donations and a couple of small local grants coming to around £500/year. Income in terms of sales only really started in the later part of 2011/12 – being approximately £1,500 from tree and log sales. It has risen into winter 2012/13 – being around £3,800 - £4,000. There has also been some income (around £1,000) from courses held in the wood, and £500/year from a local trekking business accessing the wood but there is still a dependency on grant income. What has been helpful is that the enterprise arm has been able to do contract work for the community woodland when they have applied for project grants. Hence the grant from BBCW has translated to contract income for the enterprise (BBWS). This was approx £8,500 in 2012/13.





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## 3. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts before group involvement

BBCWG have undertaken/commissioned several historical surveys of the area and the history of the woodland, so much is known about origins and benefit streams. The history of the woodland has been tied to the history of the adjacent area on the lower slope and entrance, which has been an industrial site for the extraction of coal and other materials. The key periods and impacts/benefits are shown in the table below

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
1840 -	Tenanted farm	Community woodland area arable, pasture, rough pasture and brake. Bordered by colliery and fireclay workings below present woodland area.		?
1931-1992	Forestry Commission (PUBLIC)	Productive woodland management Timber crop Woodland ecosystem services	One cycle planting/felling	PROW
1992	Chantler Timbers (PRIVATE - LEASEHOLD)	Timber crop	Felling of economic crop	PROW
1998 - 2005	Mr Larkin (PRIVATE - LEASEHOLD)	Productive woodland management Woodland ecosystem services Biodiversity Public access	Replanting conditions	PROW

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## 4. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts since group involvement

The next table summarises the key benefits since BBCWG took over ownership and management of the woodland. Active management through volunteers and organising access to projects and groups wanting to use the woodland for educational purposes has made a significant difference to the benefit streams. As well as the overall increase in visitors (about 55,000 were recorded on counters in 2012), who are likely to be increasing their levels of wellbeing, training courses and Forest Schools have increased the educational benefits leveraged by the woodland for school children and NEETS. Biodiversity values are likely to have increased because of the general improvement of woodland condition, the opening up of rides, and addition of woodland ponds. There are some dis-benefits to biodiversity in terms of the increased numbers of visitors perhaps creating more disturbance and trampling/poaching<sup>1</sup> of woodland paths. Comparison of future survey work with previous Wildlife Trust surveys should show any changes to biodiversity over time as the woodland comes back into management. Other dis-benefits are associated with theft of materials from the woodland, and increasing use by MTB as it becomes more well known as a managed community resource.

Many individuals have benefited from involvement – developing a level of social interaction, learning some practical skills and generally learning a lot more about trees and forestry. As with any group the dynamics have varied at times, but the Directors have met every month (with the exceptions of August and December as holiday periods) since the start in 2004 – so there is a striking level of commitment. For the community as a whole there has been a greater awareness of the wood as an area for recreation – as evidenced with footfall monitors and from a small survey – and a throughflow of members (over 200 people have been members at one time or another. Following up membership renewal has been an issue for the group). There are good relations with local scouts – groups using the wood throughout the year, with the social services countryside team (providing outdoor activities for young adults with learning disability), with the Cwmbran community council (providing admin support in the early days, also a meeting venue, and a previous Chair sponsoring planting of a community orchard area). Other groups to have had a regular contact over the years have been bird watchers (a regular walk by the Gwent Ornithological group), Gwent fungus group, Lowland Search and Rescue dogs, and Police dog handlers (both using the wood to exercise dogs). Partnership approaches with the local council led to creation of a new car park on TCBC land as they had funding from the Valleys Regional Park project, and with FoE has led to a regular annual joint social/fundraising event plus FoE ‘adopting’ a small area of the wood.

The only surprising and unexpected impacts covered in the discussion was an increasing interest from other groups about how BBCWG have achieved success and the suggestion BBCW might take on the management of other woodlands in the local area.

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. a term meaning ground disturbance – usually by livestock. <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-83PM64>

# BLAEN BRAN COMMUNITY WOODLAND GROUP

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
2005	BBCW (PRIVATE – LEASEHOLD)	Productive woodland management Woodland ecosystem services Biodiversity (WT surveys) Public access (footfall counters) Education and skills (evaluations, event records, client numbers, volunteer numbers/hours) Local employment	Fencing, planting and restocking, thinning and felling	PROW Open access other than restricted groups Opendays and social events Woodland walks and nature days Volunteering and training opportunities
2011	BBCW (PRIVATE – LEASEHOLD) BBWS begins operations	Productive woodland management as above plus Fuelwood, timber (BBWS accounts)	Thinning and felling	As above

## 5. Future plans

BBCWG have a very clear vision of the future in the short term (the next 3 years). Effort is centred on the development of the social enterprise. The key objectives are to find sustainability by expanding products and markets, increasing revenue streams to invest back into the woodland, developing woodland infrastructure and developing the training and educational facilities offered at the wood.

## 2. Engagement and impacts timeline

Year	Event	ENGAGEMENT	Reasons (Barriers and challenges)	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Social (evidence)	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Woodland (evidence)	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Financial /Economic (evidence)
2001	Low level informal use of woodlands by community but concern over ASB. Owner and LA begin dialogue over community involvement	INFORMAL ENJOYMENT to CONSULTATIVE	Community discontent and leaseholder difficulties prompted change	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
2003	Formal constitution of BBCW as a Trust. Informal management agreement and volunteering actions begin	CONSULTATIVE to ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT and GROUP FORMATION	Group provides organised means to engage with woodland, provide legitimate representation, and work with LA/owner			
2005	Constitution of BBCWG as a CLG. Purchase of woodland through Cydcoed grant	ACTIVE MANAGEMENT To FULL MANAGEMENT	CLG more appropriate form with purchase of woodland lease	Visitor numbers increase (counter data)		

## BLAEN BRAN COMMUNITY WOODLAND GROUP

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2007	BBCW registered Charity (changes to Articles of Association)	FULL MANAGEMENT	Charity status increases opportunities for grant capture and client group			
2011	Social enterprise (CIC) Blaen Bran Woodland Services established and supported with grant	FULL MANAGEMENT to SOCIAL ENTERPRISE	BBWS to provide financial sustainability and increase/diversify benefit stream and opportunities	Woodland Manager employed	Management plan implementation, felling and thinning operations	