

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate  
Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee  
Ymchwiliad Bioamrywiaeth | Biodiversity Inquiry  
BIO 04  
Ymateb gan : Grŵp Cymunedol Coetiroedd  
Evidence from : Community Woodlands Group

- 1) I am writing in my capacity as a volunteer / Director of a Community Woodlands Group (CWG) situated on the outskirts of Ebbw Vale, Blaenau Gwent.

The evidence provided will include the following:

- A brief history of our group,
- A response to “Brexit and our Land - Why the definition of “Landowners” should include Community Woodland Groups,
- Our Contributions to the WBfG Act and how these can be referred to as Public Goods,
- Our previous experience of funding via Environment Wales,
- Suggestions and concerns for future funding for Community Woodlands Groups to provide Public Goods post Brexit.

- 2) Historical background to our Community Woodland Group (CWG).

Beaufort Hill Woodlands <http://www.beauforthillwoodlands.org.uk> is a 22 hectare Local Nature Reserve comprising of areas of newly planted woodlands, heathland and two large bodies of water (Reservoirs) - the site is wholly owned by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. Until recently the reservoirs were managed and owned by the Local Steel works. When Corus closed their manufacturing operations they announced their intention to drain and fill in the reservoirs. The local community called a public meeting – our local beauty spot was saved, we constituted a Company by Limited Guarantee and signed an agreement with BGCBC to manage the site. The site is fully open to the public and for the past six years we have been awarded the Keep Wales Tidy Community Green Flag.

- 3) Brexit and our land –Securing the future of Welsh Farming.

In the WG consultation document reference is made to Landowners and managers – referring largely to farmers. The documents go on to state – we use the term “Land Mangers “and Land management” to mean farmers, foresters and any other activity drawing on non-urban land to produce goods and services.

I would argue that “Community Woodland Groups” (CWG’s) such as Beaufort Hill Woodlands are Land Managers and therefore should be allowed to access to funding to provide Public Goods.

Your remit states “How could the Welsh Government’s proposed Public Goods scheme, set out in Brexit and Our Land, be applied to restore biodiversity”.

Your remit should extend beyond the restoration of Biodiversity and should also include the management of Biodiversity. Many CWGs operate from well produced “management plans”. These management plans are often broken down into to defined compartments (areas of land) which include specific tasks - that clearly lay out how to restore and manage Biodiversity.

All Community Woodland Groups produce goods and services. Many are producing timber products on a sustainable basis; some provide traditional woodcraft skills, many if not all provide Public Goods. Many if not all restore and manage biodiversity.

Chapter 6 in the consultation documents is littered with statements referencing; Land management, public health improvements, educational support, heritage, increased habitat and species management. Section 6.11 also states “improved mitigation of climate risk and Healthy and functioning habitats and ecosystems” I would suggest that these terms all refer to the “Restoration and management of Biodiversity” and can therefore can be defined as Public Goods.

Community Woodland Groups easily provide these services and or outcomes- which includes the Restoration and Management of Biodiversity.

#### 4) Well-being for Future Generations Act and Community Woodland Groups.

A community Woodland refers to any woodland where the local community has some degree of control over how the woodland is run or managed. Such woodlands are supported by a community group or “friends of”. The woodland may be owned or leased by the community group, or it may be managed with another organisation (Usually the landowner) through a management plan / agreement.

Surveys figures indicate that around 27% of Community Woodland groups own their own woodland, while over 70% care for the woodland through agreement with the owner( Waverhill 2010) Whilst in Wales 59% of community woodlands are located on local authority owned land ( Waverhill 2010).

The Well-being for Future Generations Act clearly sets out its Seven well- being Goals and five ways of working. Llais Y Goedwig (<http://llaisygoedwig.org.uk/> an umbrella organisation for CWG in Wales) undertook an exercise to illustrate how Community Woodlands in Wales easily achieve those goals (**see appendix 1**). I conducted a similar excise confining my approach to how my local Community Woodlands – Beaufort Woodlands - met those Seven goals ( **see appendix 2**).

The seven goals set out in the WBfG act could easily be described as “Public Goods” – relating to Ecosystems, Habitat improvement, Biodiversity improvement or management etc and therefore should command funding.

Much of the work undertaken by Community Woodlands groups contribute to the goals of the WBfG act i.e:

Prosperous Wales :

- Support natural Heritage; maintain ecosystems, to improve the current quality of life and well-being of both volunteers and visitors.
- Help deliver public services – the maintenance of Woodlands and open spaces.
- Volunteer led activities – to build skills, self-esteem, leading to skilled workforce.

A Wales of vibrant Culture:

- The management of the site helps to project our Natural Heritage.

#### 5) Beaufort Hill Woodlands - Previous Funding, Monitoring and Evaluation.

Following the Registration of Beaufort Woodlands as a Company by Limited Guarantee we were successfully awarded £112,000 by Coed Cymru ( via ERDF) to install all weather footpaths and plant over 29,000 trees. We sought out and successfully gained additional funding from “Environment Wales” – an offshoot of Keep Wales Tidy. In collaboration with the local Authority we identified small projects that would enhance the area with the overriding aim “**to continue to manage our woodlands and to preserve, protect and restore the heathland and Biodiversity**”. The funding from Environment Wales came in small amounts of money to fund individual projects, approx. £5000 each time. The projects had to be completed within a one year time scale, had to be carefully costed and were monitored periodically and were fully evaluated on their completion. Environment Wales also provided a Field Officer who was there to advise with the initial bidding process and monitor the scheme. Sadly with the onset of Austerity this scheme was closed.

Many of CWG's are Third Sector and rely partially or wholly upon grants – often working on small amounts of monies, yet achieving greater outcomes than the money provided should expect. They are run by volunteers, who are dedicated and often hold down full time jobs. Funding processes need to be simple, transparent and non-bureaucratic.

Community Woodland Groups lament the demise of the Environmental Wales award scheme. It was rigorous, based on set criteria and outcomes with a defined

monitoring and evaluation process providing small amounts of monies to produce specific projects.

#### 6) Future Funding for Community Woodland Groups.

I have no specific knowledge of either the Glastir Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (GMEP) or the new Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring and Modelling Programme (ERAMMP).

Funding post Brexit must provide for the future of Community Woodlands Groups to ensure they are able to continue to manage and restore Biodiversity..

I would argue for the principle that any Public monies must be;

- based on clear criteria,
- be properly monitored
- and provide for stated outcomes.

But any such scheme must be **easily accessible for small Third Section Volunteer groups** who provide services and goods that meet Welsh Government policies. I would suggest that as Land managers Community Woodlands Groups should be provided for via the proposed “Public Goods scheme”.

Finally Community Woodland Groups are dedicated silent Stewards of the landscape who provide valuable benefits to our nation, but we need funding. I invite you to visit Beaufort Woodlands, see first-hand how Third Section organisations contribute to our culture and hertiage – I would be happy to give you a guided tour of our Local Nature Reserve.

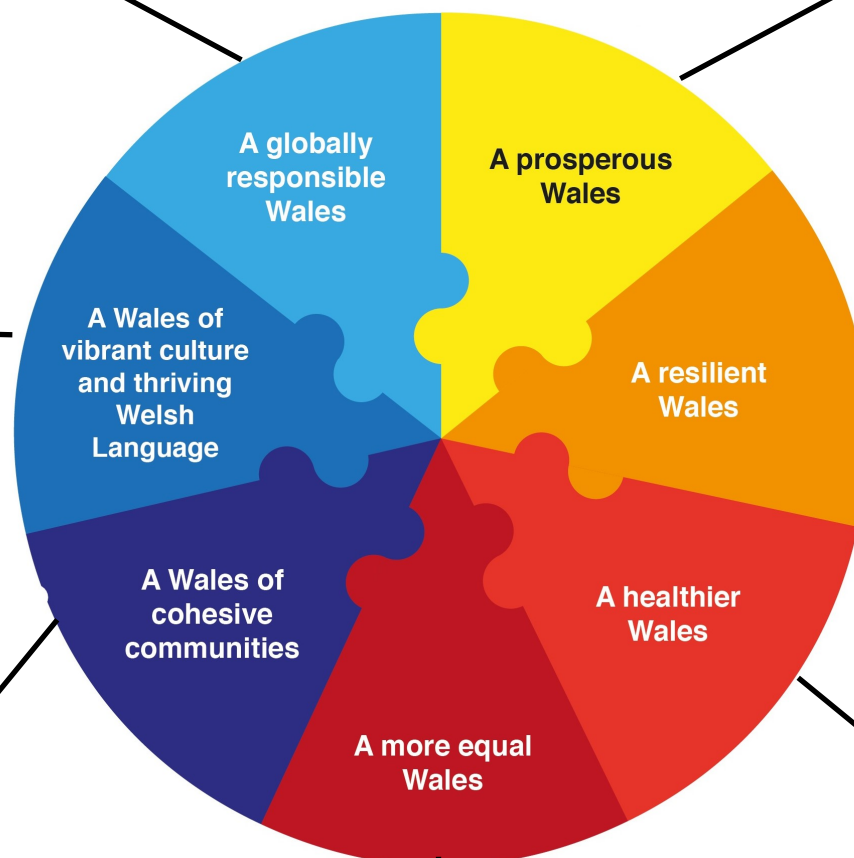
Director - Beaufort Hill Ponds and Woodlands.

# The high level wellbeing goals set out in the vision for Wales are being lived 'for real' at a local level by Community Woodland Groups across Wales

The classic phrase, summed up by community woodland groups across Wales, is 'think globally, act locally' - and groups are acting locally in many ways to reduce their carbon footprint and global impact.

Providing small scale employment and training opportunities, so that local people can work and develop their skills  
Well managed local woodland also gives small scale economic opportunities.

Community woodlands draw on the heritage of place, and local history, allowing a connection to that history and how it makes a place unique. The Welsh language is a part of that - often describing key features and giving understanding as to why places have the names that they do.



Bringing unmanaged woodland into a managed condition with greater biodiversity and thriving local environments helps woodlands become more resilient, and become places that people can use to develop and improve their own resilience and well-being.

People coming together to work in woodlands develop a level of cohesion and common interest that actively encourages and nurtures involvement. Community cohesion can become a reality around a common purpose using a landscape area valued by many.

Providing opportunities for volunteer activity for a wide range of people provides healthy exercise, and a greater awareness of our relationship to the natural world. It has a beneficial impact on mental as well as physical health, allowing time and space to de-stress and re-discover important connections.

Volunteer working in a community woodland is a great leveller, with everyone able to make contributions irrespective of age, experience or status. There are few environments that are better suited to equality, as the focus is on common interests rather than competition, on collective endeavour rather than personal aggrandisement.



# Mae'r nodau llesiant lefel uchel a osodwyd yn y weledigaeth ar gyfer Cymru yn cael eu gwireddu 'go iawn' ar lefel leol gan Grwpiau Coetiroedd Cymunedol ym mhob cwr o Gymru.

Yr ymadrodd a ddefnyddir gan grwpiau coetiroedd cymunedol ledled Cymru yw "meddwl yn fyd-eang, gweithredu'n lleol", ac mae grwpiau'n gweithredu'n lleol mewn sawl ffordd i leihau eu hól troed carbon a'u heffaith niweidiol ar y byd.

Mae coetiroedd lleol sy'n cael eu rheoli'n dda'n gallu darparu cyfleoedd am swyddi a hyfforddiant ar raddfa fach, er mwyn i bobl leol allu gweithio a datblygu eu sgiliau. Maent hefyd yn cynnig cyfleoedd economaidd graddfa fach.

Mae coetiroedd cymunedol yn gwneud yn fawr o dreftadaeth lle, a hanes lleol, gan ganiatáu cysylltiad â'r hanes hwnnw a'r ffordd y mae'n gwneud lle yn unigryw. Mae'r iaith Gymraeg yn rhan hynny - yn aml yn disgrifio nodweddion allweddol ac yn rhoi dealltwriaeth inni o'r rhesymau pam y mae lleoedd wedi cael yr enwau sydd ganddynt.

Mae dod ynghyd i weithio mewn coetir yn datblygu lefel o gydlyniant a budd cyffredin sy'n annog ac yn meithrin cyfranogiad. Gellir gwireddu cydlyniant cymunedol drwy gael diben cyffredin yn defnyddio tirwedd y mae llawer o bobl yn ei gwerthfawrogi.

Mae gweithgareddau gwirfoddoli ar gyfer amrywiaeth eang o bobl yn cynnig cyfleoedd i gael ymarfer corff a gwell ymwybyddiaeth o'n perthynas â'r byd naturiol. Mae hynny'n cael effaith fanteisiol ar iechyd meddwl yn ogystal ag iechyd corfforol, drwy sicrhau amser a lle i gael gwared ar straen ac ailddarganfod cysylltiadau pwysig.

Mae gwaith gwirfoddol mewn coetir cymunedol yn ffordd dda o ddod â phawb i'r un lefel. Gall pawb gyfrannu, beth bynnag fo'u hoed, profiad neu statws. Nid oes llawer o amgylcheddau sy'n cynnig gwell lleoliad ar gyfer cydraddoldeb, gan fod y ffocws ar fudd cyffredin yn hytrach na chystadleuaeth, ar gydymdrechu yn hytrach na hunanfawrhad.

+

## The high level wellbeing goals set out in the vision for Wales are being lived 'for real' at a local level by Beaufort Hill Woodland Group.

Sustainable resources used in Woodlands ie managed timber chipped and reused on pathways. Where possible, purchase materials and hire equipment locally and or within Wales.

Management of the Woodlands and open spaces contribute to counter the effects of "Climate Change"

Help deliver public services – the maintenance of Woodlands and open spaces.

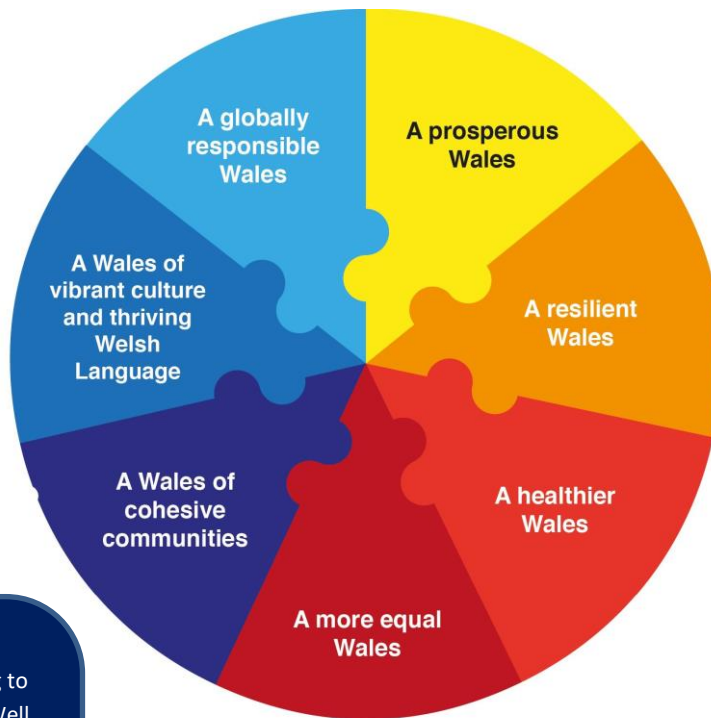
Volunteer led activities – to build skills, self-esteem, leading to skilled workforce.

Support natural Heritage; maintain ecosystems, to improve the current quality of life and well-being of both volunteers and visitors.

All signage within the woodlands is Bi-Lingual. This includes "Talking posts" at the main entrance which are both audio and visual.

The management of the site helps to project our Natural Heritage.

The Woodlands has all weather disability footpaths and gateways and is accessible to all the community and visitors.



Directors and Volunteers improve the Biodiversity of the Woodlands and help to restore habitats.

The Woodlands and open spaces are a source of recreational and enjoyment for the community and visitors.

The Woodlands, reservoirs and ditches help both capture Carbon Dioxide and upland water contributing to counter the effects of "Climate Change"

The Woodlands provide the opportunity to volunteer, helping to combat loneliness and improve Well being. The community are given the opportunity to influence decisions at the AGM or directly to Directors. The community are updated via a number Social Media platform.

The Woodlands are enjoyed by all the community, without exclusion. I.e. "Community First", "Parents and Toddlers" and the Local Mental Health Unit.

Also "Disaffected children" from the local school volunteer in the Woodlands.

We ensure the Woodlands are accessible to all, to avoid social exclusion. There are benefits/ improvement to Health and Skills via the opportunity to Volunteer.

There are benefits/ improvement to both Mental and Physical Health and Well- Being through the opportunity to Volunteer.

The Woodlands offers the opportunity for social prescribing and to "Net Work" with others.