

# Linking Communities and Woodlands

9<sup>th</sup> October 2009, Llanhilleth, Blaenau Gwent



## Vandalism Workshop

The points below are the main ones raised during the workshop and are not comprehensive. It was agreed that further discussion was needed at a future date with more time allocated to exploring this issue and how to manage it. Vandalism is a major problem for many of the woodlands in South East Wales and most of the participants in the workshop had had some experience of it.

The workshop included a talk with questions from the Forest Crime officer (PC Andrew Scourfield) who is employed by the Forestry Commission.

### ***What are the issues experienced?***

1. **Off road motorbikes**
2. **Burnt out cars**
3. **Flytipping**
4. **Forest fires**
5. **Underage drinking leading to**
  - litter
  - forest fires
  - environmental damage

#### **1. Off road motorbikes**

Issues of access e.g. bridleways need to be wide enough for a horse and disabled access for wheelchairs/ scooters but this also makes them wide enough for off road motorbikes or cars to enter the woodland too.

#### **2. Burnt out cars**

Can be hard to identify/ trace owner and unclear as to who should remove them.

#### **3. Flytipping**

This was raised as a major problem in some areas and is a problem mainly caused by adults, whilst littering is caused by many age groups.

#### **4. Forest fires**

It is believed these would have been a bigger problem this year if the summer hadn't been so wet. Mainly caused by bonfires and barbeques in the forest left unattended

#### **5. Underage Drinking**

This has been experienced in some areas by groups of 80-100 people organising parties on the internet. 90% of litter left is alcohol cans- often bought cheaply from the supermarket by adults supplying the children. These parties can then lead to fires and environmental/ structural damage (e.g. the destruction of a bridge in a woodland by drunk people).

## ***What has/ has not worked in managing these issues?***

- **Firepits-** have been created on the edge of woods to control spread of fires. However they are often not used as people want to go into the woods for their fires.
- **Giving young people a seat on the local council.** In one case this has proved successful leading to a greater sense of ownership of the woodland by the young people.
- **Engagement schemes**  
E.g. a bike exchange scheme where young people are given mountain bikes in exchange for handing in their off road bikes, which are then destroyed.



### **Forest Watch Scheme- PC Andrew Scourfield**

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-73gdwk>

Anyone interested in becoming involved should contact PC Andrew Scourfield on 0845 604 0845 or the Forest Watch email address, [forestwatch@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:forestwatch@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

Purpose is mainly information gathering. The knowledge gained is only as useful as the people it gets to so it is a good idea to engage with the relevant people.

Engaging with the neighbourhood policing team was recommended. It is a good idea to meet with the local police to see what can be done, then collate information and take it to them regularly

PAC meetings are a good resource to use as is the Forest Watch Scheme.

Watch schemes can be linked to the police and you can then have someone as a contact point. If there isn't such a scheme in your area already then talk to the police and set one up.

When reporting a problem it is always good to say what response you would like (e.g. a call back with the outcome) as this may not happen unless requested.

- **Preventative measures**

This is Andy's main focus as he is the only forest crime officer and can not respond personally to every problem in forests as it occurs.

Talking to **architecture liason officers** can help to design crime out when work such as new footpaths and access is being put into a woodland (E.g. Access points to the woodland can use natural features such as gorse bushes and large drops).

- **Responsibility**

Trespass is a civil offence and not a criminal one so police can only ask people to leave and not compel them (unless a crime such as criminal damage is being committed).

Removal of burnt out cars is the responsibility of either the local authority or the landowner and they should be contacted in the first instance. However it is always good to tell the local community police officer as it may become a hotspot for drinking and other problems.

- **Firearms**

Ordinary officers can be deployed top air rifle incidents whereas bigger guns need special police (which takes longer) so be as specific as you can about what weapon is being used.

Forestry is mostly a public place and firearms in a public place is a criminal offence even if not included on the forestry byelaws.

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## ***Conclusions***

- Vandalism is a major issue in the woodlands of South East Wales with various types of littering and environmental damage being the main concerns.
- Perceptions of vandalism can be skewed- whilst young people can and do cause problems there have been many experiences of older people causing problems too (e.g. two men in their forties dumping fridges into streams). It is good to not assume that a group of young people is up to no good.
- Engagement with the whole community (young and old) is necessary to successfully tackle vandalism.
- Police engagement through local officers, PAC meetings and Forest Watch schemes is useful.
- Further training on engagement would be useful and this is something to be raised for future Llais y Goedwig events (e.g. a whole day's workshop on vandalism).