

Community Involvement in the Management of Local Authority Woodlands in Wales

**A Report by Llais y Goedwig
for Forest Research
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Acknowledgments

This study would not have been possible without the willingness of Local Authority (LA) staff across Wales to take part in this survey. We wish to heartily thank all the Local Authority staff for giving so freely of their time, often at short notice, and wish them every success in their future woodland work.

We would also like to thank all the community group members who shared their experience of being involved in caring for their Local Authority woodlands with us. We also wish them the greatest success.

The final report will be a public document and we hope it will be of use to everyone supporting community woodlands in Wales.

1. Background, objectives and scope

1.1 Background

Llais y Goedwig (*the voice of community woodlands*) is a voluntary grassroots association that supports and represents community woodland groups across Wales.

In March 2014, Forest Research commissioned¹ Llais y Goedwig (LlyG) to undertake a survey of the extent and potential for community involvement in the management of Local Authority (LA) owned woodland in Wales. The survey compliments a report on Local Authority woodlands undertaken in England by Shared Assets in 2013².

This report presents the findings of interviews in spring 2014 with 20 officers with responsibilities for Local Authority woodlands, and a further 4 interviews with Local Authority officers in autumn³ 2014. All 22 local authorities in Wales have been contacted and interviewed for this study. The report also includes short case studies based on interviews in autumn 2014 with community groups involved in caring for Local Authority woodlands in Wales.

In October 2014, county councils across Wales were informed that they would receive £146 million less for their 2015-2016 budgets. Ceredigion CBC will receive the biggest cut of £4.5 million, whereas Neath Port Talbot will receive the smallest at £2.4 million. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-29539935>). Significant cuts in Local Authority budgets are now affecting the way local authorities can manage their woodlands; this is an opportune and interesting time to be looking at community involvement in Local Authority owned woodlands in Wales.

In some Local Authority areas, for instance Powys, the situation has changed dramatically between spring and autumn 2014; with Powys County Council now seeking to devolve management responsibility for woodlands to community groups and local councils; cost reduction is the driver.

In 2014 Llais y Goedwig also looked at community uptake of the Woodlands and You (WaY) framework for community involvement on Welsh Government woodlands (report in preparation). In autumn 2014 Llais y Goedwig also held 5 regional community woodland events across Wales to try and understand the potential for community woodlands in Wales and the actions needed to realise that potential (report in preparation). Together, these 3 pieces of work will help build up a picture of the current, dynamic situation in Wales regarding community involvement in local woodlands.

¹ Building on earlier Llais y Goedwig work: Finding land to work on: a database of Welsh woodland owners. <http://llaisygoedwig.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Finding-land-to-work-on-a-database-of-Welsh-woodland-owners-ENG.pdf>

² Community Management of Local Authority Woodlands in England. A report to Forest Research. Kate Swade, Andrew Walker, Mark Walton & Karen Barker. December 2013. Shared Assets.

³ City of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot officers were not available for interview in spring 2014 but were interviewed in autumn 2014. The second round of interviews focused on the Coed Cymru officers within local authorities due to their specific woodlands expertise.

1.2 Objectives and scope

Llais y Goedwig was commissioned to contact in person all the local authorities in Wales in order to:

- Gain a better understanding of the extent and potential of community involvement in the management of Local Authority woodlands in Wales.

Specifically, the survey aimed to gain an understanding of:

- Local Authority staffing levels and responsibilities with respect to woodlands
- Local Authority woodlands: size, accessibility and management
- Community involvement and social enterprises as models for LA woodland management
- Resources needed to increase the level of community involvement in LA woodland management
- Information collated by Local Authorities on community woodland groups and social enterprises

These aspects of the survey were addressed in spring 2014 and the findings compiled in a preliminary report for Forest Research⁴.

Llais y Goedwig was also commissioned to contact community groups involved in woodland management on Local Authority woodland, specifically to prepare:

- Short case studies of social enterprises on Local Authority woodland
- Identify best practice in community management of Local Authority woodland

The case studies were prepared in autumn 2014. The report does not consider community woodlands in woods owned by Community Councils and Town Councils; it would be useful to include these sites in any future study.

1.3 Definitions

Forest Research's typology⁵ of community engagement has been used in some of the later parts of this report to categorize community involvement in Local Authority woodlands as either:

- **Consultative** – carrying out work led by a Local Authority officer, responding to Local Authority decisions eg conservation groups
- **Collaborative** – partnering with the LA, sharing some of the decisions, e.g Friends of Groups
- **Empowered** – with devolved responsibility for managing a designated piece of woodland; perhaps with a lease or licence or management agreement, eg local community woodland group

⁴ Community Involvement in the Management of Local Authority Woodlands in Wales. Preliminary report by Llais y Goedwig. March 31st 2014.

⁵ Ambrose-Oji, B., Tabbush,P.,Carter, C., Frost, B and Fielding,K. (2011). 'Public Engagement in Forestry: A toolbox for public participation in forest and woodland planning'. Forestry Commission; Edinburgh. Available at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-8HSEBB>

In accord with the Shared Assets (2013) report, we recognize Stewart's⁶ (2011) definition of social enterprises as being businesses that operate with primarily social or environmental objectives.

Shared Assets (2013) noted that in England “some community organisations could be considered social enterprises, if they earn income through trading activity. However, not all woodland management involves social enterprise, and not all woodland enterprises involve woodland management.” For their survey, Shared Assets asked respondents if they were “businesses with a social or environmental purpose operating on LA owned woodland” recognizing that social enterprises do not exist primarily for generating profit and many reinvest their surpluses into their social/environmental objectives.

In Wales community woodlands take numerous, very diverse forms. In this report Llais y Goedwig's broad 'umbrella' definition of community woodlands is used; *woods where the local community has a degree of control over how the wood is run or managed*. Community woodlands are usually supported by a community group (either a community of place or of interest), the definition does not include woods that are simply used by local people.

⁶ Stewart, A (2011) 'Woodland related social enterprise –Enabling factors and barriers to success.' Forest Research available at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-84JD86>

2. Methodology, interviews and data quality

2.1 Survey Design

As suggested by Forest Research, Llais y Goedwig combined the online survey form and telephone interview script used by Shared Assets into a single telephone questionnaire. Time constraints in Spring 2014 prevented the mailing of an online survey form to local authorities in Wales. The original Shared Assets questionnaire was revised to give a better 'fit' with the situation in Wales. The questionnaire was split into Part 1 (the subject of the preliminary report) and Part 2 (which was used to gather information on community woodland groups for case studies and an illustration of best practice later on in 2014.)

2.2 Interviews

Llais y Goedwig contacted⁷ all 22 Welsh Local Authorities by email in the second week of March to request their assistance with the survey. Telephone interviews using Part 1 of the questionnaire were undertaken during the last two weeks of March 2014 with 20 of the 22 Local Authorities. Part 1 of the questionnaire focused on 3 areas of enquiry:

Section 1: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT in YOUR WOODLANDS

Section 2: YOUR WOODLANDS & WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

Section 3: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT in YOUR WOODLANDS

In addition, Brecon Beacons National Park was also interviewed (although not a Local Authority, Brecon Beacons has regulatory powers). Questionnaires were typed and sent back to respondents to check.

After initial data analysis and the writing of the first iteration of this report, Part 1 questionnaires were also completed with 4 additional Coed Cymru Officers in autumn 2014 (many respondents had earlier suggested that Llais y Goedwig interview their Coed Cymru Officer, particularly in relation to grant funded woodland creation and management work through the Better Woodlands for Wales scheme or its successor, Glastir.)

Coed Cymru was founded in 1985 with the aim of bringing Wales' broadleaved woodlands back into sustainable management. Coed Cymru Officers are tied to Local Authorities across Wales and advise and support all aspects of woodland management and the wood products supply chain, working with private woodland owners as well as Local Authorities themselves. Before the recent budget cuts, there was at least one full time Coed Cymru Officer in each Local Authority. Recently the organization has had to lay off a number of staff across Wales; many respondents referred to the impact of this loss of woodland management expertise in the Local Authorities in 2014.

⁷ The preliminary report was commissioned and prepared at short notice in March 2014; to expedite the work, Llais y Goedwig initially contacted those Local Authority staff whose details were already on the Llais y Goedwig partnership database (most of whom had been contacted by Llais y Goedwig in 2012 in connection with the preparation of a database of woodland landowners in Wales.)

Altogether, Coed Cymru Officers from Anglesea, Denbighshire, Vale of Glamorgan, Ceredigion, Swansea Neath Port Talbot and Conwy Local Authorities were interviewed for this report⁸.

Llais y Goedwig had planned to re-contact all the Local Authority officers in autumn 2014 for a second round of telephone interviews based on Part 2 of the questionnaire: EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN YOUR WOODLANDS & SOCIAL ENTERPRISES⁹. However, the LA officers identified many community groups in round 1; Llais y Goedwig contacted these groups directly in autumn 2014. Ten community woodland groups or social enterprises working on LA sites were interviewed (using Part 2 of the questionnaire) and brief case studies prepared to illustrate best practice.

By autumn 2014, budget cuts in some Welsh LAs had begun to influence council policies on community management of woodlands. An interview was conducted with a second Powys officer in autumn 2014 to understand how situation in Powys had changed since March 2104.

2.3 Data Quality

The primary source of data for this preliminary report is round 1 of the telephone questionnaire survey. Round 2 of the survey focused on gathering the perspective of Coed Cymru officers on current community involvement in Local Authority woodlands and on learning from specific examples of community involvement and social enterprises in Local Authority woodlands.

Information on LA woodlands is shared across many departments within a Local Authority. The staff member initially contacted by LlyG may be only one of a team of LA officers with responsibility for woodlands and may also not have had direct access to all the available information. As noted by Shared Assets, information about woodland management varies between Local Authorities.

Llais Y Goedwig is confident that the data in this report is robust – due to the 100% coverage of Local Authorities in Wales and the congruence between qualitative and quantitative data.

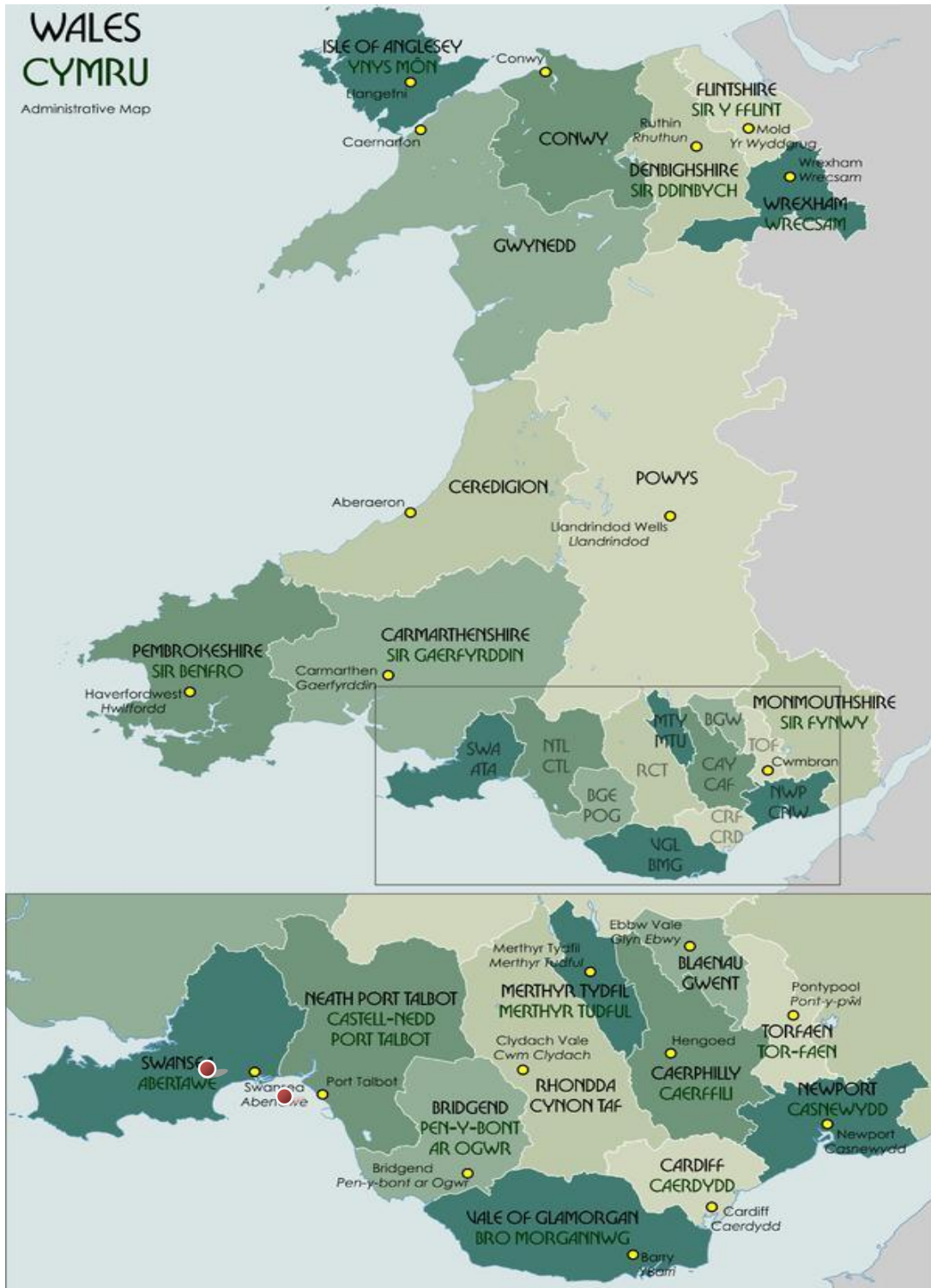
⁸ For Anglesea, Denbighshire, Vale of Glamorgan, Ceredigion, both Coed Cymru and another officer were interviewed. In addition two officers were interviewed for Powys, one in spring and a second in autumn 2014.

⁹ One additional question in Part 2 concerned the information Local Authority officers collate regarding community woodland groups and social enterprises in the area. Do you collate information regarding community woodland groups and woodland social enterprises in your area? Y/N

- If YES, what information do you keep? (eg enquiries, agreements, management plans etc)
- Who keeps the records and where?
- Is this information useful/sufficient?
- Is it publicly available?
- Does the Local Authority distinguish between different types of woodland community groups according to their organisation and orientation? – refer to FC typology

It became apparent in the interviews with LA officers in spring 2014 that there is little systematic recording of information about community groups and social enterprises; therefore LlyG did not re-contact the LAs in the second round to ask these questions; rather the focus was on the case studies.

Map of Local Authority Areas in Wales (source: Wikipedia)



3. Findings

3.1 Local Authority woodland staff in Wales and their work

Across the Local Authorities (LA), there is significant variation in both the job titles and departments of the officers surveyed. The variety of job titles and departments reflects the fact that responsibility for LA woodlands is not uniform or constant across Wales.

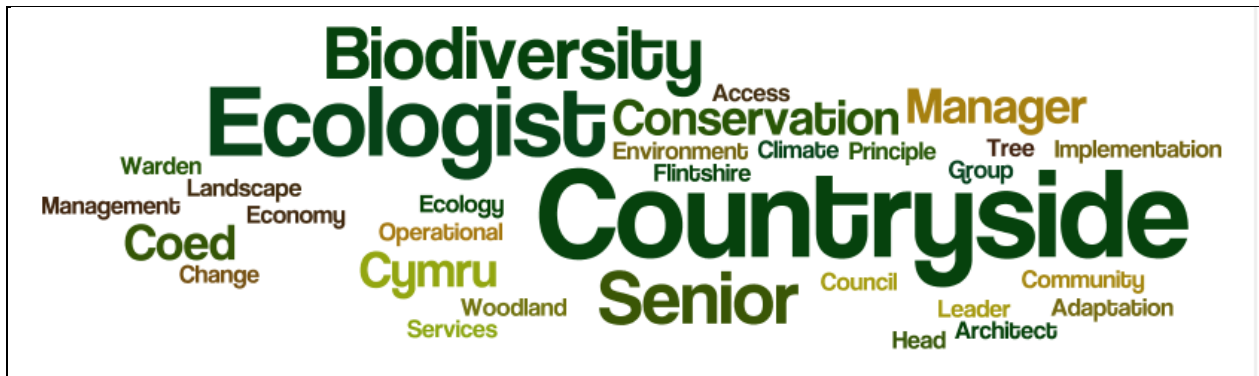


Figure 1: Representative illustration of common word themes through the job titles of respondents. Illustration created using the online tool Wordle (N=20)

Job titles for LA officers involved with woodlands can be grouped into three main sets; (a) those responsible for ecology and biodiversity, (b) those working for the Countryside Services or similar department, (c) Coed Cymru Officers. The responses to the questionnaire reflected these specialisms.

Of those interviewed, 88% of staff work full time, the exceptions are the Biodiversity officers in Carmarthen and Powys working 0.8 and 0.5 full time equivalent, and the Coed Cymru officer in Ceredigion who has recently gone part time 'due to cuts from NRW funding to Ceredigion'.

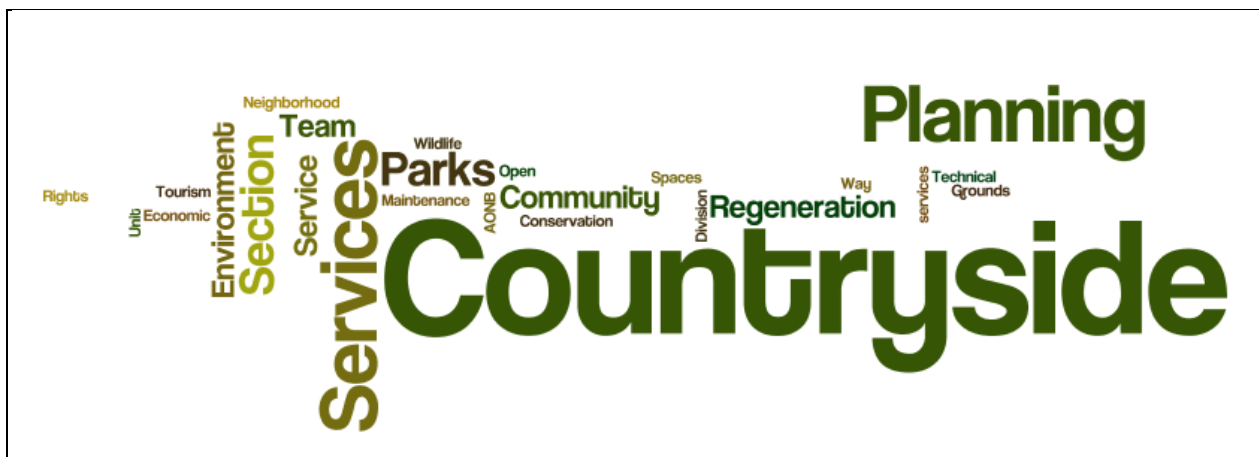


Figure 2: Representative illustration of common word themes through the departments that the respondents sit in. Illustration created using the online tool Wordle (N=20).

Local Authority departments involved in caring for woodlands also show a similar degree of variation across Wales. Of those interviewed, 44% of the respondents sat within the Countryside Section, Services or Team. Interestingly, the specific name of this department varied by LA, and often incorporated other services: Countryside & AONB services, Countryside and Tourism Team, Countryside and Rights of Way Service and Countryside & Wildlife Team.)

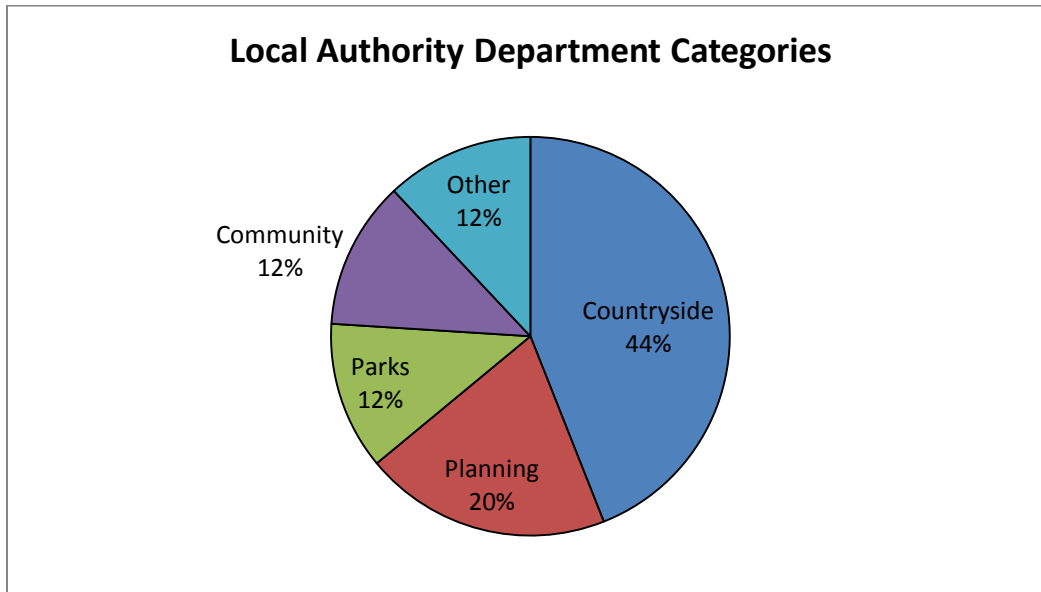


Figure 3: Department categories within the Local Authority that the respondents to the questionnaire sit in (N=25).

A further 20% of interviewees sit within the broader context of Planning, while 12% sit within Parks, and a final 12% mentioned a community department (Community Regeneration Unit and Economic and Community Services). In addition staff with woodland responsibilities can be found in Neighbourhood Services, Technical Services, Environment and County Farms. Woodland services were generally not confined to one department alone but ranged across several departments.

Recent restructuring within LAs due to budget cuts was highlighted by several respondents to explain changes to department titles (for example from Regeneration to Technical Services). Many respondents (in spring 2014) mentioned a period of flux, job losses and job changes due to budget cuts.

“We had a tree officer until 2 months ago, he looked after woodlands.”

“Until a year ago, there was a Coed Cymru Officer shared between 3 Local Authorities.”

“I’m down to part time because NRW decided they were going to reduce the amount of funding they were going to give Ceredigion for my post.” Ceredigion Coed Cymru Officer.

Primary roles and responsibilities vary significantly: Local Authority respondents who work in Countryside Services had a focus on public ‘access’ and ‘health and safety’ in their work; whereas respondents whose primary role is ecology and biodiversity had a focus on planning, impact assessment and advice.

Across many Local Authorities, staff working in Countryside Services also reported a role in managing volunteer groups; this is often described as a way to extend their work in the context of reducing budgets. The role of Countryside Ranger is described as 'on the ground', working with public and volunteers in the management of specific sites. This role has been lost in some area but does still exist in five of the LAs interviewed.

The role of the Coed Cymru Officer is to advise on all aspects of woodland management and creation with a variety of private woodland owners; often predominantly farmers. The Coed Cymru officers are situated within a Department of the Local Authority (the Departments vary across the LAs) and have a good understanding of woodland work that is grant funded; they deal with the bureaucracy of applying for grants, preparation of management plans and also the practical onsite management of contractors. Some Coed Cymru officers have more an involvement in community woodland projects than others, and this represents a certain flexibility that they have, to play to their own strengths and interests.

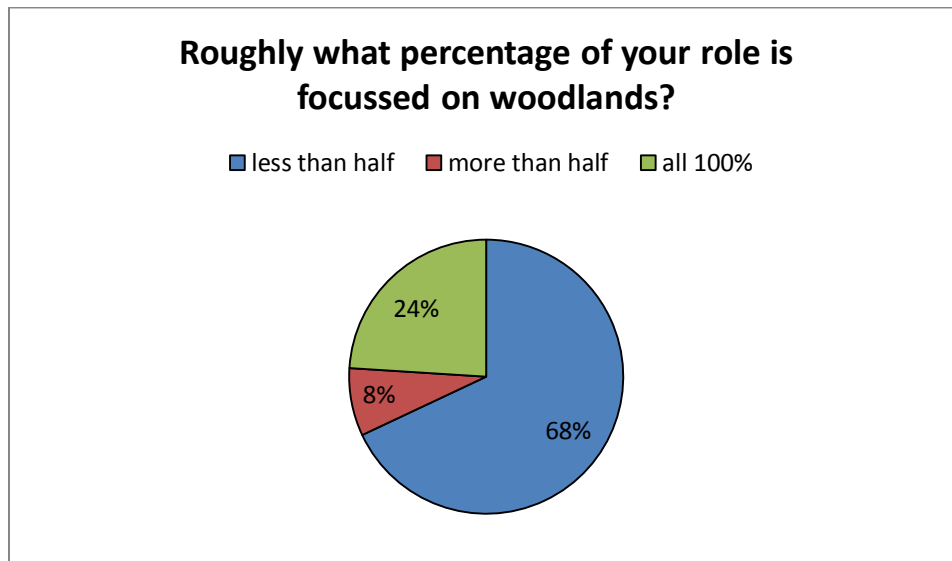


Figure 2: Respondent estimate of job time that is focussed on woodlands. N=25

Respondents were asked to estimate roughly the percentage of time that they spend on woodlands in their job; 68% spend less than half of their working time focussed on woodlands; 8% of respondents spent more than half or all of their time solely focussed on woodlands and 24% spend 100% of their time focussed on woodlands. Only the six Coed Cymru (CC) Officers reporting spending all their time on woodlands. However, the remit of the Coed Cymru officer is wider than Local Authority woodlands, with a proportion of time being spent working with private landowners on their sites.

Main responsibilities for LA staff with respect to woodlands (see Figure 4) were cited as: providing advice on woodland management (6 LA staff and 1 CC Officer), and providing public access and amenity (6 LA staff); Top roles and responsibilities for Coed Cymru staff included: working with landowners (4 CC staff), development of woodland management plans (4 CC Officers) and grant applications (4 CC Officers). Just 8% (2) of respondents specifically mention community involvement as part of their job.



Figure 3: Respondent main roles and responsibilities in respect to woodlands. N=62 responses from 25 respondents.

Respondents from almost all Local Authorities work with other staff (from their team or from other departments) to manage the woodlands, the exception is Merthyr. Brecon Beacons and Caerphilly had larger number of staff dealing with woodlands with 31 and 44 respectively.

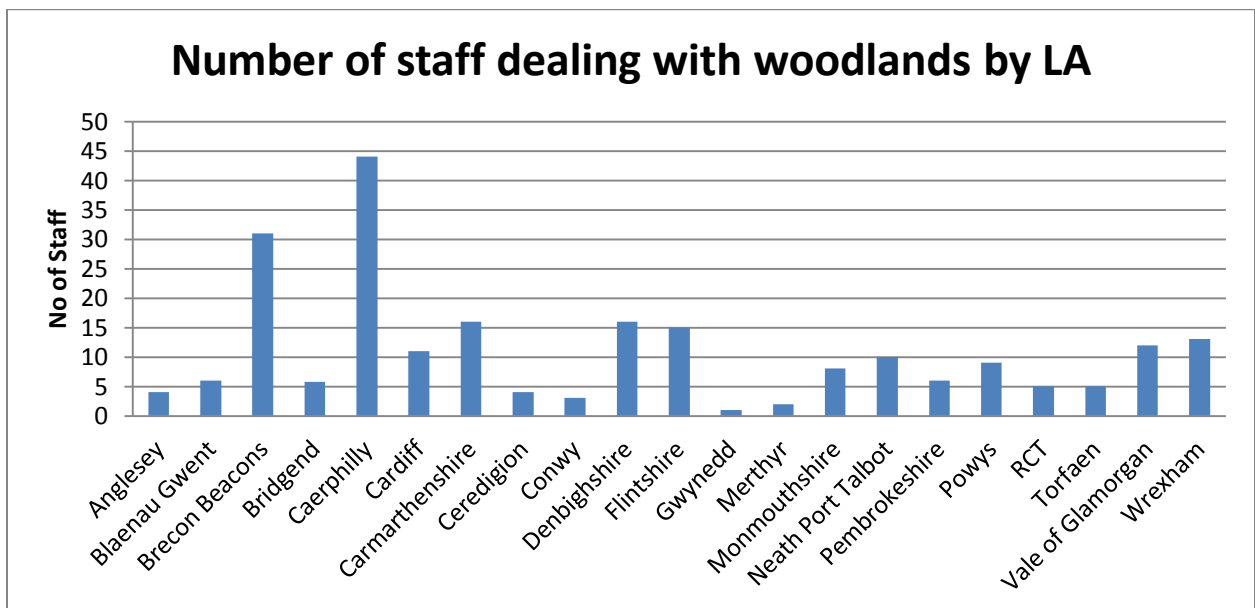


Figure 4: Respondents were asked how many other staff members deal with woodlands as part of their job by LA. The answers were often given as a 'best guess' by the respondent so the figures should be considered an estimate. N=21

Where a Local Authority contains an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or a National Park (e.g. Brecon Beacons) there is generally more strategic land management. Post-industrial sites (e.g. ex-coal fields, reclamation sites) in the South of Wales need specific consideration and management and this work was cited by many respondents.

3.2 Local Authority woodlands in Wales: size, accessibility and management

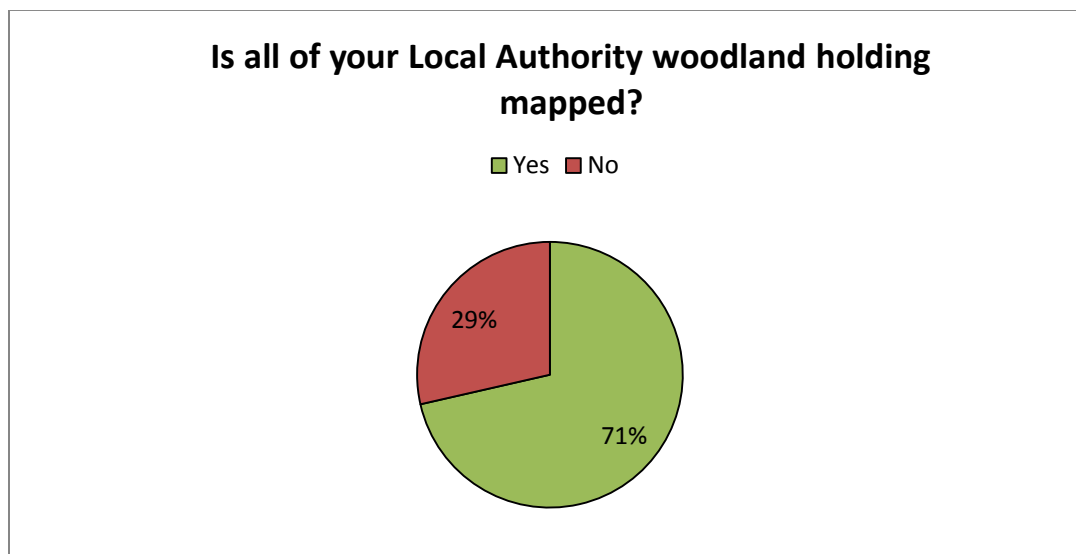


Figure 5: Local Authorities where all of the LA woodland holding is mapped. N=21.

The total size of Local Authority holdings across Wales could not be estimated. Often there is little definitive knowledge of local holdings; 81% of respondents could not provide exact figures on the total size of woodland holdings in their LA. Some respondents said that they did not have the figures for their authority 'to hand' but they could find out or look up the figures given more time

| Local Authority | Local Authority Woodland Holding Size (Hectares) |
|-------------------|--|
| Cardiff | 250 |
| Gwynedd | 85 |
| Vale of Glamorgan | 200 |
| Flintshire | 210 |

Figure 8: Size of woodland holdings for four Local Authority areas

The four LAs who did know the size of their woodland holdings are shown in the table above, (these figures were given out during the phone interview without reference back to authorised data).

The limited available data on the size of Local Authority woodland holdings stems in part from the fragmented nature of the holdings; staff tend to have detailed knowledge of their immediate area. Where LA staff did have accurate mapped data, it is due to a recent mapping programme.

“It is surprising what we own and we don’t know about it, there was a woodland in Aberystwyth next to a school, and the council didn’t think they owned it; they found out that they did own it in the end...”

As noted above, only Cardiff, Gwynedd, Vale of Glamorgan and Flintshire have information on the size of woodland holdings in their LA and these were often estimates. Cardiff has a new mapping system called “Cardiff Maps.” Blaenau Gwent has an individual tree database called Arborotrac for managing urban trees from a ‘health and safety’ point of view.

Powys County Council has recently done an audit of its timber estate and farm woodland in order to assess their value. The data was not available at the time of interview.

Information on the number of individual areas of woodland is also at times incomplete. Of 21 respondents, 29% knew the total number of individual woodland sites owned by their Local Authority. It must be noted that in Wales, LA woodlands (particularly in south Wales) are often small and fragmented pockets or long linear features such as woods along old railway lines. The small scale and the fragmented nature of such sites makes it difficult for staff to keep working figures. Where the number of sites were known (Caerphilly, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Wrexham) it tended to be in relation to the big countryside sites; sites managed for public access and amenity are at the forefront of LA work. The ecologists interviewed had greater knowledge of habitat connectivity and how small, fragmented parcels fit into the larger landscape and interrelate with other sites owned by different land owners.

When asked about the number of individual woodland sites, the Ecologist from Rhondda Cynon Taff cited the complex periurban/post-industrial nature of his LA woodlands: *“There is no definitive figure for the number of individual sites. Excellent existing habitat connectivity within a landscape of high semi-natural habitat coverage, would make any such figure fairly meaningless.”* In areas with an industrial past, boundaries between sites blur and working out who owns them can be difficult: *“there are some woodland areas where there is no local knowledge of who owns them.”*

The Local Authority with the most detailed information about the number of individual woodland sites is Pembrokeshire; this is due to a recent review of woodland sites, *“when we identified where it was, we found we had a lot more than we thought -we thought we had 4 sites, but it is more like 33...”*

In November 2014, a community group in Conwy and member of Llais y Goedwig, Golygfa Gwydyr, successfully applied for a Welsh Government Nature Fund¹⁰ grant. One element of the grant award is to pay for an audit of Local Authority owned woodland in Conwy; this audit will build on a review of woodland holdings the council did four years ago. The intention is to not only enumerate Local Authority woodlands but to determine whether or not the woodlands are being actively managed and to identify those woodlands that could potentially be managed by communities.

¹⁰ This is a £6m fund set up by the Welsh Government to support practical action to improve Wales’ environment.

Ensuring public access is a priority for almost all respondents; nearly 52% of all LA woodland sites are reported as publicly accessible in 21 of the Local Authorities contacted. Where this is not the case, the woodlands are on post-industrial sites such as old mine workings or contaminated sites or on farms.

Many LAs own “county farms” and lease these out to farming tenants, often these blocks contain a wooded element, which are rarely public accessible (unless there is a right of way). Frequency of public access can, in part, determine the extent to which a woodland is a priority for the LA officers; *“the only active management is in relation to safety,”* (Monmouthshire). A community interviewee noted that: *‘if there are no rights of way the council will do the bare minimum – they don’t visit the wood.’*

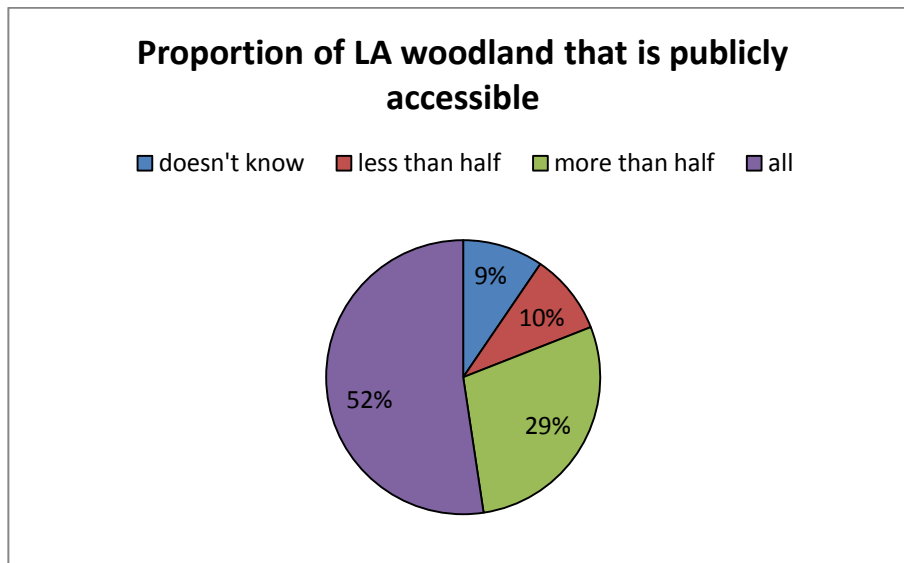


Figure 9: Proportion of woodland that is publicly accessible. N=21.

Woodland management planning varies greatly across LA holdings. Whether or not sites have management plans often depends on the designation of the site and the availability of grant funding. Detailed woodland management plans have often been prepared with grants from the erstwhile Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) scheme (or from earlier schemes), often with the aid of the Coed Cymru officer. Anglesey has a woodland strategy for the whole island prepared by the Coed Cymru officer.

Broader site management plans are often written for countryside sites and other sites with high public footfall, and tend to have a focus on Health & Safety liabilities. *“The Rangers would like to do more conservation work but health and safety takes a priority.”* (Carmarthenshire).

Sites designated as AONBs and National Parks tend to have more systematic management planning across their habitats and sites, with woodlands included as a component of the broader plans. *“Within the AONB, the management plan is reviewed every 5 years, there are special features of woodland within the AONB, it is a comprehensive breakdown and strategy, available online.”* (Denbighshire.) Such plans are often publicly accessible and available online.

Nature Reserves and SSSIs are generally subject to systematic planning and are covered by site management plans. The county ecologists and biodiversity officers who were interviewed made reference to Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP).

Some LAs have no formal woodland management plans: *“They're mostly in my head, there's nothing on paper, apart from some grant funded work under BWW.”* (Merthyr). *“We have a clear plan as to what we're doing but it's often in our heads”* Denbighshire. In any future work it would be useful to distinguish more fully between management plans prepared for different types/designations of LA sites.

Review of woodland management plans. Review periods for management plans varied greatly across the LAs, 29% review their management plans irregularly and 19% when grants dictate, 29% review them every 5-10years, and 14% when grants (such as BWW) dictate.

Officers also made reference to woodland management plans prepared ten or twenty years ago (when funds were available) which are still consulted. *“There are old management plans from the 90s which we still refer to.”* (Bridgend). However it was also reported that these documents are out of date and in need of review and renewal. Officers noted that the lack of funds to review and update management plans may lead to problems in the future, particularly after the storms of the winter of 2013-14 and in the context of pests and diseases such as *Phytophthora ramorum* and *Chalara fraxinea*.

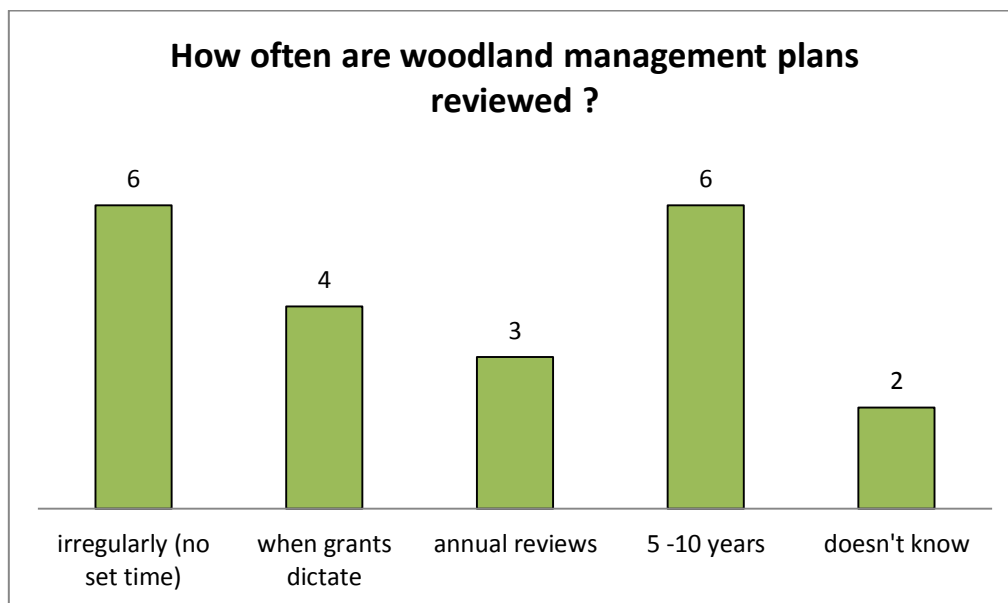


Figure 10: Frequency of woodland management plan review. N=21.

Management of some woodland sites appears to be increasingly reactive and driven by liability; budget constraints can reduce the remit down to risk management for public access to amenity woodlands. Some LAs are more focused on the development and review of management plans than others; Anglesey for example review their plans every 5 years, regardless of funding.

In summary, woodland management planning is often reliant on the woodland grant schemes BWW and Glastir (woodland creation) and funding from other projects. *“We would like to do more, but can't as*

there is no central budget to do this, we can only do it if it is linked to a larger project such as access or health and well-being.” (Blaenau Gwent). Despite the reliance on BWW for management planning, there was widespread criticism of the scheme for being overly complicated and bureaucratic.

Public availability of information. 75% of respondents said that the information they hold on management of LA woodlands would be made available if requested by external parties. Only 1 respondent said that all the information is already publicly available. 25% have some information online (mostly planning strategies for AONBs or National Parks). Within Local Authorities, information on woodlands is often fragmented and held in a number of departments.

Often, when asked about availability of information on the management of LA woodlands, respondents made reference to interpretation boards and leaflets for the public.

“If people wanted to see detailed plans, they could ask and we would make them available, but they are difficult to understand unless you know Forestry Commission speak. We put up signage when work is ongoing, telling people what we are doing and giving contact details for more information.” (Cardiff)

A number of officers referred to online information about amenity woodlands in their Local Authority. Bridgend are aiming to make much of their management information and advice available online in order to support the work of volunteers on LA woodland sites.

Active woodland management. 29% of LAs reported that they actively manage all of their woodlands, 14% said they actively manage more than half and 28% actively manage less than half their woodlands. 29% didn't know what percentage of their woodland is actively managed.

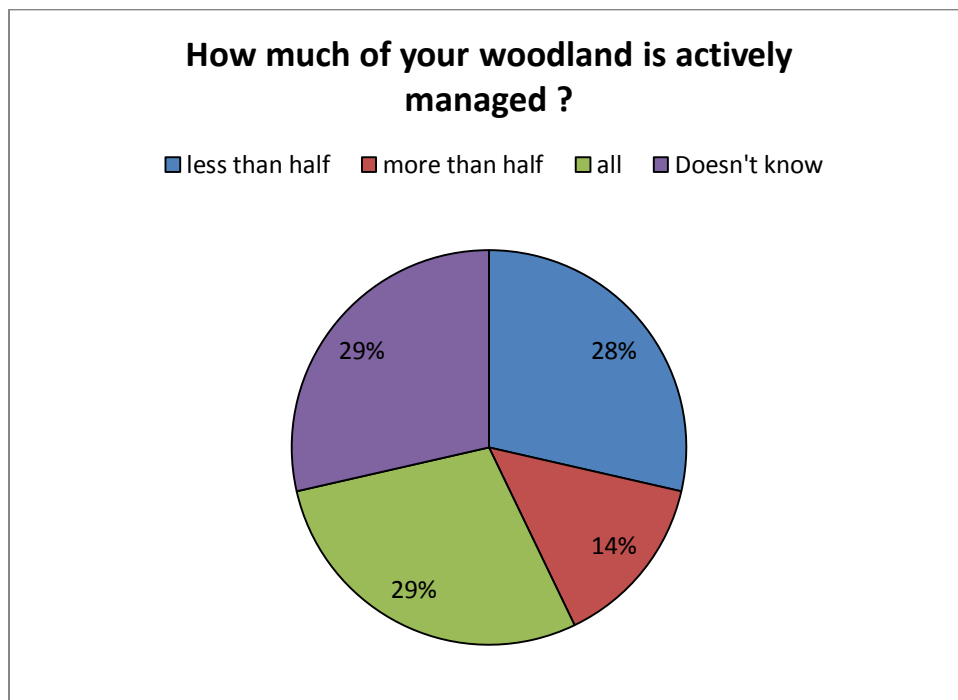


Figure 11: Percentage of LA woodland that is actively managed. All figures are estimates. N=21.

Woodlands managed in-house or outsourced. 33% of Local Authorities interviewed manage their woodlands completely in-house, however, this was often with the caveat that the practical or specialist technical tree work was outsourced.

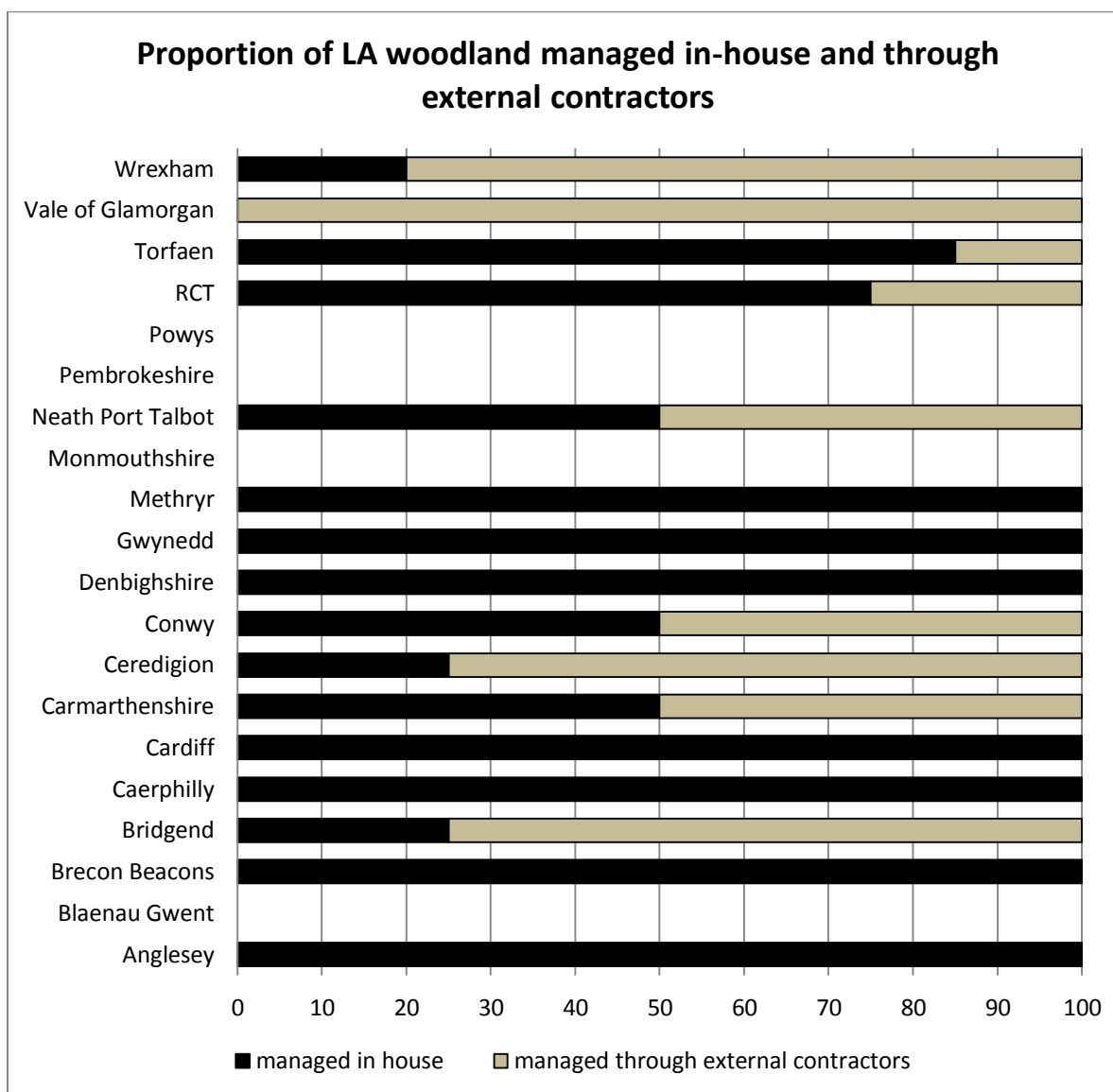


Figure 12: Proportion of LA woodland managed in-house and through external contractors by LA. N=17¹¹

A good example of an contractor being hired to bring in a specialist skill or knowledge is tree felling connected with *Chalara fraxinea* or *Phytophthora ramorum* – often a rapid response is needed to a widespread outbreak of a disease and there is a lack of in-house capacity.

It was also stated by some respondents that extraction of valuable timber would be outsourced – again due to their limited capacity. Powys outsource the management of parts of their “timber estate” to an external company.

¹¹ 4 councils did not respond to this question and therefore appear blank in figure 12.

Aims and aspirations for the future of LA woodlands. Respondents gave a variety of answers to this question; this is a reflection of the broad range of responsibilities held by officers looking after LA woodlands. Commonly cited aims are: to manage the woodlands for public access, amenity, recreation and community involvement and to increase habitat value, biodiversity and the health of woodlands. Social and environmental aims were to the fore with little comment on the economic value of the LA woodland holdings. Pembrokeshire and Flintshire were the only two LAs to mention “*commercial opportunities*” or “*income generation*” as aims.

Wrexham mentioned that they aimed to “*pay for the work that is being done,*” (i.e. to cover their costs internally.) LA woodlands are rarely seen as an economic asset and increasingly in some councils woodlands are viewed as an economic drain on LA resources. Most respondents stated that it was difficult to have big visions as achieving them is restricted by reduced budgets and staff. Generally speaking, the answers to this question were practical rather than visionary.

The LA officers were also asked two subsidiary questions: “Is improved woodland management a priority?” and “Is increased community involvement an aspiration?” Most respondents said they would like to see improved woodland management and increased community involvement, but were realistic about the chances of achieving these aspirations on a large scale due to staffing and budget cuts.

“Maintain public access in a safe and sustainable way, maintain quality of woodland and diversity and increase the level of community involvement.” (Gwynedd)

Improving habitat connectivity was stated as an aim by a number of respondents in the periurban woodlands of South Wales (Bridgend, Merthyr). These Local Authorities are characterised by small fragmented woodland sites. Connectivity was also mentioned by the respondent from RCT but not in answer to this question, stating that there is “*a lot of connectivity between LA woodlands and sites of other landowners,*” and that “*there is connectivity of woodland within both urban and rural contexts.*”

The only LA to mention a strategic plan in answer to this question was Brecon Beacons, making reference to the National Park Strategic Plan. The respondent from Torfaen mentioned that he is in the process of writing a “*Tree and Woodland Strategy...an **internal** document to raise the profile of woodlands within the authority...it will provide an overview of the reasons why trees and woodland are important, to people as well as the environment...to bring in thinking about the value, not just economic, of woodland.*”

Challenges for LA woodland management. All respondents stated that lack of resources, either through reduction of staff or budgets or lack of access to external funding, were going to be major challenges over the next year (spring 2014-2015). For example, in Denbighshire South, staff cuts have reduced the team down to one paid member of staff with other staff positions funded externally. It was noted that externally funded staff positions are often focused on the funder’s desired outcomes rather than the management of woodlands across the LA. The respondent from Denbighshire also mentioned a reliance on schemes such as Jobs Growth Wales which brought graduates into their team for short paid placements. It was reported that reliance on short term external funding and short contracts reduces

the institutional memory of the department and also makes the team less resilient in terms of capacity to respond to emergencies such as disease outbreak or extreme weather events.

Loss of specialist staff due to cuts was a big factor affecting teams within LAs and was mentioned by almost all respondents. The respondent from Monmouthshire stated that the best person to answer our questions was no longer with them, having been made redundant six months before; this person's job focused solely on woodlands.

“Everything’s been slashed, we’re really having to scratch our heads and say, well how are we going to do this? Even down to the health and safety work which we’ve got to do, we’re having to prioritise that and something else can go by the way side. If someone like me goes and xxx goes as well, he’s the Reserves Manager and you can’t lump that on someone else who’s already got a plate full of work.” Ceredigion.

Throughout the interviews there is a sense that teams across Wales are working on ‘shoe string’ budgets and able to achieve only a small proportion of what they would like to do, *“Most woodland work is related to liability maintenance, where if it is the right thing to do, opportunities will then be taken to do a little bit more work to enhance the area affected.”* RCT.

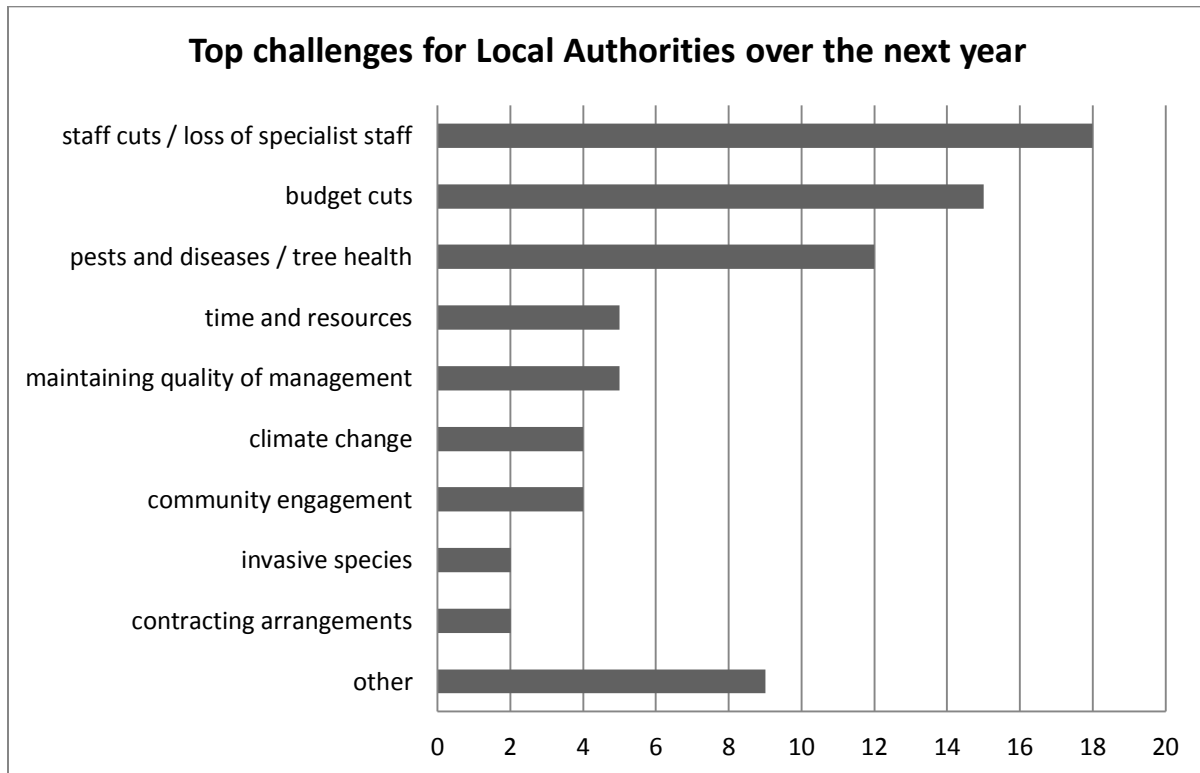


Figure 63: Main challenges for LA woodland management over the next year. N=21

Some LA officers are looking at opportunities for increased community involvement; if the capacity is not there within the LA team, they have to look at ways of multiplying the resources they do have.

Pests and diseases were also high on the list of challenges; 11 out of 21 respondents stated that pests and diseases were going to be a challenge, particularly the synergy of a disease outbreak and the lack of resources to deal with such a situation.

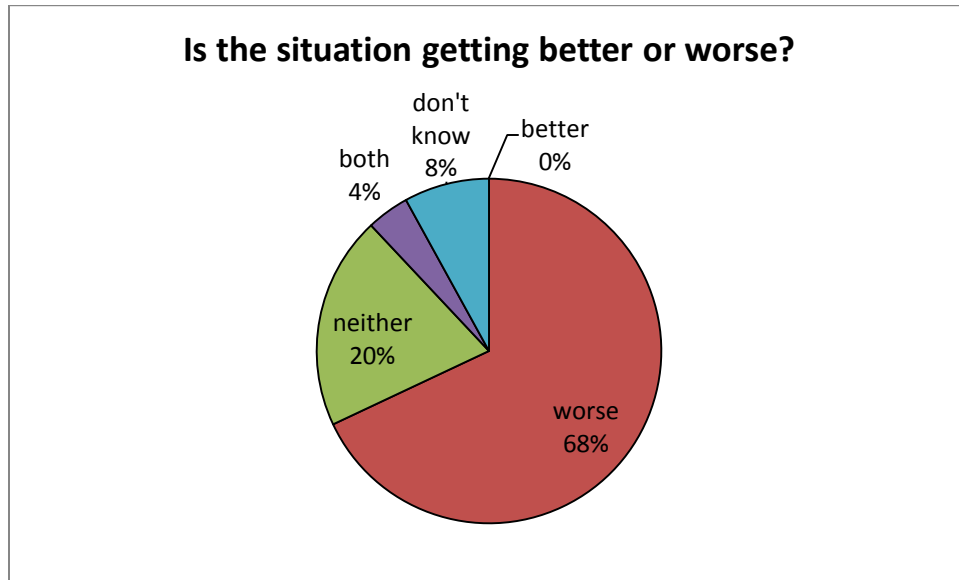


Figure 14: Respondent opinion on if the situation is getting better or worse. N=25

Situation getting better or worse? In spring 2014, 68% of the respondents said that the situation (as described above) is getting worse; 20% said that it was neither better or worse; 8% said they didn't know. One respondent (4%) said it was both getting better and worse. None of the respondents said that it was getting better. The general feeling across respondents was that they are currently stretched due to budget cuts, staff cuts and looming problems such as the increase of plant pathogens and extreme weather events.

3.3 Community Involvement in Local Authority Woodland Management

The primary aim of this survey was to gain a better understanding of community involvement in the management of Local Authority woodlands in Wales. LA officers were asked a series of questions related to current and future levels of community and social enterprise participation in woodland management.

Overall, 72% of the Local Authority respondents thought that community involvement in woodland management was a viable model for managing Local Authority woodland.

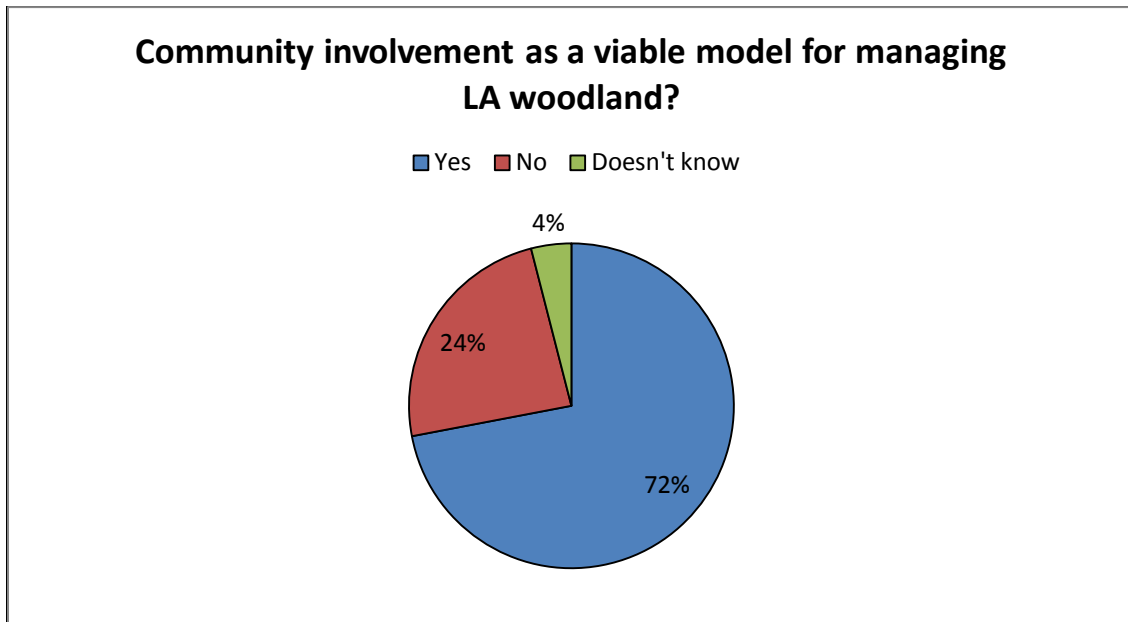


Figure 15: Answer to the questions 'Is community involvement a viable model for managing LA woodland?' N=25

Responses to this question again highlighted the variation across Local Authorities. Gwynedd said 'definitely yes, it is a question of asking if community groups can take over the management of certain woods, it is something we would wish to explore.' While Denbighshire said 'no – community involvement is great but you can't just devolve it and expect them to take it on – bureaucracy, insurance, public liability. I think that devolving to community groups is fraught with dangers.'

The question was framed so as not to specify what form 'community involvement in the management of woodlands' could take. The responses reflect the variation in what is understood by 'community involvement.' For instance, Caerphilly said: 'No – not involvement in management. The council has partnership grants to bid for grants and some have done woodland management.' Cardiff also responded by saying: 'Involvement yes, management in its entirety no.' While Ceredigion said: 'in some areas, but in partnership, not community ownership.' Conwy also said: 'no – it has been discussed, but we are bound by public access issues so want to keep control, but it would be nice to do it.' Monmouthshire said: 'light work rather than management –focussing on short term objectives.'

Most of the authorities who gave a ‘no’ response are concerned about communities ability to deal with public access, health and safety and insurance issues and their capacity to manage large areas, however these authorities also generally see communities as *‘part of the solution’* (Gwynedd).

The LA respondents who are classed as being in the ‘don’t know’ category have not had a discussion on the subject with others in their department or authority. Amongst those respondents who did give a ‘yes’ response, community involvement was often seen as a great idea rather than a defined strategy; *‘not presently, it is a great idea but would be a major time resource to kick start and manage it and to maintain the momentum and motivation.’* (Wrexham)

Benefits of community involvement. When asked to describe the benefits which greater community involvement can bring to their LA woodlands, the most commonly cited benefit (45% of respondents) was that it would enable the Local Authority staff to *‘get more done with less money.’*

Other benefits that were regularly cited by respondents were *‘the sense of community ownership’* (30%) that it would engender, and the fact that communities can access external sources of funds not otherwise available to Local Authorities (35%).

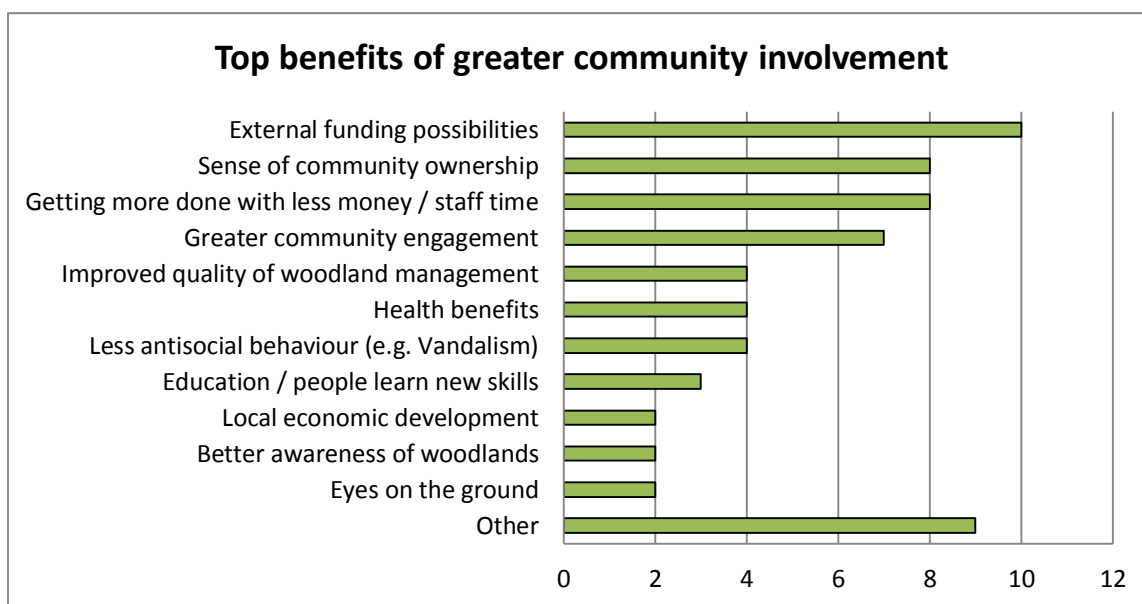


Figure 16: Top three benefits of greater community involvement in Local Authority woodlands, according to Local Authority staff. N=63 responses from 24 staff members.

Respondents regularly stated that the primary benefit of communities having a greater sense of ownership was that it would lead to a reduction in antisocial behaviour including vandalism. While ranking the resource savings highly, many Local Authorities were keen to point out that other benefits were important too, including health and well being and greater local understanding of ecology.

‘We get 30+ wardens when we work with volunteers – which helps with security when we open up woodlands’ and *‘working with communities gives a sense of ownership – people buy into the woodland – it is not a matter of Local Authority – thou shall not enter.’* (Pembrokeshire)

'Local Authorities can reduce their financial input into the management of certain sites.' (Gwynedd)

'People getting out and about without us – good for health and wellbeing' (Merthyr)

'I would hate for it to be just seen as a cost saving exercise, that's not what its about'. (Denbighshire)

'an additional resource for us – so that we can work on other things.' (Brecon Beacons NPA). Brecon also noted that community groups would become more aware of woodland ecology and biodiversity.

Forms of community involvement. In spring 2014, respondents who were positive about community involvement as a viable model for managing the woodland owned by Local Authorities were asked to list the forms that community involvement could take in their area. The key finding from this survey question is that involvement in volunteering, Friends of Groups and other activities are seen as the primary forms of community involvement. Less frequently cited were models in which the community took over significant responsibilities for management.

'volunteering, events and activities – but dependent on how they fit in with the workplan, walks and talks' (Pembrokeshire)

'Friends of groups' undertaking management work'. (Blaenau Gwent)

'volunteers or management agreements on a case by case basis.' (Conwy)

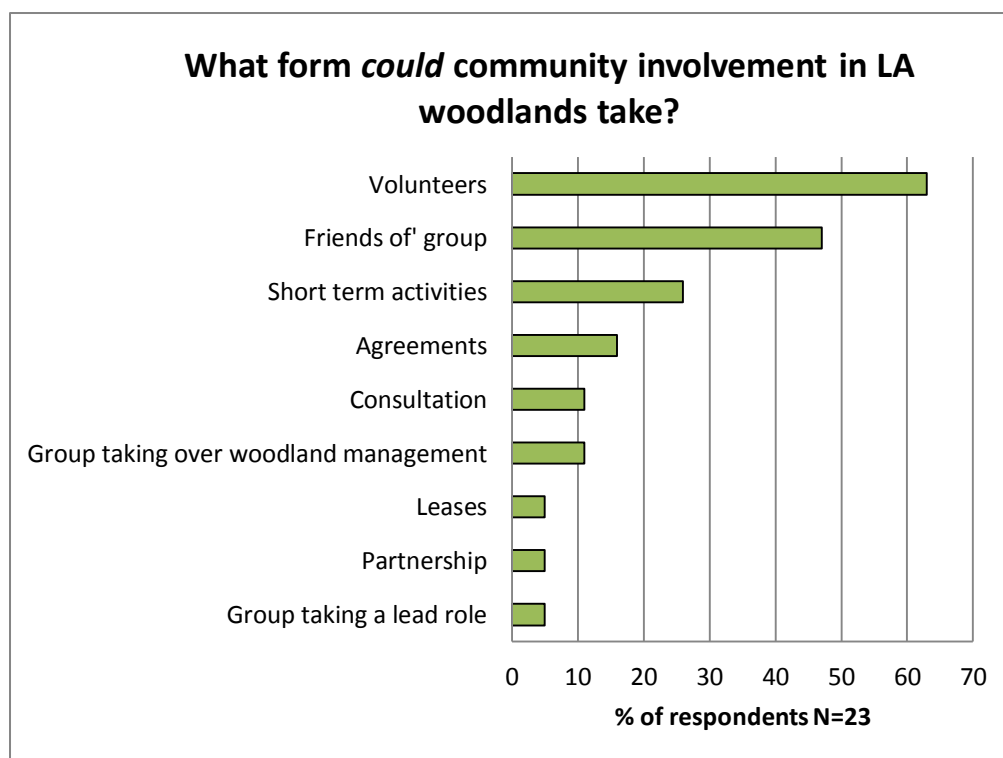


Figure 17: Forms community involvement in LA woodlands *could* take. N=23

The LA officers were also asked to describe the form that community involvement in the management of their LA woodlands currently takes; volunteering and 'Friends of Groups' were the most commonly cited forms. Using the Forest Research typology, these forms of involvement would be classed as 'consultative' or 'collaborative.'

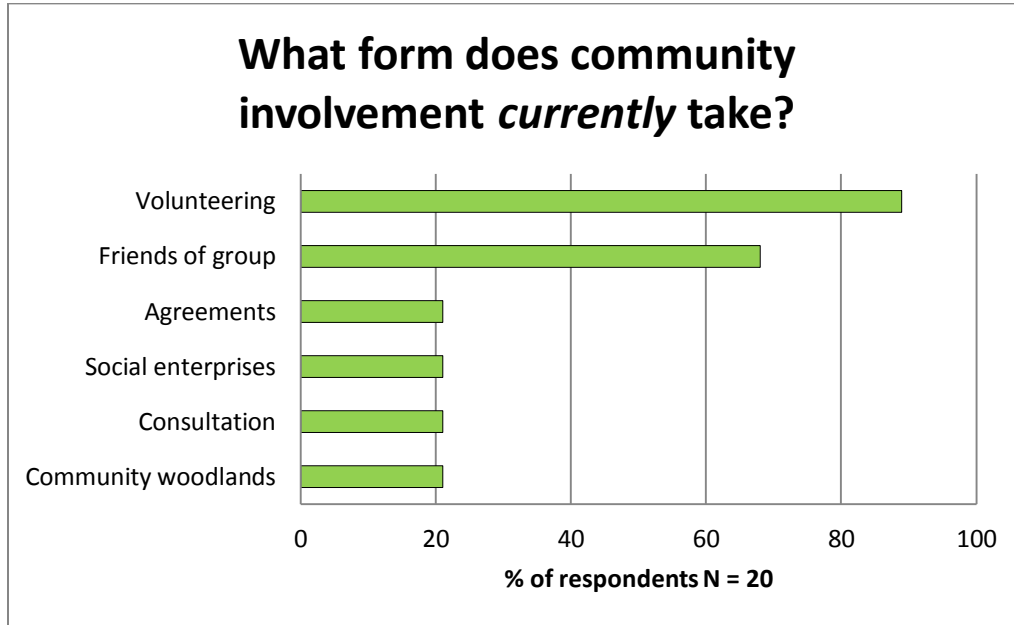


Figure 18 : Forms of community involvement in LA woodlands currently (N=43 reponses from 20 respondents)

However there is much variation in the current situation – both (i) between different LAs across Wales and (ii) at different sites within one Local Authority.

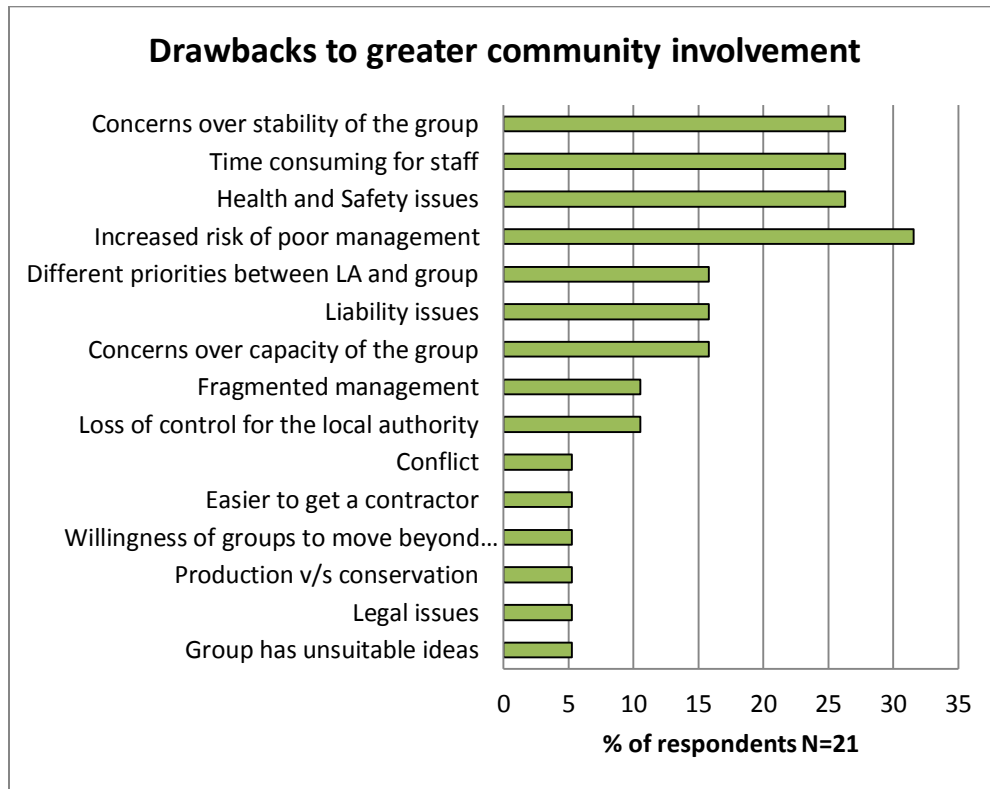
Respondents made a distinction between the current situation and what **ideally** they would like to see – many respondents clearly see a range of possibilities (from volunteering to management agreements). *'Constituted groups could take on more responsibility with raised capacity and they could take a lead role.'* (Bridgend)

'Volunteering – possibly management agreements – there aren't any in place and I don't know how it would work.' (NPT)

'It could be anything – there is no one size fits all – ranging from self managed groups with a licence or management plan to volunteering and working alongside us eg just litter picking' (Torfaen)

When asked to consider whether there are any negatives or drawbacks to greater community involvement in the management of Local Authority woodland, all respondents cited one or more drawbacks. The four most commonly cited drawbacks were concerns over the stability of a community group (i.e what would happen if the group became inactive) at over 25% of respondents, the time that Local Authority staff would need to invest in working with communities (over 25% of respondents), health and safety issues (over 25%) and the increased risk of poor woodland management (over 30%).

Figure 19: Drawbacks to greater community involvement in management of Local Authority woodlands



Social enterprises as a model for involvement. The survey also aimed to gauge to what extent social enterprises are seen as a viable model for management of LA owned woodland sites.

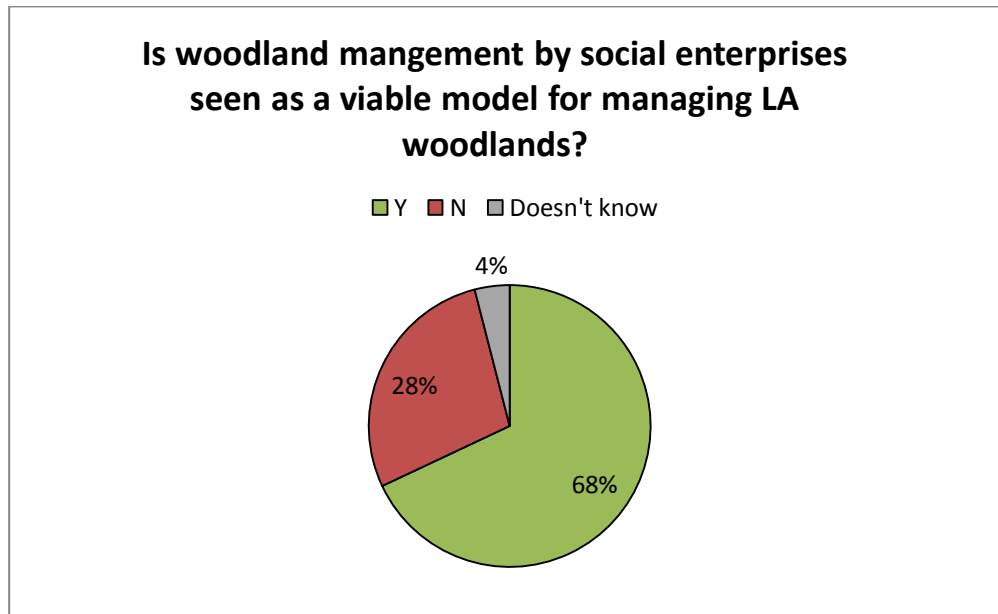


Figure 20: LA woodland management by social enterprises – is it a viable model?

The responses from LA interviewees (see Figure 20) show that the majority of respondents do consider social enterprises to be a viable model for Local Authority woodlands (68%) while 28% do not. Interestingly, the percentage figure for 'community involvement' as a viable model is 67%.

"It would depend how this worked –potentially yes. A lot would depend on the nature of the woodland – if that would help to justify management required – we have to work together – my only worry is that you would have a group wanting to take over entirely and you could end up with a muddle and a mish-mash and a lot of waster effort –so long as everyone is prepared to work together with the manager and agent then there is no reason why it shouldn't work out to everyones benefit- particularly the woodlands". (Vale of Glamorgan)

"Social enterprises – not for the Local Authority woodlands – if someone said they could make money from a site then the council would sell it –finance is the barrier." (Anglesey)

"Is it seen as a viable model? —not that I am aware of, where funding is running short it would be better to hand the woodland over to someone of that nature rather than selling it as we'd lose all sorts of control then – I think that would be a preferable alternative." (Ceredigion)

'mega viable from the Local Authority perspective – from the social enterprise point of view it is ok. We have 2 – we have told them they can have 90% of the Better Woods for Wales grant –we hold 10% back for mishaps – they get the commercial value of the wood they extract – they are getting employment. They deliver contracts.' (Pembrokeshire)

'we may not have suitable areas of woodland – mostly it is small pockets. It could work on the right sites but we would need to know what they wanted. We would need to be sure that they knew what they were doing and had adequate expertise - and that they wouldn't be going off and doing their own thing.' (Blaenau Gwent)

'yes but there are constraints from planning.' (Bridgend)

'one group has been providing a service – grass cutting and selling firewood. They supply visitor centres with firewood from thinnings and keep some back for processing.' (Wrexham)

'traditionally LA owned woodland is scrappy so it would take hard work to make it pay.' (Flintshire)

It can be noted that it is not clear from the interviewees with Local Authority staff either (a) how Local Authorities define woodland based **social** enterprises as distinct from woodland based enterprises or (b) what type of woodland based social enterprises the Local Authorities have in mind (e.g firewood producers, non wood forest product collectors, forest training enterprises etc.)

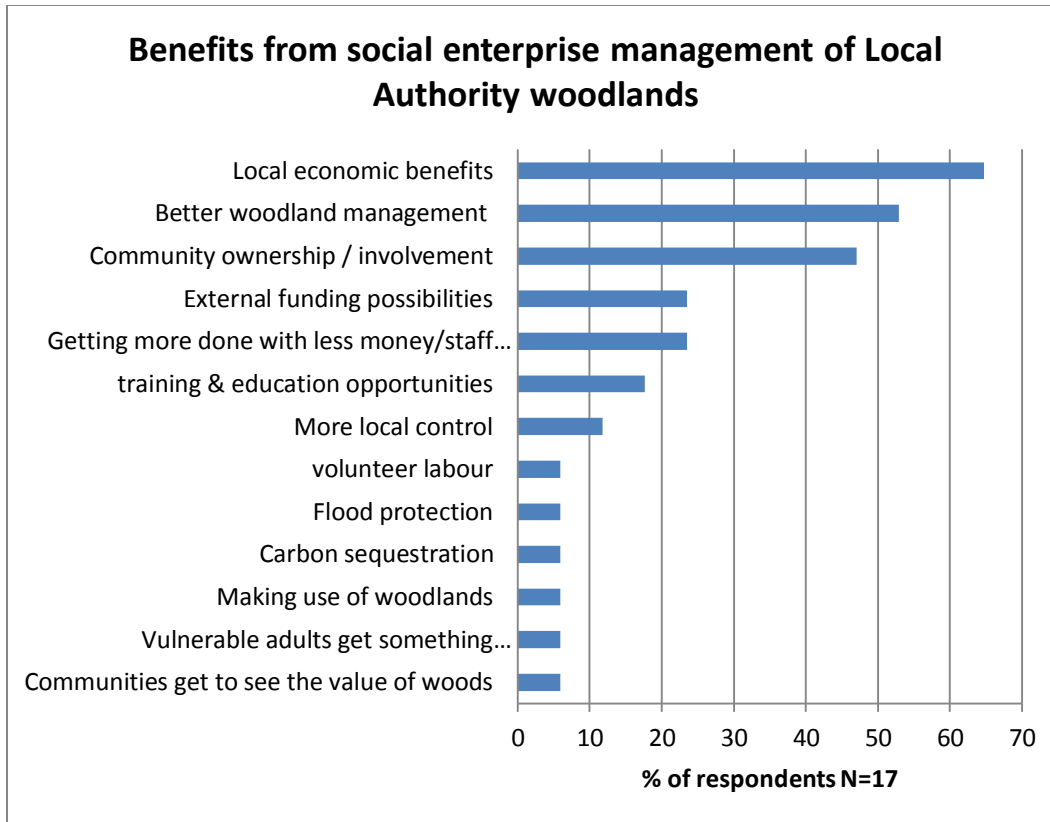


Figure 21: Benefits from social enterprise management of Local Authority woodlands

Figure 21 shows the benefits that LA officers perceive could be realized by social enterprises working on LA land; most were positive about social enterprises and the economic benefits they could bring.

However it can be noted that most respondents did not differentiate in their answers between community involvement as a model and social enterprise as a model. It can also be noted that the respondents were generally not speaking from personal experience of social enterprises and only one officer cited an example of a woodland social enterprises (Ceredigion and Tir Coed/Wise Woods.)

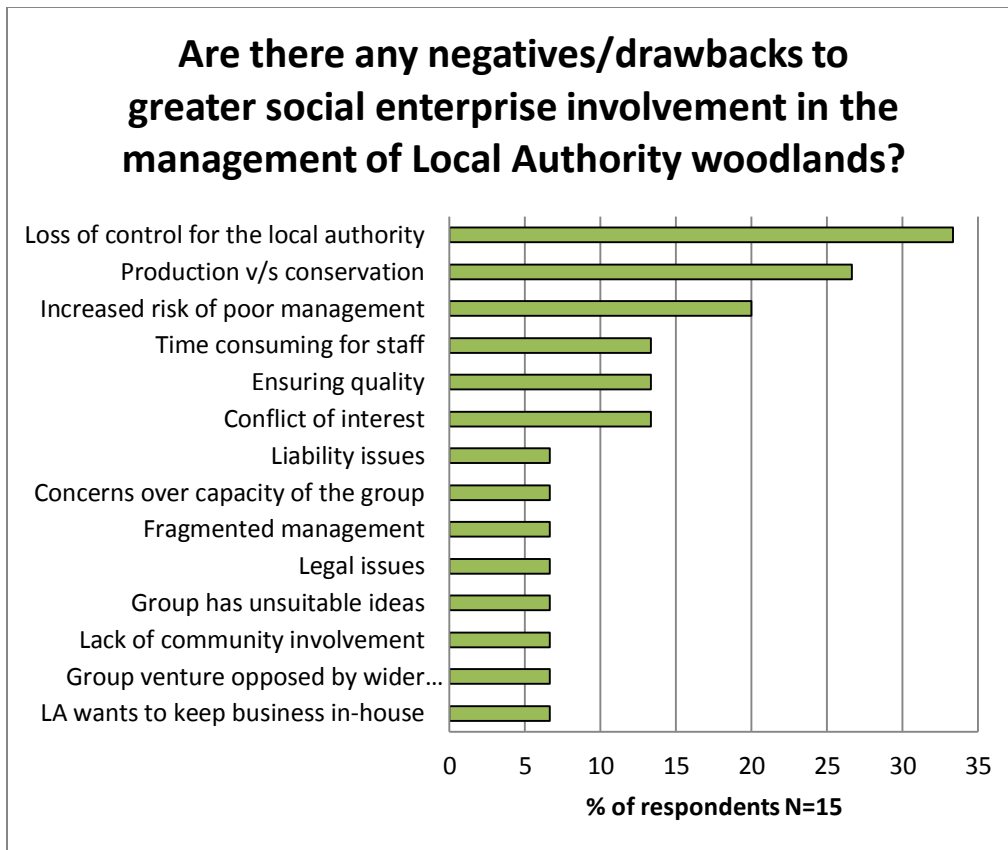


Figure 22: Drawbacks to greater social enterprise involvement in LA woods

Some of the drawbacks cited by respondents were similar for general community involvement. In addition, officers noted the potential for conflicts around production versus conservation objectives.

“Conflicts of interests – there is one area locally (not on our property) where part of the village wants to harvest firewood and others see this as doing damage and harm to biodiversity – it is all about fuelwood and is that sustainable – you can get the balance right but it takes thinking – it comes down to learning (by the community) – that can come from the work done by Green Valleys – not directly by education but more by suggestion – ‘how about doing it this way.’ (Brecon Beacons NPA)

“ We would lose a certain amount of control – it wouldn’t be managed as professionally as it is now- there could be more conflicts of interests – they don’t necessarily see the bigger picture – and there is more impact on the environment with more people getting involved. There are different expectations locally of what the wood should be and what it should be used for – some want it as it was in the 1950s – with no people in it and no paths; some want to build dens and fires; some want it left as it is for wildlife; some want it tidy. I believe there is a place for all these things.” (Flintshire)

‘The authority would not want to give over complete control – it would want to be able to monitor what was being done and to be able to take back if necessary. ‘ (Caerphilly)

Current level of community involvement. An important aspect of the survey was to try and gain a picture of the current level of community involvement in the management of Local Authority woodlands in Wales. While in just over 80% of the Local Authorities surveyed, respondents stated that communities are currently involved in the management of woodlands, in a significant percentage (19%) the respondents stated that there is currently no community involvement.

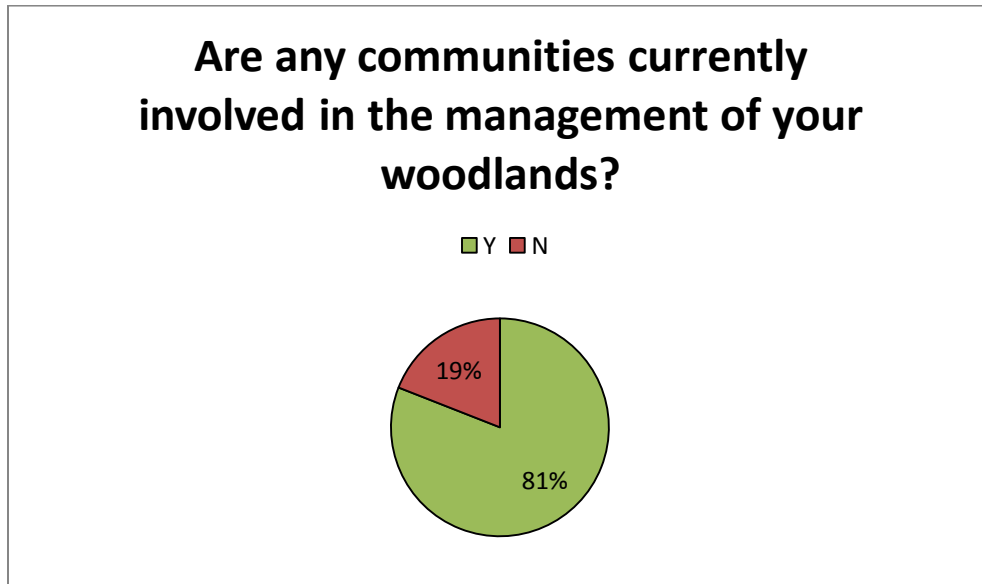


Figure 23: Current levels of community involvement in the management of LA woodlands

In those Local Authorities where communities are currently involved in woodland management, Figure 18 shows that the most common forms of involvement are volunteering and 'Friends of' Groups. The Friends of Groups often have a level of autonomy, in contrast to the volunteer groups that are often run in-house by Local Authority departments. Agreements with community groups are less common.

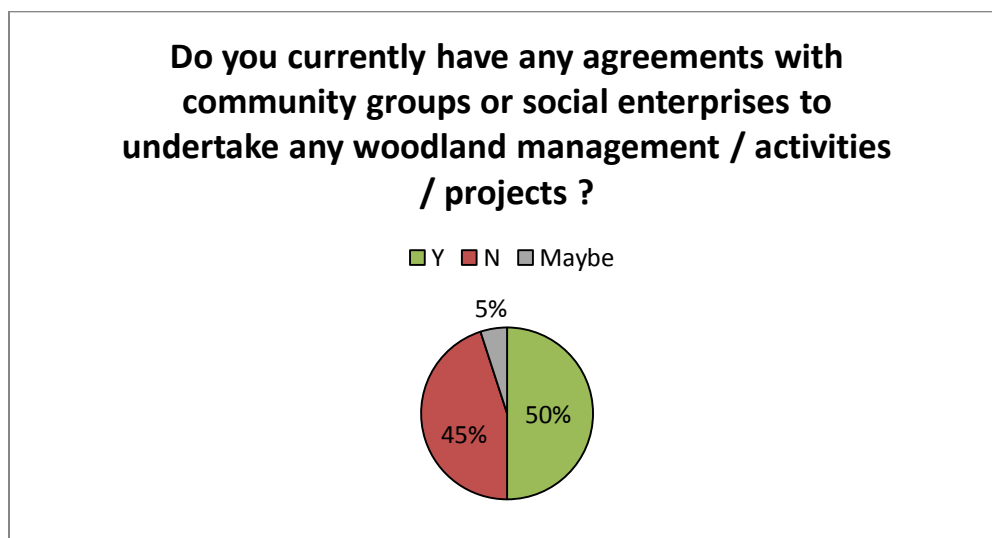


Figure 24: Current agreements with community groups and social enterprises

The respondents were asked if their Local Authority had entered into any agreements with community groups or social enterprises to undertake woodland management activities or projects? Fifty percent of respondents said, yes, they had entered into an agreement with either a community group or a social enterprise. Further research is required to establish the **precise** nature of these agreements.

'Yes, joint management but not planning, with local voluntary groups – nature conservation groups working on designated sites.' (Merthyr)

'There are, but not formal documents or arrangements, informal memorandum of understanding – the department considers this a protocol for joint working.' (Gwynedd)

Of the 45% who responded 'no' and 'never' to this question, the interviewee was asked for the reasons why their Local Authority has never entered into an agreement. A selection of responses include:

'What we do works, so why change it for something which is untried and untested'. (Flintshire)

'Not for a piece of woodlands – yes for land – there has not been a lot of demand – there has been talk but nothing has come to pass – we have never had the time and staff to encourage groups, to work with groups and to train, we do not have the capacity.' (Torfaen)

'No – but we were getting really close to one – legalities.' (Brecon Beacons NPA)

An important element of this survey is to understand whether or not Local Authorities across Wales are actively seeking to increase the level of community involvement in the management of their woodlands and if so, what does this involve?

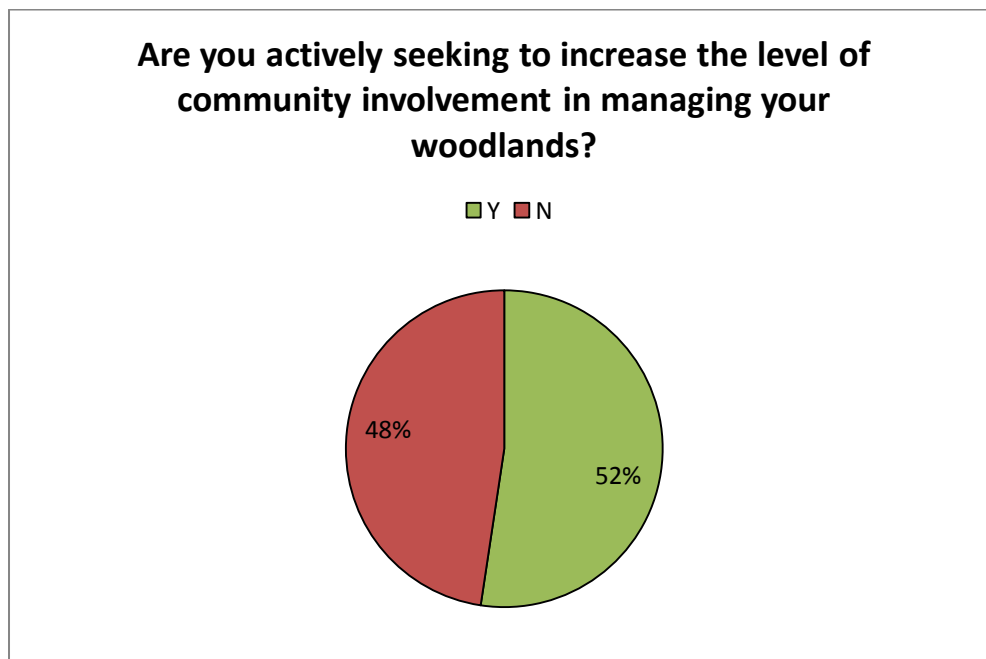


Figure 25: Local Authorities actively seeking to increase the level of community involvement

Although 48% of respondents stated that they are actively seeking to increase the level of community involvement, it was not clear from the responses whether this indicated a desire to go to another level of engagement (eg from ‘consultation’ to ‘empowerment’) or whether it indicated an expansion of existing engagement eg more volunteering.

Local Authorities across Wales are facing cuts in their budgets for 2014/15. Within this context, Llais y Goedwig asked the question ‘if you are not actively seeking to increase the level of community involvement, what resources or support or help would you need to be able to actively seek to increase the level of community involvement in managing your woodlands/work more in partnership with community groups and social enterprises?’

| What resources or support do you need to be able to actively seek to increase the level of community involvement in woodland management? | | |
|---|----|------|
| | No | % |
| More staffing | 4 | 57 % |
| More resources | 3 | 43 % |
| More budget | 2 | 28 % |
| More time | 2 | 28 % |
| Identifying the right people in the community | 1 | 14% |
| Volunteers with resources | 1 | 14% |
| Expertise | 1 | 14% |

(percentage of respondents that mentioned this point)

Figure 26: Resources needed to try and increase the level of community involvement

More staffing and more resources were mentioned by a high proportion of respondents: ‘*Manpower – another of me. Volunteers with the right resources and more funding would help.*’ (Ceredigion)

‘*An element of community groups coming forward with a more structured approach to how they want to do things, more ecologically appropriate.....*’ (Rhondda Cynon Taff)

Similarly, when respondents were asked ‘what do you see as the barriers to greater community/social enterprise involvement in woodland management’, the main barriers to greater involvement in woodland management were said by respondents to be lack of resources (35% of respondents), lack of staff time (20%) and lack of support/handholding (20%). Lack of demand from the community (15%) and lack of case examples (15%) were also cited as barriers.

‘*Lack of resources and the need for a galvanizing link between the authority and the community*’ (Powys)

‘*Lack of sites that are suitable*’ (Monmouthshire)

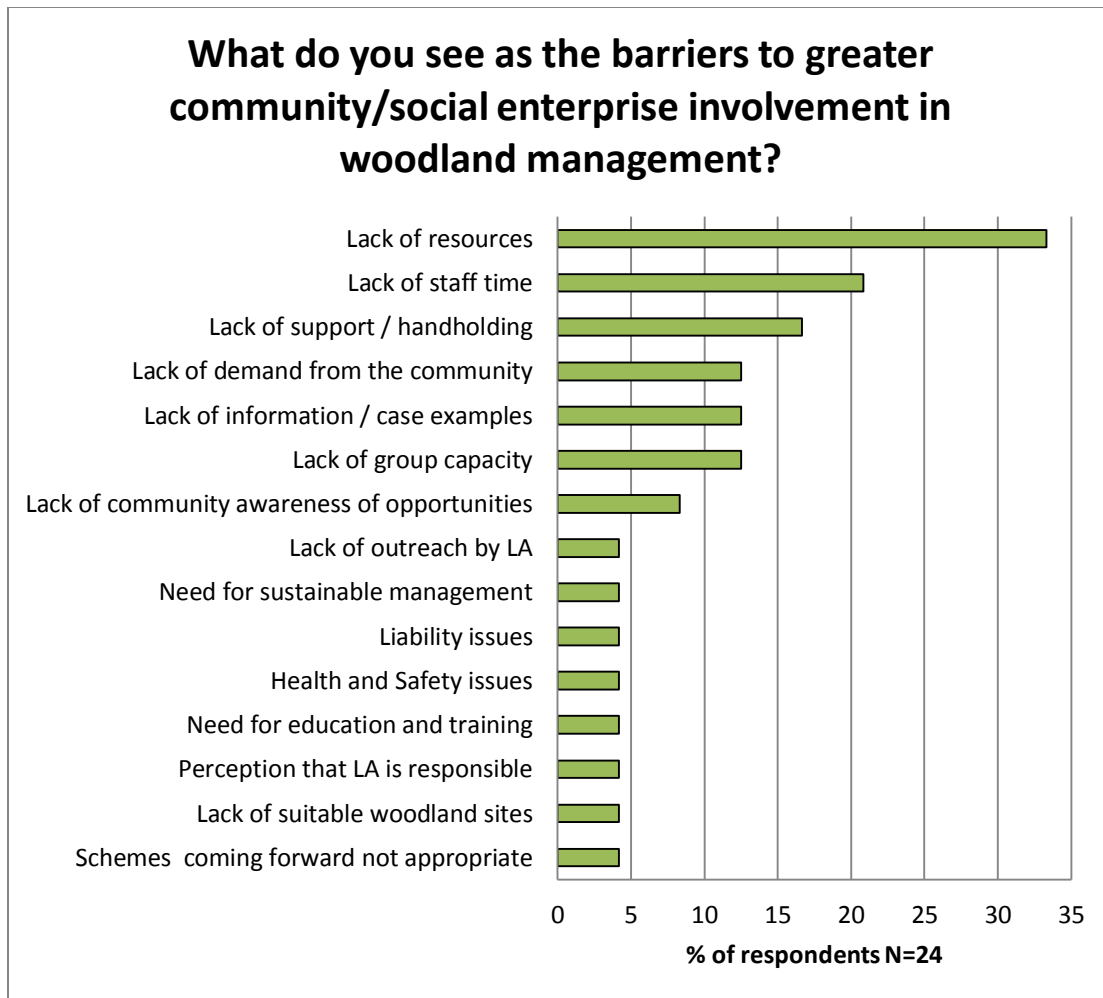


Figure 27: Barriers to greater community involvement in woodland management

‘with some communities, it is not knowing that it is an option – there are places where people are more proactive.. helps to have a person or process to take the lead and see it through to the end point- such as dealing with liability..sometimes the informal arrangements based on trust can work better.’ (Brecon)

‘officer time. I think community involvement should be encouraged – I wouldn’t knock on doors, but if the right information went out, people might come forward.’ (Ceredigion)

‘wide ranging really ! The red tape, health and safety, insurance, risk assessments, directives, might be offputting, even constituting isn’t straight forward...a bit daunting.’ (Denbighshire)

‘from our point of view, it is a question of staff resources to work with the groups and encourage and support them and so on, this is where we have a short fall.’ (Gwynedd)

‘the perception is that the Local Authority is responsible so it is ‘your work’ and you should get on with it – you are paid.’ (Merthyr)

Natural Resource Wales (NRW) – the Woodlands and You framework

NRW manages the Welsh Government forest estate on behalf of the people of Wales. In 2011, NRW launched a framework to help the people of Wales make more of their woodlands; this process is known as Woodlands and You (WaY). Llais y Goedwig was keen to understand whether or not the LA respondents are aware of the NRW process, and whether they thought a formal process like WaY would be of help to them? Of the 20 Local Authority respondents who answered the question on awareness of WaY, 95% were not aware of the NRW Woodlands and You process.

NRW – Woodlands and You (WaY)

The Welsh Government has produced a guide for individuals, community groups and social enterprises wanting to organise activities, events and projects in the Welsh Government Woodland Estate managed by Forestry Commission Wales (predecessor organisation to NRW).

The guide states that the “Welsh Government and Forestry Commission Wales are committed to making sure communities and social enterprises get the greatest possible benefit from the Woodland Estate. We welcome proposals and approaches from **all** individuals, groups and social enterprises, and proposals can be made at any time. The woodlands of Wales are here for everyone.”

The WaY framework clarifies those activities in Welsh government woodlands which need no consent (eg picnicking and geocaching), and those activities which need consent (eg forest schools and bushcraft courses) - WaY formalizes the consent process and provides for 2 types of application – for activities, events, surveys and a more rigorous process for projects.

| Woodlands and You Application Forms | Agreement Type |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Activities (Annual Permits for Individuals, Clubs, Businesses) | Permit |
| Events | Permit |
| Surveys (eg Conservation, Heritage and Archaeological) | Permit |
| Projects | Management Agreement or Lease |

WaY provides a formal route by which, for example, community groups can submit a proposal for a project on the Welsh Government estate by completing the Woodlands and You: Projects application form. Should the proposal be approved, the constituted group will be offered either:

- a.) Management Agreement - a fixed term contract setting out exactly what you are permitted to do - it does not give you exclusive use of the woodland or grant a legal interest in it.
- b.) Lease – this does give you exclusive possession of a defined area, and would be suitable for e.g. community food projects or the construction of shelters or buildings.

Under a WaY management agreement, a community group can undertake woodland management activities – for instance rejuvenating a deciduous woodland and making use of coppice products.

Source: Woodlands and You – Helping the people of Wales make more of their woodlands.

Projects, Events, Activities on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate. Forestry Commission Wales

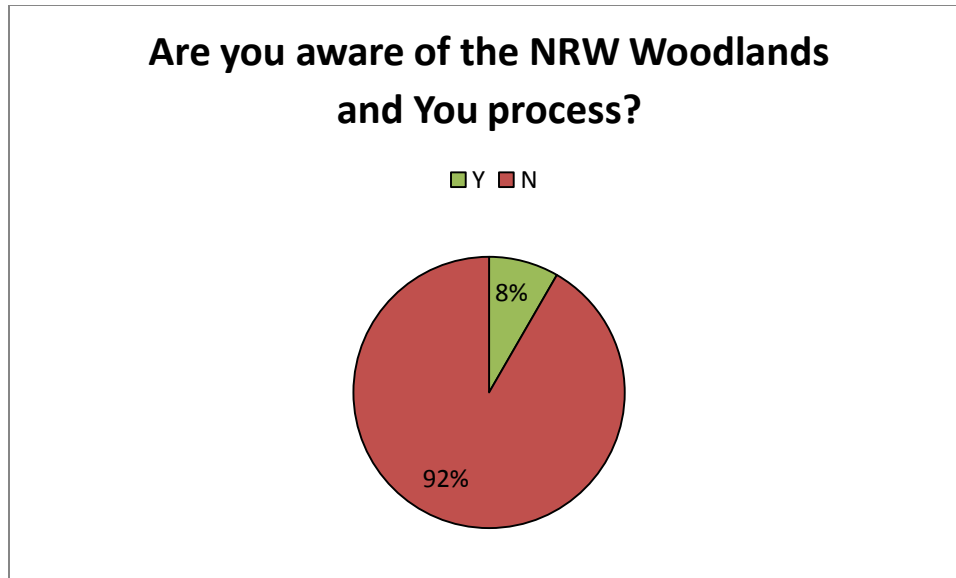


Figure 28: Awareness of the NRW Woodlands and You process?

Of the 21 Local Authority respondents who considered whether or not a formal process like WaY would help them, 48% responded that they thought it would, while 38% said that it would not.

'No – I don't think it would be appropriate. We are accessible. If someone wants to put on an appropriate event, we make it possible and wardens will be involved. We have wardens on the ground.' (Flintshire)

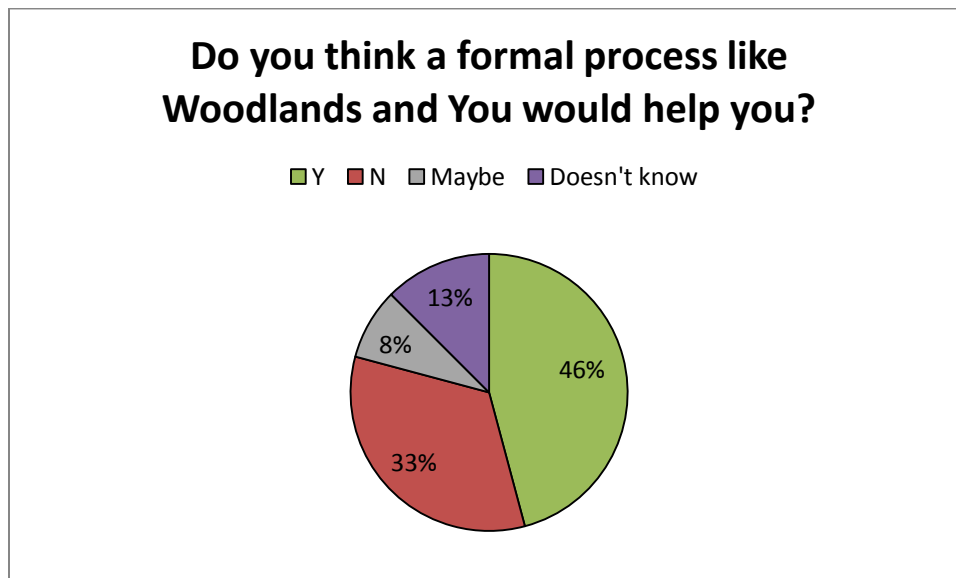


Figure 29: Would a formal process like WaY help Local Authorities?

'Having a template in place could help.' (Conwy). *'A bit early yet for this – too early a stage for a formal process.'* (Bridgend).

'Yes – if it involved helping groups set up with eg constitutions' (Blaenau Gwent)

Assistance from Llais y Goedwig (voice of community woodlands in Wales). Llais y Goedwig is a voluntary, membership based association that represents and supports community woodland groups in Wales. Llais y Goedwig currently has around 200 members, made up of approximately 50 community woodland groups and 150 organisations or practitioners interested in community woodlands. Llais y Goedwig organizes networking events, produces resources for community woodlands, raises the profile of community woodlands and engages with policy makers. All the respondents were asked – ‘is there anything Llais y Goedwig can do to help you?’

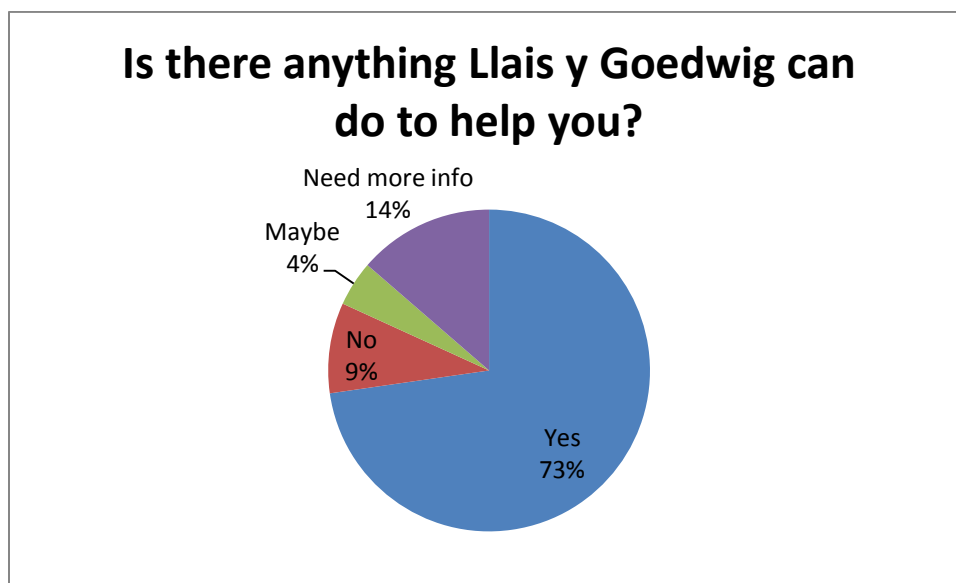


Figure 30: Can Llais y Goedwig help LA officers with community involvement

| Is there anything Llais y Goedwig can do to help you? | |
|--|-------------|
| | % |
| Support for establishing groups | 27 |
| Partnership working | 13 |
| Resources to help on the ground | 13 |
| Raise the profile of community woodlands | 13 |
| Help writing management plans | 7 |
| Web resources | 7 |
| Local person to help coordinate volunteers | 7 |
| Brokering role | 7 |
| Lobby policy makers on need for publicly owned & accessible woodland | 6 |
| | <u>100%</u> |

Figure 31: What assistance can Llais y Goedwig offer to Local Authorities? N=22 [from the 73% who said yes]

'Would be good to have a local person who could help with co-ordinating volunteers and groups' (Pembrokeshire)

'if you were able to really help with the initial planning and context, proper planning of what is being proposed, depending on the group. Groups need someone who understands the context to broker arrangements with us.' (RCT)

'potentially to be a facilitating link, between those who have the woodland and those who want to use/manage the woodland..as negotiators.. and helping with expertise on the ground, especially as we are losing our Coed Cymru woodland officers.' (Powys)

'support for new groups and help with writing management plans' (Blaenau Gwent)

'helping with my lack of time – with things like trying to establish groups/voluntary rangers especially on the site where less people are involved. But there are transport issues and it takes time to build relationships.' (Ceredigion)

'partnership working – getting the message out – having the time to get on with it.' (Conwy)

'organisations – Coed Cymru, Coed Cadw etc need to work together – it can be confusing' (Merthyr)

Main LA contact for a community. Respondents were asked 'who would be the main contact in the Local Authority for a community wanting access to Local Authority owned woodland?' The most common answer was simply 'me'.

As a follow up question, respondents were asked 'who would provide support to community groups?' In addition to answering 'me' the respondents also regularly said that rangers and wardens give support as do Park managers and Coed Cymru officers. Some respondents said that support is dispersed across the authority, often depending on which section 'owns' the site.

'within Gwynedd it gets quite dispersed, speaking on behalf of countryside service, other colleagues for example in biodiversity, they would be keen to support activities as well, we do lots of stuff jointly. It would be difficult to pinpoint a particular person or role who groups would be supported by. There are woodlands within other services, so its difficult to answer and maybe not an ideal situation. Our experience on the ground is that people within a particular community will find their way towards whoever is responsible for a particular site.' (Gwynedd)

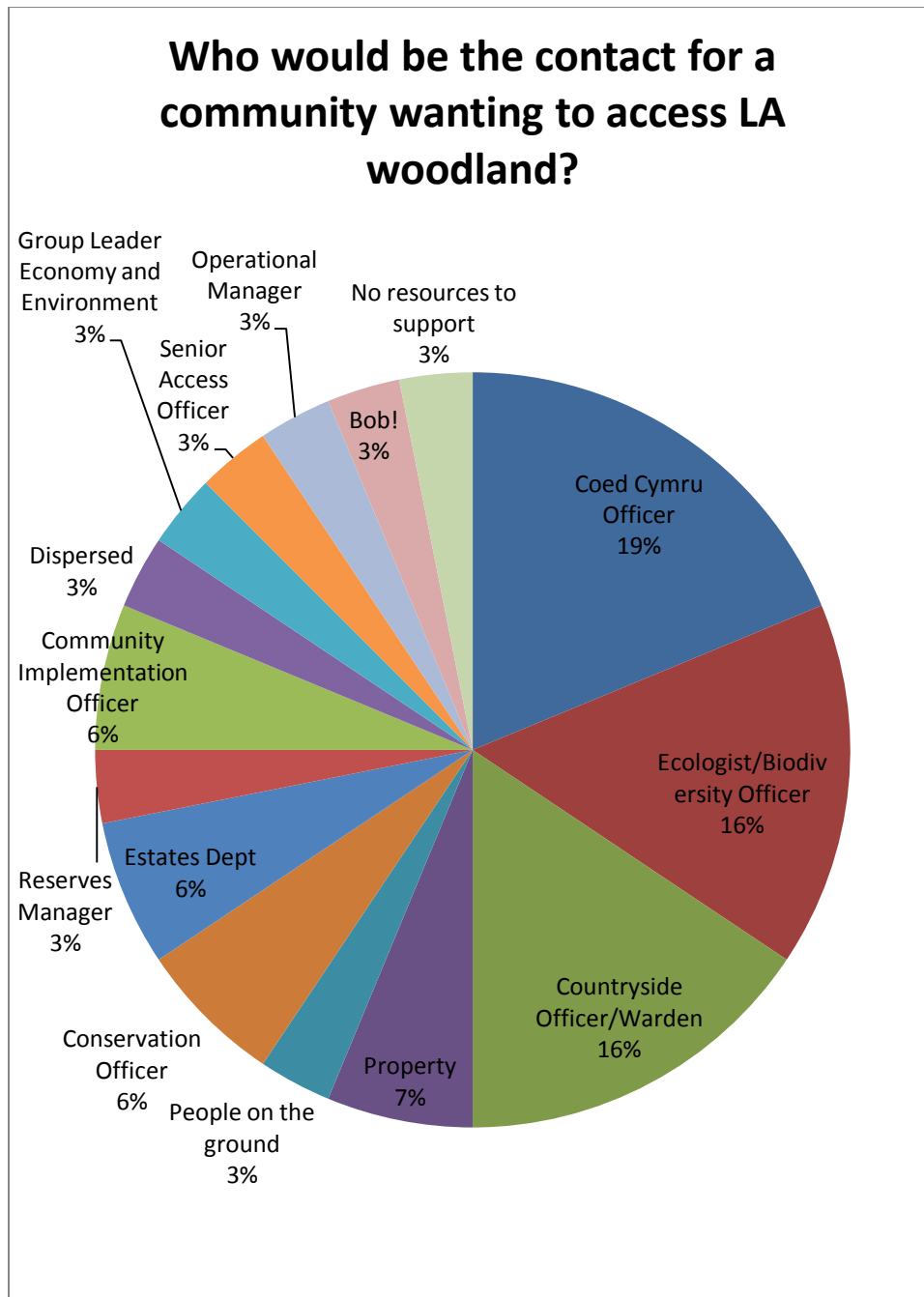


Figure 32: LA contact for communities wanting access to LA owned woodland

68% of respondents answered that they were the contact for communities wanting to access Local Authority owned woodland. The diversity of job titles in the chart above shows that there is no common system for community involvement in councils across Wales. In figure 32, the Coed Cymru Officers are cited as being a significant contact for communities wanting access to LA woodland; the numbers of Coed Cymru officers has been reduced in 2014 due to budget cuts.

Divesting of responsibilities. In spring 2014, the survey asked the respondents the question ‘ Is your Local Authority seeking any disposals or transfers of the woodland it currently administers (lease arrangements, outright sale etc). In response to this question, 12% of respondents said yes, a majority of 71 % said no and 17% said they did not know the answer to the question being asked.

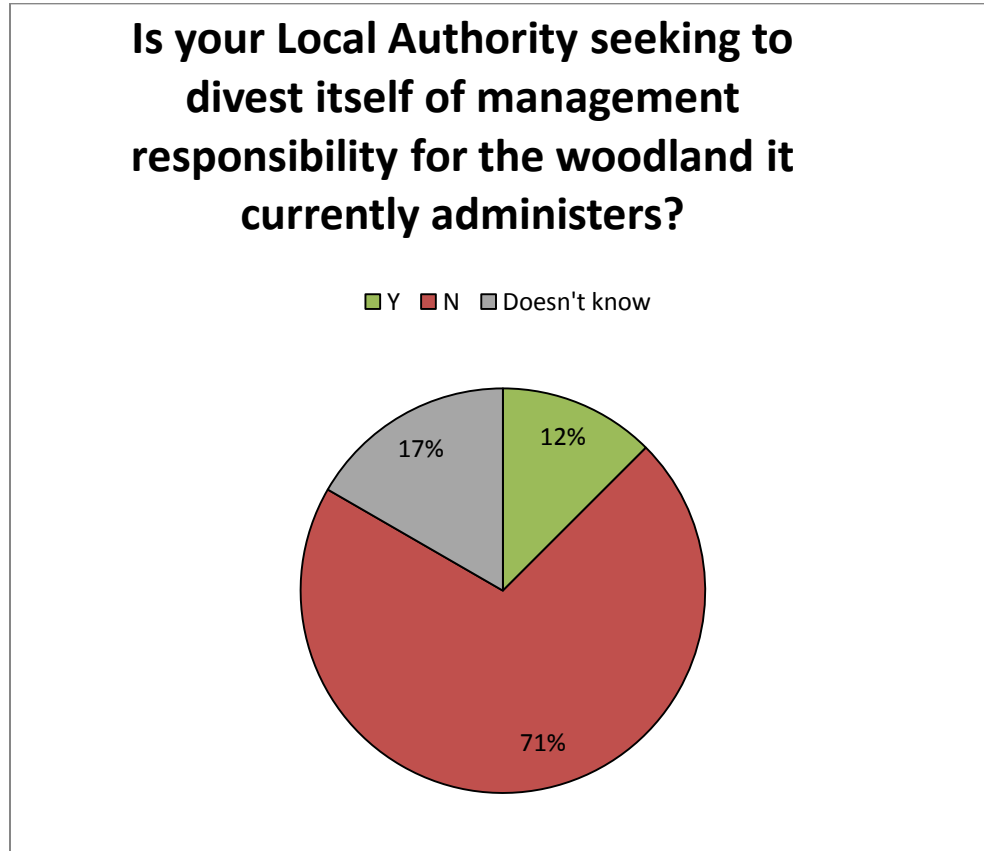


Figure 33: Are LAs seeking to divest responsibility for woodlands?

‘Not that I am aware of, RCT has a land disposal programme, woodlands generally not disposed of.’ (RCT)

‘Not that I am aware of. At the moment I can’t see woodlands being sold on the open market, not woodland with timber value.’

‘there would be an uproar from the public if it were to be offered for sale.’(Flintshire)

‘it is seeking disposals....but can’t see anyone would want woodlands.’ (Merthyr)

The situation in some Local Authority areas with respect to divesting woodland management responsibility has changed between spring and autumn 2014 due to cuts in overall budgets. Llais y Goedwig is not sure what the current situation is across all 22 Local Authority areas, however it is aware that the policy in Powys County Council (the largest by area in Wales) has changed significantly. A second interview with a Powys LA officer in November 2014 sheds light on a dynamic situation (see below).

Case example: Impact of budget cuts on policy vis divesting responsibility for woodland management – Powys, November 2014¹²

Staffing: currently 3 staff look after woodlands – the farm estates manager and 2 staff with responsibilities for outdoor areas (football pitches, parks, woodlands combined). Biodiversity officers also help with habitat management. Coed Cymru staff left in June; losing them has made a big difference – they dealt mostly with landowners but also wrote woodland management schemes for the council.

Cuts: the Council are now expecting a lot more working with volunteers (*the ‘buzzword’ of the moment*). Now if a group comes to the council and says they want to look after a woodland the council will be keen to give it up – a plan will need to be put together and a management agreement or lease drawn up. The council will not sell the sites but it cannot afford to spend money on them. The council is keen to ‘off load’ sites now – the situation has changed significantly since March 2014. In spring the council were just looking to get rid of bowling greens and football pitches – now that is extended to woodlands and playgrounds – *‘its all about reducing costs’*.

Approach: the council will be writing to the community councils and town councils about the playgrounds. Handover of any site would have to be to a constituted group with a management plan and an agreement. If it is managed correctly there could be a longer term lease – if it was a Town Council it would be easier to start with a lease and they could sub let. The council does not know how long a group will last so best to start with a management agreement. The council would not charge rent – they just want the site managed.

Support for a woodland group: the support can depend on the officer but in general there is no funding. The council would pay for a tree survey to be carried out so that the group know what to do – the officers are keen to help and support – but funding is the problem. The council could supply a few trees and fence stakes but not a management plan – the Coed Cymru officers could have done this but remaining staff are NOT foresters by training. Council staff can try and find people to help but they cannot be ‘hands on’ due to lack of funds.

Sale of firewood/timber: the council would be *‘more than happy for a group to sell firewood/timber etc to generate income’* – *‘I would want them to MANAGE the woods.’* The critical issue is that the council *‘does not want to spend money on the site’*.

Public liability: Most sites would be open access and the public liability would be with the group. The council officer would go along to the AGM and ensure that the group has done the tree survey etc according to the agreement.

¹² Prepared from an interview with a Powys CC officer in November 2014. The officer is responsible for management of open spaces including woodlands and sports pitches and playgrounds. Approximately 25% of the role is focused on woodlands – the % varies with the seasons. Primary responsibilities are the same for all open spaces – inspections every 6 months and then acting on the findings.

Friends of Groups: the council are trying to get away from Friends of Groups – ‘we haven’t got money to help Friends of Groups’. In the past the Friends of Groups would put programmes together and the Council would spend money on their programme – ‘so now it’s all about using volunteers – including for strimming etc’. For example – a Wildlife Trust wanted to see flowers on a roundabout – the council spent £75 on digging the roundabout and the Trust covered the cost of the flowers and did the planting. The council is keen for people to take more ownership and do more. Essentially though what the council are hoping for is that volunteers will come forward and the staff will look after the volunteer force.

Community group interest: ‘To date I haven’t had any other groups come to me in Powys. For instance in Welshpool- Coed y Bren near the leisure centre could be a community woodland. No one is coming forward in Powys – the areas where people are keen are Machynlleth, Knighton and Presteigne – there is no one coming forward in Newtown, Llanidloes etc. They are more enthusiastic in Mach etc. For instance there are no allotments in Builth Wells as no one is asking for them.’

‘The Community First areas in South and North Wales seem to encourage this type of thing – it doesn’t seem to be working here – its hard to get young volunteers. It’s a contrast to the Cotswolds Way where the volunteers do so much – and they do what they want to do.’ ‘The interest is not coming in for groups and woodlands- contrast with the bowling greens and football pitches- the clubs have taken them on now –we gave them a lot of support and grant funding for 3 years. ’

In Conwy the cuts in Local Authority spending have inspired a local organization to take the initiative to try and identify potential LA woodlands that local communities could manage and benefit from.

Case example: Local organization¹³ secures funds for an audit of Local Authority woodland – Conwy

Aim: This audit will be able to say ‘there are so many ha of woodland in this location which is not being managed - and if it is not being managed it could potentially be taken on by a community. The audit is being paid for from the public purse (Nature Fund) and we intend that the results should be in the public eye. We would like Golygfa Gwydyr to be a learning hub for managing a wood and supplying forest products - the inventory is the first step.

Driver: 4% budget cuts are starting to bite – management of small areas of woodland will not be possible. We would like to see the council move away from the ‘Friends of’ model – to show people that there is another model – to one where the groups can take more control and can generate income from the woodlands. Farmers can also take on the woodlands where communities cant.

Key factors for success with councils: having someone within the council who understands the way we work and is willing to make representations and open doors – councils are impenetrable to most people. Also confidence building – we have gained a lot since associating ourselves with CARTREFI CONWY –they are a big organization (a registered social landlord) that manages a lot of housing stock in north Wales.

3.4 Case studies of community involvement in Local Authority woodlands

¹³ The case study is based on an interview with Golygfa Gwydyr – a community group based in Llanwrst that aims to enhance social, environmental and economic resilience and to promote growth opportunities for growth and vibrant communities.

One of the aims of the survey was to contact community groups and social enterprises involved in Local Authority woodland in Wales, in order to prepare a set of case studies and to identify best practice. Case studies below are based on interviews with community groups and council officers in autumn 2014.

Case Study 1 – CWM TALWG WOODLANDS RESIDENTS GROUP , Barry¹⁴ (Empowered)

Name of woodlands: Cwm Talwg community woodlands

Name of group: Cwm Talwg Woodlands Residents Group

Council: Vale of Glamorgan

History: *This group has been in existence since February 1988. ‘The Council wanted to ‘improve’ part of the site by filling in with subsoil a tree filled hollow which they said collected rubbish- we objected to this and put pressure on the Council by pointing out that part of the land belonged to a property developer. They withdrew the plan. The Wildlife Trust gave us a booklet on the Pocket Park initiative in Northamptonshire.*

This simple concept of local people taking action for the community and the environment on their own doorstep really enthused us. We constituted a group with the aim of making a Pocket Park. A Prince of Wales committee officer gave us the encouragement we needed in the early days.

We kept up our profile by collecting rubbish every Sunday morning. Though the Council did not share our ideals, (few Councils then were as enlightened as the trailblazers in Northampton) this showed the council we were determined and useful and eventually the Council came round.

Legal status: *Our legal status is that of an unincorporated association with a constitution, policies on volunteers and health and safety etc.*

Aims: *Our aims was to create a Pocket Park. We have 70 members. The woodland is just under 3ha – just what we like –a wood like Blaen Bran would be too overwhelming for us.*

Agreement: *We have a management agreement with the council. We are the site manager and have a 25 year management agreement with the Council. We had initial help from BTCV and GWT to draw up a management plan which is updated each year. The Council’s attitude to us changed very gradually; at first we were not on the same wavelength.*

We meet on Sunday mornings to maintain the site, drink coffee and provide friendship and support to each other. We pay for contractors in to do heavier work.

We like to organise the work ourselves rather than to ask the Council to do more than the agreement specifies: which is that the Council cuts the vegetation by the pavements and deals with dangerous trees.

We have a committee of 7 – and as well as indoor meetings we have an annual site meeting when we

¹⁴ <http://www.cwmtalwgwoods.co.uk/history.htm>. Anne Bryan drafted this case study of her group for this report

plan the work for the coming year. We have never considered having someone from the council on our committee.

Funding: *Members pay a subscription fee and many add a donation. We have received grants from various bodies such as Environment Wales and also apply for funds from the council. The Coed Cymru officer helps with raising funds and gives advice. We have a bank balance of about £1000. We also have good support from local Councillors and AM Jane Hutt*

Our relationship with the council: *Over the last 26 years the Council's attitude to us has changed from the council always knows best to welcoming our contribution and our ability to access grants. The council officer says he could not maintain the site to our standards and is quick to respond to any concerns we may have. Since we had problems with getting insurance from BTCV the Council insures our Group. We work within limits and within our safety policy, for instance our brushcutter is only operated by the 2 volunteers who have been on a Lantra brushcutting course. I believe the Council are now encouraging a Group to set up near the cemetery.*

LA budget cuts: *We are not aware of any prospective cuts in our project. If Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan councils merge some of the people we work with may lose their jobs which could be disruptive.*

Best practice recommendations: *The 2 sides need to talk to each other and feel their way into a relationship. Council officers need to get to know the group's aims and needs rather than going in with pre-conceived ideas. Every group is different so a flexible approach is essential. As we started in opposition to the council we had to prove ourselves and we didn't like being pushed aside, but thankfully our council would not behave like that now. It's good to encourage people to look after their local environment but people may resent having things 'dumped' on them*

I have found the project really satisfying; my main worry is the increasing age of the volunteers. It's not easy to find capable people who have space in their life, and the number of people interested in the environment will always be a minority. Any project depends on the right people, but one person who is keen may act as a catalyst in the formation of a successful Group.

In 2000 I met Northampton's pocket park officer. As a result of the support they give there were 70 pocket parks back in 2000.. Northampton has 30 years of best practice that others could learn from. 'An elderly lady who takes her little dog for a walk in the woods most days once told me how much she loved the place. 'It's like a fairy glen.' she said, 'everyone should have a fairy glen.' And so they should.'

Case Study 2 – PENGLAIS NATUR PARC SUPPORT GROUP , Aberystwyth¹⁵ (Collaborative)

Name of woodlands: Penglais Natur Parc (Council owned nature reserve)

¹⁵ Interview with Len Kersley, Penglais Parc Natur Group, November 2014

Name of group: Penglais Natur Parc Support Group

Council: Ceredigion County Council

Overview or background: *The history – the woodlands and a quarry were originally part of the Penglais estate – then they were owned by the town and neglected and used informally –no management work was done then. In the late 1980s government money was available for land reclamation in Wales — someone in the council had the idea that there was a lot of spoil in the quarry – an architect drew up a plan – for roads and tree planting. They eventually sent a contractor in to do some trial digging. We local residents then got involved with the councillors. Residents nearby included Peter Walters Davies – who was retiring from the Countryside Council for Wales (red kite man). Also a University mycologist nearby – and they pressured the council. A student doing Countryside Management course at the agric college produced a report that said it could be turned into a ‘**Pocket Park**’ – a little park in an urban situation. So the council eventually had a public meeting – there was a lot of local support and a few people were elected onto the support group committee and a Constitution was drawn up – which said we were advising the council as the owners – the aim was to work with the council – it has worked superbly.*

How long has the group been in existence: *Formed in 1991*

Legal status: *Unincorporated voluntary group.*

Aims of the group: *Basically to advise and assist Ceredigion County Council on the management of Parc Natur Penglais as a resource for the community taking into account wildlife considerations, recreation, land use etc. Giving **ADVICE** about the management of the reserve is the primary thing..*

There has been a project officer from the council on our committee – open and frank discussions. Why has it worked so well? Common sense –we are working with the council. In terms of advice – the council are not really the experts in this case – we had Peter who had a background in setting up nature reserves and Roger Bray who was also senior in the Countryside Council for Wales. We also had a couple of people from the Forestry Commission and also biologists from the University. Basically we have a lot of good professional expertise that is respected by the council – it is a factor in our successful relationship.

Size (number of volunteers?): *The committee has 17 members – one is from Ceredigion County Council and one is from Aberystwyth town council. We meet 4 times a year plus an AGM. We also have a meeting in May in the Parc itself and go for a walk together around the Parc.*

Volunteers: *Local residents - we try to maximise publicity and let locals know something is taking place- people who are interested turn up. We had 70 people turn up to plant saplings.*

Staff employed + number: *No staff*

What type of woodland is this: *broadleaf native- council owned nature reserve*

Management Status: *Before we could apply for any funding we obtained a letter from the County Council to say that the Parc is secure – it is a council owned nature reserve. There is a 5 year project plan drawn up by the Council – we see it and we have to approve it – it is a substantial document. We have no statutory status, no management agreement – but we are recognised.*

How are you involved? *A support group/advisors. Many surveys— recently we did a bluebell survey and a map was produced. We have taken fixed point photos every year – we can follow trends. Advisors - the management plan reflects our wishes –we have been going for so long and have such good relationships with the Council. The site is a nature reserve – we are encouraging wildlife in a way that is commensurate with public access - the 2 are often in conflict –we have a common sense approach.*

Funding: *Most funding has been by the County Council until recently. Funding also from Aberystwyth Town Council – for counters for bats and people. We know from the counters that 30,000 people visit the park annually - it is on a through route between the town and the university.*

We have deliberately avoided any sort of management agreement – we do a lot of voluntary work etc – for example we cleared a lot of holly saplings. **The way it works is we have no budget** – the committee runs on a budget of about £50 a year to cover its costs. The council has an annual budget of about £3,000 for the Parc –and that is not going up – a lot of that is used up in things like Health and Safety. The officer has to do a tree survey every year – any tree that might cause danger comes down – there is very little free money to do anything else. In recent years we have sought Environment Wales project funding – between £1200 and £2000 a year –we spend every penny on the Parc. We have to have a match fund contribution in terms of volunteer effort and so we don't ask for too much. We have had grants in the past – the odd £100 for committee expenses and for the counters. We had £1000 from the university for new notice boards.

Insurance: *We have no insurance policies for the voluntary work – but we do nothing without the approval of the council. The funding from EW will include funds for a local contractor who is insured to supervise the volunteers –it's an arrangement that works very well. The contractor we use was a technician in the university on the countryside management course- he is very happy to work with volunteers. With the EW funding we have organised training days in the Parc where the contractor has taught students how to build paths. The County Council will give the students certificates. We are providing a free course to the students with EW funding to pay for the trainer.*

Relationship with the Local Authority: *very good*

Cuts: *How might they affect you? So far the cuts have not really affected us at all – we receive no money directly from the Parc. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure the health and safety aspects – it has to spend money on this and there is no spare money.*

Divesting assets to groups? *I don't think the council could offload the Parc – it has **nature reserve status**. We would NOT want to take it on – we would not want the responsibility for 11 hectares of woodland – we are retired people with other lives. We would all just walk away if it was suggested – the opposite is happening here –the council is planning on extending the Parc further to take in an additional bit of land that the Council is selling off – a golf course – we want the bit next to the golf course excluded from the sale and used instead to extend the Parc.*

Best practice: *We are pretty much unique – there was an attempt in the 1990s to establish a similar group for a nature reserve on the south side of Aber. That started off quite well but it only lasted 3-4 years – they just couldn't keep it going – it was down to personalities. For us it has been a very good model that has worked superbly well – maybe that we have all this expertise and confidence.*

Communities should be advisors if possible – leave the management to the council –and recognise that

you don't win all the arguments and that council officers have their own pressures too – don't be confrontational. Competent, sensible people will not come forward to take on management –the danger is you will get the wrong people coming forward – and in the long run the Council will end up with greater costs and doing it themselves

I am very much against the idea of councils putting everything on volunteers – it will end up being a shambles. A woman in the council envisaged planning ahead for 6 months of volunteer work on council footpaths (coastal walk?) – it wont work – volunteers wont know how to deal with farmers/access etc and it will be a shambles

We don't have very long term plans – eg with EW wales 3 year plans- you don't want to commit to very long term plans as people on the committee change so its best to focus on immediate things.

I really want to cast the experience with Ceredigion council in a positive light - what is important is working together – understanding each other and moving forward with common aims. Our model – with a minimal budget and involving the younger generation could be copied by others.

Case Study 3 - CWM DU GLEN and GLANRHYD PLANTATION woodland near PONTARDAWE, Neath Port Talbot¹⁶

Name of woodlands: Cwm Du Glen and Glanrhyd Plantation woodland (**Collaborative**)

Name of group: Community engagement strategy to build up a Friends Group

Council: Neath Port Talbot Council – this is a new initiative to try and engage a community around a local Nature Reserve.

Background: *This site is a proposed Local Nature Reserve.. It is a council owned woodlands and there are some permissive paths and rights of way – not much has been done beyond that. We put the site into a Better Woodlands for Wales scheme and started to work on removing rhododendrons and knotweed. The site is almost in the centre of Pontardawe – not many people use the site so (Countryside team) decided to designate it is a local nature reserve. I became involved in writing the management plan. **With local nature reserves the idea is to engage the local community - we would like to see the Friends Group resurrected to assist with site management** – there was a Friends of group a long time ago.*

Community engagement: *We started to hold a range of activities on the site – we successfully applied for funds from the local windfarm community fund – the funding had 3 strands. The first strand was **education** with local schools. We contracted an environmental education professional who will start this year – he will do the John Muir award with 4 local primary schools. Local secondary school – doing the Duke of Edinburgh – coordinating voluntary hours and practical tasks. We have also supplied the school with equipment – for use in environmental science eg mammal tunnels.*

¹⁶ Interview with the Coed Cymru officer for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, November 2014

*The second strand is a general **community** element – a programme of events – we have one event a month – and in the school holidays we have one event a week – we do birdlife and bushcraft etc and also we did some more unusual things – we worked with the local library – they organized a story read at the library eg Gruffalo – they had 70 kids and it was very popular – and then the children came into the woods and tried to find signs of the things they had seen in a book (eg a fox or a bird or certain tree). It has been really popular with kids and parents and we have had other events too. Arts and crafts events are an inspiration to get people into the woods and we have regular conservation task days too.*

*The third strand is **health** – we are working with Actif woods wales- they run a 12 week woodland gym programme with us – every 2 weeks they have a group from Mind and have also involved other health initiatives/groups eg drug and alcohol rehabilitation, a local cancer support group etc – very popular.*

The idea of the grant was to engage the community – getting them into the woods with the aim of building a relationship to help and facilitate a Friends Group. For instance the lady that lives in the Lodge used to walk her dog in the woods – now she goes every week to the woodworking group – there are a few regulars who in time will be confident enough to crack on on their own.

We also have funds from Tidy Towns –for instance for a better entrance and signage – and for milling oak to make benches and a series of events and ways to invite volunteers in – to get people to one place and working together.

Funds:-community windfarm - £20,000. The local biodiversity forum applied as the Local Authority is not eligible. Tidy Towns- £18,000 – the Local Authority was eligible to apply for these funds.

It is a difficult site as there is no real central focus point and no car parking – it is not a big site like Penllegare Valley Woods in Swansea. It is 12 hectares and a lot of it is inaccessible – it is very steep sided. The river valley (Cwm Du)doesn't need much managementk – steep steps onto a plateau to Glanrhyd plantation. The ruins of the house of the former estate owner, and a ruined walled garden are on the site and pose a Health & Safety hazards. It is about trying to find a balance between the historical aspects and the woodland as it is now –secondary woodland with some interesting specimen trees planted by the former owners.

A Friends Group: - this is what we are looking for when we run conservation task days showing them what to do – we would like them to take more ownership and crack on with the task days and come up with ideas. I am not a local – what I want is not relevant. People wanted allotments but its not feasible on this site – no water. We want people to come forward with ideas – they would be a partner – no sites in this area have been handed over to a Friends Group to manage the site – rather they are partners. If a really keen group that were confident came along we would consider it (management) – we have just never been approached by a group wanting to do this (management). We had a Friends Group in the past– they were wanting us to be there every month – it's a lot of resources. People want to get out and do a bit but they don't want the responsibility. With the cuts - assets like community centres are being looked at to 'offload' and the football pitches and bowling greens have all gone – but parks and woodlands are not being looked at in that way (as they are in Powys) – no active groups here.

My boss started a scheme called CONSERVATION AREA SCHEME -and tried to find areas like corners of parks to encourage biodiversity – some of the parks have now been leased to community groups for management – like bowling greens – we are trying to make sure the areas that were set aside for biodiversity are being maintained.

Establishing nature reserves:- *have to go through NRW – to get the statutory designation as an LNR- they are about biodiversity and people both (unlike SSSIs) – the main aim is to get people engaged. Nature reserve status helps with funding and helps to protect the site from development – it gives it a status and signage and goes on a national database.*

Staff support for Friends groups: *- we use grant funding to contract a community ranger who works with the Friends groups - we don't have the resources to do it – funding for these staff is an issue -and there is a lack of consistency – hopefully Coed Cymru will always be around but we can't guarantee any of us will be here.*

Future Funding *– we hope it will carry on - we didn't realize it would be this popular – the library staff are getting the confidence to do it on their own - they felt they didn't know about ecology – then we explained that if you are talking about an owl then you can look for cracks in trees etc where they might have been and they say – oh yes I can do that.*

Council communications: *We have also set up a Facebook page this year and that has taken off quite well – with many likes – all our events go on there – we have started to engage with a wider group – not yet picked up many new people – will when the task days get going – we have had 236 likes in 4 months- that's good for a council web page*

Best practice: *It has really worked for us bringing people in first – we have 2 really enthusiastic volunteers who come rain or shine – I don't know what else we could have done. At the start we had nature based events like Bird Identification – but these were not well attended – but the other events have been – and then people come across into the conservation events – we just had to use other means to get them in.*

Just because we are interested in nature we have to understand that other people want to visit for other reasons – eg to entertain their kids - storytelling etc...the families who did not go to the woods before are now going to the woods – and they go come rain or shine (they see that it is ok to go out in the rain).

The story telling is the best thing we have done so far – we have rolled it out across other habitats too – eg The Snail and the Whale -they are read it in the library and then they go down to the beach with seashore guides etc – ID sheets to try and work out what things they find are – they are not told or just ticking things off- they are trying to work it out. We did a Halloween event in the wood – really good.

Engaging with a wider audience than before – not just the biodiversity forum – widening it out to a wider audience and once we have some regular activities we will get some new blood in hopefully. The community ranger has registered with the Council for Voluntary Service – the idea is that I focus on these 2 sites in Neath Port Talbot – and he is looking at grassland too – so over all the sites we hope to have a task day somewhere local every week.

The key is to get to the wider community – a fault in the past was just working with people in the nature conservancy world/biodiversity forum – people don't know who to contact – social media is so big now – on Facebook you can pay £3 for targeted messages – we are going to try that out. Press releases were also not working – this is a better way – sharing more through social media.

Neath Port Talbot youth service- also shared things with their networks – bringing in new people –

Community councils –we do send things to them– they are supportive and send things around. We work with the Wildlife Trust – they haven't got a big volunteer force in Neath Port Talbot – the reserves are mainly on Gower – there is a lot going on there anyway – and a lot of money – National Trust etc – its well catered for –and retired people with smallholdings etc.

Crwys community woodland group – Countryside Connection project is getting local communities involved – 2 paid members of staff – Tim Orell – tim.orell@swansea.gov.uk. They had a big 'love your countryside festival' in September this year and did a lot of things.

I feel positive about Cwm Du Glen – the big thing for us is to have money to contract the community ranger in to lead it – and to spend the time to show people how to do things – this is time consuming. Up until march we could do this – but now there is a worrying lack of consistency – danger of grant funding. The community ranger was paid for by NRW Joint Partnership Funding – using the old CCW format – liked seeing practical things on the ground.

Key thing if trying to replicate this is to find funding for someone like the community ranger – it needs time to get local people started – in urban areas people need to have knowledge etc to do things – in rural areas its different – farmers etc are more gung ho.

Case Study 4 – FRIENDS GROUP on a PAWS site in Neath Port Talbot¹⁷

Background: *Larch and then affected by Phytophthora – the Parks officer asked the Coed Cymru officer to help with the felling of the larch – the Friends group got quite upset to see the site felled and we have struggled with Glastir and the re-stocking.*

New initiative from council: *There is not much for the Group to do and the key members are getting on in years and there is no new blood coming in. There were floundering - the community ranger has now met them and gone out to the site with them – getting them involved again in little bits of work – we are applying for a community tree pack from the Woodland trust so they can start doing things again – with support to get them back up again .*

Case Study 5: BEAUFORT HILL PONDS & WOODLANDS PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Name of group: Beaufort Hills Ponds and Woodlands Preservation Society
(collaborative community group)

Local Authority: Blaenau Gwent

Background: The Beaufort Hill Ponds & Woodlands Preservation Society was formed in response to the threatened drainage of the Beaufort Hill Ponds which were owned at the time by the Corus Steel

¹⁷ Interview with the Coed Cymru officer for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, November 2014

Company. The 81 hectare site had long since ceased to play a role industrially and had become a haven for biodiversity as well as an important location for the local community.

Transfer of ownership to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council was negotiated in 2006 and at the same time, a Cyd Coed grant of just under £100,000 facilitated the incorporation of a company which became the community group. The grant also paid for upgrading the informal network of paths traversing the site and other improvements to access and infrastructure. The woodland is one of the green spaces on the Ebw Fach trail.

Activities: The group have focused on the management of the mixed broadleaved woodland on the site and have worked closely with their local Coed Cymru officer on management issues. They have carried out surveys of the paths on site, mapping them and producing a condition report. This has supported the formalisation of entrances and access across the site which has served to increase the use of the woodlands by the local community.

The group have also put in place a car park and an “all ability” path around the ponds, encouraging usage by a greater diversity of visitors. Ecological surveys have led to interpretation boards being installed and local school groups have designed the entrance features. The group also started a membership programme in 2007 and currently have 197 members from the local area. News and events are promoted through a regular newsletter.

In 2014, the group have been very busy with tree planting, hedge laying, installing memorial benches, picnic benches and bat boxes. In 2013, the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Environment Awards “Green Champion Award” was awarded jointly to founder members Roy Lynch and John Hillier for their hard work. The group also received a Green Flag community award from Keep Wales Tidy. They have received funding from the European Union, the Big Lottery Fund and Environment Wales.

www.beauforthillwoodlands.org.uk

Case study 6: FRIENDS OF THE WERN PARK

Name of group: Friends of the Wern Park (consultative)

Local Authority: Caerphilly County Borough Council

Background: Friends of The Wern Park is a voluntary group, which began in July 2009, to encourage residents of Nelson to help look after and improve the Wern Country Park. This 14 hectare site is in Local

Authority ownership and comprises of 9 hectares of woodland and scrub and 2.5 hectares of managed wildflower meadows, as well as a football field with changing rooms, skate park, children's playground and car park. Involving the local community was seen as a way for the Local Authority to secure Green Flag status for the site.

Relationship with council: The group has a very good relationship with the Parks Ranger who is employed by the Local Authority. The Ranger has, in the past, helped the group to organise their activities on the site, which have featured tree planting, otter holt building, coppicing, and bracken bashing.

Lately, the Parks Ranger's role has changed due to cut backs and redundancies, and he has not had as much time to dedicate to the group. Also, they are suffering from a lack of local support with the majority of the work falling on the shoulders of one dedicated individual who finds it difficult to push things forward all the time. There is also a feeling that the group has been over-politicised by local councillor involvement when residents feel that this detracts from the business of organising activities in the woodland.

Funds: There is clearly local interest in the group and the woodland with a recent meeting drawing 30 attendees but the continuity of involvement is a concern. The local football club and local schools have been involved in the project and they have received funding for tree planting as well as receiving community tree packs from the Woodland Trust.

http://your.caerphilly.gov.uk/parklife/sites/your.caerphilly.gov.uk.parklife/files/pl_pdf/FOWP.pdf

Case study 7: FRIENDS OF PEN-Y-MAES WOODS

Name of group: Friends of Pen-y-Maes woods (consultative)

Local Authority: Flintshire

Background: Friends of Pen-y-Maes Woods is a community woodland group of just over 40 members who got together in February 2005 with the aim of restoring a 7 hectare site of ancient semi-natural woodland, oak and ash being the predominant species.

Pen-y-Maes Woods is owned by Flintshire County Council and the group has had good support from the Countryside Rangers since its inception. Although 40 members are signed up, there is a core group of about 10 who regularly turn up and get the work done.

Activities: The main work of the group has been to clear litter and fly-tipped material from the site as well as creating access through new paths, planting native woodland wild flowers, planting hedgerows along the boundaries and carrying out thinning work. The thinning of sycamore has been carried out in order to increase light levels to the woodland floor in order to promote the understorey flora.

Council relationship: Ongoing work on the site is informed by a management plan that was written in consultation between the group and the council. One Countryside Ranger is always present at the group

meetings and they often work alongside the group's volunteers at the workdays. Since litter clearance is an ongoing job, the rangers often help by removing some of the bulkier material with their trailer. One ranger is always assigned to look after Pen-y-Maes Woods so their main contact has changed through the years but the Friends feel that they have a good working relationship with Flintshire Council, although lately their time has been more limited.

Funds: The Friends of Pen-y-Maes Woods have been able to apply for grants to manage the site, and as a community group they have had access to funds that the Local Authority would not be able to apply for. Natural Resources Wales have just provided grant support for a spur off the Wales Coastal Path to connect to the woods.

Case study 8 – WENVOE WILDLIFE GROUP

Name of group: Wenvoe Wildlife group (consultative)

Local Authority: Vale of Glamorgan

Background: The catalyst for the group was an agreement made 7 years ago with the Vale of Glamorgan council to look after a local meadow. Since then they have gone on to plant up 4 new orchards locally. They focus on heritage varieties and have planted up a wild orchard of native wild fruit varieties. Their main activities are biodiversity monitoring, active conservation work and communicating with the wider public on issues relating to biodiversity and wildlife.

Status: Wenvoe Wildlife Group are a community managed wildlife group based in and around Wenvoe village. The group is an unincorporated association and has 30 members from within the parish and others from further afield who come to help with various projects.

Activities: Last year, the group became involved in the Jubilee Woods project run by the Woodland Trust. 6000 trees were planted by a contractor on a site owned by Vale of Glamorgan council. There is a three year agreement for aftercare of the site with the contractors but the group have a role in monitoring the site for biodiversity.

Relationship: The group's main contact with the council has been through the Ecologist but this is becoming increasingly difficult due to reduction in staff time as a result of budget cuts. Difficulties also arise from the fact that the group is primarily motivated by biodiversity but the site is under the management of the Parks department whose primary focus is not wildlife. It is a protracted procedure negotiating with Parks and the organisation contracted to plant and management the site are rarely present. The group are unsure what will happen to the woodland after the three year contract comes to an end, as Wenvoe Wildlife Group feel they don't have the capacity to manage the site alone.

www.wenvoewildlifegroup.co.uk

Case study 9 – CWMDU SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT GROUP (CSEG)

Name: CWM DU Sustainable Environment Group

Land: this site is on COMMUNITY COUNCIL OWNED LAND

Local Authority: Powys

Background: CSEG was formed in 2007 by a group of Cwmdu residents who were looking to share their experiences of energy saving and to help promote sustainable activities within the local community.

Currently the Group has 22 members who correspond regularly and meet monthly. We have adopted a constitution and have close links with other community groups in the local area. The Group is also a member of The Green Valleys, a company which promotes and supports sustainability across the whole Brecon Beacons National Park area. In January 2012 CSEG was awarded nearly £15,000 by the Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF).

Case Study 10 – TIR COED & WISE WOODS-Volunteering in the Natural Environment project (VINE)

Name of Social Enterprise: Wise Woods - Tir Coed (empowered)

Local Authority: Powys

Background: Tir Coed is a charitable company that has existed since 1999, historically it has aimed to provide opportunities to disadvantaged individuals in rural Wales through tutoring in woodland skills. The organisation is advised by a board of 9 trustees who also steer Wise Woods Wales, Tir Coed's trading subsidiary which was established as a social enterprise in 2012.

Project: Tir Coed's main current project "Volunteering in the Natural Environment" (VINE) operates in 3 different woodlands locations in Ceredigion and Powys and coordinates opportunities for local communities to get involved in the management of their local woodlands as well as the associated craft and creative pursuits that accompany woodland work.

Training is given to those furthest from the job market to help increase their employability in woodland industries as often those who have not engaged with traditional academic routes thrive in an outdoor and practical setting. The work undertaken during training activities has the added value of improving the biodiversity, quality, sustainability and accessibility of the sites.

Funding: The VINE project is funded by the Big Lottery, People & Places grant as well as small grants from trusts and other funding bodies. Wise Woods Wales generates its own income as a social enterprise but also receives funding from NRW and Environment Wales. Wise Woods received an important start-up grant through Ceredigion County Council (CC) in the form of the Social Enterprise Grant Fund.

Contracts: Without this seed funding and the advice received on fundraising and business plan development from the council's Social Enterprise Officer, Wise Woods would not have been able to go

ahead. A considerable contract to supply Ceredigion CC with street furniture has been a big help in securing much need income for the social enterprise. This is something that could be replicated in other regions and shows another way in which Local Authorities can support community social enterprise by offering contracts locally rather than outsourcing.

Town Council Woodland site: One of the VINE woodland sites in Powys is owned by Llanidloes town council. Allt Goch is a mixed woodland but predominantly Oak and Beech, it was managed by the local Coed Cymru Officer (now redundant due to budget cuts) through the Better Woodlands For Wales grant scheme, which paid for the creation of a woodland management plan.

Friends of group - There has been a need for very sensitive management of the project due to a difference of opinion between the town council and a small but vocal community group called 'Friends of Llanidloes woodland' about the management of the considerable grey squirrel population. Tir Coed were invited to join a focus group on the management of the site but the discussion was dominated by issue of squirrel management. Tir Coed continued reporting on the work of VINE to the town council but have been unable to attend the focus group due to the variance of its subject matter from the objectives of the VINE project.

Management agreement: A current working management agreement has been drafted by Tir Coed in consultation with the town council, the previous woodland manager (ex-Coed Cymru officer) and a professional woodsman. This document sets out the management objectives for the length of the VINE project and details the responsibilities of each of the involved organisations. The town council take responsibility for the safe access and health and safety measures on site, i.e. maintaining the safe accessibility of pathways and dealing with dangerous trees, whereas, Tir Coed are responsible for risk assessments and the safe delivery of activities on site

Activities: Tir Coed run 3 woodland open days each year on site, which are also intended as community consultation days. Such events represent opportunities for the local community to engage with the project in a positive way and voice any concerns they might have about the project's management activities as well as feeding into the development of woodland improvements/facilities and the type of activities on offer.

www.tircoed.org.uk

Case study 11: GREEN EARTH

Name of social enterprise: Green Earth (empowered)

Local Authority: Blaenau Gwent

Background: Green Earth is a community social enterprise based in Blaina, Blaenau Gwent. The group was founded in 2007, with the objective of mobilising community action around environmental projects, from tree planting and woodland management to improving social housing landscapes and developing

gardens for primary schools.

Contracts: Initially supported by Communities First in Blaina, with much of the work being carried out on a voluntary basis, Green Earth now have contracts with three Local Authorities (Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff) and 26 staff on the payroll, they've also worked with 6 Jobs Growth Wales placements since the inception of the scheme.

Nature reserve site: A large proportion of Green Earth's current work comes from a contract with the local housing association, Tai Calon, to manage their sites. This contract has given rise to a partnership with Blaenau Gwent council to manage a nature reserve next to an estate owned by Tai Calon, this partnership involves woodland management as well as creation and maintenance of paths and fences. They also carry out hedge laying work and general grounds maintenance as well as offering a woodland management planning service. A new wood fuel programme is being developed whereby Green Earth carry out woodland management operations such as thinning in return for the fire wood which will then be sold as an income stream for the social enterprise.

Funds: An environmental award from Blaenau Gwent county council helped to raise the profile of the group and in 2008 they received £10,000 in funding from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. This was a turning point in the success of the social enterprise as the grant allowed them to establish the administrative side of the business, employing a full-time administrator with a desk in the Communities First office. This allowed Green Earth to triple their turnover and take on Future Jobs Fund work experience programme placements, training 18-25 year olds in chainsaw operating and other land management skills (Green Earth trained over 200 such placements).

A second grant from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust allowed further expansion and the hiring of a factory unit from the council in order to house equipment. In 2010, the turn over of the social enterprise was £150,000. Green Earth has rapidly developed from a small voluntary organisation to a successful social enterprise.

Case study 12: BLAEN BRAN COMMUNITY WOODLAND GROUP¹⁸

Name of group: Blaen Bran community woodland group (empowered)

Name of social enterprise: Blaen Bran woodland services (empowered)

Local Authority: Torfaen County Borough Council

Background: Although not on Local Authority owned land, Blaen Bran is a useful case study to look at in

¹⁸ More information about Blaen Bran's story can be found in two Llais y Goedwig case studies, available on www.llaisygoedwig.org.uk

its illustration of the collaborative working that often goes on between groups and the Local Authority as in this case, land belonging to Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) has to be crossed in order to enter the wood and the group has had a lot of interaction with the council as a result.

Community woodland group history: Blaen Bran Community Woodland Group was established in 2005, through the purchase of a 40 hectare area of woodland from a private owner made possible by the Cydcoed grant scheme. Torfaen CBC was involved in initial meetings regarding the woodland and the setting up of the community group.

The group also received a lot of support from the then Cydcoed officer, in governance and the early stages of planning. Local participation in the community group was inspired by a wish to reduce antisocial behaviour on the site (such as fly tipping and off-road motorcycling) and to increase recreational and educational activity by the community. The group are run by a board of volunteer directors from the Cwmbran area and have a membership of over 130.

Funds: In 2009, Blaen Bran successfully submitted a joint application with TCBC through the Valleys Regional Park, for E4G Convergence Funding, in order to improve the site's access and way-marking. This partnership has led to an agreement to improve access to the woodland, including the installation of a ford, on TCBC land. The funding also included new signage and the creation of a carpark at the entrance to the site. The success of the application was partly due to the promotion of the Blaen Bran as a gateway to the local upland landscape for inhabitants of Cwmbran.

Relationship with council: Torfaen CBC sees Blaen Bran as a key environmental asset to the local area and this has been shown through the partnership working that the council has supported and their willingness to underwrite Blaen Bran's Access and Environmental Improvements project.

Social enterprise history: In 2011, the group applied to the Community Enterprise Development Programme in order to set up a social enterprise. This led to the incorporation of a separate company with aims to develop and utilise the assets of the woodland, create local employment opportunities, and provide a source of income for maintenance and improvement work. Due to the fact that Torfaen is a Local Authority qualifying for European Union Convergence Funding, Blaen Bran was able to apply for a three year revenue grant fund to support the development of the social enterprise.

www.blaenbran.org.uk

4.0 Discussion

The purpose of this work is to gain a better understanding of the extent and potential of community involvement in the management of Local Authority woodlands in Wales at the present time. Surveys with Local Authority (LAs) officers and community groups were undertaken in spring and autumn 2014. It should be noted that in some LAs the picture changed quite significantly between spring and autumn this year, due to the effects of reductions in LA budgets; it is a dynamic and evolving situation.

4.1 Key Findings

Local Authority staffing levels and responsibilities with respect to woodlands. Across Wales there is significant variation in the job titles and Departments of Local Authority officers with responsibilities for

woodlands. There is generally no single 'post' or job role that assumes sole or overall responsibility for a Local Authority's woodland estate; the responsibility is shared across staff and Departments. LA officers involved with woodlands generally fall into one of three groups: ecology and biodiversity; countryside or recreation services; and Coed Cymru.

Officers with responsibilities for woodlands invariably have wider roles of which woodlands are just one part; for instance management of a suite of outdoor areas such as bowling greens and football pitches as well as woods. Coed Cymru officers placed in LAs have forestry expertise and qualifications and are generally the only staff who spend 100% of their time on woodlands (often supporting landowners); budget cuts in the past year have reduced their numbers significantly.

The main responsibilities of LA staff with responsibilities for woodlands are: providing advice on woodland management (often this is related to tree surveys and dangerous trees as well as broader management planning), public access and amenity and health and safety. Only 8% of respondents specifically mention community involvement as part of their job. However it can be noted that the survey did not interview community rangers, or seek to enumerate their numbers in LAs across Wales.

Some respondents are expecting their roles to evolve and change as the effects of reduced LA budgets are felt; for instance in Powys, officers expect in future to spend more time managing volunteers and looking for local councils, associations and groups who wish to take on the management of assets (such as bowling greens and woodlands). Cost cutting drives and reduced staffing levels are key challenges facing many Local Authorities in Wales at this time.

Local Authority woodlands¹⁹. The total hectareage of LA woodland holdings across Wales could not be estimated. While 71% of respondents reported that all their LA woodland holding has been mapped, 29% reported that this was not the case. The incomplete data on the size of LA woodlands often stems from the fragmented nature of the holdings, particularly in the post industrial landscapes of south Wales or from insufficient resources to carry out mapping exercises; Pembrokeshire has the most detailed information about its woodland sites due to a recent review.

In Conwy a local community group has sought funds to do an audit of Local Authority woodlands and hopes that this information can be placed in the public domain and used as a basis for considering which un-managed woodlands could be managed by communities.

Ensuring Local Authority woodlands are accessible to the public is a priority for LAs; more than half the officers interviewed reported that all their woodlands are publicly accessible; the woodlands on County Farms are an exception. Ensuring the sites are safe for the public is a major activity for many officers; annual tree surveys to identify dangerous trees are a statutory obligation that is prioritized in budgeting.

¹⁹ Woodland responsibility is shared across departments. Llais y Goedwig generally interviewed only one staff member in each LA and it was often the case that data was held by other departments too – it was beyond the scope of this work to re-contact all the officers in each LA to request all the data.

It is not possible to generalize about the size of individual LA holdings; some are small and fragmented (eg sites along old railway lines), others are part of large and diverse area such as an AONB. Similarly LA woodlands have many designations (or none), including Nature Reserves, AONBs, SSSIs, county farms.

Whether or not a site has a management plan often depends on the designation and the availability of grant funding. The erstwhile Better Woodlands for Wales scheme provided grant funding for management planning in the past; with applications often prepared by a Coed Cymru officer. The majority of Local Authorities do actively manage some or all of their woodlands; 29% of LAs reported that they actively manage all their woodland, 14% said they actively manage more than half and 28% reported that they manage less than half their woodlands. It can be noted that these figures need to be explored further to determine what constitutes 'active management' in each case.

All Local Authority officers contacted for this survey stated that lack of resources, either through reduction of staff or budgets or lack of access to external funding are going to be major challenges over the next year (spring 2014-15). Staff are increasingly having to 'scratch our heads and say, well how are we going to do this?' In woodlands with public access the statutory requirements to ensure the sites are safe takes priority over other management activities.

In some areas the changed financial situation has led to across-the-board policies of 'offloading' council services to other organizations, including community groups, in order to reduce costs; and an increased focus on volunteering as a cost saving measure. Councils are finding that while ready-made-groups, clubs, councils and associations are there to take on the management of assets such as bowling greens and football pitches, the same is rarely true of woodlands.

Community involvement and social enterprises as models for LA woodland management. Of the officers interviewed, 67% said community involvement was a viable model for Local Authority woodland management and 67% also said that social enterprises were a viable model for LA woodland management. Respondents see community involvement as having multiple benefits including saving resources. Those respondents who did not see devolved management as a viable model were particularly concerned with issues around public access and liability.

In spring 2014, volunteering and Friends of Groups were cited as the most common forms that community involvement in LA woodland management *currently* take. Using the Forest Research typology these forms of engagement would be classed as 'consultative' or 'collaborative.' However the case examples show that there is great variation in what Friends of Groups and Support Groups actually do, and the nature of the relationships they enjoy with Local Authorities. Most groups appear to be doing exactly what they want to do; whether it is giving advice, managing a wood or volunteering. Groups arise out of particular local circumstances.

81% of respondents reported that communities were currently involved in the management of LA woodlands. 50% said that they currently have agreements in place with community groups or social enterprises; further enquiry is needed to understand what is meant by 'agreement'.

In spring 2014, 52% of Local Authority officers said that they were actively seeking to increase the levels of community involvement; it is not clear whether this referred to (i) increasing the overall numbers of people involved or (ii) increasing roles and responsibilities or both. Concerns over the long term stability of community groups (contrasted with Town Councils for instance), the time that staff would be required to spend with groups and Health & Safety issues were all cited as drawbacks to greater community involvement.

In spring 2014, volunteering and Friends of Groups were seen as the main forms that involvement could take (consultative or collaborative engagement in Forest Research typology), although agreements and leases were also seen as possibilities (empowered forms of engagement in Forest Research typology). In some counties, particularly Powys, the situation has changed significantly since spring 2014 with agreements and leases now seen as distinctly desirable in order to save money.

Concerning typology, it can be noted that community groups often use alternative terms to describe their role or involvement, for instance Penglais Natur Parc Support Group describes its role as 'advisory' – using the Forest Research terminology Penglais would be categorized as 'collaborative.' The Forest Research term 'empowered' may be somewhat 'value laden'; implying that only groups with devolved management responsibility are empowered. However, groups such as Penglais who approve the management plan for Penglais Natur Parc and are clearly able to influence the management of the site, but have no wish to take on a formal management role, are surely empowered too. Groups have to weigh up the costs and benefits of different forms of involvement – being able to influence management to ensure the site is run as the community wishes, without taking on full responsibility is a rational choice for many. Groups like CwmTalwg who have taken on managerial control have done so primarily because the council were not running the site as they wished. It may be simpler to refer to this third 'empowered' category as 'devolved management.'

Lack of resources and support (for instance for brokering agreements) and staff time are cited as the greatest barriers to community and social enterprise involvement. In general Local Authorities do not systematically collate information on community groups and social enterprises.

No council in Wales has a systematic, funded programme of support for local woodland groups in the way that for example Northamptonshire council has with its well regarded Pocket Parks programme.

4.2 Community involvement in LA woodland management in Wales

The extent of community involvement in Local Authority woodlands in Wales cannot be quantified in a modest survey of this kind; exact figures for the number of community groups operating on council land have not been compiled, nor has the exact nature of each communities involvement been investigated. However as noted, 81% of Local Authorities reported that communities are currently involved in the management of their woodlands in Wales; most commonly as volunteers or as Friends of Groups.

Many Council staff are presently operating in difficult and challenging circumstances due to widespread percentage reductions in Local Authority budgets in Wales, it is expected that a number of Local Authorities will merge before long in order to save funds; this is the context in which staff are working.

The potential for community involvement in the management of Local Authority woodlands in Wales is a matter for further debate and enquiry in each Local Authority area. Wales is a diverse country and it is unwise to make generalisations across LA landscapes as diverse as Powys (a large rural County with small, scattered populations) and Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC (a peri urban post industrial Borough Council with many small connected woodlands)!

Many Local Authority officers have limited funds or spare capacity with which to develop and support new initiatives in woodland management. However the drive to save funds may lead to a greater eagerness to encourage and invite community involvement in woodland management. There are some really interesting initiatives already underway: in Conwy a local community group, Golygfa Gwydyr has secured funds from the Welsh Government Nature Fund to do an audit of Local Authority woodland holdings specifically to see if any have potential for community management, in Swansea the Council has secured funds to develop an innovative approach to community involvement in the management of a Nature Reserve – reaching beyond the biodiversity/conservation community to engage with local families. In Ceredigion Tir Coed/Wise Woods have secured Lottery funding for a social enterprise to create opportunities for volunteering and practical skills training to increase youth employability. In Penglais the local group has an interesting model operating on almost zero funds but with excellent working relationships with the council and Environment Wales and a commitment to providing practical conservation opportunities for young students.

The case examples show that across Wales there are local groups who are working with Local Authorities in an advisory role, in a volunteer role and in a managerial role – it seems likely that most groups are fulfilling the role that works for them.

The motivation for community groups getting involved needs further enquiry but is often rooted in conservation and an interest in helping care for a local wooded environment. A number of councils across Wales are hoping that new community groups (or Town and Community Councils) will help them care for their woods in future- for this to happen new and more ambitious ‘models’ of community involvement that provide a real reason for people to get involved may be needed– reaching beyond the committed conservation volunteers to families for instance and in some areas generating jobs. Resources are needed to make this happen.

Whatever happens, there is much that can be learnt from best practice as highlighted in some of the case examples, in particular the Pocket Parks initiative in Northamptonshire and the importance of building good relationships between the Council and the local community based on mutual understanding and common aims.

This survey has helped Llais y Goedwig to gain a better understanding of how communities are involved in Local Authority woodland management in Wales. Together with the findings of a recent Llais y Goedwig study of community uptake of Woodlands and You on the Welsh Government estate, and the results of 5 regional community woodland debates across Wales this autumn, a clearer picture is appearing of the state of community woodlands in Wales and the practical support it needs.

4. Appendices

5.1 Telephone Interview Questionnaire



Supporting community involvement in Local Authority Woodland in Wales Brief Phone Survey

Introduction

Llais y Goedwig (the voice of community woodlands) is a voluntary grassroots association that supports and represents community woodland groups across Wales.

We also try to help Welsh woodland owners who want to work with communities (NRW, Coed Cadw, Local Authorities and private land owners).

Llais y Goedwig has a brief opportunity to work with Forest Research UK to better understand the extent and potential for community engagement in Local Authority owned woodland in Wales. Resources in all Local Authorities across Wales are being severely cut back - so we know how very hard a challenge this can be!

We would like to conduct a short phone interview with every Welsh Local Authority. The survey will help us all gain a better understanding of how communities are using/not using Local Authority woodlands in Wales. We are also working with NRW on a complimentary survey of community uptake of Woodlands and You (WaY).

Llais y Goedwig are hoping (funds permitting!) to follow up this survey later in 2014 with regional community woodland networking events to bring communities and agencies (NRW, Coed Cadw, Coed Cymru, Local Authorities, Tir Coed etc) together to see what **practical actions** we can take to support community use of woodlands. If you have any thoughts on where we could organise regional events or if there are areas in which you think Llais y Goedwig can help you, please let us know.

We are aware that some of the information we are seeking is hard to come by, or may not be known. If you have any questions, please email Rosie or Jane at LlyG: rosie.strang@llaisygoedwig.org.uk or jane.gronow@llaisygoedwig.org.uk or Anna at Forest Research: anna.lawrence@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Transcripts of phone interviews with Local Authority staff members will be typed up and sent back to you for checking. Information will be held by Llais y Goedwig on a secure database and will not be shared with any third parties without your explicit permission. The final document will be a public document and we hope it will be of use to everyone supporting community woodlands in Wales.

We have to call you and finish the survey by **5pm on MONDAY 31st MARCH 2014**. Thanks to everyone for your help! Diolch yn fawr iawn i bawb!

| | |
|--|---|
| QUESTIONNAIRE PART 1 | |
| Interviewer: | |
| Date: | |
| Section 1: ABOUT YOU and YOUR WORK | |
| Q1 | Name of Local Authority |
| Q1a) | Your name, job title, (+ email if not already known) |
| Q1b) | Do you work full time or part time? |
| Q1c) | How long have you been in your post? (years) |
| Q1d) | Which department does your post sit within? |
| Q1e) | Very briefly, what are your main work responsibilities? |
| Q2 | Roughly what percentage of your role is focussed on woodlands? (100%, more than 50%, less than 50%) |
| Q2a) | What are your main responsibilities with respect to woodlands? |
| Q3 | In your Local Authority, how many other staff members deal with woodlands as part of their jobs? |
| Section 2: ABOUT YOUR WOODLANDS & WOODLAND MANAGEMENT | |
| (i) Your Woodlands | |
| Q1 | Is all of your Local Authority woodland holding mapped? |
| Q1a) | How much woodland does your authority own? Number (ha) |
| Q1b) | How many individual areas of woodland is this made up of? Number |
| Q1c) | Approximately, how much of your woodlands is publicly accessible? % |

| | (ii) Woodland management |
|------|--|
| Q2 | What information is available about the management of woodland in your Local Authority at the moment? |
| Q2a) | Who holds that information? |
| Q2b) | Is the information publicly accessible? Y/N |
| Q3 | Approximately, how much of your woodland is actively managed? (%) |
| Q3a) | What proportion of your woodlands are covered by woodland management plans? (%) |
| Q3b) | Who prepared the woodland management plans? |
| Q3c) | How often are the woodland management plans reviewed ? |
| Q4 | What proportion of the woodland is managed in- house? % |
| Q4a) | What proportion is managed through external contract (and with whom?) % |
| Q4 | What are the broad aims and aspirations for the future of your LA woodland? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is improved woodland management a priority? - Is increased community involvement an aspiration? |
| Q5 | What do you see as the top three challenges for Local Authority woodland management over the next year? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - budget cuts - staff cuts/loss of specialist staff - maintaining quality of management - contracting arrangements - climate change - pests and diseases - community engagement - community groups folding - other / comments |
| Q6 | Is the situation getting better or worse? |
| | |

| Section 3: About COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT in YOUR WOODLANDS | |
|--|---|
| Q1 | <p>Is community involvement in woodland management seen as a viable model for managing the woodland owned by the Local Authority? Y/N</p> <p>If yes, what do you see as the top three benefits which greater community involvement can bring to your Local Authority woodlands?</p> |
| Q1a) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more local control - improved quality of management - external funding possibilities - innovative / entrepreneurial approaches - greater community engagement - local economic development - other |
| Q1aa) | <p>If Yes, what forms do you think community involvement could take?</p> |
| Q1b) | <p>Are there any negatives/drawbacks to greater community involvement in the management in Local Authority woodland management ?</p> <p>Drawbacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - loss of control for the Local Authority - increased risk of poor management - reputational risk for the Local Authority - fragmented management - loss of control (down to member concerns/need for political approvals) - other |
| Q2 | <p>Is woodland management by social enterprises seen as a viable model for managing the woodland owned by the Local Authority? Y/N</p> |
| Q2a) | <p>If yes, what do you see as the top three benefits which greater involvement of social enterprises can bring to your Local Authority woodlands?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more local control - improved quality of management - external funding possibilities - innovative / entrepreneurial approaches - greater community engagement - local economic development - other |
| Q2b) | <p>Are there any negatives/drawbacks to greater social enterprise involvement in the management in Local Authority woodland management ?</p> <p>Drawbacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - loss of control for the Local Authority |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased risk of poor management - reputational risk for the Local Authority - fragmented management - loss of control (down to member concerns/need for political approvals) - other |
| Q3 | <p>Are any communities currently involved in the management of your woodland?</p> <p>Y/N</p> |
| Q3a) | <p>If yes, what form does community involvement currently take?</p> <p>For example –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultation - Volunteering - Social enterprises - ‘Friends of’ groups - Community woodlands - Management agreements |
| Q3b) | <p>Do you currently have any agreements with community groups or social enterprises to undertake any woodland management / activities / projects ?</p> <p>If NO – have you ever had such agreements?</p> <p>If NEVER – why is that?</p> |
| Q4 | <p>Are you actively seeking to increase the level of community involvement in managing your woodlands?</p> |
| Q4a) | <p>If YES to question 4, what does this involve?</p> <p>eg - getting more groups involved,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more volunteers, - a deeper level of commitment, - greater powers handed over to the groups that are already operating |
| Q4b) | <p>If NO to question 4, (and in the current context of budget cuts) what resources or support or help would you need to be able to actively seek to increase the level of community involvement in managing your woodlands/ work more in partnership with community groups & social enterprises?</p> <p>e.g - more information about how community partnerships can work</p> <p>(such as how to maximise benefits and avoid pitfalls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - working with an organisation who’d develop community partnerships - increased internal resources etc. |

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| Q5 | <p>What do you see as the barriers to greater community/social enterprise involvement in woodland management?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there a lack of information? - A lack of support? Both for the community groups and for the LA itself. - A lack of knowledge and expertise? - Lack of resources? - time taken to develop partnerships - legal barriers - procurement barriers - lack of demand from communities |
| Q6 | <p>Are you aware of the NRW Woodlands and You process? Do you think a formal process like this would help you?</p> |
| Q7 | <p>Is there anything Llais y Goedwig can do to help you?</p> |
| Q8 | <p>Who would be the contact for a community wanting access to LA owned woodland? Who would provide support to community groups?</p> |
| Q9 | <p>Is your Local Authority seeking to divest itself of management responsibility for the woodland it currently administers?</p> <p>If yes, is reducing costs a driver?</p> |
| Q10 | <p>Is your Local Authority seeking any disposals or transfers of the woodland it currently administers? (lease arrangements, outright sale, etc)</p> <p>If yes, is reducing costs a driver?</p> |
| Q11 | <p>Any further comments you would like to make?</p> |
| | <p>Thank you – Diolch yn fawr</p> |

Note. If the interviewee is short of time, Part 2 can be completed later on (even after 31st March). It can also be sent to the interviewee to complete.

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| | QUESTIONNAIRE PART 2 |
| | <p>Interviewer:</p> <p>Date:</p> |
| | Section 1: About EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN YOUR WOODLANDS & SOCIAL ENTERPRISES |
| Q1 | <p>Do you collate information regarding community woodland groups and woodland social enterprises in your area? Y/N</p> |
| Q1a) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If YES, what information do you keep? (eg enquiries, agreements, management plans etc) - Who keeps the records and where? - Is this information useful/sufficient? - Is it publicly available? - Does the Local Authority distinguish between different types of woodland community groups according to their organisation and orientation? – <i>refer to FC typology</i> |
| Q2 | <p>Are there any community groups or social enterprises actively involved in the <u>management</u> of any of your woodlands? (see Part 1 –Section 3, Q3 above)</p> <p>Y/N</p> |
| Q3 | <p>Can you provide any specific examples or case studies of community groups who have managed areas of woodland in the Local Authority?</p> |
| | Name of group + contact |
| | Overview or background |
| | How long has the group been in existence |
| | Aims of the group |
| | Community engagement –consultative, collaborative, empowered |
| | What worked/what didn't |
| | Size (number of volunteers?) |
| | Staff employed + number |
| | Location (which woodland / authority wide?) |

| | |
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| | What type of woodland is this (broadleaf (native), ancient, recent, non native, mixed, other) |
| | Management Status (informal user group, volunteers, formal management agreement, leasehold, service level agreement other etc) |
| | Legal status (unincorporated association, charity, CIC, Company Limited by Guarantee, other) |
| | Services / activities delivered (eg woodland management, recreation and leisure, health, education, timber processing other) |
| | Funding (public sector contracts, grants, charging individuals, sale of timber and products other) |
| | Political member support |
| | Contact details (name, email, phone, any website) |
| | Comments / other information |
| Q4 | Can you provide any specific examples or case studies of social enterprises who have managed areas of woodland in the Local Authority? <i>(ie businesses with a social or environmental purpose operating on LA owned woodland, maybe producing timber or other woodland products, and earning an income from selling them. They may also carry out environmental education or other health related activities.)</i> |
| | Name of social enterprise + contact |
| | Overview or background |
| | How long has the enterprise been in existence |
| | Aims of the enterprise |
| | Community engagement –consultative, collaborative, empowered |
| | What worked/what didn't |
| | Size (number of volunteers?) |
| | Staff employed + number |
| | Location (which woodland / authority wide?) |
| | What type of woodland is this (broadleaf (native), ancient, recent, non native, mixed, other) |

| | |
|----|--|
| | Management Status (informal user group, volunteers, formal management agreement, leasehold, service level agreement other etc) |
| | Legal status (unincorporated association, charity, CIC, Company Limited by Guarantee, other) |
| | Services / activities delivered (eg woodland management, recreation and leisure, health, education, timber processing other) |
| | Funding (public sector contracts, grants, charging individuals, sale of timber and products other) |
| | Political member support |
| | |
| Q5 | Do you know of any projects or organisations that demonstrate best practice in community management of Local Authority owned woodland? What is it about them that is good, innovative or interesting? Can you provide contact details or web addresses? |
| Q6 | What are the most important things in making a successful partnership between a Local Authority and an external group? How important is time and experience as a factor in working together successfully? |
| Q7 | Are there any other comment you wish to make? |
| | |
| | Thank you – Diolch yn fawr |

Subject: More support for Local Authorities and community woodlands – Llais y Goedwig
Dear XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Llais y Goedwig (the voice of community woodlands) is a grassroots volunteer association that supports community woodland groups across Wales.

Last year you kindly talked to us about how community groups can access Local Authority woodland - we now have a database of contacts on our website that our 200 members can use - many thanks !

We have just been given a small pot of funds by Forest Research UK to better understand the potential for community engagement in Local Authority owned woodland in Wales - if we can do a phone survey before the end of the financial year !

Llais y Goedwig are hoping (funds permitting) to follow up this survey with regional community woodland roadshow events to bring communities, NRW, Coed Cadw and other agencies together to see how best to support community woodlands in Wales. If there are areas in which you think Llais y Goedwig can help you, please let us know.

Two of our volunteer Board members - Jane Vaughan Gronow and Fay Sharpley will be making the brief (20 min) phone calls - jane.gronow@llaisygoedwig.org.uk and fay.sharpley@llaisygoedwig.org.uk

We understand that with the budget cuts and 31st March looming this is not the best time to call you.

We have to finish part 1 of the survey by 5pm on MONDAY 31st MARCH 2014. Thanks to everyone for your help! Diolch yn fawr iawn i bawb!

5.2 List of Local Authorities interviewed

Bridgend County Borough Council (CBC); Blaenau Gwent CBC; Caerphilly CBC; Cardiff City Council; Carmarthen County Council (CC); Ceredigion CC; Conwy CBC; Denbighshire CC; Flintshire CC; Gwynedd Council; Isle of Anglesey CC; Merthyr Tydfil CBC; Monmouthshire CC; Neath Port Talbot CC; Pembrokeshire CC; Powys CC; Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, The Vale of Glamorgan; Torfaen CBC; Wrexham CBC and Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.

5.3 Northamptonshire's Pocket Parks

<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/leisure/pocket-parks/pages/default.aspx>

The idea of Pocket Parks originated in Northamptonshire. They are natural areas of countryside which are owned, looked after and cherished by the local community for peaceful enjoyment, the protection of wildlife and to provide access for all.

If there is not a Pocket Park near you, why not consider [establishing a Pocket Park](#)? If you have any questions about setting up a Pocket Park, or any other matter related to Pocket Parks, please e-mail pocketparks@northamptonshire.gov.uk.

You will find Pocket Parks all over the county of Northamptonshire, to be enjoyed by all.

Find a pocket park near you

- in the [Pocket Parks A-Z](#)
- by [postcode](#)
- click on your local District / Borough below:



Pocket Parks can be enjoyed by everyone - from the local school using them for wildlife projects to older folk who enjoy sitting by a beautiful pond.

Are you on Facebook?

If you like visiting Northamptonshire's Pocket Parks why not receive updates and news on events via our Facebook page.

- [Facebook - Northamptonshire's Pocket Parks](#)

