



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Policy Position in support
of Woodlands for Wales,
the Welsh Assembly Government's
strategy for woodlands and trees

**Community Involvement
with Welsh woodlands**



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endnotes¹

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glossary



Glossary of terms and acronyms.

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1: Introduction

Purpose and Audience

This Policy Position is one of a suite designed to provide further background and evidence for the outcomes sought in *Woodlands for Wales* and the actions required to achieve these outcomes (see **Appendix 1** for full Policy Position list). Each Policy Position proposes an 'Agenda for Action' which collectively provide the implementation framework for the whole strategy. The 5-year Action Plan for Woodlands for Wales takes its lead from the combined 'Agendas' from each of the Policy Positions and sets out the short-term priorities for all the organisations responsible for helping to implement the strategy.

The primary purpose of these Policy Positions is therefore to support the implementation of the strategy through the relevant corporate processes of each organisation identified with a responsibility in the Action Plan. Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) is already aligning its corporate programme development in this way and we hope that all the other lead and supporting organisations will act similarly.

Therefore the main intended audience for these Policy Positions are those responsible for policy development and policy implementation through corporate planning. However we hope that because of the way the Policy Positions are presented, they will be of wider relevance to those with an interest in the particular subject matter of Woodlands for Wales as a whole.

1.1 Aims and objectives

In Woodlands for Wales¹, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) made a commitment to promote community involvement in the decision-making and management of Welsh woodlands and trees so that they deliver more benefit to local communities.

The aims of this Policy Position are to achieve this commitment through:

- Supporting the development of programmes under the Woodlands for People theme of Woodlands for Wales¹;
- Supporting the use of trees and woodlands in the delivery of the WAG's programmes on community development and third sector support

The diagram in **Appendix 1** shows where this Policy Position fits into the policy hierarchy from both WAG and FC Wales perspectives.

The target audiences for this Policy Position are woodland owners and managers, public and third sector organisations, relevant grant giving bodies, Planning Authorities and other support organisations.

There are/will be separate Policy Positions and Guidance setting out the range of public benefits associated with woodlands as outlined in Woodlands for Wales¹. This Policy Position is intentionally focused on 'community benefit' via Community Involvement with Woodlands.

What we mean by 'Community Involvement'

For the purposes of this Policy Position, the term "community involvement" is used in a loose sense to include the processes, outcomes and governance structures associated with the use of woodlands in Wales, for delivering community benefits. The term "community" refers here to either a geographical community where the common issues are those of the locality or to a community of interest or identity where the common issues are not spatial². "Involvement" refers here to the full spectrum of involvement from engagement in public consultation through to hands-on management of woodlands and the establishment of woodland-based social enterprises.

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1.2 Equality and Diversity

The WAG is committed to developing an organisation in which fairness and equality of opportunity are central to our business. We will ensure that we treat all users of our woodland, our stakeholders and staff fairly, with dignity and respect, regardless of race disability, gender, age, sexual orientation and religion and belief. We will assess the ability of all potential users to access woodlands, activities and services and take appropriate steps to ensure that barriers are reduced or minimised. A summary of equality and diversity evidence in relation to community involvement in woodlands in Wales is included at **Appendix 2**.

1.3 Policy drivers

Public accountability: Sustainable development places people - as citizens or communities - at the centre of the development process. As a result, sustainable forest management and public service delivery in Wales are required to recognise and take account of citizens' views (or public opinion). This has a direct impact on woodlands in Wales via two converging sets of policy instruments:

- The United Kingdom Forestry Standard³ (UKFS) identifies community involvement as one of the social criteria for sustainability. Woodland managers seeking to comply with UKFS must therefore demonstrate how they have involved communities in decision-making around woodlands
- The WAG has adopted a "people-centred" approach to service delivery as promoted in Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services for Wales (2004)⁴. All Government services - including the management of the Assembly Government Woodland Estate (AGWE) - are therefore required to take account of public opinion

Addressing deprivation and inequality: There are inequalities in Wales - extreme in some cases - between and within communities in terms of levels of deprivation. A lack of access to the benefits of woodlands and other forms of well-managed greenspace contribute to these inequalities. Through wider WAG policies and programmes, public resources - including trees and woodlands - are being prioritised for those communities with the highest levels of deprivation and the greatest potential for regeneration.

Mobilising the voluntary (third) sector to deliver more from woodlands: Delivering public benefit from woodlands requires management and governance arrangements that deliver across social, environmental and economic outcomes to a wide range of beneficiaries. Experience from Cydcoed[♦] and elsewhere has shown that, by mobilising the energies of volunteer community groups and social enterprises, more woodland benefits can be generated and distributed within communities. These additional benefits are not just social, but tend also to be environmental and economic (**Appendix 3**).



[♦] FC Wales run grant scheme funded by the European Union and Welsh Assembly Government between 2001 and 2008

1.3.1 Welsh Assembly Government policies relating to Community Involvement with Welsh woodlands

The WAG has recognised the need for a more inclusive and less top-down style of public service delivery. Since devolution in Wales, The WAG has been strengthening its commitment to citizens and communities through the following high level strategies:

- Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services for Wales (2004)⁴ promotes a 'citizen-centred' approach, with effective services designed and delivered with the active participation of citizens, communities and businesses. This approach was endorsed by the Beecham Review 2006
- People, Places, Futures: The Wales Spatial Plan (2004 and revised 2008)⁵ recognises the role of Community Strategies which should set out long-term local development priorities and which should in turn feed into spatial Local Development Plans. These plans should be discussed and negotiated with local citizens, communities and their leaders
- One Wales: A Progressive agenda for the government of Wales (2007)⁶ maintains the Welsh Assembly Government commitment to citizen-centred local services and their role at the centre of the Spatial Plan
- The Third Dimension: A Strategic Action Plan for the Voluntary Sector Scheme (2007)⁷ defines the third sector as a wide-ranging set of voluntary, non-governmental, value-driven organisations. The strategy identifies, as a priority, the need for Government to provide support to strengthen the third sector so that it in turn can support communities
- National Strategic Framework for Community Development in Wales (2007)⁸ provides practical recommendations and principles that have been used to support the approach to community involvement in woodlands in this Policy position
- One Wales: One Planet: The sustainable development scheme for Wales (2009)⁹. The Scheme is a strategic document which brings together the outcomes the WAG wants to achieve through existing One Wales commitments in terms of their impact for the people and communities in Wales. The Scheme identifies a number of new high level commitments to promote sustainable development
- Social Enterprise Action Plan for Wales (2009)¹⁰ - the Welsh Assembly Government has a vision of dynamic and sustainable social enterprises strengthening an inclusive and growing economy

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1.3.2 Welsh Assembly Government funded programmes

- The Rural Development Plan (RDP) for Wales 2007-2013¹¹. Axis 3 is intended to address quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy and Axis 4: LEADER targets rural community regeneration and recognises the need for direct involvement of the communities themselves
- Communities First is the WAG's flagship programme to improve the living conditions and prospects for people in the most disadvantaged communities across Wales. These communities are identified using the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation
- The Heads of the Valleys Programme is a 15-year regeneration strategy (2005 - 2020) in five Local Authority areas across the Heads of the Valleys. The aim is that the Heads of the Valleys will become a rich, dynamic network of communities helping to drive the success of south east Wales
- Regeneration areas elsewhere in Wales are building on and extending the work being undertaken in the Heads of the Valleys

1.3.3 Woodlands for Wales strategy

As previously stated, Woodlands for Wales¹ (2009) contains the objective of more communities benefiting from woodlands and trees.

1.3.4 Policy Drivers

Collectively, the broader policy drivers and funded programmes in Wales provide a clear steer that:

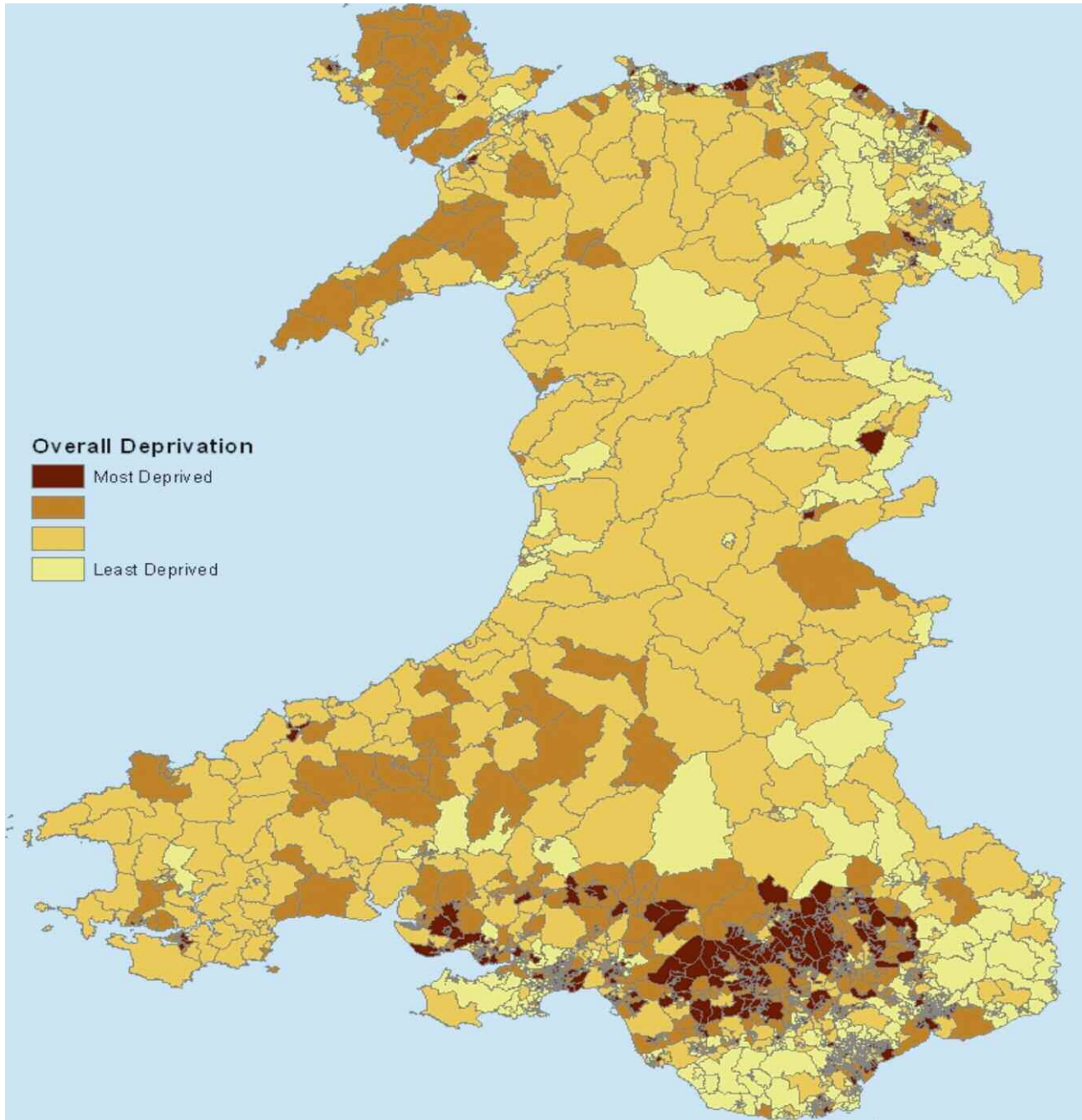
- Community involvement needs to take place as part of the day to day operational practice of sustainable forest management in public and private woodlands. Given the rationale for public ownership, the strategy highlights the special role of the Assembly Government Woodland Estate (AGWE) in this respect
- Woodlands need to contribute to community development and regeneration programmes in Wales
- In order to deliver a balance of social, economic and environmental goods and services, and serve local, regional and national interests from woodlands, we need to include the third sector, private sector and public sector organisations in woodland-related decision making processes

1.3.5 Spatial priorities

The overall levels of multiple deprivation in Wales are presented in **Figure 1**. This demonstrates a strong concentration of deprivation in the South Wales valleys and along the North Wales coast. **Figure 2** overlays existing woodlands in South Wales to the areas of highest deprivation to illustrate that there are already extensive areas of woodland from which deprived communities can benefit. Engagement in local forests by rural communities can provide a basis for diversifying the rural economy and addressing rural deprivation.

figure 1

Overall Multiple Deprivation Wales 2007



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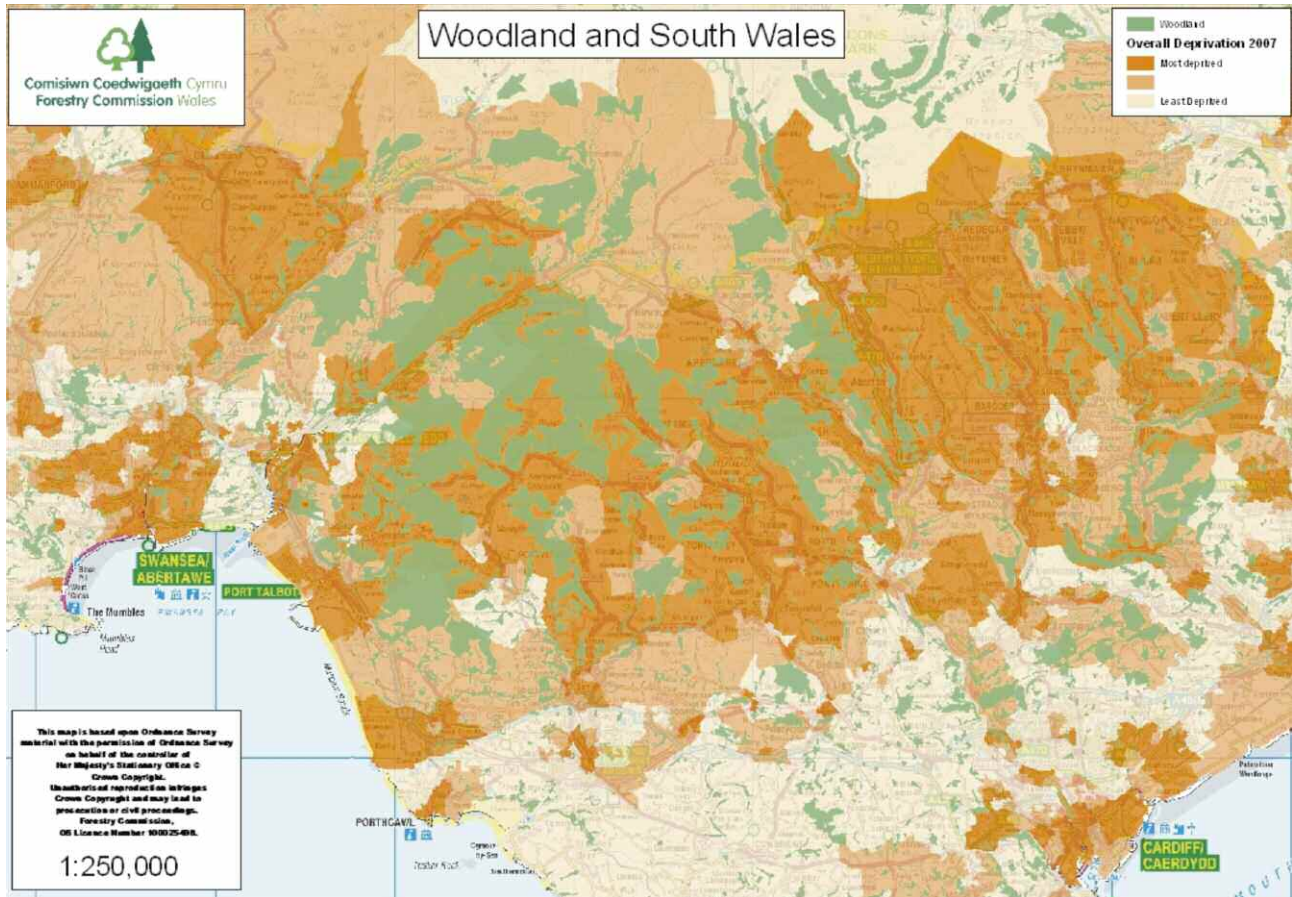
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figure 2

Woodlands of South Wales and areas of high deprivation



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2: Background

Woodlands have a significant impact on communities across Wales. These include:

- Impacts on health and well-being - through the role of woodlands in the landscape, and as places to visit
- Impacts on education and lifelong learning
- Impacts on the environment such as water quality, and as habitat for biodiversity
- Impacts on the economy - through timber and other woodland outputs for job creation and skills development

Experience in Wales demonstrates that, through the involvement of communities, woodlands can deliver a better balance of benefits, which recognise the needs of local people, as well as other stakeholders. This experience has been developed over several decades of woodland management, on both the AGWE and in public and private woodlands. In more recent years, as well as the regular Forest Design Plan consultations required by UKWAS¹², there have been a number of programmes designed specifically to increase levels of community involvement in trees and woodlands such as Cydcoed, Tir Coed¹³ and Treegeneration¹⁴.

Managing community involvement can be a challenge to both community groups and woodland managers alike. There are, however, many examples of good practice and learning in Wales that need to be shared constructively to improve the quality of engagement processes.

There is an emerging body of evidence to demonstrate the specific impacts of community involvement. The recent evaluation of Cydcoed¹⁵, provides some useful evidence of the kinds of benefit generated directly from community involvement in woodlands, showing that community involvement can support the delivery of a wide range of woodland strategy outcomes. In addition, - depending on the level of involvement - it can support community development itself. This evidence is summarised in **Appendix 3** against the areas of benefit described as follows:

2.1 Community capacity

There are a number of different terms to describe the ability of individuals within communities to work together to address their own common local needs. The terms **Social Capital** or **Community Capacity** refer to the networks and institutions used and the experience and skills developed by individuals to benefit the community.

Strengthening community capacity can empower communities to help themselves, as opposed to relying in the long-term on public service delivery to solve problems. This can be particularly valuable for disadvantaged communities where individuals cannot afford to buy their way out of problems in the way that better off communities can.

However, community capacity is hard to measure and evidence suggests that its accumulation (or erosion) is a process that can take several years at least. So despite the fact that the accumulation of community capacity is probably one of the most valuable impacts of Cydcoed, it has been one of the hardest to measure and quantify. Some indicators are summarised in **Appendix 3**.

It is essential that all parties involved in community development recognise the importance of continuity of support to community capacity building (even if it is hard to measure). This is particularly important for woodland projects that may be time-bound and contribute just one element to a much wider long-term community development process.

2.2 Health and wellbeing

There is a separate Policy Position on Woodlands for Health and Well-being¹⁶ that provides a summary of evidence relating to the link between health and trees, woodlands and other natural greenspace. The Policy Position identifies the need to develop a culture of community involvement in woodland decision-making to ensure that woodlands and the facilities they offer ‘meet local needs’. Emphasis is also placed upon involvement by children, so that healthy lifestyles can be encouraged from an early age. The evidence provided by the Cydcoed review (summarised in **Appendix 2**) supports these links although the quality of the data limits our ability to quantify some of these benefits.

2.3 Education and Learning

There is a separate Policy Position on education, learning and skills development which sets out the research evidence relating to the use of woodlands as both a venue for learning as well as the subject of learning. This shows that learning outcomes have featured prominently in most community-focussed initiatives in Wales, including many of the Cydcoed projects. A summary of the Cydcoed learning outcomes is provided in **Appendix 3**.

There is a clear link between learning (in all its forms) and the wider processes of community involvement and community development. Community involvement generally delivers significant learning benefits for those directly involved, and many community projects have included specific education and learning outputs in order to spread the benefits - particularly to young people and vulnerable adults.

The Cydcoed and TreeGeneration projects demonstrated that Community involvement can deliver significant social and human capital. Opportunities can be created for the acquisition of life skills, interpersonal and communication skills, project management and fundraising competencies, administrative and business management expertise, practical skills (i.e. use of chainsaws, coppicing) as people learn how to work together to deliver results.

2.4 Economic Development and Enterprise

A separate policy position will be developed on Economic Development and Enterprise in relation to woodland and trees. Creating sustainable jobs is a key Welsh Assembly Government objective and woodlands and trees offer opportunities for highly valued economic benefits at community level, especially in communities with few economic opportunities.

The development of social enterprises has been particularly welcome. We have defined ‘social enterprise’ as being ‘a method or a business model with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally re-invested in the business or in the community rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners’¹¹. Social enterprises, alongside voluntary organisations fall within the definition of the ‘third sector’. It is the third sector which is increasingly seen as the means to achieving economic regeneration by bringing together the combined energies and resources of community based voluntary organisations and entrepreneurs. There is a need for government to work with the third sector and the private sector to develop and publish examples of how this can work sustainably and equitably in a Welsh woodland context.

In addition to supporting social enterprises there is still scope to support more conventional private enterprises. The separate Policy Position on Economic Development and Enterprise (to be published later in 2010) will explore the opportunities and issues associated with both private sector and third sector enterprise.

2.5 Recreation and access

The evaluation of Cydcoed provided a useful insight into the perspectives of community groups with regard to access and recreation. Clearly recreation and access opportunities are considered prime benefits, with most groups of (75%) establishing or improving access and recreation infrastructure in woodlands. Interestingly, only a small proportion of those interviewed (10%) engaged in more physical activities such as running or cycling, with the majority favouring more gentle pastimes such as walking (85%) and wildlife watching (53%).

It is therefore important to align programmes for access and recreation development in woodlands to programmes to support communities. As local communities are identified as the prime beneficiary of most recreation infrastructure they should be involved in the planning and management of such developments.

2.6 Environmental benefits

For many individuals and community groups, the ecological condition, or the landscape benefit of the woodland is as much, if not more, of a motive for involvement as the opportunity for access and use. The Cydcoed evaluation gives an insight into community perspectives surrounding environmental benefits. What the Cydcoed evaluation was unable to provide is data against specific indicators for biodiversity, soils, water or landscape. However, there is some qualitative evidence to suggest significant improvement in condition of many of the sites, as a direct result of community involvement. Obvious improvements have occurred through the creation of new woodland on a variety of sites, and the bringing of existing woodland back into sustainable management through effective management planning. See **Appendix 3**.

When considering the range of benefits that can be generated through higher levels of community involvement in woodlands, environmental benefits must not be overlooked. Arguably, it is also necessary to manage the potential environmental costs associated with increased community involvement - which is certainly the concern expressed by a number of respondents to the Wales Woodland Strategy consultation¹⁷. Effort therefore needs to be made to gather environmental data from community woodland projects in order to monitor changes over time. Additionally there are specific education and learning opportunities and drivers for outdoor volunteering associated with the environmental values of woodlands.

2.7 Volunteering

The Welsh Assembly Government via the Wales Council for Voluntary Action provides financial support to build the capacity of the voluntary sector; raise awareness of the importance of volunteering; and make people aware of the range of opportunities that there are, as well as encourage more people within society to volunteer.

According to Volunteering Wales¹⁸, volunteers make a substantial contribution to life in Wales through engaging with voluntary, community and public sector organisations, and by being active in their own communities of interest and place. This contribution has an important role to play in helping to shape Wales as an active, successful and socially just society. There is significant potential to promote and extend the involvement of volunteers in all Welsh woodlands, in the areas of learning, skills development, health and well-being and greenspace management.

3: Agenda for Action

In this section we identify the key building blocks which need to be in place to enable more and higher levels of beneficial community involvement in woodlands in Wales.

The [Woodlands for Wales Action Plan](#) (published March 2010) identifies a number of actions, and those organisations who will be taking the lead, to improve community involvement in woodlands.

Many of the issues presented here were identified as priorities for action by the Community Involvement Policy Advice Group (CIPAG). This was a group convened by FC Wales in 2005 to provide recommendations on a policy for community participation in the management of the AGWE, and for FCW's role in supporting community involvement in other woodlands. They reported in 2005 and 2006 respectively¹⁹.

3.1 Accessible, well-managed woodlands

Accessible, well-managed woodlands are the physical resource upon which all programmes to support Woodlands for People depend. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed to deliver this agenda:

Location of woodlands: the location of our woodlands in Wales is the result of centuries of woodland loss, followed in the last century by a period of woodland expansion. The drivers for woodland expansion and loss are developed in the Woodland for Wales and are not repeated here. There is no obvious correlation between where woodlands currently exist and where people need woodlands to be. New woodland creation will be spatially targeted to ensure that environmental, economic and social benefits are maximised. We will work with the Strategic Regeneration Area Partnerships to develop planning models that identify how this may best be achieved.

Quality of woodlands: the Forest Design Plan, species choice and management regime will determine the quality of visitor experience to woodlands. Unthinned woodlands, stands of single species trees, or neglected woodlands used for flytipping do not create a high quality experience. On the other hand, well-managed, thinned woodlands with a mixture of species and ages are more pleasant places to be. Only by encouraging people into woodlands will we deliver more social benefits. Community involvement and the mobilisation of the voluntary sector can help woodland managers deliver high quality woodlands. The Wales Woodland Strategy is calling for more diverse woodlands and more use of thinning for woodlands in Wales.

Rights of access: in order for more people to enjoy woodlands there needs to be a legal framework for allowing public access and the infrastructure to support a range of activities. The current legal framework governing public access to woodlands is provided in **Appendix 4**. Over and above this we need to encourage the creation of access infrastructure, such as welcoming entrances, trails (of various kinds), interpretation, signage and other facilities. It is through the involvement of local communities that much of this infrastructure can be identified and developed.

Anti-social behaviour: use of off-road vehicles, fire-setting and fly-tipping are ongoing problems in woodlands and open space - particularly in peri-urban areas. All anti-social behaviour can be perceived as threatening and can discourage communities from accessing their local woodlands. Third and public sector organisations need to work together pro-actively to build on current research work (i.e. Police secondment in South Wales and the 'Wildfires in Wales' research project) to develop pilot projects that address these issues, looking at education, prevention and the development of alternative venues and resources.

¹⁹ Wildfires in Wales - a two year project which seeks to address the issue of deliberately started wildfires in South Wales

3.2 Effective mechanisms for community engagement

There are several current mechanisms whereby engagement takes place between woodland managers and communities, and between various public and third sector initiatives and communities. These need to be consistent, transparent, fit for purpose and regularly reviewed.

Forest Planning Consultations: Forest Design Plan (FDP) consultations take place on the AGWE every time a FDP is developed (every ten years) or reviewed (every five years).

Public consultation is also a requirement for developing a woodland management plan through the Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) grant scheme for private woodlands. The purpose of the consultation is specifically to gather information that will support the planning process. Good practice exists in Wales for how such consultation can be carried out in a meaningful way, however this good practice needs to be continually reviewed and reflected in guidance.

Ad-hoc engagement: Many of the issues raised by consultees during FDP consultations are nothing to do with FDPs. Routine management issues such as anti-social behaviour, or the impact of vehicle movements on local communities, need to be addressed alongside the FDP process. We will encourage woodland managers to be accessible to communities and develop the necessary skills to treat communities and their concerns appropriately. Through a culture of routine engagement with local communities trust can be built, problems identified and solved and development ideas brought forward. There are good practice examples of skilled woodland managers having good working relationships with neighbouring communities.

Project-based engagement: FCW, other public sector and third sector organisations have projects that require consultation with communities. The purpose of such consultations is to understand how woodlands could be used to support local development objectives. The key challenge is to promote interest in woodlands whilst realistically managing expectations. Where such consultations are publicly funded, and particularly when they are delivered or funded by FCW, care will be taken to ensure consistency in terms of how opportunities are identified, evaluated and implemented.

Community Woodland Association: Llais y Goedwig was set up in 2009 by community woodland groups in Wales to support community networking and to represent the views of community groups in local, regional and national processes. This new line of communication will support more strategic engagement around policy and programme development as well as the identification of best practice around project delivery.

3.3 Effective support structures

We need to have effective structures in place to support increased community involvement in woodlands. There are many different government and third sector organisations supporting communities in urban and rural parts of Wales. These organisations need to work together more effectively to ensure that adequate resources are mobilised, and that these resources are co-ordinated, managed and deployed efficiently.

- At a national level we need to ensure that there are linkages between woodland initiatives and initiatives to support community development. In particular, Communities First, the Strategic Regeneration Area Partnerships and the support structures designed to support delivery of Axis 3 and 4 of the Rural Development Plan
- At Local Authority level we will support community woodland groups to promote their work and gain access to support from local development structures - including Community First partnerships, Local Action Groups, and County Voluntary Councils
- We will support the aspirations of community groups to develop their own networking and support structures to encourage promotion, networking, lesson learning and the dissemination of best practice

3.4 Funding

Although it is widely recognised that funding is not always the barrier to increased community involvement in woodlands, it is undoubtedly an important catalyst for delivering community projects. It is often the physical evidence of change on the ground that can inspire individuals to volunteer time and empower groups to feel a sense of achievement. The investments made through the Cydcoed programme included recreation infrastructure, welcoming gateways, new trees planted and areas of woodland restored. Such investment involves money, even if some of it can be achieved through volunteer time and effort. We will work together with others to mobilise funding to continue support for community projects. We will:

- ensure that Better Woodlands for Wales is accessible for community groups as a funding source
- help support community groups to mobilise funding for woodland projects through other existing sources
- work with partners in the public and third sector to develop project bids, where appropriate, for external funding as and when opportunities arise

3.5 Facilitating Community Involvement

Levels of community involvement may be described in terms of steps up a ladder. The lowest rung on the ladder is simply informing the public, the next step may be consulting the public, whereas the top rung may involve full transfer of control of the woodland to a community group. It is not surprising that there tends to be a higher level of complexity to the legal and operational arrangements required as groups move up the ladder. Evidence from Cydcoed suggests that some good 'business models' have been developed to support the majority of the aspirations of community groups.

There is no one preferred level of community involvement. We encourage third sector involvement in woodland management on the assumption that it leads to better quality woodlands and yields greater benefits to local people. It should be possible to facilitate any level of involvement, as long as it delivers more benefits. In order to support higher levels of community involvement we therefore need to provide the following:

- **Legal framework:** a range of clear legal options need to be developed to enable community involvement at appropriate levels
- **Clear guidance:** Appropriate guidance is required which supports woodland managers and communities to identify management objectives, assess risks and seek suitable management arrangements
- **Skilled facilitators:** Skilled facilitators may be required to deliver higher levels of involvement. There needs to be adequate investment of time and skill in the process of engagement to build trust, analyse the key issues and negotiate suitable agreements

3.6 Promotion

Many of the benefits which may be generated through community involvement in woodlands, may not be obvious to community groups. Since the evaluation of Cydcoed we have a powerful body of evidence describing a wide range of very tangible benefits. In order to encourage more groups to take an interest in woodlands these benefits need to be communicated and promoted. We will encourage this promotion amongst public sector service providers and also seek to work with the third sector and private sector to reach groups in urban and rural areas.

4: Methods of delivery

This Policy Position will be delivered by FCW and others on behalf of WAG via the following mechanisms:

- Supporting and enabling communities to deliver programmes which encourage increased use of woodlands - especially in areas of high deprivation
- Deployment of grant funding via Better Woodlands for Wales to facilitate communities to deliver accessible and well managed rural and urban woodlands
- Providing expert advice on community involvement in the management of trees and woodlands and assist in the dissemination of good practice
- Working with the Strategic Regeneration Partnership on the development of woodland programmes to support benefits for communities
- Establishing a series of "Pathfinder Projects". Within the context of this document a Pathfinder project is a community group which wishes to take greater management control of their local public woodland. The project objective is to explore the implications of higher levels of community involvement in the management of the AGWE
- Supporting networks and partnerships that deliver higher forms of community involvement
- Reviewing the current mechanisms for involving communities in the management of their local woodlands
- Work with others to develop a comprehensive spatial data set to ensure that programmes and resources are targeted as effectively as possible
- Work with others to research and address issues of anti-social behaviour in woodlands - particularly with the Police and Fire Services, Local Authorities and the Wales Off Road Motorcycling Steering Group²¹

As stated in the Introduction it is hoped that other organisations responsible for delivery of government policy will also develop a corporate response to help deliver collectively our 'Agenda for Action'.

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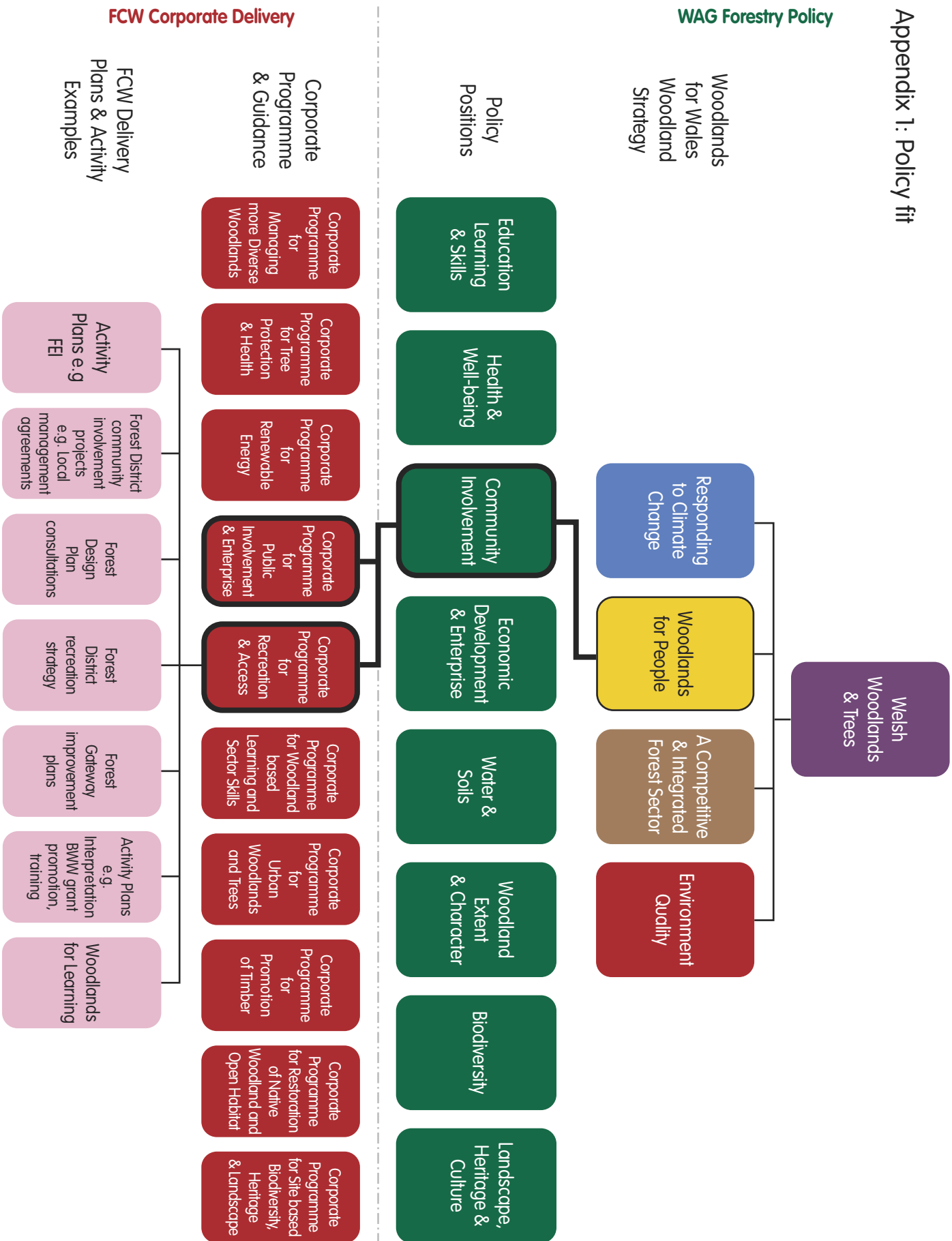
5: Monitoring and evaluation

There has been a tendency for support for community woodland development to be project-driven with start-stop funding cycles and a rapid turnover of staff. One of the results of this is that lessons learned through the delivery of projects tend not to be learned and shared. In addition, the outputs and outcomes from different projects tend not to be recorded and so an overall measure of impact or success becomes difficult to provide.

Funding for Cydcoed had built into it resources for an evaluation. The Cydcoed evaluation report tells us a great deal about the impact of Cydcoed against a range of outputs and outcomes (**Appendix 3**). However, it also acknowledges its own limitations due to the fact that baseline data was not collected at the start of most projects, against which change could be measured. We will ensure that a higher degree of rigour is applied to evaluation and that lessons learned are captured and effectively disseminated. Key objectives for monitoring, evaluation and review are as follows:

- **Identify and promote best practice.** Recent reviews of Cydcoed and Treeneration have identified practical recommendations for supporting community involvement programmes. More specific project case studies need to be developed to highlight best practice at a project level for delivering specific kinds of project outputs - such as health, education, volunteering etc. We need to continue developing best practice community involvement processes - such as Forest Design Planning. We also need to develop good practice examples of where higher levels of community involvement in woodlands have been achieved and what additional benefits arise.
- **Measuring public benefit.** The assumption behind more community involvement in woodlands is that it results in higher levels of public benefit. We therefore need to be able to measure public benefit. The Cydcoed review and the Economic and Social study by Forest Research in Scotland²⁰ (2008) have demonstrated what can be measured and what is difficult to measure. We need to find acceptable and affordable ways of measuring the benefits we are interested in.
- **Monitoring and Reporting.** We need to monitor levels and impact of community benefits over time. Many of the benefits of community involvement may not be realised for several years, and levels of community involvement may change. We need to report on these issues against the Wales Woodland Strategy and programmes for community involvement. Suitable indicators need to be developed based on the monitoring data to be collected. We need to manage the trade-off between the cost of data collection versus the need for differentiated data in order to report as accurately as reasonably possible against outcomes and outputs.
- **Monitoring by community groups.** We need to encourage and support community groups to report both on their own development and also on the woodland that they are involved in. Encouraging reflection and developing a learning culture in groups is an important facet in their ongoing development.

Appendix 1: Policy fit



Appendix 2: Equality and diversity evidence in relation to community involvement with woodlands

Although there is relevant evidence relating to the use of woodlands for recreation by a number of the equality strands there is less evidence relating to community involvement with woodlands. The review of the Cydcoed project provides some recent evidence see **Appendix 3**.

The positive effects of using woodlands for recreation are known (opportunities for exercise, improving health and well-being). Following from this community involvement in woodlands will provide similar benefits to all diversity groups. Community involvement with woodlands provides opportunities to increase knowledge and gain practical and social skills. However there is a need for further work to review and develop good practice guidance ensuring any barriers to groups being involved in woodlands are addressed.

AGE

In Wales 19% of the population are children aged 0-15, 58% of working age 16-59 and 23% of the population are of retirement age (which is rising). BME groups generally have a younger age structure with some sections having up to 45% of the population aged 0-15. **Office of National Statistics - Wales mid year estimates 2007**.

Visitors to woodlands are 15% aged 0-15, 67% 16 - 59 and 18% retirement age. **Forestry Commission survey of visitors to Welsh Assembly Woodlands (2004)**.

The younger and older age groups are under represented in the number of visitors to woodlands. They represent only 33% of visitors compared to 42% of the total population.

The report on the Cydcoed project showed that older people were well represented within community woodland groups. A significant numbers of people felt their health and well-being had improved as a result of involvement in projects. Overall 90% of people surveyed as part of the review of the project felt that woodlands were important in providing a stress free area where they could relax thereby creating a sense of well-being. **Forestry Commission (2008) An evaluation of Cydcoed: the social and economic benefits of using trees and woodlands for community development in Wales**.

The benefits of using the countryside for access and recreation are well known and documented - exercise brings health and well being benefits, which are important at all ages. However they are particularly beneficial to younger people in developing a healthy lifestyle at a young age and in later life as physical and mental health declines exercise is beneficial. **A statistical focus on older people in Wales Statistics for Wales, Welsh Assembly Government 2008**.

There is evidence to show that young adults, under-participate in countryside recreation. However, debate surrounds the question as to whether these groups are 'excluded' or if they simply choose not to use the countryside. Whatever the reason greater involvement of this sector is to be encouraged. **'Social exclusion in the countryside', Bill Slee (2002) Countryside Recreation Vol. 10**.

DISABILITY

Those who describe themselves as disabled represent 8% of the visitors to woodlands - this is low when compared to 24% of the total Welsh population classed as disabled. Those without disability represented 92% of woodland visitors compared to 76% of the Welsh population who are in this group. **Forestry Commission survey of visitors to Welsh Assembly Woodlands (2004)**.

The health benefits for all are as described in the evidence in the **Age** section above.

The reasons for disabled people not using woodlands are varied and include the physical barriers, the lack of information and a lack of confidence about using woodlands.

GENDER AND GENDER IDENTITY

Gender

2001 census 48% population male, 52% population female. **Office of National Statistics - Wales mid year estimates 2007.**

There was some variation in the % of visitors to Forestry Commission woodlands with 56% male and 44% female visitors. **Forestry Commission survey of visitors to Welsh Assembly Woodlands (2004).**

The health benefits for all are as described in the evidence in the Age section above.

Some women feel afraid of venturing out alone into such woodlands - however the Incidence of personal crime in woodlands and open spaces is low. (Also concern about Children in open spaces). **Accessibility of woodlands and natural spaces: Addressing crime and safety issues. O'Brien and Tabbush, Forest Research 2005.**

This perception of danger is reflected in the findings of other work including **New Pathways for health and well-being: Summary of research to understand and overcome barriers to accessing woodlands. Weldon et al Forestry Commission 2007.**

Women are shown to be well represented within community woodland groups as shown by the results of Cydcoed projects. The report produced in 2008 showed that overall 41% of participants felt their health had been improved as a result of being involved in a project. **Forestry Commission (2008) An evaluation of Cydcoed: the social and economic benefits of using trees and woodlands for community development in Wales. Final Report for Forestry Commission Wales, September 2008, Social & Economic Research Group, Environmental & Human Sciences Division, Forest Research.**

Gender Identity

Transgender and transsexual - no publicly available statistical data on numbers. Estimated in UK in 2000 based on those who had changed their passports - 5000. As of 2006 - 1660 had been awarded a Gender Recognition Certificate. However there is no substantive information on the number of transgender and transsexuals in the population. **The Equalities Review. Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination. Press for Change. 2007.**



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RACE

The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population of Wales is 2% of the Welsh population. 61% of the BME population live in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. The 2001 Census showed the BME population has a younger age structure than the majority white population. **Office of National Statistics data /Census 2001 data.**

Less than 0.5% of visitors to woodlands were from the BME community who represented 2% of the population. **Forestry Commission survey of visitors to Welsh Assembly Woodlands (2004).**

It is known that Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BME) communities suffer from more health problems compared to the population as a whole. Increasing access to the countryside can improve their quality of life. **Capturing Richness: Countryside Visits by Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. Black Environment Network & Countryside Agency 2003.**

Despite assumptions black and ethnic minorities do have an interest in the countryside. It is access to the countryside that impacts on the number of BME visits due to unfamiliarity, lack of knowledge, cost of visiting the countryside. Positive examples are given in this report as to the experiences and benefits the BME community can gain from access in the countryside and the positive benefits the wider community will get from this. **Capturing Richness: Countryside Visits by Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. Black Environment Network & Countryside Agency 2003.**

Benefits of the countryside were recognised by BME groups but use was limited by cost of visits, lack of knowledge of the countryside, lack of 'cultural habit' of visiting and fear of discrimination. **Countryside Agency Diversity Review 2005.**

A number of factors can act as barriers to BME groups and deter them from using woodlands - similar to those already described in Disability section above. The attitudes and understanding of Forestry Commission staff and other countryside service providers towards BME groups is considered and examples of best practice to encourage greater use of countryside by BME groups are described. **Race Equality and the Forestry Commission, Forest Research report (Edwards and Weldon) 2006.**

As with young people, (as already described in the **Age** section above), there is evidence to show that ethnic minorities, under-participate in countryside recreation. However, debate surrounds the question as to whether these groups are 'excluded' or if they simply choose not to use the countryside. Whatever the reason greater involvement of this sector is to be encouraged. **'Social exclusion in the countryside', Bill Slee (2002) Countryside Recreation Vol. 10.**

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

"Very little creditable data has been collected on sexual orientation. National surveys such as the Census of 2001 and the British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NSSAL) do not ask a direct question on sexual orientation. Therefore, it is not possible to state with any confidence the size of the Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual (LGB) community in Wales. Estimates vary, Stonewall proposing a figure of around 10% but other studies proposing the figure is in the region of 1 or 2%. No data has been analysed at a Wales level" **A brief analysis of Demographic Equality Strands (2006) National Assembly for Wales.**

No evidence has become apparent that directly relates to the aims of this policy position. Generally however "The overall picture (in Wales) can be summarised as one of increasing inclusion of, and contribution made by, LGB people in Welsh society." **Counted In! The third all Wales survey of lesbian, gay and bisexual people (2007).**

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RELIGION AND BELIEF

There is limited evidence related to religion and belief.

Response to a 'voluntary' question in the 2001 census regarding religion resulted in 98% of respondents recording Christian as their religion. This represented 72% of the population of Wales. **Office of National Statistics 2001, - National Assembly for Wales: A brief analysis of Demographic Equality Strands 2006.**

Muslims are the second largest religious group in Wales representing 0.7% of the population. 1.1% of the Welsh population stated their religion was not Christian or Muslim. **National Assembly for Wales: A brief analysis of Demographic Equality Strands 2006.**

A community involvement project, involving people of different faiths, in Bedfordshire is creating a 'Faith Space' in a Forestry Commission woodland. Working on such a project enables those taking part to learn more about themselves, their environment and each other. At the same time it provides health and well-being benefits for those involved. The project has shown that a range of faiths has an interest in access to woodland and also working together. **Faith Woodlands Dec 2006 - March 2007, The First Phase. Kevin Hand, Forestry Commission.**

Khalsa Wood in Nottingham is an earlier example of a woodland being used by faith groups. In this case the Sikh community began the project in 1999. Located within a country park on the urban fringe of Nottingham it was awarded Heritage Lottery funding in 2002 to take forward a range of community activities.

http://www.ben-network.org.uk/participation/green_spaces/gs_more_info/kalsa_wood.html



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Appendix 3: Summary of key findings for the Cydcoed evaluation

Interpreted from a report by Forest Research 2008

Summary of health and well-being benefits

- Just over one half of the people involved in Cydcoed projects agreed or strongly agreed that taking part in the project had led them to take more regular exercise and over 40 percent of people stated their physical health had improved since becoming involved
- One half of people involved in Cydcoed projects indicated an improvement in their overall well-being
- All of the projects have provided considerable opportunity for people to take up informal recreation, something widely taken up by groups such as dog walkers
- There is anecdotal evidence that a small number of people are now using the woodlands in a concerted manner to address their health problems
- Questionnaire data reports that people feel the woods to be an important part of creating a sense of well being through offering a relaxing and stress free area
- Research shows that over 12,900 primary school children and over 5,060 secondary school children have been involved with Cydcoed projects

Summary of community capacity benefits

- Almost half of households involved in Cydcoed (44%) indicated the project had provided them with an opportunity to volunteer to help suggesting that there is a latent desire among households to be involved in community activities
- In total Cydcoed project groups have 8,955 members who work with a further 6,494 people from other groups who are involved in some way with the Cydcoed project
- Just over half of the sample agreed that their level of trust in the community had increased as a result of taking part of the project
- Seventy nine percent of people questioned thought the project had helped develop stronger ties between people in the community
- Eighty five percent agreed or strongly agreed the quality of life for the community had improved as a result of Cydcoed
- Overall around three-quarters of respondents indicated an increase in the number of people they knew as a result of taking part in the project
- One third of respondents indicated the project had provided space for children to play, and just over one third claimed the project had stopped, or helped to reduce, anti-social behaviour in the woods

Summary of education and learning benefits

- Approximately 3,500 people attended courses (covering a range of relevant environmental, vocational or managerial subjects) organised directly and indirectly through Cydcoed groups
- Most Cydcoed projects produced publicly available information about woodlands as part of the project
- Cydcoed groups organised 82 educational events in woodlands at which an estimated 7,043 people attended
- 227 schools participated in Cydcoed projects involving 18,000 children
- Teachers reported that when visiting the woodland the pupils were more visibly relaxed and became more confident, although there was uncertainty over whether this was then transferred to the schoolroom
- Many Cydcoed projects provided direct learning infrastructure such as Forest School sites (10%), woodland interpretation and signage (15%) and other improvements to woodlands for school use (15%).
- Twenty nine percent of adults involved in projects gained general work experience
- Seven per cent of adults involved in projects said their involvement directly contributed to their gaining a formal qualification
- Case study work shows that several projects have engaged in student placement schemes with local colleges and universities and one project has reported developing an accredited apprenticeship scheme as a direct result of Cydcoed

Summary of access and recreation benefits

- 64km of new footpath/track have been created which equates to an average of 420m per project
- 32km of existing footpath or track has been brought into use which equates to an average of 200m per project
- A total of 30km of new mountain bike/cycle track has been created from 8 projects. (Note one project reported 20km)
- A total of 7.8km of existing mountain bike/cycle track has been brought in to use from 4 projects
- 326 new access points have been created which equates to an average of 2 new access points per project
- 24 recreation or sporting events were organised directly by Cydcoed projects involving 1,070 people

Summary of environmental benefits

- Forecast 230ha of new woodland created on non-agricultural land
- Forecast 9,000ha of existing woodland brought into sustainable management
- 82% of respondents said visiting woodlands helps to learn about nature
- 98% of respondents said woodlands are important to their communities

Summary of economic benefits

- Estimate of woodland and timber related jobs created is approximately 60
- Estimates of woodland and timber related jobs safeguarded is approximately 240
- There is no certainty as to the duration of these jobs and a general concern that many of them are dependent on the continued flow of grant funding
- Estimates of woodland and timber related businesses supported is approximately 41

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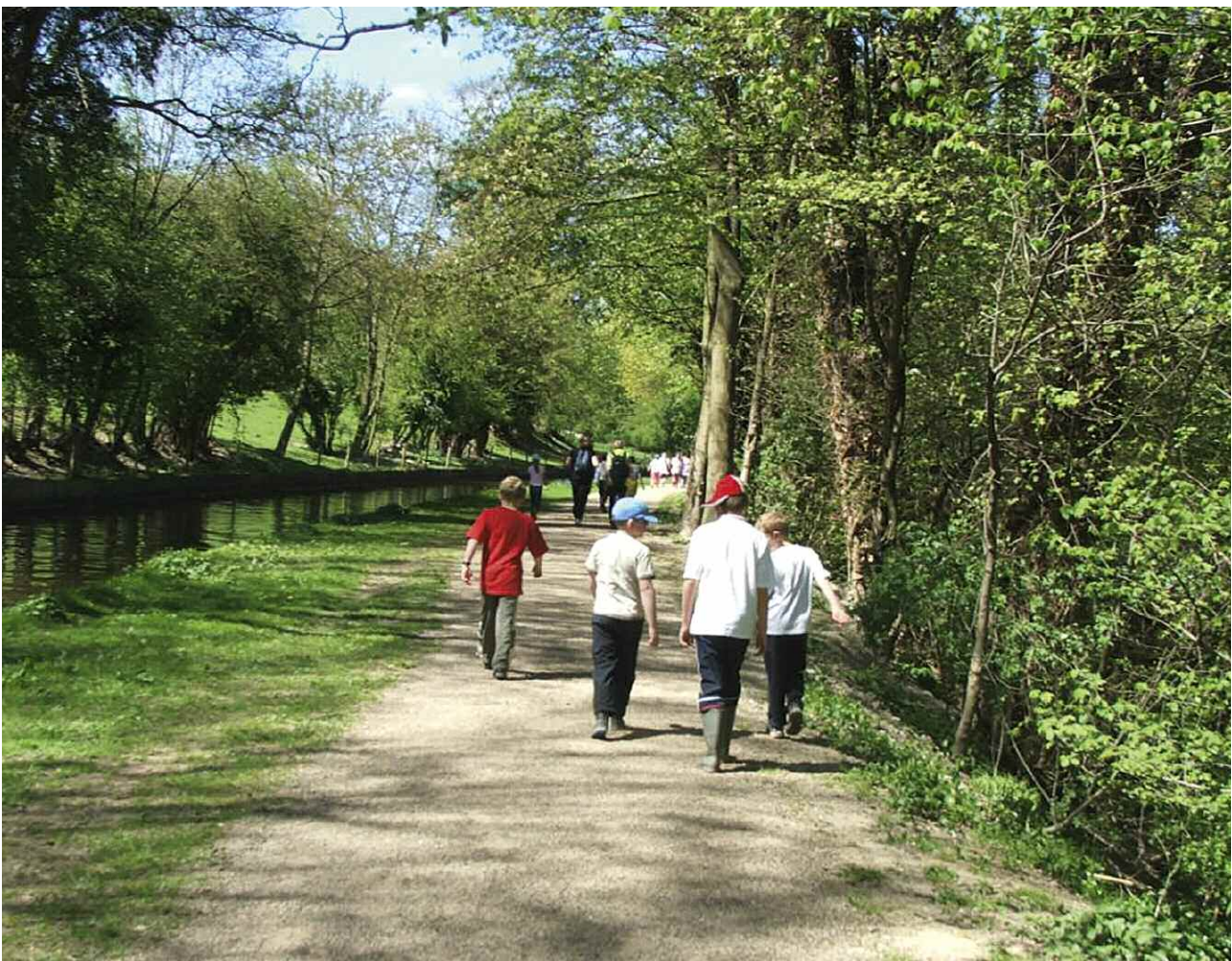
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Appendix 4: The legal framework governing public access to woodlands

- **Public Rights of Way (PRoW):** Certain trails through woodlands will be PRoWs. These are statutory rights provided under the Highways Act 1975. The responsibility for keeping PRoW open is a shared responsibility between the Highways Authorities and the occupier of the land. Broadly speaking, the Highways Authorities have a duty to maintain the surface and occupiers have a duty to keep them clear of obstructions.
- **Permissive Ways:** In order to manage access liabilities, or to provide public benefit, occupiers of forestry land may choose to provide formal access through the provision of waymarked trails or “permissive ways”. In such cases the landowner has effectively “invited people onto the land” and this creates an increased duty of care to ensure adequate notification of dangers and to ensure the trails are waymarked and free of obstructions.
- **Countryside Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000:** The CROW Act created a statutory right of public access on “access land”. All FC Wales freehold land has been declared “access land”. The occupier’s duty of care under CROW is equivalent to that under trespass. Occupiers have limited rights to suspend open access for operational purposes.
- **Trespass:** When people enter onto land, without permission, by act of “trespass”, the landowner has a duty of care in terms of Occupiers Liability legislation to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to ensure public safety. This includes reasonable notification of dangers.

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Further information

This is one of a series of Policy Positions providing additional detail and background to the overriding themes of the Woodlands for Wales strategy. Each also contains an agenda for action which set out methods for delivering strategic aims and objectives.

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