

Regeneration of previously developed land

Creating community forestry in Glan Morfa, Rhyl, North Wales

Introduction

Cydcoed was a £16 million programme that gave 100% grants to community groups in Wales in order to increase access to community greenspace for relaxation and exercise. Funded from a European Union Structural Funds Programme, the programme was primarily aimed at the most deprived communities (as classified in Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation) who had no access to community greenspace. The programme was funded over two phases: 2001-2004 and 2003-2008.

Glan Morfa in Rhyl North Wales is a 27 ha area located on a former landfill site adjacent to the town, about 5 minutes walk from a large housing estate and in a ward ranked (at the time) as the most deprived in Wales. The Marsh Road Residents Association successfully bid for a Cydcoed grant of over £250 000 in 2005 to create a woodland area.

In the past Glan Morfa was only used for dog-walking, motorcycling and fly tipping. The Residents Association's vision was to provide the whole community with access to a safe woodland environment where they could have 'a breath of fresh air', exercise and learn about the natural surroundings.



Glan Morfa before and after restoration (courtesy Bob Griffiths, Forestry Commission).

Project objectives

Cydcoed aimed to create new community woodlands on non-agricultural land. The core objectives of Cydcoed were to use community forestry to:

- deliver social inclusion and to create social capital
- help create and maintain high capacity community groups able to influence decision about their locality
- deliver woods that provide long-term social, economic and environmental benefits and
- enable individuals to play a positive role in their communities.

Highlights

- Over 2500 new trees have been planted, many by local community volunteers, addressing the shortage of good quality, public, open space in Rhyl.
- Soil surveys on site showed up small areas of compaction mostly associated with old roadways and haul routes, and tests indicated alkaline soil (pH >8). Soil physical remediation was conducted prior to planting to aid vegetation establishment, and species selection was tailored to suit the alkaline soils.
- New and improved footpaths (7000 metres) and cycle track (5000 metres) have been provided. Additional funding from Denbighshire County Council allowed for signposting and tarmacking of paths to make them less attractive to illegal motorcycling activity.
- Part of the site has been designated a nature reserve supporting a large population of lapwings and skylarks.
- New habitats have been created and new management regimes are in place to improve biodiversity value.
- The project has created a focus for community action and cohesion through volunteering opportunities, with over 1000 local people being involved in some way. Local people are currently undergoing leadership training through the 'walk your way to health' initiative.
- The new site at Glan Morfa provides a link to another recently completed community project – a sculpture trail - at nearby Brickfields Pond. The link provides a variety of sensory experiences and greater scope for walking.
- Forest Education Initiative has held a number of events with over 200 children attending and Forest School training has been undertaken.
- Despite initial concerns of the Residents Association over managing such a large sum of money, the group gained skills and confidence that will encourage them to apply for other grants. They are keen to take on other projects in the community.

Recommendations

- Local government support and a high level project champion should be sought for community based regeneration schemes. Communication between local authority departments must be well maintained to prevent confusion and unnecessary delay.

- Importance of deliverables and impact of time scales must be repeatedly emphasised from the outset. Community interest in land regeneration projects can fluctuate depending on what else is going on locally and the sometimes lengthy periods of time required for progress; for example, in the establishment of trees and wildflower meadows. Interestingly, mature planting can be counterproductive with respect to establishment success.

Reference

Forest Research (2008). *An evaluation of Cydcoed: the social and economic benefits of using trees and woodlands for community development in Wales*. Final Report to Forestry Commission Wales. Forest Research, Farnham.