

Managing local assets collaboratively

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Managing local assets collaboratively

A policy brief for community & town councils' Biodiversity Champions

Summary

- This policy brief explains how community & town councils can implement a 'Wild Pathways' strategy to deliver their multiple responsibilities for community development, public health and wellbeing, and biodiversity.
 - Statutory guidance encourages community & town councils to work with other organisations on a range of issues, from managing local assets to implementing biodiversity plans.
 - Recent research in Wales¹ identified multiple dilemmas for collaborative partnerships, which risk councils losing the focus on local priorities.
 - The research project created a specific strategy called 'Wild Pathways' that can help Biodiversity Champions to work with local partners to manage community assets without losing the focus on community & town councils' priorities.
 - The briefing builds on a focussed group discussion with 23 Biodiversity Champions, organised by One Voice Wales' Pethau Bychain project in November 2023.
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Collaboration and community assets

[Welsh government guidance](#)² encourages community and town councils to expand their activities to respond to local needs. One way in which councils can do this is through their ownership and management of community services and assets.

There are many examples in [One Voice Wales' Assets & Services Toolkit](#) of councils taking a collaborative approach to managing these assets. Working together for the common good is a key principle of the [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#)³.

One Voice Wales organised a focussed discussion with Biodiversity Champions of community and town councils in November 2023, as part of the Pethau Bychain project. Representatives identified a wide range of environmental organisations with whom they work in partnership, from local groups to local government to national organisations, in the third and public sectors.

Collaboration challenges for community and town councils

The question for councils is, how can they keep a focus on local priorities when working in partnership means they must help their partners' aims, too?

My recent research¹ studied collaboration in Public Services Boards (PSBs) in Wales. We found that these strategic partnerships struggle to include all partners' priorities and to keep a focus on local communities. Four main dilemmas contribute to these struggles.

Partners bring expertise from their different fields, but there is limited time for dialogue to understand how each organisation can contribute to the others.

Long-term planning needs a strategic approach, but prioritising between different organisations' objectives gives some partners more influence over decisions.

Partners must be accountable to their own organisation, while also contributing to other partners' aims and communities' diverse needs.

Partnerships can access a wider range of resources, including grants, but external funding risks shifting the focus from local needs to funders' criteria.

Case studies

Community & town council Biodiversity Champions report mixed experiences of working in partnership to manage local green assets. These experiences demonstrate ways local councils work to overcome the dilemmas identified in the research.

By *embracing the needs* of different groups in the community, **Welshpool town council** have facilitated people to work together to create a community garden adjacent to the local canal. The community council played the role of intermediary, to bring together a local Arts group, the county council, school children and residents. The space now has a mural, wildlife area, new paths and accessible benches. It is maintained jointly by the county council and a local 'ground force' of volunteers.

By *working on joint projects together*, **Dyserth community council** have increased their understanding of what matters to different people to create a shared vision of a memorial garden. In doing so, they have motivated people to pool resources. Members of the community council, the WI and an environmental group, along with members of the public have helped to plant trees donated by the Woodland Trust with tools loaned from North Wales Wildlife Trust. Together they are creating a memorial wildlife hedgerow.

The role of **Goetr Fawr community council** as *mediator between different interests* came into sharp focus when trying to enhance a local green space. Whereas the county council is constrained by budgets, the community council responds to the needs of local people. The community council has to negotiate procurement of play equipment from the local authority, while at the same time bearing in mind the different needs of local people for an open green space or a place for young families.

Llanedi community council are familiar with *overcoming differences* to create a community asset that works for everyone. Recognising the amenity loss but environmental potential of a flooded cricket ground, the council have involved community volunteers and school children to create a nature reserve and trail. Similarly, recognising the value to both wildlife and people of a reclaimed industrial site, the council have facilitated its development with both native and non-native plantings to encourage both biodiversity and physical activity.

A Wild Pathways strategy for partnership working

The research project developed a strategy to enable partners with different priorities to work together to manage local green assets.

Biodiversity Champions can use the 'Wild Pathways' strategy to help community and town councils to work with a range of partners with interests in community development and public health as well as the nature and climate crises.

'A wild pathway is for example, a verge and hedgerow linked by a footpath and cycleway to a small wood, churchyard, village green, playground, common land, country park etc.'

Wildlife Trust volunteer

The vision



The aim of Wild Pathways is to create a network of pathways that connect local wildlife habitats while at the same time creating opportunities for healthy activities on people's doorsteps and building local community assets.

Meeting legislative requirements



Every 'wild pathway' contributes not only to biodiversity (section 6 requirements) and to public wellbeing (local government duties), but also to asset-based community development (identified as a priority for local councils).

'We know that these are the things that can enrich people's lives and sustain better health and well-being, thus contributing to a healthier, happier local area.'

Senior Practitioner in public health

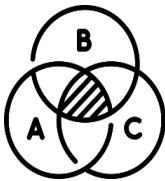
Putting Wild Pathways into practice



Partners from the council, environmental organisations, public health and voluntary bodies together identify multiple local green assets which they could enhance to connect ecological habitats, create doorstep activities and build community assets.



The partners work with a local social prescribing scheme to engage with diverse groups of the local community. Together with these groups they identify the specific networks of pathways that will have most benefit for residents' daily lives.



The partner organisations identify which work programmes are operational in the specific community. By pooling these resources, they design a joint project which can begin to create the identified network of pathways.



The joint project engages again with residents and voluntary groups via the social prescribing scheme, offering opportunities for local people to get involved in creating, using, monitoring and maintaining the networks of pathways.

Next steps

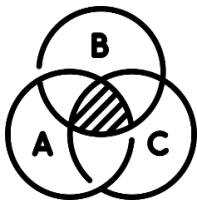
Discussions during and since the research have identified two key potential partners for Biodiversity Champions to put a Wild Pathways strategy into action.



[Local Nature Partnerships Cymru](#) facilitates a network of partners in every local authority area in Wales, with a focus on biodiversity.

[Social prescribing](#) is a rapidly expanding approach across Wales to improving communities' well-being, often coordinated by [county voluntary councils](#).

Wild Pathways projects contribute to multiple strategies and the research group identified work programmes which Biodiversity Champions can bring together in a joint local project.



Wildlife Trusts' '**Living Landscapes**' programmes contribute to ecological connectivity.

Primary-care and Public Health '**Social Prescribing**' schemes contribute to creating doorstep activities.

Local authorities' '**Active Travel**' plans contribute to asset-based development.

Forming a 'community of practice' can help community & town council representatives to support each other as they begin to adopt a Wild Pathways strategy. There are 3 key principles which facilitate such a shared learning community.



Dialogue: Understand each C&TC's current priorities and the ways they currently address them. When engaging new partners, start by asking about *their* local priorities and work programmes.

Reflection on joint projects: Share examples of local partnership projects. Reflect on who contributes and who benefits or has more influence.

Shared language: Identify key words and phrases used by fellow council representatives, communities and partner organisations to talk about what matters to them.

About the research

Dr Elizabeth Woodcock is an Honorary Research Associate at Bangor University, where her research contributes to the University's civic engagement strategy. This policy brief is based on an extended action research project between 2016 and 2022, that formed part of her doctoral thesis. The full research and links to other published policy briefings can be found on Elizabeth's profile page:

[Dr Elizabeth Woodcock | Bangor University](#)

References in this document

1. Woodcock, E. M. Cross-sector collaboration for Wales' national well-being: Transformative action in communities of practice. (Bangor, 2022).
2. Welsh Government. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 : Statutory Guidance for Community and Town Councils. (2021).
3. Welsh Government. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials Guidance on our law to improve social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being. (2021).