



Resilient
Green Spaces
Mannau
Gwyrdd Gwynn



Exploring Community Access to Farms & Land

Morrison Hospital, Swansea Bay Case Study
Resilient Green Spaces



Setting up a CSA

The Landworkers' Alliance and Shared Assets have teamed up to find ways to realise the challenges and opportunities of access to land for new entrants and local communities interested in agroecological farming as part of the Resilient Green Spaces project. This series of case studies are meant to showcase existing good practice amongst a variety of groups in Wales, as well explain how they have tried to tackle some of the barriers they've faced along the way, to inspire others who might be on a similar journey.

Setting up a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project on land at Morryston Hospital, Swansea Bay University Health Board

Morryston Hospital, a 750 bedded teaching hospital, is managed by Swansea Bay University Health Board, and located in an area of relatively high deprivation in the north of Swansea. The Health Board has recently worked in collaboration with a local grower to begin setting up a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm on its land. This unique relationship between a health board and a CSA is a first of its kind within the UK.

A CSA is a model of agriculture where the responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared between farmers and consumers. There are different types of CSA, but one of the most common is where community members agree to purchase 'shares' ahead of the harvest, so that the farmer has the money to invest in the growing season with a customer base (who will later receive regular veg boxes) already guaranteed.

Aside from increasing access to healthy, locally produced food, CSAs can also provide a range of indirect benefits, such as improving biodiversity, reducing loneliness and isolation within the local population, enhancing economies, supporting the circular economy and providing educational opportunities for the wider community. By developing a biopsychosocial model of care such as this, it will help alleviate the pressure on the medical model of health provision.

The proposal for the Morryston CSA aligned closely with the Health Board's Organisational Strategy, Welsh Government's Programme for Government Wellbeing Statement 2021-2026, their plan for health and social care set out in 'A Healthier Wales', the Chief Medical Officer's Special Edition Annual Report 2019-2020: Protecting Our Health, and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Who was involved?

Rob Hernando, who has a background in alternative agriculture and sustainability, has been involved in community outreach projects in the Swansea area for a number of years, and has volunteered at Cae Tan CSA in the Gower Peninsula since 2017. Rob was keen that people in the north and east of Swansea also had access to the benefits of a local CSA scheme.

In conjunction with Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Rob undertook a feasibility study, which showed the potential for a CSA to work in this area, but he quickly ran into problems finding available land that was suitable for the CSA. Amanda Davies, the Service Improvement Manager at Swansea Bay University Health Board, became aware of Rob's search. Amanda's role involves overseeing the management of land and property within the Health Board, and she fully understood the broader ways in which a CSA could improve people's health and wellbeing.

She explained that the Health Board owns 55 acres at Morrision, most of which is destined for future health care development. However due to its topography the Health Board had 7.6 acres available that was unsuitable for this sort of development and was being rented out for grazing. She thought the land could ideally lend itself to the CSA project should Health Board approval be granted.

Amanda stated that as a Health Board they have a responsibility for, and are a key contributor to, the reduction of health inequalities within the population they serve. Part of Swansea Bay University Health Board's vision is to be a sustainable organisation, one that protects and enhances their environment. One of the Health Board's Wellbeing Objectives is to:

“Seek to allocate our resources to meeting the needs of, and improving, the population's health.”



Amanda and Rob on the CSA site (Image credit: Swansea Bay University Health Board)

Welsh Government published its Programme for Government in June 2021. The Wellbeing Statement within it sets out how wellbeing objectives meet public bodies' statutory duties under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Objective 9 states that as a public body the Health Board should look to:

“Embed Our Response to the Climate and Nature Emergency in Everything We Do”

As an anchor institution, the Health Board recognises that they have assets such as land that can be leveraged to benefit their local population. In January 2021, Amanda approached Rob and Cae Tan CSA to explore further what was involved. Impressed with what she saw and heard, Amanda championed the project within the Health Board, utilising the language and duties of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, commitments around addressing the climate emergency, and the 'One Health' approach to health policy outlined above, to act as the lever to seek approvals from the Health Board to support the establishment of a CSA.

What were their aims?

The Morriston Hospital CSA aims to improve the health of people and the environment in the area by increasing access to good food, green space and contact with nature, education and training, and enhancing biodiversity. When established, the CSA hopes to produce enough food for approximately 100-150 households per week through a veg box scheme, provide some food for the hospital catering department at special events, and donate any surplus food to local food banks to ensure nothing is wasted. The CSA will also support the Healthy Schools initiative which will allow children from the local area to learn more about the environment and participate in a growing project.

There are also clear opportunities for hospital staff and patients to benefit from having a CSA to visit on their doorstep, given the recognised impact of spending time in natural environments on recovery from illness and maintaining good mental health. Initial discussions have taken place for research to be undertaken by Swansea University to evaluate the benefits of the CSA. By documenting the impact of the CSA from the outset, the team at the Morriston Hospital site hope their experience will act as a beacon of good practice which will inspire other health boards and local authorities throughout the UK to begin similar projects on their estates.



Map of the potential CSA site

(Image credit: Google Earth with edits by the the CSA/Health Board Team)

What did they manage to do?

After many months of negotiation, the project received Health Board approval in November 2021. The CSA has registered as a Community Interest Company. The lease was agreed and signed in May 2022 for the 7.6 acre site. In exchange for a peppercorn rate, the CSA will offer volunteering, training, social prescribing opportunities, and provide some food for the hospital's patients to support special events such as 'Sustainability Days' or Vegetarian/Vegan Week.

The Health Board has a number of coffee shops within Morriston Hospital and the catering teams will be providing their coffee grounds waste which will be used for composting on the site which contributes to the circular economy.

What did they not manage to do?

At the time of writing the CSA has not yet produced a harvest. However, the plan for the rest of 2022 will involve preparing the land for growing and getting essential infrastructure in place such as hardstanding for parking and polytunnels. The first growing season and harvest will be in 2023/24.

The CSA has signed a 10-year lease, which has a 5-year break clause. This means that the CSA is not currently eligible for some of larger funding pots they might otherwise apply to support their activities.

What barriers did they face and how did they attempt to tackle these?

The main barrier faced during the process of securing the land for the CSA was assuring colleagues in the Health Board to allow the CSA, as a business, to gain access to public land to operate on. Initially, as this was something that was new, and had not been done elsewhere before, there was a sense of nervousness about doing this. However, once Amanda explained that the CSA could provide a range of benefits to the hospital, its patients and the wider community, which align with the Health Board's organisational policies and objectives, they were persuaded of its value. In particular, it was helpful to use the language of the 'One Health' approach, which emphasises that addressing climate change and food/water security should be considered part of healthcare. The Health Board is fully committed to this project, wants it to succeed and is working with the University and others to evaluate the impact of its successes.

What if any lessons could be learned for other community groups?

From their positive experience of working together, Swansea Bay University Health Board recognises the benefits of working with grassroots projects. Both parties have learned some lessons worth sharing with other groups interested in doing something similar.

Rob shared that it is important to be patient and not give up, as for large institutions such as a Health Board, approvals and governance arrangements can take time to finalise, especially if they haven't had to set up this type of framework before. To support with navigating these processes, it is very helpful to have an 'champion' (like Amanda) within the institution who really understands the potential project, the benefits it would bring, and can explain these to their colleagues in the right language - referring to policy objectives they are trying to meet as an institution can be particularly useful here.

In a healthcare context, Amanda said:

“Like many other parts of Wales, as a Health Board we face increasing challenges about how to keep our population healthy. We need to think differently about how we address these challenges if we are to have a sustainable health and care service in the future. The NHS doesn't have to be the primary deliverer of healthcare, but can still achieve positive and measurable outcomes by supporting schemes such as CSAs, which will alleviate the pressure from the NHS. By helping to establish a CSA on our land it is a perfect opportunity to support our communities, increase well-being and encourage greater access to affordable, healthy food.”

Rob's view is that partnering with the Health Board has led to more opportunities for the CSA initiative than would otherwise be the case, whilst still providing accessible and affordable organic food to the local community as the core of the business.

Find out more:

<http://www.caetancoa.org/en/exciting-new-csa-for-morrison-hospital/>



About Resilient Green Spaces:

Resilient Green Spaces is a £1.27m partnership project being led by Social Farms & Gardens to pilot alternative re-localised food systems using communities and their green spaces as the driving force for change across Wales until June 2023.

This project has received funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

