

Resilient
Green Spaces
Mannau
Gwyrdd Gwydn



FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

JUNE 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Resilient Green Spaces was a £1.27m partnership project led by Social Farms & Gardens (SFG) to pilot alternative re-localised food systems across Wales, using communities and their green spaces as the driving force for change. It ran from 2021 to June 2023. The project 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. The partnership comprised: Cardiff University, Cyngor Gwynedd, Development Trusts Association Wales, Landworkers' Alliance Cymru / Gweithwyr y Tir Cymru, Lantra / Tyfu Cymru, Open Food Network UK, Shared Assets and Social Farms and Gardens. This report presents key findings and reflections from the project's final evaluation, reporting on activity delivered up to May 2023, as evaluated by researchers from Cardiff University and UWE Bristol.

The Resilient Green Spaces project has achieved wide-ranging benefits for communities and environments around Wales, whilst enhancing food systems, with an emphasis on local production and agro-ecological farming. Communities have developed confidence and skills required to enable them to initiate change in future.

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RESILIENT GREEN SPACES ACHIEVEMENTS

The project has achieved all key targets set at the outset, and exceeded many of them. To end of May 2023, these achievements include:



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The diversity of activities and approaches demonstrate the value of multiple mechanisms for engaging communities with greenspaces. Many have clear potential to be implemented more widely, around Wales and beyond. The partners involved have gained new expertise and insights which will enhance their future work, and provides a strong basis for building on this project's legacy.

The evaluation identified impacts across the project which would not have been possible otherwise. These were achieved in face of significant challenges associated with a reduced period of project delivery, whilst retaining very ambitious aspirations.

The project has established tangible assets which will act as an enduring legacy for communities, including land, trees, digital solutions, and equipment. Intangible assets, such as resilient community groups and relationships between stakeholders may also enable future activity and impact.

WORKSTREAM 1 responded to communities' aspirations for allotments, supporting them to enhance existing sites and establish new ones. It created 420 new plots, improved 17 sites, and delivered 5 training sessions. It established the Wales Allotment Forum to support those who manage allotments with networking and exchanging best practice, highlighting the value of community-led approaches.

WORKSTREAM 2 supported the creation of five new food hubs enabling communities to purchase locally produced food. Each was funded to employ a manager, and supported through mentoring and training to trade via a specialist online trading platform. So far 443 customers and 83 producers have traded £110,870 of local food, including 55,566 kg fruit and vegetables and 50,782 kg of meat.

WORKSTREAM 3 enabled communities to establish new community orchards, and to develop systems to produce, store and process fruit. To date, 1146 heritage fruit and nut trees have been planted in 24 orchards. Training in orchard management has been provided to community groups, and a network has been established to enable learning between groups.

WORKSTREAM 4 worked to enhance Gwynedd Council's approach to managing roadside corridors to create pollinator habitats. It supported 14 community groups in the county to become involved in managing green spaces as meadow habitat, providing specialist equipment and advice. Visual materials created with local artists have been promoted to support communication of the importance of greener corridors.

WORKSTREAM 5 researched how people interested in agroecological farming can access land for farming, from both land owner and land seeker perspectives, sharing the findings in reports. It created a partnership for local authorities' peer learning, and provided training for those seeking land. Case studies and guidance based on this learning are being developed and promoted. Work is underway to award £100,000 for land purchase for agroecological farming with long-term community benefit.

WORKSTREAM 6 developed and piloted training in horticultural skills in partnership with agro-ecological growers. Across two rounds, 29 trainees were hosted on 8 farms, including on-farm experience, webinars and farm visits. Research into existing training provision identified gaps and opportunities nationally. Related action research worked with young people to explore current perceptions of career opportunities, and how these are affected by contact with horticultural trainees.

Activity across the workstreams has been captured as data input to a new open-source mapping platform which provides opportunities to visualise and analyse activity by a range of organisations. This will be enhanced beyond the project life, and shared with interested bodies.

Learning from this project is likely to be of interest to a range of stakeholders, community groups, and decision makers. There is clear merit in the partners continuing to communicate widely what the project has achieved, and how it can be replicated.

The project has piloted a range of approaches suitable for wider implementation and policy support. Capitalising on the many potential legacies which would contribute to wider change will only be possible through continued support for key functions and coordination, and resources to help share learning more widely.

The evaluation also suggests specific recommendations for the partnership and project funder to consider in relation to future activity with aligned goals or ways of working.

Lessons for the project partners:

- 1 Draw on learning from across the project as evidence of what works, and of how the activities piloted could be adapted to respond to emerging needs
- 2 Continue delivering 'a whole package' approach to working with communities, including funding, information and advice, offering flexible support tailored to beneficiaries' needs
- 3 Make generous rather than conservative estimates of staff capacity required to deliver ambitious, complex projects and to administer large partnerships

4 Dedicate time and capacity within partnership projects for activity to build relationships between partners, and for them to exchange learning

5 For large partnerships, plan for face-to-face meetings with space to talk, particularly for organisations working together for the first time

6 Plan for action focused on securing land for community ownership to be slow and for beneficiaries to require ongoing support

7 Consider how to balance the accessibility of a Wales-wide approach, with the potential for synergies and more efficient working through focusing on specific geographic areas

Welsh Government and other funders could enhance similar programmes in future:

- 1 Consider potential to support replication and continuation of workstream activities shown to be effective across this project
- 2 Expedite funding decisions quickly; allow additional time for delivery following delayed decisions
- 3 Simplify claims processes and provide a single point of contact for funded projects
- 4 Support activity to disseminate information on what worked in the piloted activities, and how they can be adapted to other places.
- 5 Advise applicants on an appropriate balance between ambition, risk, and feasibility, especially in light of the coordination required for complex partnership projects.
- 6 Foster collaborative approaches where organisations have potential to cooperate on complex problems and connected solutions; enable cooperative rather than competitive applications for public funding.



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Resilient Green Spaces is a £1.27m partnership project led by Social Farms & Gardens (SFG) to pilot alternative re-localised food systems using communities and their green spaces as the driving force for change across Wales. This project 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. The partnership was given permission to proceed at risk in January 2021 and received approval in August 2021, at which point delivery commenced fully, ending in June 2023.

Activity was organised into six workstreams:

- 1 Building a National Allotment Development Team
- 2 Innovative Food Hubs
- 3 Productive Community Orchards
- 4 Greener Corridors and Spaces
- 5 Exploring Community Access to Farms and Land
- 6 Building Horticultural Future Farming Skills

Workstreams were delivered by the project partnership, with each taking a role in one or more; SFG acted as the project coordinator. (Table 1)

This report presents key findings and reflections from the project's final evaluation, reporting on activity delivered up to May 2023.

Resilient Green Spaces (RGS) sought to pilot approaches to changing food systems by involving communities and their green spaces. Achieving change with such complex problems is more likely through approaches organised around collective impact. Collective impact is an approach to understanding change related to complex problems. It starts from the premise that more is achieved through organisations working together. Analysis of collective impact finds there are certain conditions which make it more likely that change will result, including the role of a backbone organisation and common agenda across those involved. Although RGS was not designed around a collective impact framework, its delivery and ethos represent many facets of this approach, therefore increasing the chance of achieving change. The project was however relatively short, reducing the opportunity to achieve transformative change; this report highlights how the foundations it laid could be built on to further the collective impact.

PARTNER	ACTIVITY
Cardiff University	Workstream 6
Cyngor Gwynedd	Workstream 4
Development Trusts Association Wales	Workstream 2
Landworkers' Alliance Cymru / Gweithwyr y Tir Cymru	Workstream 2 Workstream 5 Workstream 6
Lantra / Tyfu Cymru	Workstream 6
Open Food Network UK	Workstream 2
Shared Assets	Workstream 5
Social Farms and Gardens	Workstream 1 Workstream 3 Workstream 4 Partnership and Project Coordination

TABLE 1: Partnership organisations



2.0 METHODOLOGY

Researchers from Cardiff University (Barbora Adlerova, Hannah Pitt) and UWE Bristol (Angelina Sanderson Bellamy) were the independent evaluation team for the project. They supported and guided delivery partners to think about data collection to monitor and assess the project's activity and achievements. The evaluation approach centred on co-production in which academic researchers collaborate with the project team, partners and beneficiaries in order to design and deliver research to learn about the project's impacts and processes. This means that learning is gathered during the project and can inform activity in progress. This approach can also develop capabilities and confidence for partners and beneficiaries to undertake evidence gathering in future. Ethical approval for all research activity associated with the project was secured from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University.

The aims of this evaluation were:

- To present robust, transparent evidence of the impacts of the project activities
- To reveal and document how impacts are achieved
- To support and facilitate sharing of learning between partnership actors, and between them and external actors
- To test assumptions about how to achieve change
- To gather learning about how to expand and extend project impacts

These was achieved through:

- participation in project planning, development and dissemination
- collecting primary data from beneficiaries and stakeholders,
- analysing secondary data from project partners and stakeholders.

Findings have been shared with project partners, and other stakeholders at key points throughout the project, including a mid-term evaluation report in May 2022. This report aims to capture findings from the final evaluation in order to provide a reference for project partners, and to inform stakeholders of project progress, whilst sharing learning on the processes behind its achievements.

An initial evaluation workshop for partners in April 2021 confirmed Theories of Change for each workstream as the basis for evaluation activity. A second evaluation workshop was held in February 2023 to gather reflections on delivery, impact and collaboration. The aims of this session were:

- To reflect on progress and delivery in each workstream
- To identify what enables the achievement of positive change
- To identify what inhibits the achievement of positive change
- To understand the value and impact of a large partnership approach
- To identify opportunities to build on the project and partnership

This workshop included time for individual workstream teams to reflect on their activity, and for the whole partnership to explore these topics together. Discussion also considered how the project's achievements might be scaled up or extended in future.

Data collected for the final evaluation is summarised in Table 2. In addition the evaluation team reviewed material collected during project delivery to monitor the impact and effectiveness of each workstream Table 3.

For more details see 'Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact' Preskill et al 2013 www.fsg.org/publications/guide-evaluating-collective-impact Cardiff University staff were involved in delivering the action research activity within workstream 6; this was discrete activity separate from the skills training element of that workstream which was the focus of evaluation. Staff duties within the CU team were divided to avoid any conflict of interest.

FOCUS	PARTICIPANTS	METHOD
Workstream delivery and learning & project delivery and learning	6 workstream leads	Qualitative interviews
Workstream impacts	138 workstream beneficiaries	Qualitative interviews Online questionnaires Focus groups Event feedback forms Participant observation Output statistics
Project delivery and learning	2 workstream partners 2 project coordinators	Online questionnaire Qualitative interviews
Project and workstream reflections and learning	18 partners and coordinators	Participatory workshop

TABLE 2: Summary of data collected for final evaluation

	DATA	NO. RESPONSES
W1	Online feedback from Allotment Forum participants Event feedback forms Qualitative interviews with supported sites	9 participants 15 participants 8 participants
W2	Qualitative interviews with food hub managers Self-assessment questionnaire with food hub managers Qualitative interviews with mentors	4 participants 4 responses 2 participants
W3	Qualitative interviews with supported sites Event feedback forms	10 participants 40 participants
W4	Qualitative interviews with supported sites	5 participants
W5	Online feedback from webinar participants Qualitative interviews with public landowners	15 participants 3 participants
W6	Feedback forms from training participants - pre training Feedback forms from training participants - post training Focus group discussion with training participants Participant observation Qualitative interviews with training participants	23 trainees 15 trainees, 6 growers 12 trainees 1 farm visit 8 trainees, 2 growers

TABLE 3: Summary of monitoring and evaluation data analysed

2.1 LIMITATIONS

As with any evaluation research, the findings are limited by who is willing to participate in data collection. Whilst the team sought to include a wide range of views it likely that those with more positive opinions on the project were more willing to participate - for example recipients of funding rather than unsuccessful applicants.

It is also impossible to be confident to what extent impacts can be attributed to the project rather than other factors. For example, beneficiaries of the programme were habitually involved with other initiatives that supported their operations in different ways. To counter this the evaluation team sought views on what might have happened anyway, and have used their expert judgement in presenting achievements associated with each workstream to present a reasonable assessment of attribution.



3.0 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The project has achieved all key targets set at the outset, and exceeded many of them. Key outputs are summarised in Table 4.

INDICATOR	TARGET	ACTUAL <small>END MAY 2023</small>	VARIANCE
Marketing / information activities	17	113	+96
Beneficiaries supported	78	143	+65
Jobs safeguarded	11	17	+6
Jobs created	4	5	+1
Participants in training	176	317	+141
Expenditure on training	£47,238	£41,090	-£6,148
Training days delivered	25	46	+21
Networks established	4	6	+2
Feasibility studies	3	7	+4
Stakeholders engaged	1,015	1,205	+190

TABLE 4: Project outputs

3.1 MAPPING

Given the breadth and scope of activity across the workstreams, and potential for working with a wide range of communities, individuals and organisations, the project included a goal of mapping stakeholders throughout. An external consultancy was engaged to provide mapping expertise to build capacity and help collect accurate data. Working with new company Digital Commons enabled the project to support their development whilst using open-source technology. Their platform (Land Explorer) offered potential to map polygons and export data in formats suitable to other data holders, allowing RGS data to be shared with others. A mapping workshop was held with the project partners, to introduce the concept, and initiate activity to develop data collection. Land Explorer imported existing data held by SFG. Mapping of community

orchards was then prioritised, with a consultant appointed to support this activity.

To date, the following mapping has been completed:

- SFG data on community orchards, community gardens, allotments, CSAs and incredible edible sites available on Land Explorer.
- All RGS partners have their own log in to Land Explorer.
- Data shared with a local authority to support green infrastructure policy.

Data and use of the map will continue beyond the project end.

4.0 ALLOTMENTS

Social Farms & Gardens (SFG) convened Wales' first Allotment Development Team to support communities, landowners and managers seeking to meet the growing demand for adequate allotment provision, and to improve access for those who are often marginalised from green spaces and healthy food.

The workstream aimed to respond to communities' wants in relation to allotments, and to provide support to help achieve them. Its focus was therefore distinct in looking beyond statutory sites, and local authority-led priorities and activities. Through enabling establishment of new plots it sought to offer more people access to growing and its benefits. Although in contact with Welsh Government and their engagement with local authority responsibilities for allotments, the workstream had a distinct and complementary focus. There was also an aspiration that its community-driven approach might inspire local authorities to be more responsive than directive in their own allotment management.



4.1 ACTIVITY & OUTPUTS

The workstream has delivered (to end May 2023):

5 meetings of the Wales Allotment Forum with **109** attendees in total

17 allotment sites awarded funding

4 training sessions for allotment groups and communities

1 training session for landowners

420 new allotment plots created

Created an online resource:

Advice for growers and land-seekers in Wales



A key feature of delivery was offering capital funding to groups so they could purchase materials to enhance allotment infrastructure, again responding to communities' priorities.

In addition to the offer of funding, the workstream provided support to community groups, including specialist advice from Community Land Advisory Service (CLAS) which is particularly valuable in negotiating access to new sites and liaising with landowners.

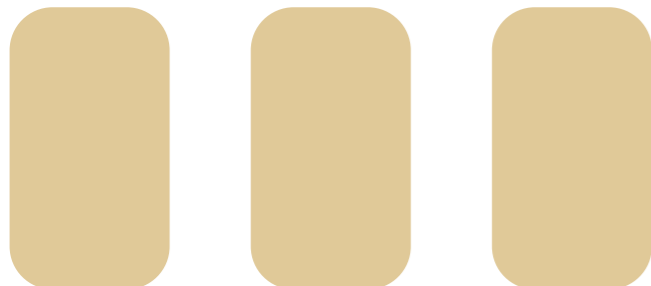
To support those who manage allotment sites, the project established the Wales Allotment Forum which meets quarterly, online, and is attended by a range of stakeholders, including local authority officers, current and prospective allotment groups and third sector organisations interested in local food provision. The SFG team facilitated these meetings and sought to focus discussion and exchange on issues prioritised by participants. They also delivered training sessions for those who manage allotment sites, and produced a set of online resources sharing advice and guidance.



4.2 IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

Progress against the project’s intended outcomes is summarised in Table 5 below. There are tangible outcomes in the communities supported to improve or establish allotments. Where groups have received financial support this has enabled enhancement of sites, for example establishing water harvesting and irrigation. It has also meant that newly acquired sites could be equipped with basic infrastructure such as shelter and plots ready for growing, making it easier for plot holders to start growing. At the point of evaluation there was still some outstanding activity, and not all groups awarded funding had yet implemented their activity. Much of the funding was allocated quite recently meaning that it is too early to establish how plot-holders have benefited from newly created or improved sites. The team intend to follow-up with a selection of them in 2024 to gather insights to longer term impacts.

Beyond these sites, the project’s other direct beneficiaries are “those that can provide the sites or grow them” through support and networking provided. SFG have also benefited in two key ways, firstly they gained insight to barriers and future support needs which will inform their future work, and in the long-term therefore enable allotment management to be more community-led, and for more plots to be available. Secondly, the team feel that the organisation is now recognised for its work in relation to allotments, broadening its reach.



OUTCOME	PROGRESS	EVIDENCE
O1 Landowners and managers are aware of the importance of provision and how best to meet demand for adequate allotment provision.	WAF established to provide support, networking and exchange of best practice	WAF participant feedback
O2 Improved access to green spaces and healthy food for those often marginalised from these, increasing well-being.	17 allotment sites enhanced 420 new allotment plots created	Qualitative interviews Monitoring data
O3 Forum members have confidence in their communities and allow allotments to function effectively.	WAF established to provide support, networking and exchange of best practice	WAF participant feedback
O4 SFG and WAF are established as leading experts and actors in relation to allotment provision in Wales.	SFG now recognised for its work in relation to allotments, broadening its reach	WS lead interview
O5 Links brokered between land-owners/managers and community run allotment teams, enhancing communications and enabling better run allotment groups.	Support enabled 3 sites to secure leasehold of publicly owned land for community use	Training feedback Qualitative interviews
O6 SFG Allotment resources stimulate supply (to meet demand).	Toolkit available publicly	
O7 WAF and SFG identify areas of policy and legislation presenting barriers or opportunities in relation to allotments.	SFG have identified learning from WAF to be promoted post-project	WS lead
O8 Raise awareness & understanding across other sectors of links between food poverty and low biodiversity / GI		
O9 Communities actively communally engaged and delivering biodiversity / GI increases	The funding enabled community groups to provide more biodiverse spaces	Qualitative interviews

TABLE 5: Workstream 1 progress with outcomes

Although other activity focused on allotments was ongoing in Wales there are good reasons to expect that this project has unique attributable outcomes. Firstly, providing financial support to sites and groups enabled purchases that would not have been possible without such investment. Beneficiaries especially noted the flexibility in the funding scheme that allowed them to secure much needed support for essential, but less ‘glamorous’ work. For example, a participant that received funding to remove concrete, old soil and replace wooden structures at a neglected site, which she previously struggled to attract funders for, improved biodiversity and accessibility. Similarly, many participants commented how the funding for essential site enhancement enabled them to make their sites accessible to new communities:

“The existing access to the bottom site is through steps, but with the money we were able to create a graded walkway down. So people who are not as fit or not as healthy or not as agile, can actually access the whole site, as opposed to the top one.”
(WS1 beneficiary 2)

For some beneficiaries the support also enabled enhancement to their environmentally-friendly approach to growing:

“It’s allowed us to incorporate it into the building of the allotments. They were just overgrown grass, so not particularly diverse at that. So where we’ve created or renovated some of the allotments and created the other ones, it’s allowed us to do more [in terms of biodiversity], but I don’t know if it’s altered the way we think about it as such.”
(WS1 beneficiary 3)

Many commented that the funding has significantly sped up their work, a key contribution of this workstream:

“Because we’re a set of volunteers, we do what we fancy doing, rather than what maybe would be as a whole, a better intention. So by having this thing to focus on that said, here’s the thing we’ve got to build this. And this is what we’ve got our £5,000 for - it’s meant that we’ve been able to focus on a total project, rather than just doing lots of nice things. So I think the ultimate benefit is speed, there is going to be much greater community engagement on the ground.”
(WS1 beneficiary 4)

Knowledge and skills support delivered through WAF and training has enabled beneficiaries to learn more about biodiversity and green infrastructure maintenance.



All participants in training events reported increased knowledge in allotment establishment and maintenance. Feedback included:

“Thoroughly comprehensive info with plenty of links to develop knowledge.”
(Setting up and running allotments training (West Wales) participant 1)

“We are currently in the process of establishing an Allotment Association and here we gained lots of important info and good ideas to incorporate.”
(Setting up and running allotments training (West Wales) participant 2)

Secondly, the popularity of WAF meetings suggests this network is addressing a need not otherwise met. Thirdly, a majority of publicly supported activity on allotments focuses on local authority responsibilities whilst this project had an alternative focus on community-led sites.

There are also signs that the project is being recognised as delivering a unique and valuable approach: allotment managers and landowners from England have participated in training events, and seem to recognise *“Wales is definitely leading the way in this work.”*



4.3 CHALLENGES

Delays in commencing project activity resulted in delays to the call for applications for financial support, and resulted in fund allocation being concentrated later in the project than intended. For successful applicants in round two this resulted in applying and spending the funding to very tight timescales. Beneficiaries suggested three things that helped:

- A** Having already a co-designed ‘wish list’ to quickly turn into application (WS1 beneficiary 3)
- B** Having established relationship with SFG that provides awareness about the unique ongoing support throughout the application process, and
- C** Relationships with SFG or being aware that this is something they can draw on

For a minority of participants who may be used to different working relationships with funders, there was a lack of clarity about the ongoing support SFG provides. For example, one participant very new to establishing an allotment site and without previous relationships with SFG suggested that although they had a rough idea of what they are doing, they would welcome more advice.

“I just sent a list of things and said, this is what we’re thinking about. Does that sound okay? And they came back and just said, Yes. So the engagement didn’t go beyond that. But maybe if I tried asking right questions, I might have got better answers, but I didn’t know the sort of help I could engage with.”
(WS1 beneficiary 4)

Responses to the first call also found that interested groups were not as far advanced with their plans as expected, meaning they were not ready to receive funds. Both factors made it more challenging to reach the already demanding target set for number of new plots created.

It remained challenging to secure interest from landholders wanting to enable new allotments; the first call for expressions of interest did not identify any sites suitable for capital investment. The team suggested that the legislative context associated with allotments can deter authorities and land holders from offering sites. They also found it more difficult than anticipated to engage private landowners, both in terms of engaging the appropriate audience, and understanding what might motivate them to turn some land to allotments. For example, housing associations which have sites and interest in providing greenspaces for tenants were found to be more interested in community gardens than allotment plots to be held by individuals. Where landowners were engaged, processes of arranging permissions and leases was slow, with subsequent delays on other activity. Specialist support from CLAS was valuable for negotiating these processes, but essential administrative actions cannot necessarily happen faster.

The team noted that all WAF sessions had been held on-line due initially to covid-19 related restrictions, then to enable Wales-wide participation. This was found to hamper discussion in some cases, and it was suggested that in-person meetings may be more beneficial. They also recognised that the learning and experiences from the workstream could have been communicated more widely, but it is expected that promotion will be enhanced during final communications around the RGS project.

The team for this workstream struggled with capacity to deliver all aspirations, and found it challenging to manage the workload, particularly when working across other parts of the project.

4.4 LESSONS & LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

The clearest legacy of this workstream is the expertise and reputation SFG have established for working on allotments. Communities’ response to the project suggests that they have previously been unsupported to have a say in allotment sites, and welcome work to engage them. This is not without risk as they may have created demand for support that can only be provided beyond this project if they identify further funding for capacity within the organisation. The team are confident that their work has demonstrated that an approach to allotment management centred on being responsive to communities is effective. They have promoted this message to Welsh Government and other stakeholders, and are being engaged by them to advise on local authority plans. SFG hope this will influence their approach, encouraging local authorities “to talk to communities rather than to second guess” what communities want, resulting in more effective investments. These messages and other learning from the project will be taken forward through advocacy and communications work by SFG. They also expect to seek funding to enable continuation of similar support to communities, beyond the CLAS service which is ongoing.

The team see a continued need for the forum discussions, but do not expect it is in a position to continue functioning independently. They hope to identify capacity to provide facilitation for forum meetings beyond the project end.



5.0 FOOD HUBS

Working with Social Farms and Gardens (SFG), Open Food Network (OFN), Development Trusts Association Wales (DTA) and the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) helped establish five new enterprising and sustainable food hubs in communities across Wales.

Each hub seeks to provide food that is good for people, environment and local business by promoting short supply chains.

Following a competitive process which received 37 applications, five organisations were selected to receive support for their vision:

- Siop Griffiths, Penygroes
- Partneriaeth Ogwen, Bethesda
- Canolfan Maerdy, Ammanford
- EcoDewi, St Davids
- Cwm Food Hub based at
Welcome to our Woods, Rhondda

All five food hubs are now established on the OFN online trading platform meaning they can promote local produce to consumers, and coordinate customer deliveries or purchases.



The ultimate goal according to OFN is “getting more locally produced food into people’s homes and meals” (WS2 lead). It is also intended that establishing new hubs in Wales will feed networks which in turn develop into further hubs and support for local producers.

5.1 ACTIVITY & OUTPUTS

The workstream has delivered:

£80,581 awarded to the five food hubs

Hubs have sold to **443** customers, selling produce from **83** producers with a value of **£110,870**

5 OFN mentoring sessions with the five food hubs, followed by sessions with DTA

13 online training sessions for food hubs and other interested in establishing hubs in Wales

2 peer to peer webinars and **1** face to face peer learning session

Produced a video about the food hubs:
<https://vimeo.com/796649601/974acec08c>

Welsh translation of the OFN trading platform allowing customers to make their purchases in Welsh

Produced **3** bilingual case studies

Session at the Wales Real Food and Farming Conference: ‘Community food: health, equality and celebration in difficult times’

Delivery began by needing to identify what the team called “fledgling potential food hubs”, getting to know the organisations behind them, and how they would contribute to the project goals. Once selected, the five were supported with what they needed to become viable hubs. The strength and number of applications received suggested that far more than five could have been supported to deliver the goals.

Key support delivered to the hubs was: providing financial support to pay a hub manager which enabled them to employ a part-time manager, and purchase of materials to support its operation, including fixtures and fittings and marketing materials. The hubs were also connected to networks of other hubs and suppliers. The team provided business mentoring, webinars and other guidance.



5.2 IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

Progress against each outcome intended for the workstream is summarised in Table 6 below. To date the food hubs have served 443 customers with food from 83 producers with orders totaling £110,870.10 This includes 55,566 kg of local fruit and vegetables and 50,782 kg of local meat.³

OUTCOME	PROGRESS	EVIDENCE
O1 Food insecure households are able to access healthy foods.	Food hubs made local food physically available, but with mixed results for food insecure households in the wider context of cost of living crisis.	Qualitative interviews OFN platform data
O2 Food hubs are well-supported to overcome challenges to establishing themselves - 5 food hubs established	5 food hubs established, 3 trading by project end - 1 dormant, 1 relaunching soon in a different format.	Qualitative interviews WS lead interview Partner organisation online questionnaire
O3 Additional food hubs are established across Wales, increasing the supply and consumption of locally produced food. They are able to access produce to sell.	Food hubs has worked with 83 producers, creating a new, more efficient route to market.	Qualitative interviews OFN platform data. Partner organisation online questionnaire.
O4 Food hubs are able to monitor, evaluate and improve their economic impact.	Mixed progress - access to sales data is possible but some lack of capacity to evaluate it.	Qualitative interviews. WS lead.
O5 Trained food hub managers in skills to successfully manage food hubs.	All participants reported increased knowledge in managing food hubs, in particular, marketing strategies, social media use and using the OFN platform.	Qualitative interviews. Event feedback forms.
O6 Contributing to a stronger economy by creating new food hub jobs.	5 Jobs created.	Qualitative interviews. Monitoring data.

TABLE 6: Workstream 2 progress with outcomes

The most tangible impact of the workstream was “...the process of finding people who need the money and getting that money to them.” (WS2 lead)

The majority of this funding was dedicated to employing a manager at each food hub.

³ OFN platform data, retrieved 12/05/2023

5.2.1 FOOD HUB MANAGERS

Food hub managers gained management and technical skills through support provided by OFN and DTA (webinars, one-to-one, tutorials), learning from others and from ‘learning as you go along’ (WS2 beneficiary 3, North Wales). They valued support tailored to the different hubs’ needs, especially in terms of marketing, or with ‘big picture ideas’ (WS2 beneficiary 1, North Wales) on how to attract more consumers. For example, as a result one food hub manager was able to create a more successful marketing strategy and improve their use of social media.

Participants also valued the technological support provided by OFN to set up and trade on the platform. One participant noted that some producers they work with struggled with digital literacy and may not have been able to join otherwise:

“[name of a former hub coordinator] is less technically minded than me, perhaps, and she really appreciated the help that she got from everybody setting up. I think it was quite a lot of work, because a lot of our producers are also less technically minded. So I think it was a lot of handholding to get people on to the platform.”
(WS2 beneficiary 1, North Wales)

They gained additional knowledge and skills from networking with and learning from shared challenges across the Welsh cluster, but also beyond, via the OFN network. They preferred to learn from places that are more similar to them organisationally, rather than geographically. For example, one hub was inspired to approach a public sector employer to establish pick up points, after learning about it from a visit arranged by OFN to Tamar Valley food hub in Devon, England.

There were mixed views on the value of the business advice provided by the mentors. On one hand participants saw them as useful for giving a different perspective, “to have somebody to bounce ideas off” (WS2 beneficiary 2, South Wales). On the other, all participants noted they had less clarity on how to utilise fully the mentoring offer and were unclear how it could meet their particular needs:

“I thought she [mentor] is very helpful. She’s like - ‘anything you want, anything I can help with’ - but I’m just trying to think of what she could help with. I don’t know, because I think what we need help with is more sort of, you know, having connections with places of work, or finding pots of money. Yeah, I would like to utilise their help, but I’m not entirely sure how or what they could help with.”
(WS2 beneficiary 1, North Wales)

All hubs also created new volunteer posts, but for some of them it raised questions about whether or not it makes the hub sustainable.



5.2 IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

5.2.2 PRODUCERS & CONSUMERS

The hubs created outlets for local producers to reach more customers. Without being part of the project directly *“those are the people that are having the direct impact of this”* (WS2 lead). OFN identified how they benefit from selling produce via the hubs rather than via other supply chains: *“I know that they’re going to get the best possible return by selling through a food hub”* as producers retain control of price setting.

Participants noted that hubs provide more efficient ways to sell as opposed to other local vending opportunities, such as farmers’ markets, including having one drop off point, exact orders preventing food waste, and accessing customers they wouldn’t otherwise:

“So they’d [producers] all be selling separately. I know you know one lady does brownies is by post. But this [food hub] it’s quite a nice hit of cash for her business on a weekly basis, additional sales.”

(WS beneficiary 2, South Wales)

The OFN team highlighted the benefit of two hubs being established in the same geographic region, offering potential to develop good networks of local producers. They have supported these hubs to connect with a similar regional network in England to explore how to replicate their regional distribution model. The distribution model for linking the hubs has now been established by two of our North Wales hubs and customers are benefitting from a wider range of products.

Food hubs made local food more physically available to consumers. The OFN team suggested that *“these are the people that are benefitting.”* They are confident that customers accessing the new hubs benefit:

“I know that the customers, the food they’re getting is amazing, and they’re really proud of the fact that they’re buying local food, it makes them feel good.”

(WS2 lead)

This is especially true when offering a delivery service in rural areas:

“We have regular customers, and they are very positive about the service. Some of those customers house found so they can’t leave the house. So with that kind of service, dropping it off of the door that makes a massive difference.”

(WS2 beneficiary 3, North Wales)

All food hubs reported challenges when trying to make food accessible to food insecure households (see next page).

5.2.3 UNFORSEEN IMPACTS

There were some unforeseen impacts beneficial to the community: some participants reported improved social cohesion through food hubs, bringing different communities together and tackling isolation:

“We do tasting events, and we have sort of connection where people get to meet each other, and then they end up sitting around and having. I like the social connection side of that hub.”

(WS2 beneficiary 2, South Wales)

As a result of establishing hubs which might have otherwise not been possible, the project has supported local supply chains:

“If there wasn’t the hub, people would be shopping elsewhere, and they wouldn’t have easy access to lots of different local food, because you’ve got so many producers in one space. I think it encourages people to purchase more than they would normally, because everybody buys their veg and the meat. And then suddenly, there’s chocolate, brownies and sponge cake, and lots of other things added as well. So I think it does help with the amount of local food that’s consumed.”

(WS2 beneficiary 3, South Wales)

Whilst some of hubs supported through the project might have developed anyway, the OFN team suggested that support provided them capacity to establish what will work in their area, meaning the hub is more likely to be viable

long-term. They also suggested that given the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on consumers and producers, it is unlikely that all would have been able to survive the past year without external support. Mentoring and support with business planning is also likely to have enhanced their resilience. The hubs would also not have benefited from being connected to the other project workstreams which has helped them develop community growing. Contact with SFG via the project has also brought the hubs benefits in terms of advice and information on other opportunities.



5.3 CHALLENGES

The most apparent challenge for food hubs during the project period was the cost-of-living crisis which impacted costs of production and delivery, and reduced consumers spending capacity. This resulted in two out of five hubs operating more as food pantries, relying on Fareshare and other surplus food, to meet their local demand. The OFN team described this as resulting in “less money in their pocket and the loss of confidence” (WS 2 Lead), both pushing people from local food and towards supermarkets. Those involved with the hubs suggested that this was affected by a perception that local food “is only for posh people” (WS beneficiary 3, South Wales), which deters them from approaching something like a hub. One hub manager noted that although they had seen increased interest during the covid-19 pandemic, this was not sustained:

“We had sort of between 40 and 50 orders a week, and I think people did feel like it was quite a nice lifeline while people were isolating and stuck at home, and didn’t want to go to the supermarkets. We’ve definitely lost a lot of customers, and people are back at work because they’re not at home to get the deliveries on a Thursday afternoon. We’re in quite a poor area, and it’s not the cheapest option. And now that Aldi is back open, and people aren’t worried about Covid as much... you know.”
(WS2 beneficiary 1, North Wales)

Different food hubs (with OFN and DTA support) attempted to overcome this through various ways depending on their local circumstances and existing relationships, including:

- Capitalising on the food hub’s flexible format that allows for selling smaller quantities of food that may be more affordable: “(From a producer perspective) it’s great because you can sell a pack of 2 chops to a local family that couldn’t afford to buy half a pig, for instance. (WS2 beneficiary 2, South Wales).
- Working with an analyst to compare data on food hub and supermarket produce, to use for marketing.
- Integrating different projects the organisations offers (e.g. volunteers move between them, people are signposted to different project - food hub, community transport and food pantry working together; supplying a local community dinner club).
- Experimenting with subsidising produce from other grants or from accessing other markets, for example holiday makers.
- In future food hubs wanted to try out additional routes of making their produce more affordable, including using ‘sliding scales’ for produce or different landing pages on OFN platform.

OFN has recently introduced a feature that allows food hub managers to offer vouchers to shoppers to enable those on low income to order the same food as other shoppers at lower prices. To fund this hubs encourage shoppers to make a voluntary donation at check out.

Another challenge faced by some food hubs was the lack of suppliers in their local area. Out of the five hubs, three managed to establish ongoing links with local producers:

“We have experienced significant difficulties with an extremely limited amount of local growers (at a reliable, market garden scale). However, these shortfalls have proven important learning curves and raised the profile/need to support such enterprises in our region.”
(WS2 beneficiary 4)

With OFN and DTA support the hubs attempted to overcome it by:

- Deeper partnership working to highlight the need to support these enterprises regionally and holistically (for example, including focus on skills).
- Exploring alternative growing spaces for supply - community gardens, allotments.
- Encouraging ‘small kitchen’ based suppliers and co-operative bulk-buy.
- Linking with other food hubs in the area, creating more pick up points to make it more convenient for customers and producers.

The partners suggested that it might have been beneficial to research the local area before hubs were chosen for the project, to be more aware of potential challenges regarding local consumers and producers in advance.

The wider funding environment meant that the resources provided by the workstream (particularly food hub manager’s time) was used to support the organisations hosting the food hubs. The OFN team noted that food hub managers are very busy and mostly work part time, and that in combination with very busy producers it makes it difficult to communicate as necessary. Pressures on their capacity were intensified by staff turnover, and the need to quickly adopt administrative procedures required by the project.

Being a Wales-wide project also presented challenges as it made it difficult for the hub teams to meet up, or to go and visit useful case studies. The resulting reliance on online meetings was felt to hinder relationships; ideally the OFN team would have liked more face-to-face time with the hub managers.

5.4 LESSONS & LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

The five hubs look to continue beyond the project, and will become embedded in the broader support available via OFN and its networks. The OFN team noted: “Food hubs are pretty resilient, and they do tend to continue in some form.” They will probably change, but OFN are confident in the abilities of the organisations involved to make this happen:

“I think they will continue with the goal of getting local food to local people but it might look different.”

(WS2 lead)

As part of the OFN network they will continue to receive support as part of the wider community of food hubs around the UK. They have also established their own peer network which will enable them to support each other and exchange learning. As they become more established, they will pass on learning to newer hubs. Becoming a network in Wales is also beneficial, as there are differences in how hubs operate across the border. Several organizations who applied for financial support but were not included in the project have remained in contact with OFN and benefit from their support and network.

The OFN team noted that the hubs had evolved in different ways, responding to issues in their area, and that this potential for different approaches was part of the logic of selecting the final five candidates. They recognise this as the way to make the hubs resilient and responsive to local need. This means that each will offer a model of how a hub can look which other organisations might learn from in future. This project was helpful for giving them space to work out what they can do to get local food to local people.

This project’s approach of supporting hubs has been promoted via OFN’s networks, highlighting it as a model worth replicating. As a result of their increased profile in Wales OFN have already received approaches from local authorities and others looking to use the online platform. OFN will also stay in contact with the project partners, and being more aware of their expertise, expect to collaborate in future when suitable opportunities arise.

The project has demonstrated the value of financially supporting organisations to establish food hubs, so ideally OFN would replicate this through other funding programmes. Investment would be used to support more new hubs through *“money in their pockets to do what they want to do”* (WS2 Lead). Funding direct to OFN would also increase their capacity to provide dedicated support to new hubs.



6.0 COMMUNITY ORCHARDS

Social Farms & Gardens (SFG) aimed to facilitate the development of 10 new community orchard sites and to develop innovative systems for fruit production, storage and processing.

They worked with communities to pilot, monitor and evaluate the economic benefits that community orchards provide in addition to benefits as habitats which capture and store carbon, and benefit pollinators. In addition to improving green infrastructure, they sought to bring about a step change in community owned fruit production, storage, processing and fruit-based products for Wales.



6.1 ACTIVITY & OUTPUTS

The WS has delivered:

£59,529.01 worth of processing and storage equipment purchased for **13** community groups

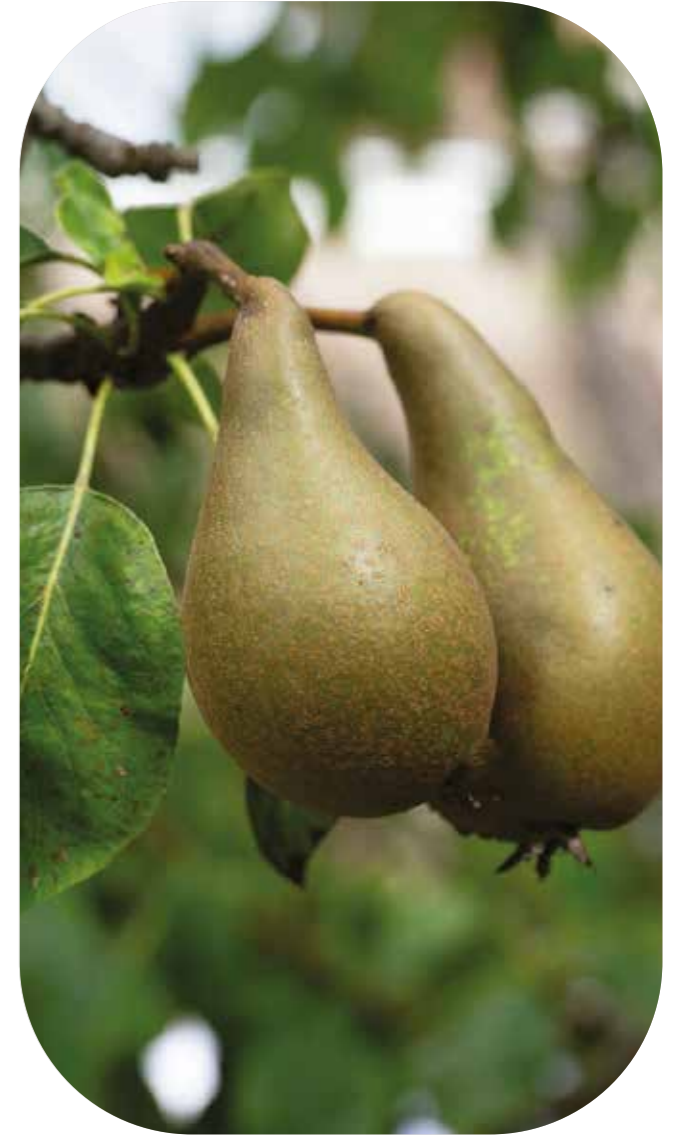
1,146 fruit and nut trees planted in **24** orchards

Productive Community Orchard Network attended by **158** participants at **16** events across Wales

Run **10** training workshops and study visits

Workstream 3 ran two rounds of applications to identify orchards to support and where to plant trees. Not all applicants were successful in securing funding for tree plantings. In addition to purchasing trees and equipment, groups were supported to lease equipment. The network, however, was much wider than the group of funding recipients.

The orchard management team received training and support around orchard management. Workstream 3 then delivered a variety of orchard management training sessions, with study visits to Powys. There has been an endless demand for training in pruning. Orchard sites were grouped together according to their region, with some regions more active than others. In one region, local sites were brought together for short online sessions and they have continued to meet in person as well because they are all local to each other.



6.2 IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

Progress against the project’s intended outcomes is summarised in Table 7.

OUTCOME	PROGRESS	EVIDENCE
O1 Greater community involvement in land access and use.	24 new orchards created with 1146 trees	Qualitative interviews WS lead interview
O2 Increased community orchard management knowledge & increased links to other forms of support (resources; other orgs)	Vast majority of participant across different training events reported increased knowledge in different parts of orchard management, including pruning or managing for biodiversity.	Event feedback forms Qualitative interviews
O3 Adding value to Community Orchard production: increased production / prospect for doing more.	By supplying equipment, the workstream has enabled existing orchards to scale up their processing capacity	Qualitative interviews
O4 Increase supply of Welsh trees to Welsh Productive Community Orchards	73% of spend via Welsh businesses £20,772 spent on Welsh fruit and nut trees Some sites reported continued relationships with the tree suppliers	Monitoring data Qualitative interviews
O5 Value of peer-to-peer support seen by PCO’s; increased production / prospect of Welsh fruit products	All participants created at least 1 new relationship with an organisation or community they did not know before.	Event feedback forms Qualitative interviews

TABLE 7: Workstream 3 progress with outcomes

One organisation that received processing equipment spoke about how much more quickly they have been able to achieve their ambitions with the support. Another applied to plant 30 trees on common land; whilst this did not align with original vision of funding orchard development, the team decided to fund the project. It went well and proved very successful in bringing people onto the common land.

The organisation applied for further funding for additional trees, and created more public pathways through the commons. The manager of this project talked about their greatest achievement being when he walked across a small river and saw a 16-year-old with his girlfriend, sitting under a tree; the project was responsible for introducing a new generation to nature.



6.2.1 GREATER COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN LAND ACCESS USE

The support provided through the workstream allowed stakeholders to involve more diverse communities in land management and use. Across the sites these included school children, care leavers, people with autism or learning disabilities, families, farming community, the elderly and socially isolated. Establishing a new orchard provided opportunities for community building when new and existing communities came together to plant trees, care for them and celebrate their produce. Many participants commented on how ‘positively received’ (WS3 beneficiary 3) it has been by their communities and the easiness of ‘getting a buy in’ (WS3 beneficiary 5).



“I think it’s really, given people a good opportunity to learn more about kind of what apple trees they can grow for fruit and in this climate, but it’s also giving people the opportunity to become closer to their food and have more knowledge of where the food comes from. And it’s yeah, it’s brought different communities together with kind of something in common, we all enjoy eating apples, and we all enjoy juicing, so yeah, it’s been really beneficial.”
(WS3 beneficiary 2)

6.2.2 INCREASED COMMUNITY ORCHARD MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE & INCREASED LINKS TO OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT (RESOURCES; OTHER ORGS)

The support, training activities and funding resulted in increased knowledge of orchard management and biodiversity.

Successful applicants especially valued that the support came as a whole package, equating an 'orchard in a box' (WS3 beneficiary 3) with trees, assorted equipment, and expert advice, signposting to other resources and organisations, including Keep Wales Tidy.

Flexible support responsive to participant's particular needs worked particularly well.

For example, if stakeholders were knowledgeable about trees they were free to get on with things, whereas more bespoke, hands-on support was provided to those who were in learning stages. Site visits were especially effective in increasing people's knowledge and supporting community involvement in land management:

"[SFG staff] came out, looked at our site, and was really helpful and also gave ideas about avenues, rather than creating a regular style orchard, which just was really great. His enthusiasm and input... there's not a lot of funders who come out and talk to you. Now all of our volunteers are involved with what bids we go for, they help us decide. So to actually meet a real person who talked to them and listened to their thoughts, even when it was quite chaotic, was really amazing and it made people really excited about that idea."

(WS3 beneficiary 4)

Training workshops and site visits organised as part of the Productive Community Orchard networks helped increase community knowledge in orchard management and biodiversity. A vast majority of attendees said as a result of attending, they improved their knowledge and understanding of different parts of orchard management, including pruning, orchard design or maintenance. A majority also felt more confident to make changes in their work. Feedback included:

"Helpful detailed instructions and demonstration looking at trees of various ages."

(Orchard Management 1 training participant, event feedback form)

"I feel confident enough with the basics to prune and care and then build on the new knowledge."

(Orchard Management 2 training participant, event feedback form)

"We've had a training day here with Joey, he came down to give us a training session with 22 other members of the community learning how to prune and prepare for apple trees. As a result, then I responded and made use of his skills and information, I've done the feeding. I've put some protection around them and I've watered the trees."

(WS3 beneficiary 1)

6.2.3 ADDING VALUE TO COMMUNITY ORCHARD PRODUCTION

The workstream improved orchard productivity through funding, tools and training. It has also helped to build capacity for existing orchards to process and store their produce, for example by funding fridges or juicing equipment:

"Because we only had a very small press, I don't know how many tonnes of apples we pressed last year, but it was hard to make it, and took more time than it needed to. So hopefully with the new equipment, we'll be able to do it in less time with fewer people. It's going to make us more efficient."

(WS3 beneficiary 7)

The value and benefit of this equipment has been multiplied by being shared with the wider community, beyond the immediate beneficiary. This also helped to strengthen links between different orchards and communities. A few participants commented on the clunky process of needing to lease-hire equipment (subject to Welsh Government regulations) and the fact that it prevented them from acquiring cheaper, secondhand tools locally.

It is unclear to what extent the workstream upskilled beneficiaries in creating products for market as most stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation already had established market links, or had recently planted the trees so were not yet considering processing. This is another learning need to be considered in future. (see below)

"[the orchard] is not something that we've designed to be commercial, but what it does do is it brings profit to other parts of the organisation, it increases what we can offer the community and therefore increases how we can raise funds with grant funding, what we can offer to people who come to the site, and what we can give back and thereby making our business more commercially viable in that sense."

(WS3 beneficiary 6)

Smaller community projects (for example without existing growing initiatives running alongside it) who had just planted the trees suggested it was too early to think about creating and selling products. Some felt that commercial potential - even on a small scale - may not be appropriate as they wanted to focus on sharing the produce with their community for free, increasing availability of healthy food for those not being able to access it otherwise.



6.2.4 INCREASED SUPPLY OF WELSH TREES

The programme enabled stakeholders to secure Welsh heritage trees that they would not be able to access otherwise due to their cost:

“So a lot of supermarkets do sort of bare rootstock. But they’re not actually sort of labelled, it’s just a tree, and you’re not sure what the variety is until they actually sort of start producing fruit. So that sort of the idea of sort of getting sort of named varieties, and the fact that they were sort of heritage varieties as well, that ticks boxes, and a bit more unusual, and some of them are sort of native to sort of Wales as well, which is good.”
(WS3 beneficiary 6)

However, a minority also noted that given the squeezed timelines in first round of applications, they did not get as healthy and good trees as they would if they could order earlier. Participants valued the links the programme created between them and suppliers. For example, a participant from Mid-Wales was able to contact a supplier she met at a study visit as part of the Productive Community Orchard Network and ask for help responding to acts of vandalism on their site that damaged trees.

6.2.5 LINKS BETWEEN DIFFERENT ORCHARD SITES

The workstream helped to build relationships between orchards and other community organisations that has resulted in further learning and equipment sharing:

“I do find [the Network] very productive and worthwhile. Because all these people, when we go around the group sort of thing with an update, we ask each other, like, tell us what have you done. So when people are doing similar practices, we learn from somebody’s been doing some apple pressing, or processing or whatever, and everything that these people are doing means that we could be doing, or we can ask questions, or they’ll share their concerns, what’s gone well.”
(WS3 beneficiary 1)

Some participants suggested they did not create any new links with orchards, but instead deepened existing connections, especially locally.



6.2.6 ADDITIONAL IMPACTS

In addition to outcomes foreseen at project conception, there were some unforeseen impacts beneficial to the community. Participants suggested the support has increased access to healthy food in food insecure communities. Organisations working with vulnerable individuals in particular mentioned their increased physical and mental health, including confidence:

“It’s a meaningful activity. So you might have sort of 10 to 15 people a day here with sort of different sort of support needs. So when we’re planting the trees and the tree ties, or some of the guys less able to dig, can sort of put the tree ties or the tree protection, catalogue the trees or make a plan so everybody got involved, having a sense of achievement. And then the benefit afterwards of getting the fruit.”
(WS3 beneficiary 6)

It has also helped to create orchards as sites for learning about healthy diets, biodiversity and wider life-skills.



6.3 CHALLENGES

Notification of RGS project start in August meant very little preparation time to implement the first funding round in time for tree planting between November and March. As a result, only seven sites were funded. Beneficiaries commented on the tight turnarounds in round one but understood the wider circumstances of delays relating to the pandemic and funder’s sign off. There was concern at that stage about whether or not they would be able to hit their final targets. However, the second round was more effective.

As in any similar work, some beneficiaries commented on the challenges resulting from working with nature. For example, difficult conditions when trees needed to be planted, also influenced by compacted timelines for round one of the funding. This was mitigated by good communication with the SFG and appreciation that they understand the challenges so were flexible.

Some participants did not attend training as they did not see it relevant to them at this time.

“I think it’s quite a common thing for something, the project is funded for a finite amount of time, when you get to the end of that, yeah, it’s kind of awkward because you would achieve so much more if it continued longer and useful, and it would be good if in three years they had a pruning course right before they need to prune their trees.”

(WS3 beneficiary 2)

The project team would have liked to have developed the Orchards Network further. However, limited capacity within the team and the site partners made this difficult. They would still like to build up a national network, but more focus is needed to continue to develop the local ones. There are a few local networks mostly in South Wales that are working well; the team would like to replicate this success in North Wales.



6.4 LESSONS & LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

The Community Orchards Workstream would like to continue talking with some beneficiary groups about further collaboration. They plan to continue collaborating with The Orchard Project and Cwm Arian’s Fruit and Bounty project to provide support for orchard management, and fruit processing.

There are more people who want to engage with this kind of support, and a shared wish to ensure that the right processing equipment is available for groups, through cooperative ownership and use of equipment. Some of this is already happening in Llandeilo where equipment is shared. The partners will consider how they can continue to support orchards, particularly because it takes approximately five years from when the trees are planted until they bear fruit. Therefore, in four years, the orchards will begin producing fruit and will need support for the next stage of the journey: processing the fruit for the benefit of their community. The team is looking for funding to continue these activities.

This is also linked with learning about training workshops. Despite their success in terms of their enthusiastic reception and impacts on participants’ knowledge, they may not have reached many people. Common barriers to participation voiced by project beneficiaries included limited capacity, geographical spread, and training not being appropriate to current learning needs. Participants valued more the ongoing relationship with their SFG contacts and signposting to resources and contacts as and when necessary, including organising training days on their site. In future, support might be focused on localised clusters or networks and delivered through established partnerships, for example via The Orchard Project in Swansea or the Mother Orchards Network in Pembrokeshire.



7.0 GREENER CORRIDORS

Social Farms and Gardens (SFG) in partnership with Gwynedd Council (GCC) supported communities to manage verges and other public green spaces, such as community centres grounds and parks, as meadow habitat.

This work was originally intended to pilot an approach for local authority management of roadside verges which could be replicated nationally. But this was superseded by national action to promote the importance of pollinators, and Welsh Government coordination of activity to influence cutting regimes.

The workstream sought to benefit biodiversity by changing management to enhance pollinator habitats, and creating habitat corridors. It also aimed to offer communities opportunities to be involved in greenspace management. This was intended to provide education about pollinators and meadow habitat, and the broader issues of nature emergency. By volunteering to manage local spaces it was expected that local people would benefit from feeling urgency in relation to the challenge.



7.1 ACTIVITY & OUTPUTS

The workstream focused on two strands of activity: changing GCC practices, and working with community groups to manage greenspaces for pollinators. During delivery it became apparent that there were prohibitions around community engagement in managing roadside spaces, resulting in a shift in focus to other public greenspaces which could provide meadow habitat.

The workstream has delivered:

A change of cutting regime within GCC that now follows Plantlife guidance on verge management

An animation that explains how and why to manage green spaces for pollinators

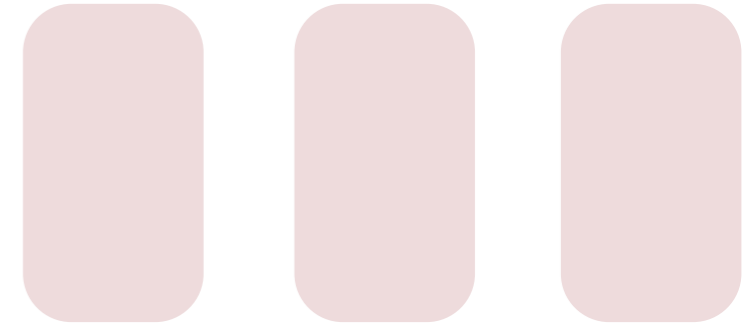
'Life on the Verge' guidance and FAQ document for communities on verge management and other community green spaces

Promotional materials around #NoMowMay

Guidance for communities in Gwynedd for a safe working on road verges

Support for **14** community groups with tools for meadow management, advice, seeds and plug plants, access to courses for license to manage road verges, and signs explaining the new management

Insufficient time has passed since implementation to enable post-activity assessment of impacts on the greenspaces. It is possible to state the area of greenspaces now being managed by communities for pollinators, and subject to the enhanced cutting regime.



7.2 IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

Progress against the project’s intended outcomes is summarised in Table 8.

OUTCOME	PROGRESS	EVIDENCE
O1 Reversing the decline of biodiversity - plants and invertebrates.	GCC has established a new regime of managing for meadow habitat which offers enhanced pollinator habitat.	Area under new regime
O2 5-7 community groups gain a more in depth knowledge of and confidence in verge management for biodiversity.	14 community groups engaged All participants reported increased level of knowledge and confidence in verge management.	Qualitative interviews
O3 County wide - increasing the understanding of the importance of verges as a meadow habitat and the need to reduce cuts during the spring/ summer months.	14 community groups engaged GCC teams and senior management understand and support the approach	Qualitative interviews Partner questionnaire

TABLE 8: Workstream 4 progress with outcomes

Prior to the project, Gwynedd County Council was not managing verges in the most beneficial way for pollinators. By changing their cutting regime in accordance with good practice there are biodiversity benefits across the areas they manage. The council has also gained understanding of how to best manage spaces for pollinators, with relevant teams now better connected and sharing priorities in this area. Key staff members are now appropriately skilled to deliver this work. They are currently investigating how to manage leavings from mown sites in the most sustainable way. The GCC staff member involved in the project suggested that the partnership had made senior managers aware of and open to *“the opportunities that are now available to work positively with organisations that promote biodiversity in general.”*

SFG and the local authority now have better understanding of practicalities of engaging volunteers with management of spaces alongside public highways.

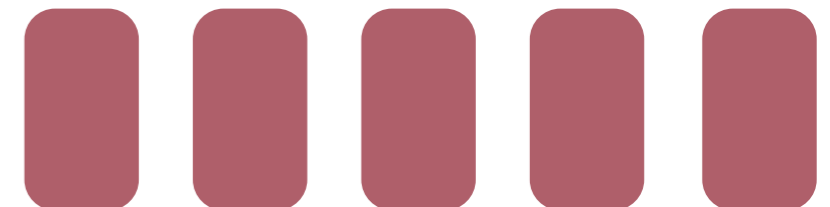
The community groups engaged with the workstream have received specialist machinery and advice on how to use it to manage spaces. The workstream has created the first guidance for communities focused on this activity. Participants particularly valued the provision of tools and equipment which they may not have afforded otherwise, as small community initiatives. This enabled them to scale-up their work and manage larger areas for biodiversity. Similarly, some participants suggested sharing these tools between different communities provides better value for money and allowed

different communities to benefit. The advice and support provided community groups managing sites with confidence and increased their knowledge. Participants valued someone coming to their site, providing tailored advice. Similarly, organising talks and workshops locally enabled knowledge to be shared more widely, rather than just upskilling the project coordinators:

“When we had plot holders come to [on site workshop] as well, it wasn’t just me and [expert]. We had quite a good turnout. So for a lot of the people who came to that, I think that was. and very new to them. So in that sense it, you know it increased people’s knowledge and understanding quite significantly.”
(WS4 beneficiary 2)

Besides increased knowledge, participants noted increased social cohesion, mental and physical wellbeing stemming from being involved in this workstream:

“I think people are feeling a sense of empowerment that we can do things differently on these spaces in the middle of our villages. It doesn’t have to be just grass. We can choose. we can make it something different. We can make it more colorful.”
(WS4 beneficiary 3)



Participants also suggested that seeing change in public space inspired people to make changes in their private gardens. Similarly, people noted that this work is useful for bringing different communities together, for example Welsh and English speakers as *“it’s a forum where people feel comfortable learning a few Welsh words as well.”* The workstream has enabled relationships and trust building with other stakeholders - either local community groups or the Council:

“Often it’s collaboration, because I was trialing a natural seeding network, identifying donor sites, meadow sites on Llyn, where we could harvest a local provenance seed. So then I was able to let [SFG staff] have some seed last year that she could use on some of her sites, so it felt like a partnership, really.”

(WS4 participant 1)

“[SFG staff] put me in touch with the biodiversity officer for Gwynedd that is doing some of the providing machinery for something else. So yeah, definitely, helpful connections.”

(WS4 participant 3)

When collaborating with the council, participants noted feeling encouraged that they are doing the right thing. However, one participant was interested in more community campaigning around council-wide verges management, which suggests that the messaging about changes perhaps did not reach everyone.

It is difficult to establish the degree to which changes to greenspace management in Gwynedd resulted solely from the project, as it coincided with other initiatives such as delivery of the Welsh Government pollinator strategy and Local Nature Partnerships. The project team noted that they were working amongst *“the zeitgeist”* which had similar priorities and strategies. They contributed to this through joining specialist national stakeholder groups where they both contributed and benefited from discussions with other authority areas. But the partners suggested that it was difficult to *“have a voice”* for the project due to the number of other initiatives working on similar issues simultaneously. Similarly, beneficiaries working in this area for a number of years noted how it became easier to get a community buy-in given more public awareness about biodiversity issues.

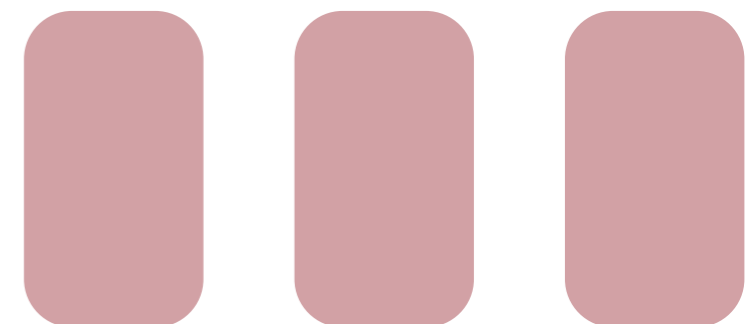
What is clearly attributable to the project is the support for community management of greenspaces to benefit pollinators, and encouragement to local authorities to engage communities in their management. The GCC team will share learning on this within their local authority networks.

7.3 CHALLENGES

The workstream team noted challenges arising from delays in awarding the project funding. This was particularly problematic given the seasonal nature of meadow management which made it impossible to catch up on delivery missed in the first year. There were also changes in personnel within both partner organisations, with subsequent loss of capacity or delays. The team noted that it can be difficult to achieve change in a large complex organization like a local authority, although good progress was made in a relatively short amount of time. The most significant challenge for SFG was lack of capacity to focus on the workstream, especially given staff involvement in multiple workstreams.

A key challenge realised during delivery was the need to adhere to legislative requirements for safe working practices when working on public highway. The rules require trained personnel to accompany volunteers, suitable PPE and signage. These restrictions precluded community involvement in managing many roadside areas which might have otherwise been suitable. The project adapted by focusing most community activity on greenspaces not subject to these requirements, such as parks and orchards.

All participants from community groups raised the issue of sustaining this work beyond the timescales of this programme - not necessarily in terms of funding for future equipment, but whether they will be able to access the tailored advice as their needs change with the developing meadows.



7.4 LESSONS & LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

GCC will take forward management for meadow habitats in future, and expect to continue improving their approach, whilst also bringing more areas under in-house management. Some of it will happen through the next round of Local Nature Partnerships.

The lead partners will continue to participate in the Welsh Government-led Pollinators Action Task Force Sub Group on Verges, which will facilitate exchange of good practice and learning from the project and with other areas. The project has already been presented to this group, and the resources created by the workstream shared with attendees. These materials (animation film, guidance, sign for managed spaces) are publicly available for anyone to use when managing meadow habitat.

Since this activity was conceived, Welsh Government have required all local authorities and community councils to report on how they have enhanced biodiversity in their area. Project partners suggested that this provides incentive to work on pollinator management, and has already resulted in increased attention to the issue. RGS project activity has fed into this, whilst itself learning from others travelling in the same direction. One local authority directly approached the workstream partners for advice based on their approach. This process of mutual learning is expected to continue through the national forum.

The main legacy of the workstream arises from having established a new management regime within GCC. They have funding, machinery and knowledge which will enable them to continue delivering the approach to benefit pollinators. In future, community groups can approach the GCC team for support in relation to managing for pollinators. Materials including the new guide to machinery use are also available to support community groups. This approach is beneficial for community orchards, so it is likely that new sites created by RGS Workstream 3 may seek support with grassland management in future.

SFG hope to build on knowledge gained through this project, to be able to support community orchard groups with management plans and machinery. This was not feasible as part of the project as they were not ready to learn about management practices such as pruning and grass management:

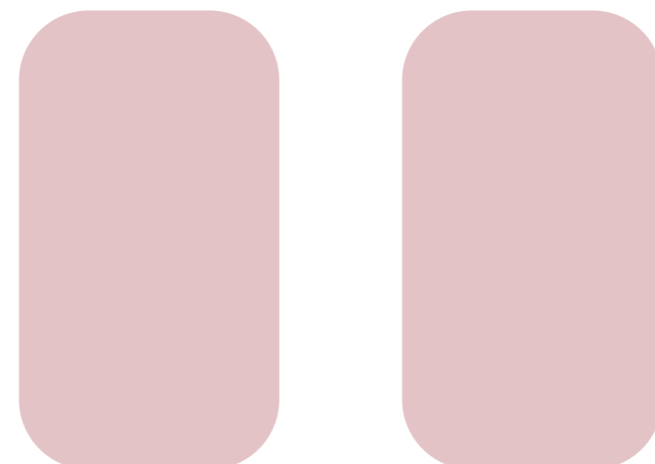
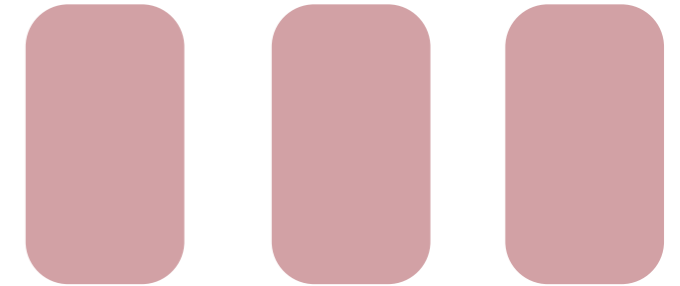
“You can’t train people in orchard management when you’re putting the trees in.”
(WS4 Lead)

This presents a clear niche for SFG to address in future.

Community groups who have established management of communal greenspaces for pollinators are expected to continue doing so:

“None of that is stopping, that is all carrying on and will only get better as time goes by and they continue to do improved management.”
(WS4 Lead)

This should be feasible without ongoing project support; other groups interested in replicating their experiences can approach GCC to be supported.



8.0 EXPLORING COMMUNITY ACCESS TO FARMS & LAND

This workstream was led by Shared Assets and Landworkers Alliance. They explored the barriers and opportunities for people interested in agroecological farming to access land owned by council, other public bodies and private entities. It aimed to support communities or new entrants seeking access to land for agroecological farming, and to support landowners who are looking for their land to be farmed in future. It aimed to bring together landowners and communities to make new farming initiatives a reality.

Workstream 5 had a research phase, when they surveyed local authorities and national public bodies, like Natural Resources Wales and national parks. Results of the survey were analysed and written up. It also surveyed land seekers, asking for information about how prepared they were and how skilled they were to run a horticulture business. There was a good response from land seekers. They also reviewed Welsh, UK and international policies on community access to land.



8.1 ACTIVITY & OUTPUTS

The workstream has delivered:

Approximately **£100,00** awarded to **2** projects to support the purchase of farmland for agroecological farming with long-term community benefit

10 meetings of learning partnership for local authorities

2 training sessions for landseekers

2 events targeting public landowners, run in liaison with other workstreams

2 case studies showcasing existing good practice amongst a variety of groups gaining access to publicly owned land, with others in development

2 policy reports outlining the policies on community access to land in Wales and UK more widely

After conducting the research, the team initiated the events and relationship-building phase. The first event was aimed at public land owners. Many local authorities showed interested in this work, and were interested in discussing it. A local authority learning partnership was established, with monthly meetings. The workstream offered support and signposting to resources, and cultivated a peer learning environment. The team also organised events for land seekers: a generic event in September 2022 to review survey results and signpost participants to resources, and a second in May 2023, looking at community financing models.

Three case studies have been written, with further scheduled for completion by the end of the RGS project.

The final activity was an application to buy land, with a total funding pot of £100,000. This required significant effort from October 2022 to January 2023. Three applications were selected for funding, however, there are remaining challenges to complete the transfer ahead of the project finish date due to the nature of land markets.



8.2 IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

Progress against the project’s intended outcomes is summarised in Table 9.

OUTCOME	PROGRESS	EVIDENCE
O1 Community groups and new entrants who are looking to access land will have more information about publicly owned land.	4 webinars and training events delivered 3 case studies published	Event feedback forms
O2 Local authorities and communities have a clear picture of the status of local authority owned farmland in Wales, and any remaining gaps in knowledge, and opportunities for new joint approaches to managing farmland and supporting new entrants.	Learning partnership for local authorities established, met 10 times	Qualitative interviews Event feedback forms
O3 Private landowners and communities have a range of best practice examples to draw on in developing future collaborative farming arrangements, and better understand the opportunities and barriers which may present themselves in working towards these.	2 case studies published.	Qualitative interviews Event feedback forms
O4 Communities/new entrants in up to 4 places are able to take the first steps to access land and/or set up new community farms/land banks (1 on privately owned land, 3 on local authority owned land)	£100k due to be distributed to 2 communities to secure access to land	WS lead interview
O5 Private and public landowners understand the potential of their land to support community farms and/or land banks, and the benefits this will bring them, and local authorities have more ideas for policy change to set in motion to support or incentivise these initiatives.	2 policy reports published 2 case studies published Learning partnership for local authorities established, met 10 times	Qualitative interviews WS lead interview

TABLE 9: Workstream 5 progress with outcomes

WS5 was able to meet the targets set for the project. Some activities did not work as originally expected, whilst others responded to needs that emerged through initial project activity. The survey of land holdings was the most difficult activity: it was an ambitious to map all publicly held land. Necessary data is held in many different places across each local authority; there is no dedicated role in each local authority holding the information, and in some cases, local authorities are not willing or able to share it.

Notwithstanding access to data, the work with local authorities has been effective, with strong relationships in place for future work. By working together on local authority farmland, in an arrangement that works for both local authorities and communities, there may be opportunities for innovative new entrants to enter organic or agroecological agriculture, whilst sharing some of its inherent risks and costs with a wider group. This could nurture more sustainable, localised food systems, and improve local people’s health and wellbeing.

The potential benefits of local communities being more connected to their local farmers, farmland, and food systems, are of course not limited to local authority estates, so there may be opportunities to try similarly collaborative approaches on privately owned land, with the right support in place. While the funding applications and above activity has focused on community land ownership, there was a realisation that there is also work to be done to document progressive options for private landowners. Another need that emerged from the work was identification of other options for supporting community groups who submitted unsuccessful applications; how can their objectives for community owned growing spaces be realised?



8.2.1 LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Participants from local authorities engaged in the learning partnership found it useful to connect with other local authorities across Wales working towards the same goal, in different contexts with different stakeholders, including officers and Councilors. They valued having an open space where challenges could be shared and problems solved. For those interviewed, being new to their policy area was a key motivation to join the meetings; both reported an increased knowledge as a result. One participant said:

“It’s given me, more confidence in what I’m doing and knowing that there’s support there. If you might have had some councillor questions or internal questions from officers higher up, you might not have the answer straight away, [but] you’ve got a network to go out to, and they might have experienced that issue before.”
(WS5 beneficiary 1, South Wales)

As a result of this work, local authority officers were able to make connections with and learn from different areas in Wales and England. One participant said:

“It’s helped understand how some more experienced local government officers may work, and how you can sort of bring people around to new ways of working and thinking about problems.”
(WS5 beneficiary 2, South Wales)

In terms of advancing community access to land, the workstream has helped local authorities to progress at a higher speed than without it. For example, when developing guidance around community growing, one participant said:

“[the partnership] helped speed up the process and get a real solid understanding of what we can and can’t do in terms of planning with fences and structures on potential community growing land.”
(WS5 beneficiary 1, South Wales)

In another case, the partnership has helped one local authority to learn from other people’s mistake then progress their first community asset transfer of land at a greater speed. Similarly, sharing learning has created a more joined up approach within one local authority:

“For example, it [community asset transfer] goes down to the corporate estates team, maximising receipts, and maximising the value of assets. Whereas the nature of community transfer of land in this specific context is to trial innovative farm, innovative techniques that possibly won’t work. And so to maximise receipts just doesn’t add up. So [within the partnership] it was learning about how it’s been done differently in other areas while still maintaining peace.”
(WS5 beneficiary 2, South Wales)

8.2.2 LANDSEEKERS



The work with landseekers was not as expected at the outset: the team had anticipated finding people who were highly skilled, ready to access land and start growing. While they were in contact with many landseekers with growing skills, there were far fewer who also knew how to run a business. This led to questions of whether this was a shortcoming of their ability to distribute the survey widely, or reflecting that the skill set is genuinely missing from those interested in accessing land for horticulture. Key learning from the workstream is that business skills and governance arrangements are lacking amongst the land seeking community.

Participants involved in webinars and training events reported an increased understanding of barriers and support available to access public land in Wales. They valued learning from others, finding out what financial support and advice is out there and how particular models of financing work, such as Community Share Model. Examples of what people found most valuable included:

“Hearing experiences of successful or unsuccessful land seekers in Wales. Learning about the support available in Wales. Discussing issues of access to land.”
(Participant feedback form)

“The level of support that Cwmpas can offer and also that Shared Assets have such expertise.”
(Participant feedback form)

8.3 CHALLENGES

Participants in the learning partnership suggested that the different context every local authority operates in, in terms of land, may have hindered the transfer of learning.

For example, one participant said:

“Each county is very different, and therefore having a speaker that would have suited our market gardening topic, in what we’re going to do in the next couple of months, isn’t what [name of a local authority] need and it isn’t what [name of a local authority] are doing. So, it wouldn’t have appealed to them, would it?”

(WS5 beneficiary 3, South Wales)

Therefore, for all local authority participants, the case studies were useful to understand what different approaches exist, but may be difficult to transfer into their area as the contexts and scales were very different.

Given that local authority officers work across multiple policy areas, prioritising attendance at the learning partnership was sometimes difficult. This may have contributed to drop-out towards the end of the programme. Participants suggested that this has resulted in a closer working relationship between those remaining but it meant a smaller pool of knowledge and topics discussed. It also proved difficult progressing from one meeting to another, as similar topics were revisited for new attendees.

Participants suggested that having a local community growing strategy in place, or buy-in from a senior colleague or Councilor has helped them to prioritise these meetings.

Sometimes policies and projects are in a stage when officers cannot share information more widely, which may pose a challenge when attending events. Also they may speak only about successes, rather than struggles and failures, which would also present helpful learning.

It was particularly challenging to get the right contacts in the local authorities which are short-staffed and incredibly busy. In some cases, initial contact was not made with the correct people; it was difficult though to know who to approach because few contact details are publicly available. The team often had to rely on word of mouth to find the right contact in a local authority.



8.4 LESSONS & LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

The partners plan to communicate as widely as they can their project outputs. They would like to continue working together with partners, local authorities and community groups with whom they have collaborated. With only 18 months to run activities, they feel they have just started and are seeking opportunities to build on this work for several more years.

While they need funding to continue this work, there is a need to shift the funding and policy context in terms of what people think are solutions to food systems and agricultural crises. Legislation in Scotland provides a good example of how to shape policy to give communities access to land. There are also existing instruments that could be better used to prioritise food growing, for example by protecting high grade agricultural land from housing development.

The survey of landseekers revealed the extent to which they need help with business skills. The scope of their ambitions and aspirations are not supported by business or legal skills and knowledge. They also tend to lack a source of business financing. These are issues to consider for follow-up training provision.

The team discovered that progress was slower than expected, especially in relation to land issues and the intricacies of council infrastructure. Land data is not transparent and is very difficult to obtain, and local authorities are often not able to share it, and may not have it compiled in one source.



9.0 SKILLS

As a collaboration between Lantra and Landworkers' Alliance/Gweithwyr y Tir this workstream developed and delivered a pilot training package covering the skills needed to run horticultural farming businesses. It commissioned research looking into the existing horticulture training provision in and around Wales, reflecting on where the training needs of the sector currently stand.

A connected action research project by Cardiff University worked with groups of young people, to understand their perceptions of career opportunities, and how these are affected by contact with horticultural trainees.



9.1 ACTIVITY & OUTPUTS

The workstream has delivered:

A co-designed curriculum covering agroecological horticultural skills to run a commercial horticultural farm, accredited by Agored Cymru

Two rounds of traineeship for **12** and **15** trainees respectively, on **8** host farms

Training consisted of a minimum of **5** months on-farm experience (21+ hours a week), **5** theory webinars delivered by trainers and **4** farm visits

5 'train the trainer' workshops

Specialist training sessions in tractor driving and first aid

Research report published 'Mapping of existing horticulture training provision (and current sector requirements)'

3 sessions with groups of young people to explore their perceptions of careers in food growing, with a fourth scheduled to take place after evaluation reporting

Film raising awareness about horticultural careers targeted at young people created and circulated publicly



9.2 IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

The workstream’s progress against outcomes is summarised in Table 10.

OUTCOME	PROGRESS	EVIDENCE
<p>O1 Better understanding of young people’s perceptions of horticulture and whether exposure to workers in this sector affects them.</p> <p>Advice and materials for careers services on how to promote food production opportunities to young people, tailored to the Welsh curriculum.</p>	<p>Research into existing training provision.</p> <p>Video raising awareness about horticultural careers targeted at young people created and circulated publicly.</p>	<p>Published.</p> <p>Published.</p>
<p>O2 More people are trained in specialist skills, enabling them to be valuable workers in horticulture.</p>	<p>Traineeship developed and piloted with 27 new trainees horticulture.</p>	<p>Qualitative interviews.</p> <p>Focus groups.</p>
<p>O3 Creating a stronger horticulture sector which is able to offer more long term employment. Also to make the Welsh horticulture sector more appealing to choose a career in.</p>	<p>Majority of trainees reported gaining confidence and inspiration to work in the sector.</p> <p>All trainees reported a long-term ambition to stay in the horticultural sector; half secured a horticulture related job or volunteering / learning opportunity immediately after the traineeship.</p>	<p>Qualitative interviews.</p> <p>Questionnaires.</p>
<p>O4 Farms currently hosting trainees will be upskilled in how they train whilst on farm. They will receive a curriculum to help them structure training. Farms who don’t currently host trainees, but would like to, will be provided with a curriculum to help them structure a traineeship.</p>	<p>Half of trainers (n=3) said they had gained skills and/or confidence in delivering training</p> <p>They also said the programme had influenced the way they deliver training on-farm, for example making them focus on the commercial rather than growing skills.</p>	<p>Qualitative interviews.</p> <p>Questionnaires.</p>

TABLE 10: Workstream 6 progress with outcomes

9.2.1 MORE PEOPLE ARE TRAINED IN SPECIALIST SKILLS, ENABLING THEM TO BECOME VALUABLE WORKERS IN HORTICULTURE

All trainees agreed or strongly agreed they gained skills and abilities in commercial, field-scale growing and felt inspired to continue working in the horticultural sector. Trainees found the integration of different modes of learning especially valuable. Together with forming a strong community of like-minded people this resulted in increased confidence in pursuing horticultural careers. Trainees valued the additional learning that came within the network itself, which has helped equip them for a career in horticulture, including funding for tractor driving courses or attendance of the Land Skills Fair. Trainers reported that providing agroecological and commercial skills filled an important gap on the horticultural market, hence adding value to the Welsh sector.

The traineeship uniquely integrated different ways of learning (on-farm practical and theoretical learning, online webinars and farm visits) previously missing from horticultural training:

Most participants found farm visits the most valuable part of the traineeship, enabling them to see the diversity of techniques, approaches and business models involved in agro-ecological horticulture. This was a key contribution, which would not be achievable through disconnected learning experiences on individual farms. Farm visits played an important role in strengthening the network and creating a community of like-minded people (trainees, growers, new entrants). Trainees and growers appreciated the opportunity to learn from each other and their diverse experiences, including transparency and openness about successes and failures, business models and finances. In a few cases, farm visits were able to fill gaps in knowledge not available at a host farm (i.e. herbal medicine). They were also valuable in transferring the knowledge between farms and helping trainees to become more confident growers.

“I’m not very good at just like looking at a screen and learning that way. So the [different] kinds of sessions that we had, were really helpful because it was on top of like the growing like the usual traineeships, the head grower would do once a week a session with a bit more a bit more theory. Because he’d like talk about it and I had references from what we’ve been getting on farm. It was good to get it that way. And then on top of that, we then also had the webinars, which would then just kind of drill in what we’d already learnt.”
(WS6 beneficiary 2)



9.2.2 CREATING A STRONGER HORTICULTURE SECTOR WHICH IS ABLE TO OFFER MORE LONG-TERM EMPLOYMENT

Trainees valued gaining skills in commercial horticulture over a longer time and in bigger spaces, developing basic horticultural skills from growing at home or in a community garden, to field, market-garden scale. This included learning about field-scale growing, crop-rotation, long-term planning, growing at scale and for market. However, the skills gained as part of the traineeship went beyond growing. Trainees valued the additional training that came with the network itself and has helped to equip them for a career in the horticultural sector. Although majority agreed that they gained skills and abilities in running business (75% in Cohort 1 Questionnaire), this was the weakest point compared to the other elements of the training. This was a common thread in the follow-up interviews where people suggested future training focus on accounting and business skills, alongside opportunities and funding to learn other skills, such as carpentry or using machinery. Having these additional skills was perceived as important to getting a job as an assistant/lead grower:

“This course has made growing seem like a more accessible thing for me where as before I thought you may need a degree or family experience to be accepted into the profession. I would definitely feel more confident to apply for assistant grower jobs but not to start a business. The way that LWA has been able to connect us to other farms has been hugely beneficial, it has made me feel like getting into growing is an achievable goal.”
(WS6 participant, Cohort 1, Questionnaire 2)

Trainees reported gaining confidence & inspiration to work in the sector, and understanding how to grow commercially. However, out of five trainees interviewed from Cohort 2 only one felt confident

to become a lead grower. According to the Cohort 2, at the end of the traineeship: three trainees were enrolled on other training courses; four wanted to continue to volunteer on their host farm, alongside other paid work; six did not know their next career steps. This may be due to the seasonality of jobs in horticulture. All three trainees interviewed from Cohort 1 were successful in gaining jobs after the end of their traineeship, whilst two secured another traineeship. There may also be a gendered element to this, connected with gender inequalities across agriculture: female trainees reported being less confident in moving onto assistant or lead grower positions than male trainees.

In relation to aspirations for their trainees, hosts in Cohort 1 hoped trainees would continue working in horticulture, with one qualifying this by saying some trainees may be enabled to realise whether or not it is for them. All agreed this had been met ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’, with reasons being: *“I thought the training was excellent at engaging trainees in the horticultural sector as a career, rather than just a job, by linking them to others in the industry.”*

“Of our 5 trainees, one has joined our business, one is currently arranging to rent land to start her own business next year, one has serious, if unspecified, aspirations to see employment in the sector, and two are returning to other (non horticultural) work for the foreseeable future.”

Similarly, a majority of trainees felt that a longer traineeship would build more skills and confidence, especially in relation to crop planning and having more responsibilities. Nevertheless, all trainees reported a long-term ambition to stay in the horticultural sector and half of them secured a horticulturally related job, volunteering or a learning immediately after the traineeship.

9.2.3 FARMS CURRENTLY HOSTING TRAINEES WILL BE UPSKILLED IN HOW THEY TRAIN WHILST ON FARM

All hosts taking part in evaluation questionnaires in both cohorts (n=3 and n=3) have previously provided informal training to staff and volunteers, and a majority had hosted trainees. All were motivated to participate in the programme to support skills development in the sector, alongside other goals around skills and training. Two had considered participating in an alternative programme - Open College Network and Kickstarter - but chose this one because the content is more relevant to agroecological growing and because of the level of flexibility and autonomy for them to choose their trainees and design the programme whilst enhancing trainee employability: Feedback from trainers expressed agreement that all events and training sessions were well planned and run. There was less certainty that events and training sessions were suited to their needs with half of respondents neutral on this point:

“But I felt like there was no communication between the trainers. I had no influence, or no real knowledge of what was being presented to my trainees from elsewhere. Whether it was the farm visits or the webinars, I would have liked to have connected what they were being taught elsewhere into what we were doing on a daily basis.”

(Trainer, Cohort 2, Interview)

Half of participants said they had gained skills and/or confidence in delivering training, and that the programme had influenced the way they deliver training on-farm, for example making them focus on the commercial rather than growing skills. The ‘train the trainer’ workshops led in Cohort 2 were done by a different provider than in Cohort 1 and it had more general pedagogical focus. Retrospectively, participants expressed interest in more agroecological focus.

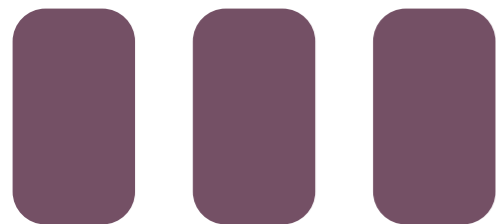


9.2.4 ADDITIONAL IMPACTS

For trainees, getting to know peers and growers across Wales was seen as a positive step towards their future career, as trainees shared contacts, information about job openings and other opportunities. The social dimension of community building was not only a source of learning, but also of fun and supportive relationships, enabling them to feel part of a bigger movement that works towards a common goal. This was important when dealing with burnout or isolation. One trainee highlighted that being connected with people, either other trainees or as part of the wider LWA network, provided a safety net against negative experiences:

“It definitely felt like, okay, there’s like a safety net here. If some of us are not having a good time, it’s not just you and your farm, like there’s other people that are living through the same experience. And yeah, maybe have similar struggles as you or yeah, just kind of felt a bit more held, because I’ve definitely spoken to friends that have done traineeships, like eight years ago, they weren’t held, you know, it just didn’t work - they weren’t part of a group, they weren’t part of a network.”

(Trainee, Cohort 1, Interview)



9.3 CHALLENGES

A project lead suggested that the amount of paperwork for host farms may have been a barrier to engagement. She managed it by adjusting the workload in relation to the agricultural year, i.e. to do majority of it before the main growing season. Given her limited capacity (1 day a week), there was a restricted time for communicating with farmers and trainees which was addressed through flexible use of different channels.

Limited capacity of farmers also impacted the extent to which the traineeship and curriculum itself could be coordinated. Although it was initially co-designed, all three trainers interviewed felt that there were further opportunities to strengthen coordination, especially of its content, in future. The suggested gaining input from all trainers into the design and foster ongoing communication between themselves. Even as the programme built on existing relationships and preceding discussions, in the end there may have been a less sense of an ownership from the growers.



The traineeship has been shaped by an environment that makes training opportunities in agroecological horticulture inaccessible, either through inability for some growers to pay Living Wage given the tight margins within which they are operating, or reduced opportunities for transport and housing in Welsh rural areas. For many trainees, the fact that the traineeship was free was therefore an important motivation to join, in contrast to other opportunities on offer. They also appreciated funding of costs to attend events. Each had different financial arrangements with their host farm, but being paid a fair wage for their work was also perceived as a key factor in making the career and traineeship accessible to more people, rather than only to those who can afford it:

“I got paid. So it was actually financially sustainable for me, because I had looked at other places, or like, traineeships, where you go and sort of like volunteer, but you know, I’m quite early in my career and you know, cost of living is expensive. So I guess that was part of it being like, Oh, this might be a more financially sustainable way of learning as well. Yeah, and I think I’ve thought about going and like volunteering on a farm but I we’ve also been a bit worried about being a bit isolated as well. So being able to be part of a bit of the network and you know, keep living where I live was also quite appealing.”

(WS4 participant, Cohort 2, Interview)

Another accessibility-related challenge is that some trainees required childcare provision to be able to participate. The workstream responded for the second round of training by offering a bursary for childcare provision (up to £100 per training weekend) or allowing child/ren and childminders to attend the training with expenses paid by the project.

9.4 LESSONS & LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

As an important legacy the project leads praised effective collaboration between the partners that did not work together in the past. The partners are building the learning from this pilot into the work of their organisations. Cardiff University secured funded for follow-up activity testing the results of evaluation with a wider circle of trainees and growers not involved in the pilot.

LWA continues its work on creating a shared curriculum for agroecological work as well as minimum standards for employing trainees. It also coordinates a network seeking to further training provision and support across the UK. Lantra under its Farming Connect work is taking forward the focus on training the trainers through mentorship and farm visits. It is pursuing priorities identified by the Miller Research, in collaboration with the Wales Horticulture Alliance.

Nevertheless, significant funding is essential to embed and extend the best practice in training in horticultural enterprises across Wales. This funding should overcome the accessibility and fairness challenge, making sure that growers are remunerated for their training skills and trainees are paid fair wage for their work.



10.0 PROJECT WIDE ACHIEVEMENTS

10.1 IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

In terms of building a broad partnership based on trust and collaborative working, RGS has been very successful. SFG has managed quite a big partnership, which Welsh Government were keen to support. The project has had a wide impact and

is quite well known, paving the way for follow-on actions in other areas. Increased recognition extends to project partners, placing them in a position to leverage leadership across the sector.

Progress against the outcomes established for the programme as a whole is summarised in Table 11.

OUTCOME	PROGRESS	WORKSTREAM
O1 Local green spaces are networked with similar community organisations in other parts of the country and are supported by them.	National networks established for allotment and orchard managers, trainees and trainers on farms, and public land owners.	1, 3, 5, 6
	Participation in networks for management of greener corridors.	4
O2 Increased investment in community-led food production that benefits people and planet.	Food hubs expanding and supporting local supply chains.	2
	Community orchards established with potential for future food growing and processing.	3
	Communities support to purchase land.	5
O3 Improved relationships of trust and co-working between member organisations.	All partners established good cooperation and formed new collaborations.	All
O4 Communities have support that is tailored to suit their requirements, rather than meeting demands of available funding. Leads expert in different areas but can signpost effectively.	Specialist support provided to community beneficiaries.	1, 2, 3, 4

TABLE 11: Whole project progress with outcomes

In addition to the outcomes specified during project design, partners commented on what they felt to be the collective outcomes of its activity. These are summarised in Table 12.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Strong and trusting partnership.

Communities supported by multiple workstreams: joined-up working.

Increased awareness of organisations and food system projects in Wales amongst communities and local authorities.

More land in community use.

More people working on the establishment of local food networks.

Enhanced access to land.

Increased access to local food supply chains.

Increased participation in community food growing.

Improved community resilience through building knowledge, networks, capacity and assets.

A new network with shared priorities.

Wider awareness of organisations' skillsets and expertise.

TABLE 12: Collective impacts identified by project partners

WS1 welcomed the project's Wales-wide remit as it meant there was "equality of opportunity" for communities around the country, and no need to turn away interested groups as happens in regionally targeted programmes.

In relation to their key outcome of more community involvement in land access and

management, the overall programme has significantly supported resilience of community groups, not only through funding and advice creating tangible community assets with legacy, but also interpersonally. Beneficiaries across workstreams - especially from smaller initiatives - felt proud that somebody has invested in them.

Some stakeholders reported that the funding and support helped to bring their groups together and focus their energies:

"So the first support we had from her [programme staff] was a few bags of wild flower seeds. That was hugely exciting, because it's just a great action we can do right now. We don't need any money. We haven't set up a bank account yet, but this this enabled us to start right away."

(WS4 beneficiary 4)

"It's boosted morale and confidence. It's encouraged everybody to think that somebody is valuing what we're doing enough to give thousands of pounds of money to, and that's helped an awful lot. I think it's difficult to measure that. But I can't underestimate the impact that's had. And the sense of pride as well, in a voluntary group."

(WS3 beneficiary 7)

The reach of the programme has been amplified through offers of match-funding or in-kind support when others saw an initiative is supported by the programme:

"We're really lucky, our local community is brilliant and we have a lot of contractors and agencies that give us a load of donations, whether it's local building companies or things like that. So actually we found that when we were given this donation by Social Farms and Gardens, it engaged other people to come and give more and help more, you know, like all these kinda things it's, it's natural, isn't it?"

(WS4 beneficiary 4)

Similarly, the programme has supported wider community cohesion through raising residents' interest in how their local green spaces are managed and how they can be involved, reaching groups that may not have been involved before (such as refugees or farmers), and creating new public assets in places with limited community infrastructures:

"I don't think there's anything that unites the community [apart from us], and I think food and growing cuts across age groups and genders and household incomes, with the right support. Apart from [sport] clubs, there's not really any community events."

(WS1 beneficiary 1)

Furthermore, there is some evidence that work supported by the project in public places has inspired people to do things differently in their private gardens, amplifying its collective impact:

"I've had 5 or 6 people joining in one village and by the third session people were coming, bringing stuff from their gardens, saying, oh, I've had a clear out in my garden, and I've got this old lump, and I think if we split it up. It can fill the gaps in these planters, and that would be nice. And then they're doing more work in their own gardens rather than just leaving it."

(WS4 beneficiary 3)

11.0 MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE

Across the project, workstreams employed various levers which might achieve change in relation to food systems and greenspaces. The key approaches used across the workstreams are highlighted in table 13. Partners reflected on

their relative efficacy in order to understand what approaches to change might be most usefully applied in future. This highlighted that the levers tend to work together, with a multi-faceted approach being beneficial.

	FUNDING	NETWORKS	TRAINING	ADVICE	SIGNPOSTING	TECHNOLOGY	RESEARCH	MAPPING	COMMUNICATIONS & POLICY ADVOCACY
WS1	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
WS2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
WS3	X	X	X	X				X	X
WS4	X		X	X	X				X
WS5	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
WS6	X	X	X		X		X		X

TABLE 13: Overview of mechanisms applied to achieve change

FUNDING

Financial support was most effective where it enabled activity that would not have otherwise happened, for example the new food hubs supported by WS2 or essential groundworks financed by WS1. Distributing funds to community organisations was a good way to catalyse action, and create a platform for ongoing activity, particularly where used to establish physical assets which will endure such as new allotments and orchards. Partners identified that the project was rather unique for supporting groups' running costs (e.g. salaries) and capital/infrastructures.

Additional benefits of this approach were enabling groups to take risks and experiment, and attracting other organisations, of which partners were not previously aware. Two workstreams noted that applicants who were not finally awarded funds went onto receive other support, so the application process served as a useful engagement strategy. Allocating financial support was highlighted as particularly important for enhancing accessibility, for example by making land purchase available to a people who would not otherwise have resources to invest. Recipients highlighted that it was also important the organisations offering them funding were knowledgeable and understood their needs:

"The support's been so great, but it's also allowed us the bits that we were very competent and happy was... it wasn't like we had someone standing over us going, 'You're doing it wrong'. So it was really nice and it just seemed really flexible to what we needed and they really understood, they understood our needs."
(WS4 beneficiary 4)

This highlights the value of the organisations understanding the challenges when it comes to working with communities and nature, and embedding financial support within broader support. However, partners noted that any financial support needs to be accompanied by advice, and should avoid building reliance on funding. This can be particularly problematic in relation to food growing activities which require ongoing support. For most beneficiaries it was the unique combination of funding and ongoing support through advice that enabled them to make difference in their communities. It was also noted that there was considerable administration and bureaucracy involved in allocating funds, in part related to Welsh Government stipulations.

In hindsight, some partners noted that they might have prioritised funding allocation differently, for example funding social projects tackling food poverty during the cost-of-living crisis (WS2). Some noted that it is difficult to balance priorities for awarding funding, for example potential for activities to become self-sustaining whilst also delivering high social value. WS6 highlighted that it would have been beneficial to pay trainees participating in the programme. The greatest limitation of funding as a lever is that it is time bound, when many of the recipient activities need ongoing investment.



NETWORKS

Workstreams which established new networks found them beneficial for peer learning, and exchanging good practice, with beneficiaries acting to support each other. WS5 created a learning partnership for public landowners that helped them to understand barriers and opportunities in improving community access to land. WS3 noted that it may have been beneficial to set up a strong orchard network, but the team lacked capacity to focus on this. Partners found these were a relatively cost-effective way to provide support, which added momentum to other activity. Those involved in networks highlighted that there is effort required, particularly for facilitation and leadership, and it is not always the case that those involved will take a lead or contribute their energy. Some workstreams found it challenging to maintain consistency in participation, making it harder for a network to gain momentum. There were also mixed views on how effective online meetings were, with the advantage of light-touch coordination and participation, but disadvantages around building relationships and ensuring equitable participation in discussions. It is not clear that the networks will all continue independently beyond the project, as most were felt to require some support and coordination. There was a sense that if participants find a network valuable they will continue to participate in it.

Within and beyond official networks, the workstreams allowed beneficiaries to create 1-2-1 relationships which are also legacy of this programme:

“As part of a study visit, we met someone else working in a local area and we didn’t realise that we were applying for the trees and they were applying for the pressing equipment. So we’re hoping that when our orchard becomes productive we will be going to see them. So it’s really nice to have that joined up networking experience.”

(WS3 beneficiary 3)



INFORMATION, TRAINING & ADVICE

Workstreams ran various forms of training activity, covering a range of specialist topics and cohorts. WS1 supported community groups with progressing their plans, including connecting to specialist services such as CLAS. WS6 focused on delivering training, and also funded additional training courses that resulted in formal qualification (eg: tractor driving license) which improved trainees’ skills and employability. WS3 provided several training sessions on orchard management, with pruning skills in high demand. Others provided ad hoc advice, information resources, and direct mentoring, whilst also sign-posting community groups to other sources of support.

Several partners highlighted that an advantage of the project was getting to know organisations who have a range of expertise, so they can better connect people to the advice they need. A majority of beneficiaries highlighted the importance of how sensitively and expertly the advice is delivered. For example, they emphasised the ongoing communications and support provided informally through e-mails or phone calls responding to their particular needs as a unique contribution to their success. They valued the expertise of the partner organisations that may not be available from other organisations.

Disadvantages of this activity were that it can be difficult to run accessible training, both in terms of geographic location and other factors and to reach all who require or would benefit from training. WS5 highlighted that they did not have time or capacity to cover all issues on which beneficiaries would welcome training. WS3 commented that while they provided several training sessions in orchard management, that there were still many more people wanting to access training sessions.



MAPPING

Data collected and mapped across the project is being compiled onto Land Explorer, as an open-access source for partners and others. This has been promoted at the Wales Real Food & Farming Conference to showcase its potential of Land Explorer and the data available from the project. The project partners have also shared their experience of the mapping process and its potential with other groups in Wales. SFG, together with teams from WS3 and WS5 have participated in wider discussions around mapping including presenting at an Urban Agriculture Consortium webinar and regular meetings with People and Places teams from Natural Resource Wales to coordinate data sources.

In the course of this activity the team have come to appreciate the scale of work involved in mapping, particularly across such a large partnership and project. There are opportunities for it to communicate a range of information: interactions between sites/organisations, areas for potential activity, and ownership/use of land. The advantages of developing mapped data are being able to share it with other organisations, to highlight spatial patterns of activity, and enable analysis in interaction with other data. The potential for this may be further realised beyond the project.

The full potential of mapping has not yet been harnessed, largely due to lack of capacity. It proved challenging for each workstreams to enter their own data. There are also limitations with the platform, particularly as it was under development so lacks some functionality. Mapping is also a highly technical skill, meaning someone with suitable insights should lead related work.

COMMUNICATIONS & POLICY ADVOCACY

Several partners commented that they had not yet focused on wider communication of their activity or impacts, and that this will be a focus of effort beyond the time when evaluation data was collected. Several workstreams created films to disseminate learning and promote project impacts. Others commented on the value of the project's capacity to enable and coordinate communication activity. One workstream targeted

policy makers, engaging with a Senedd consultation and liaising with local government. Partners valued the potential of this type of activity to seek broader, deeper change and to reach beyond communities directly engaged in the project. Partners noted that not all of them have skills in advocacy, and that it can be difficult to prioritise such work, particularly when it is difficult to evaluate its impact.

11.1 LIMITATIONS

Partners were asked to identify whether they felt there could have been other mechanisms employed by the project, and what limited or prevented their use. Suggestions included: extend and enhance the online mapping, including adding public land; greater use of travel to visit sites of good practice; and more in-person team-wide meetings, particularly at the project start. But partners noted that they did not have capacity to cover all potential activities, and so tended to focus on those with good potential or where they found that others had the energy to support progress. This was particularly important given the wealth of other initiatives ongoing at the time, sometimes competing for the attention of communities and potential beneficiaries or supporters. Some highlighted that they had set ambitious plans, which proved challenging in practice, sometimes in ways which could not have been anticipated. Others noted that as the project drew to a close they felt they had only just got going, meaning they saw the project as laying the groundwork for future work.

Across the approaches taken, a key limitation was the short-term nature of any project-based activity, which is not conducive to seeking enduring change. Partners also highlighted that it in many cases it is not possible to determine or measure impacts. Some suggested that delivery no doubt failed to reach some potential beneficiaries, with certain activities likely to engage those already connected to the issue rather than reaching new audiences.

From a programme perspective, the SFG coordinator reflected on a lack of capacity to be able to support workstreams to better connect and develop synergies. There were a few cross-workstream events coordinated, but this happened because the SFG coordinator or others in SFG led on the activity. This was often not possible due to very limited capacity across all the project.



11.2 SYNERGIES

Across the workstreams, partners identified how activity had benefited from being part of the broader project and partnership. Participants in the WS5 learning partnership benefitted from new connections gained through LWA and Shared Assets in England. WS2 noted that the partnership approach gave the team access to people with diverse expertise, meaning they could access the right support for food hubs. It was helpful being part of the project as food hubs could be connected to the other partners and the support they offer. As staff time was supported by the project, they knew that partners could be called on to engage with hubs to share their expertise. In addition to being able to access expertise across the partnership, workstream leads could also access the wider networks of each of the partners for disseminating surveys, event information and outputs. Similarly, beneficiaries in different workstreams were generally aware of the others, even if not directly involved due to their particular circumstances. This is important as they may use resources created through the programme at a later date, amplifying its impact.

There was direct collaboration between WS4 and WS3 with two community groups receiving trees and being supported on meadow management. This connection had biodiversity benefits and also made it easier for groups to manage their sites:

“An orchard can be quite big and cutting it is really hard!”

(WS4 lead)

WS1 and WS5 established collaboration to focus on engagement with landowners. However, this was slow to progress due to work to develop the most effective approach. The finally selected approach of a showcase and associated video worked well, and means there is a legacy of the project that can be used to communicate in future.

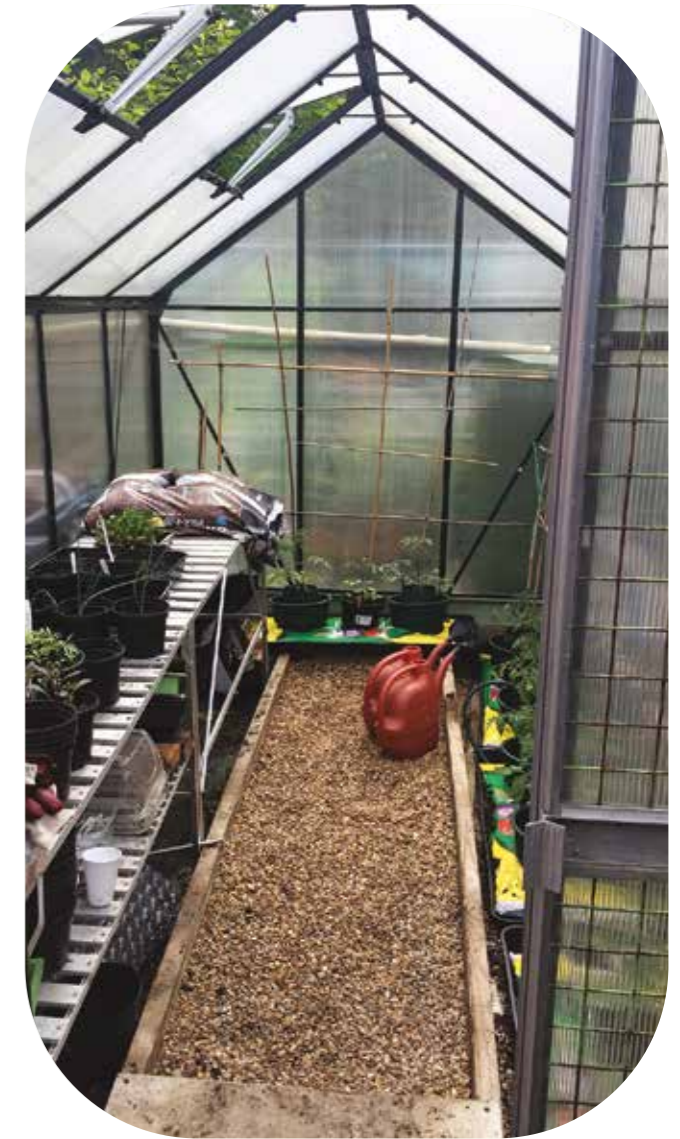
One of the food hubs supported by WS2 was introduced to WS1 and WS2 to help them establish community food growing in their area. There were expectations that more such connections might be possible, but the timing of different initiatives prevented this. For example, orchards established through WS3 will not be producing sellable goods for some time, which could support WS2 food hubs. WS3 community orchards and WS5 land access could have worked more with WS6 skills training, but WS6 was very focused from the beginning and was able to start earlier than the rest of the workstreams. As the project operates Wales-wide it is not always the case that community food production supported by other workstreams was near to the hubs which could sell their produce.

It was initially expected that there would be opportunities for WS1 and WS2 to collaborate given the similarity of issues and target groups. In practice, this only happened where personnel were working across activity and made the connection between the opportunities.

Partners involved in the project stated that they found it beneficial to develop relationships with organisations, and to work with them on implementing good practice. Another highlighted the benefit of the project intervening *“at a number of interconnected points in the food system”* which over time *“could build a more resilient food system across Wales”*.

Several partners noted that there was potential to have built more connections between workstreams to benefit from the synergies presented by the project. But the squeezed timeline for delivery meant that this did not become a focus until close to the project end. There was also reduced capacity to reflect on such opportunities, rather than focusing on reactive delivery. Some highlighted that whilst project partners had become well connected, potential to foster synergies between workstream beneficiaries had not been attempted.

Most of the project activity had a Wales-wide remit which opened opportunities to as many communities as possible, and enhanced accessibility. It also presented potential to transfer activity and learning from one area to other parts of Wales. However, partners noted that there is variation in how local authorities work and their priorities, meaning that delivery may not directly translate into other settings. It also made it challenging to ensure that in-person events were well-attended by participants from different geographic regions of Wales.



11.3 ADDED VALUE OF THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

Project partners were asked to reflect on the added value gained from a project with multiple strands of activity, and a large partnership. They identified multiple benefits and impacts of working in this way, summarised in Table 14. The OFN noted that prior to this project they had not engaged much in Wales, so the partnership

benefited their profile and presence here. As part of the project they have discovered new opportunities, such as participation in the Wales Real Food and Farming Conference, where they were able to share expertise and expand their networks.

WHAT WOULD HAVE DIFFERENT WITHOUT THE PARTNERSHIP?

Duplication of organisations' work resulting in frustrations.

Reduced impact - less reach to beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Fewer new and strong relationships between organisations.

Lack of access to contacts and expertise.

Greater use of consultants for delivery.

Less exchange of learning.

Silo working and lack of links between projects at a community level.

Reduced signposting to other support and advice, meaning poorer quality advice to beneficiaries.

Reduced sense of momentum.

Reduced innovation.

Weaker platform for future action.

TABLE 14: Value added from a partnership approach identified by partners

WS3 felt that the partnership came into its own after the midterm evaluation, where the project partners were able to sit together to develop the conceptual image of how they were all working together. They could see how community orchards would be feeding into the community food system; they could see the big picture. They valued getting to know other partners, who were doing amazing things, very quickly and very directly. Partnership updates online meant they could hear about successes and challenges from other projects.

WS5 also valued the wider network of people to get involved in activities. They found that the expertise of the wider network was really helpful to seek advice on topics with which they were working. As a result, they always felt they were operating in a well-informed way because of these other sources of expertise. This also applied to knowing about other activities happening within the same space, especially as one of the co-leads was not physically based in Wales. Such exchanges of expertise and connections also stretched beyond the partners, with several people mentioning how they benefited from being introduced to other organisations who could help them:

"The other great thing was [X] then introduced us to Keep Wales Tidy, so from that we were able to get some extra resources. But because they were able to work together it really meant that we could compliment and continue to get some further fruit trees and actually put in things like a potting shed. So these two things together really, really meshed, it was really powerful."

(WS3 beneficiary 4)

Workstream leads highlighted the benefit of engaging with the whole project team, particularly at the in-person meetings. These provided "time out to actually think, bringing people together and to reflect", including personal conversations; *"learning what other people are doing - and in that sense the partnership has been really rich."* (WS1 lead)

This was felt to support CPD and learning which was particularly valuable post-pandemic as such opportunities had been lacking for some time. Other partners suggested that project meetings and communications also helped maintain momentum within the workstream, serving *"To keep the energy of the project going"* (WS2 lead). They found it valuable to hear other partners' experiences - good and bad.

However, partners did note that some aspects might have been easier if activity had been delivered outside such a partnership project. They expect that administrative processes might have been easier, reducing this burden. One partner suggested that things might have happened more quickly if each organisation worked on their own, but that this would not have been as effective in achieving collective impact and synergies. However, there were other partners who appreciated having a central coordination team to deal with project finances, communication and management.

11.4 MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Partners were asked to reflect on where there was potential for the project to achieve or deliver more, and activities that would have been beneficial but were not achieved (Table 15). Several workstreams noted that because of the delay to commencing, they lost time to deliver which is particularly problematic for activities reliant on seasonal cycles. WS4 and 3 could only engage with groups for one full growing season and WS3 were rushed in the delivery of their first round of funding dispersal for orchard plantings, leading to planting only 100 of a targeted 1000 trees in the first of two funding cycles.

Other opportunities were identified with hindsight as partners reflected on how they could have improved the project. WS6 suggested that ideally, they would have developed a dedicated 'train the trainer' programme for growers, but instead came to connect with existing provision. WS2 suggested that hub managers would have benefited from connections with other successful projects, or potential funders. Ideally, they would have found appropriate mechanisms for the new hubs to learn from other UK hubs. Partners suggested that it would have been preferable for the £100k land fund to be established as a revolving loan fund to enable communities to buy land, but Welsh Government requirements prohibited this. The option developed as an alternative does not have the same legacy of ongoing investment in land.

Although some partners highlighted the Wales-wide approach was positive for offering access to project support nationally, some noted that alternative approaches might have been more impactful. For example, focusing support on fewer sites might have enabled greater impact and more sustainable change as it would have been more manageable for teams to target their support and engage communities.



MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

More joint work across workstreams.

More coordinated communications telling the story of the project's vision.

Showcase nature/net zero throughout the project.

A conference/event about sustainable food systems for all beneficiaries

Supporting communities for longer than 18 months.

Phasing of work to spread activity and build on prior stages.

Focus on reaching harder to engage people.

Connecting beyond England and Wales e.g. EU, rest of the UK.

Thinking about real change, not just quick wins

More consideration of 'what's next'

Welsh Government support eg: access to data, introductions to local authorities

Centering social justice as a priority for selecting beneficiaries.

TABLE 15: Missed opportunities identified by project partners

Opportunities at a programme level were largely missed due to a general lack of capacity within the SF&G team. Most of the team work part time. Increase capacity would have enabled them to be more focused. Another WG-funded project had a 4-day week finance person, which released time for the coordinator to do more coordination. At SF&G, the programme coordinator was also responsible for managing programme finances, which severely reduced capacity for coordination. In general, the team underestimated how much capacity was needed to manage such a large

project team that spans all of Wales. This was also the result of the desire not to appear to be using too high a percentage of project costs on coordination.

Activity around developing and sharing mapped data was more complex and time consuming than anticipated, meaning that the Land Explorer resource was not fully developed by the project end. The work done so far presents a basis to build on in future.

11.5 COORDINATION & DELIVERY

Workstream leads noted that it was significant that partners had existing expertise and networks related to the focus of their delivery. For example, the SFG staff member focused on WS4 already had connections locally so could engage appropriate community groups, and build on support already provided to communities on related initiatives.

It is notable that many project partners had not worked together previously, meaning that they had no established ways of working or relationships. For example, SFG had previously worked with Gwynedd County council, but it was with specific individuals rather than an organisational relationship: *“You have a relationship with those individuals, and those departments, it’s not with the council.”* Part of building successful workstreams was therefore to develop good working relationships with new partners, something that all highlighted as a positive outcome of the project.

Even at a coordination level, there were a number of project partners new to the SFG coordination team. There was a sense that partner organisations were much more connected at the end of the project period; partners know who to speak to and are aware of peoples’ interest, expertise and knowledge. As a team, SFG are also more confident to speak to the different organisations. Previously, they would have written funding bids on their own within the SFG team, whereas now they are more willing to take a joint approach, as they have trust in others and what they do. A challenging mix of workstreams created complications for the coordination team, who were expected to have an overarching view of everything. It was challenging to track all of the project activities with lots of data to manage plus

responsibility to monitor targets, outputs and deliver reporting. This was challenging, particularly as the first time SFG coordinated a pan-Wales project, but it was not unsurmountable.

Partners noted that having the overall project governance managed by the SFG team was invaluable - the communications, finance and project management support provided was important to smaller and less experienced organisations who did not have had the capacity to provide this.

Partners noted that time in online meetings was always constrained, and that there were often many details to cover. This left limited time to explore ideas and potential for connecting workstreams, meaning that partners only truly developed a sense of how synergies could be fostered during the May workshop where there was more space for open exchange and learning:

“In person get togethers made a real difference; they helped build connection, understanding and trust.”

(WS2 partner)

There was limited capacity and expertise to fully develop the mapping activity, and this was not fully embedded across the project from the outset. There is potential to go beyond the basic data input so far, and to make it more shareable. Having limited insight to the nature of GIS on designing the project means SFG could have conceived more appropriate mapping activity.



12.0 CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

Across discussion with project partners and the coordination team the clear message was that delivery was hugely affected by the delayed decision to award funding, especially as this did not come with any extension to the time-scale for delivery. As one partner commented at the evaluation workshop: *“The whole project was less strong because of the funding delay so we missed a good four months of work.”*

Workstreams suffered from shorter periods to deliver the same level of ambition which created pressure on staff and reduced their ability to take time to consider innovation or dimensions beyond the immediate priorities for action. Furthermore, working with nature provided a complicated backdrop which needs to be continuously considered when providing funding and balancing different priorities. Team members found they lacked space to think creatively or to develop a more connected approach.

For workstream teams, a key challenge of being part of a bigger project was lack of capacity and team members being very busy, particularly if working across more than one workstream. This lack of capacity resulting in slower communication was also observed by beneficiaries across workstreams but it was not seen as detrimental to their success. This was noted to put part-time staff under particular strain, and was intensified by the squeezed delivery time-line resulting from the delayed confirmation of project funding. Particular pressure was placed on the SFG team as the organisation most committed to workstream leadership, in addition to overall coordination. Individuals dedicated to multiple workstreams found it particularly challenging, with pressure exacerbated by turnover in personnel and associated loss of capacity.

These first two challenges were possibly heightened by the scale of aspirations set for the project, with some quite ambitious targets and expectations of high levels of impact. These targets were more feasible if the project had been delivered across its originally intended timeframe. But the project plan might also have benefited from greater reflection on the feasibility of its targets, and a more modest scope with respect to inputs. This could have allowed for greater scope for synergies between workstreams.

Partners noted that there could have been further synergies and connections between workstreams, but this was constrained by time. It was also noted that partners gained better awareness of potential for these connections during the in-person workshop in May 2022, which meant delivery was already well underway, with limited time remaining to build on them. One workstream lead noted that there was no clear hierarchy amongst partners working on it, meaning it took some time to establish the best way to cooperate and manage delivery. This was also hampered by partners not always having capacity to devote to the project at key moments for other partners or the beneficiaries.

Certain workstreams had ambitions to engage communities in urban and peri-urban areas which they highlighted as challenging. Several also required engagement with landowners, a target group not many partners had prior expertise with. They found it difficult to attract interest, and found that they needed new insights into how best to appeal to this audience to secure support.

As noted above, a challenge for all projects was that activity and associated support was tied to a specific period of funding. Some partners noted that this presented a potential cliff edge for beneficiaries, who face withdrawal of support in summer 2023:

“The only niggling thing I would feel particularly as somebody new to this project, who hadn’t had support from [SFG] before, I would worry that the support would all be over when the project is over. Because establishing a meadow is a long-term thing that you improve year on year, and you learn with every cycle of the years, so I’d like to know that I can access advice in years to come about continuing and improving it. But I kind of know that I can go down the road and talk to [SFG] any time.”

(WS4 beneficiary 3)

Partners were able to establish some mechanisms to address the impact of this, and some activity will be ongoing. But some of the activity established by the project can only be repeated or extended through further financial support.

The project also faced challenges associated with the nature of life in Wales today, which affected what could be achieved, but is not easily addressed. For example, food hubs found it harder to gain customers during a cost-of-living crisis, when price became a high priority for food purchasing. Trainees involved in WS6 encountered the difficulty of affordable living in rural areas, whilst working in what can be a low-paid sector.

Some partners felt that it would have been desirable to prioritise action to address people most affected by poverty and social exclusion, but this would have entailed a shift in focus, and might have been difficult to achieve through a project of this kind.

As pointed out previously, RGS entailed a heavier administrative burden than was originally planned for. The late sign off compounded this challenge, because it meant that the project went from being a 27-month project to an 18-month project. By the time recruitment is completed, there are only 15 months remaining, which was also challenging from a recruitment perspective. One reflection was that it would have been helpful to have received more guidance from Welsh Government about the amount of core staff time that would be required to coordinate the project (with respect to WG reporting requirements, which were onerous and time-intensive to meet). With everything paid in arrears and the amount of evidence needed for it (and the time required to gather that evidence), less time was available to spend on other coordination activities. Paying partners in arrears also generated stress, as it meant that there were several months, particularly at the project outset, when partners were not being paid for their work on the project.

As the project evolved, it became apparent that communicating its action and achievements would be an important mechanism for stimulating wider change. However, associated capacity and expertise within each partner was limited, as was capacity within SFG to lead on communications. Had these been a stronger feature in the original project design, this potential might have been realised.

Mapping should be wider than just a project in order to provide a legacy and wider use opportunities therefore collaboration with other projects at a pan-Wales and wider level is really useful. Networks exist already and these should be enhanced and supported. A major ongoing point for discussion is about how content is added - do we allow public editing access or do we restrict - both have positive and negative points.

12.1 LESSONS & LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

One aim of the evaluation was to understand how benefits achieved through the project could be extended over time and space. Some workstreams were intended to pilot approaches that might be rolled out across Wales or elsewhere. There was consensus that the project’s successes warranted follow-on funding to allow continuation and expansion of its activity. Others identified ways in which activity could be scaled up, or in other ways extended beyond the project period. Some partners expect to replicate the activity tested during the project:

“I sincerely hope that we will be in a position to carry on and replicate many of the ideas and themes that have been highlighted and promoted over the duration of our partnership.”

(WS4 partner)

This is likely more straight forward for bodies like a local authority, which receives ongoing funding for statutory responsibilities. For example, Gwynedd County Council noted that their duties

and climate emergency priorities support continuation of work to greening the public estate. However, they are aware that in the past such activity has not been prioritised during financial constraints. Other partners are not in a position to continue delivering unless they receive dedicated funding to staff activities. WS2 partners applied for funding to replicate the model for supporting food hubs in England, but have not yet secured funding.

Most partners noted that a key legacy from the project will be the learning which they have gained, and will apply in future. This included issues-based insights, and more general skills such as effective project development. For example, SFG advice has typically focused on food growing, but through WS4 they have developed knowledge on management for pollinators. They hope to share this across staff *“So that we can help people manage greenspaces for nature as well as for food growing more effectively”* (WS4 lead).

Partners highlighted potential to continue cooperating, and expect to do so in future. The networks and relationships established through the project, particularly between partners, will continue and act as a source of information, ideas, and collaboration. SFG staff noted the benefit of now being more aware of what other organisations do, their interests. They are already planning further cooperation with DTA, and are exploring with Shared Assets how to replicate the CLAS service in other parts of the UK. The team noted that such cooperations were facilitated by having better understanding of each partners different strengths, which also reduces the risk of competing for similar opportunities. SF&G will look to continue to support horticultural skills and training, and collaborating with other organisations in this space, but also backing off where other partners already have it covered.

The OFN team suggested similar benefits, and expects to remain in contact with other partners. There is potential to build on relationships established through the project: *“Being mindful and aware of what everybody does”* means they know how they could respond to opportunities and cooperate in future. *“We know we can work with them and it works well”* (WS2 Lead).

However, ongoing collaboration faces practical constraints:

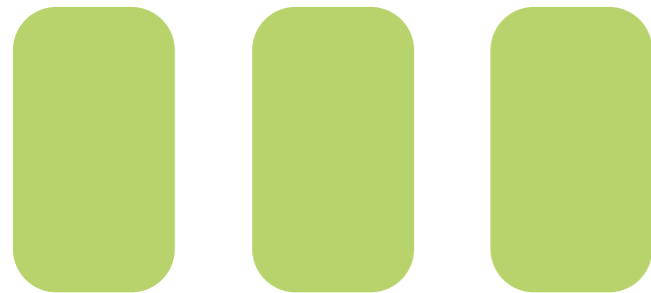
“The one thing I can envisage at the moment is the lack of time on preparation of funding bids: most of the time the turn-round is very tight and proper involvement of multiple partners can be difficult. However, if you know and trust partners (on both sides) this can often be resolved at a later stage.”

(WS2 partner)

One partner commented that there are grounds for further partnership projects building on this one, but noted that this is only realistic if driven by a specific goal.

Partners highlighted some factors which limited potential to further project benefits, or to build on its legacy. For example, the funded land purchases will not be in place until close to the project end, meaning limited potential to support them beyond the point of acquisition; ideally they would provide ongoing mentoring.

There were various ways in which partners felt the projects’ outcomes could be extended, providing suitable support were made available. Longer-term investment would enable greater focus on targeting individuals or communities “not on a ‘local food’ journey”, for example. It could also enable replication and expansion of activity delivered on a small scale, for example community land purchases. There is potential to continue enhancing and using shared mapping based on the resource established by the project. However, this will require partners to have capacity to dedicate to data sharing, and that they have necessary understanding of how they can use the mapping. It will also require a decision as to whether the map becomes fully open access, or remains open to data from the partners only.



In order to develop a legacy from the project, the partners expect to continue their collective working. They intend to identify opportunities for specific partnerships and collaborations building on the relationships established through the project. This is likely to include joint funding applications. Partners also expect to continue engaging in networking activity, such as webinars and sign-posting information and opportunities to each other. Further cooperation, which will enhance the project legacy, is proposed including communication and promotion activity. One partner described the project’s legacy in terms of the fruit which become the seeds - models of each workstream - with the partnership supporting others to allow them to flourish.

Other factors suggested for furthering the project’s progress and support scaling included:

- Changes in UK and Welsh policy to support horticulture
- Making local and national governments aware of project outcomes
- Use evidence from this project to support funding applications
- Welsh Government funding to favour collective partnerships over competition between organisations
- Welsh Government connecting ENRAW funded projects to share learning and build synergies
- Reaching out to other UK networks, and
- Developing interventions to address gaps in activity highlighted by the project

Discussion highlighted that such a partnership approach is relatively unusual. Having demonstrated its potential, partners suggested that it would be advantageous for Welsh Government to invite organisations to form partnerships to address specific problems, then facilitate them collaborating on a proposal. This would enable organisations with limited capacity to be involved in developing proposals, and may be a more efficient way to allocate public funds.



13.0 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Resilient Green Spaces project has achieved wide-ranging benefits for communities and environments around Wales, whilst enhancing food systems with an emphasis on local production and agro-ecological farming. The diversity of activities and approaches has enabled broad impacts, whilst demonstrating the value of multiple mechanisms for engaging communities with greenspaces. Communities engaged through the workstreams have developed confidence and skills required to enable them to initiate change in future. Many of these have clear potential to be implemented more widely, around Wales and beyond. The partners involved have gained new expertise and insights which will enhance their future work, and provides a strong basis for building on this project's legacy.

The project's scale and ambition challenged those involved, and may have stretched some beyond what was comfortably feasible for a project of this nature, and the level of funding. This was made more challenging by delays to project commencement caused by processes beyond the partners' control. The scale of the cooperation resulted in a volume of coordination and administration which was greater than anticipated, sometimes exacerbated by natural staff turnover. The funders' requirements for detailed reporting and very specific financial processes also absorbed considerable capacity, and created some frustration.

The project's ambition did provide momentum, and enabled connections between strands of activity and previously disconnected stakeholders. As a collaboration between organisations with aligned interests and a common agenda, the partnership presented many features known to enhance the prospects of collective impact. SFG as project co-ordinator acted as a backbone organisation encouraging continuous

communication; evaluation planning across delivery developed a shared measurement framework. The workstreams delivered mutually reinforcing activities, with the partnership recognising how they can combine to shape community food systems.

Where synergies resulted, collective impact increased the project's overall effect, particularly for communities who gained multi-faceted support. The time frame for action was relatively short when seeking to change complex issues like food systems, but the project has established foundations that can be built on to further its collective impact. To capitalise on the many potential legacies which would contribute to such change will only be possible through continued support for key functions and coordination, and to share learning more widely.

In retrospect, partners can identify how plans should have been amended to improve feasibility and synergies, but this was unknown during project design. There were also examples of goals and approach being flexed in response to changing circumstances or emerging needs, for example altering the process for land purchase, demonstrating a level of responsiveness and agility.

There were both advantages and disadvantages of working across Wales within workstreams, and as a partnership. Some geographic focusing of delivery might have fostered further synergies, allowing communities to link action on multiple parts of the food system or types of green space. However, offering support nationally was more inclusive. Logistical arrangements for partnership working become easier when organisations are located near each other, but a UK-wide scope embraced a broader range of expertise.

Several workstreams have established tangible assets which will act as an enduring legacy, particularly where the project invested in capital assets such as land, trees, digital solutions, and equipment. Similarly, the project has enabled many intangible assets, such as making community groups more resilient and creating relationships between different stakeholders that may enable future learning and support. Many of the community groups that were enabled to manage greenspaces are expected to continue doing so beyond the project end. Several of the partner organisations will provide ongoing support to such action through their core operations, or through sharing resources created by the project. But it is unlikely that all activity initiated with project support can continue, for example networks which may not function without facilitation and leadership. Goals such as changing a local authority mowing regime have been achieved, so do not require ongoing activity.

The clearest limitation of the project is that it was funded for a specified period, supporting time-bound activity. Partners noted that due to the delayed start, the project was beginning to wind-up just as their action was really gaining momentum. In some cases, it was possible to flex plans in response to the changed timeframe, but this was not always possible, particularly for activities like tree planting which are seasonally dependent.



Learning from this project is likely to be of interest to a range of stakeholders, community groups, and decision makers. There is clear merit in the partners continuing to communicate widely what the project has achieved, how, and how successes can be replicated. The project has piloted a range of approaches suitable for wider implementation and policy support. Partners have already been working to identify external conditions such as policy development which align with the project's goals, presenting opportunities to develop activity based on learning from the workstreams.

Based on the insights presented here, and evaluation across the project, the evaluation team would highlight lessons for the project partners to consider in relation to future activity and project development:



- 1** Draw on learning from across the project as evidence of what works, and of how the activities piloted could be adapted to respond to emerging needs.
- 2** Continue delivering 'a whole package' approach to working with communities, including funding, information and advice, offering flexible support tailored to beneficiaries' needs.
- 3** Make generous rather than conservative estimates of staff capacity required to deliver ambitious, complex projects and to administer large partnerships.
- 4** Dedicate time and capacity within partnership projects for activity to build relationships between partners, and for them to exchange learning.
- 5** For large partnerships, plan for face-to-face meetings with space to talk, particularly for organisations working together for the first time.
- 6** Plan for action focused on securing land for community ownership to be slow and for beneficiaries to require ongoing support.
- 7** Consider how to balance the accessibility of a Wales-wide approach, with the potential for synergies and more efficient working through focusing on specific geographic areas.

The evaluation also suggests how Welsh Government, as the body which awarded and administered the grant to this project, could enhance similar programmes in future:

- 1** Consider potential to support replication and continuation of workstream activities shown to be effective across this project.
- 2** Expedite funding decisions quickly; allow additional time for delivery following delayed decisions.
- 3** Simplify claims processes and provide a single point of contact for funded projects.
- 4** Support activity to disseminate information on what worked in the piloted activities, and how they can be adapted to other places.
- 5** Advise applicants on an appropriate balance between ambition, risk, and feasibility, especially in light of the coordination required for complex partnership projects.
- 6** Foster collaborative approaches where organisations have potential to cooperate on complex problems and connected solutions; enable cooperative rather than competitive applications for public funding.

