

Regenerate NPT: Project Closure Report



Project Organisation: Crynant Community Council

Project Name: Crynant Community Forest (Exploring the Forest)

Project Start Date: 1st June 2021 Project End Date: 31st January 2022

Date of Report: 1st Feb 2022

Attached Documents List:

Completed Map panel for Entrance,

Frog sculpture,

Mole sculpture

Polecat bench sculpture,

Nightjar evening Walk

Wildflower walk

Crynant Scout Walk

WI Walk

There is a mandatory requirement to complete this document at Project Closure. The purpose of the report is to provide a project level document evidencing how well the project has performed against the original Business Plan delivered by the Local Partnership and Local Action Group during the lifetime of the project, and how it has contributed to the aims and objectives of the Local Partnership's Local Development Strategy. Project performance against the planned/approved costs, delivery timescales and Key Performance indicators will also be detailed. **Please try and keep within the maximum word count.**

1. Background: (briefly detail the background to the Project – 250 max)

Crynant Community Council entered in to a 5 Year 'Woodland and You' agreement in 2019 with the Forestry Section of NRW. The intention was to develop the walks in the Crynant Forest for the benefit of members of our community and improve the environment. The first Phase of the project was funded jointly with NRW and was an overwhelming success. On one Sunday afternoon alone, some 83 people were counted walking the Forest tracks to visit the chainsaw sculptures, read the information panels and take in the views. The Facebook page proved very popular and there was definitely a wish from the community to develop the project beyond Phase 1. Hence the Leader application!

The aim is to continue encouraging our residents to walk, experiencing all the physical and mental health benefits that exercise brings while exploring the forest further to discover and understand the biodiversity that lives here on our doorstep. It is felt that it is critical that people experience nature first hand if they are to understand their local biodiversity and can then start to care for it and reverse the negative threats our wildlife face. The project is hopefully engendering a feeling of ownership and empathy for our local environment and fostering the wish to actively look after it while also improving individuals' health.

2. Project Outcomes as per application

Was this achieved? What supporting evidence is there of achievement? If not achieved, why not?

<p>To discover and understand more about the local wildlife that lives in and around the forest. Bat walks, a nightjar watch, a flowering plant walk and a fungi forage. Setting up wildlife camera traps to take footage of the mammals that live there</p>	<p>The guided walks were very successful, with positive interactions and comments during the days and follow up compliments on social media with requests for more .We were lucky to have such knowledgeable experts leading these. The Nightjar evening walkers experienced several Nightjars churring and visual sightings of 5 really close by. This was special. The wildflower and fungi walks were also really interesting and people were astonished at the range of plants on our doorstep.</p> <p>The preparatory bat surveys discovered only a handful of individuals foraging in the forest and so the bat walks were moved down to the river Dulais where the Crynant Scouts picked up lots of bat activity with the detectors.</p> <p>The mammal camera traps are still waiting on better weather conditions for deployment.</p> <p>See photos for evidence</p>
<p>To explore further into the forest path network. This will be achieved by providing detailed maps and increasing the signposting, seats, and chainsaw sculptures on additional routes.</p>	<p>New map panels have been produced for each of the 2 entrances and some additional signposts added. Three more benches have been installed and the new sculptures of local wildlife installed, namely frog, mole and polecat. A fox sculpture has also been installed under sponsorship of the local Tegfan company. The response on social media to each installation has been immediate with people challenging to be the first to find and photograph them.</p>
<p>To provide opportunities for volunteering, working on the infrastructure of the forest, surveying local mammal populations and also the creation of a large bird feeding station where volunteers can observe and care daily for the local wild bird population.</p>	<p>We have had 6 volunteers working purely on the installation of the sculptures and benches while 3 more also attended the walks. We have 4 further volunteers who fill the bird feeders and bird table on a weekly rota. The 2 leaders of the walks provided their expertise on a purely voluntary basis. The 2 Scout leaders are helping run the ongoing bat project on a voluntary basis. (Half of these volunteers do not appear in the numbers for the performance Indicators as they have not returned volunteers registration forms) See photos for evidence</p>
<p>To help support people’s mental health and wellbeing giving them a sense of identity and belonging, a place where people can sit and recharge which is crucial after the consequences of the pandemic.</p>	<p>The posts on social media strongly suggest that this has been achieved. In addition one of the groups engaged in the walks is Cwm Ni Iach which supports people with mental health issues in our valley. For evidence see e-mail and social media postings.</p>
<p>3. Strategic Achievements: (outline what the project has achieved in terms of alignment with LEADER Themes and Priorities and any contribution to national strategies - 300 max)</p>	
<p>Theme: 1</p>	<p>Priority: Green NPT & Vibrant NP</p>

The project aligned to LEADER Theme 1 by encouraging the local community to become actively involved in improving their local environment in the Community Forest, through volunteering to maintain and sustain the biodiversity of this green treasure. Through the installation of benches, sculptures of animals that inhabit the forest and the creation of a bird feeding station, residents are able to feed and watch local bird and wildlife in this natural space. Community facilities that jointly enhance the forest environment and improve the wellbeing of residents, walkers and resident users. Community led walks by nature experts have enabled residents to increase their knowledge, experience and see the fauna and flora on their local doorstep. Enabling residents and volunteers in turn to conserve and protect this much loved green haven. Strategic linkage to the green NPT ensures that the area is protected for future generations to enjoy and use. Allowing the Community Forest to be vibrant, well used by residents, enhancing the image of Crynant as a green, nurturing and resilient rural community.

4. With regards to your comments at application stage, how have you managed this project in terms of sustainability? (What plans have been put in place to maintain the project once it is completed? 400 words max)

The paths and infrastructure, namely benches, signage and sculptures will remain for the long term.

We have a volunteer who applies Danish oil to each of the sculptures every 6 months to preserve them.

The benches are made from recycled silage bag plastic and are guaranteed for 10 years, requiring no maintenance.

The facebook page is managed by a local volunteer who is happy to continue longterm and regularly put out snippets of interest to encourage residents to keep walking.

The two experts who led the bird and plant walks have already committed to repeat them this coming season. It is the intention to find further volunteer walk leaders with different expertise.

The Glamorgan Bat group has given commitment to continue support to develop the Bat surveys with the Scout Group after the spring.

The Camera traps will be used regularly in the Forest hopefully in conjunction with the Youth Club and the footage shown on screens in the Community Centre. If the youth Club are not able to commit long term then some of the adult volunteers have already expressed an interest in taking this forward. Footage will also be aired on the Facebook page.

The NRW Forestry Dept undertake an annual flail of the paths to prevent them overgrowing for their access purposes so they will always be maintained.

“Woodland and You” agreement we have with NRW still has 2 more years to run and hopefully they will allow us to extend it. Our long term ambition is to get Crynant East Forest and Hir Fynnydd included in the National Forest for Wales.

5. Project Beneficiaries:

The project is well known in our community and across the Dulais Valley enhanced by the Crynant Community Forest Facebook page where locals are encouraged to add their own photos to our gallery. It has engendered a feeling of pride as it has been shared across social media attracting walkers, cyclists and horse riders from as far away as Llanelli. They have unanimously given positive comment.

It has appealed to all age groups, partly for the health benefits of getting out in the fresh air exercising and enjoying the peace of our beautiful valley but also from learning about the wildlife on our doorstep. This in turn should lead to benefits for local wildlife eg the bird feeding station is encouraging people to feed birds in their own gardens.

6. Cross Cutting Themes: If relevant, briefly describe how your project contributed to the following themes:

Equal Opportunities:

The project is available to everyone, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity and it is our experience that all sectors have engaged. The group we were concerned for were those with mobility issues. To address this we have copies of each of the information panels on the walls and will be displaying the wildlife camera footage on our screens in the Community Centre. The Centre has good disabled access. In addition the main Forestry gate is wheelchair accessible. All information for the project has been produced bilingually.

Sustainable Development including Economic, Environmental and Social

All purchases for the project have been made in line with our sustainability policy. The benches are made from recycled silage bags and manufactured near Pontardawe less than 10 miles away. The chainsaw sculptures are carved by 2 local craftsmen who live within 5 miles using locally sourced logs where possible. The bird feeding station materials were purchased via the local agricultural stores 5 miles away who kindly donated sacks of wild bird food to the project. The business who provided the digger for installation is from our village as was its driver. The private sponsor for our Fox carving is from the neighbouring village of Seven Sisters.

Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion

The beauty of this project is there is no financial aspect to getting involved. It is on people's doorstep so there is no transport requirement either. There is no requirement to be part of a group, but the opportunity is there to visit or take part with others. The opportunities for volunteering have already brought in individuals who are finding social inclusion difficult.

7. Conclusion Summary: Please provide a summary on the project's performance, identifying any key issues that need to be addressed:

a) Summary

We feel the project is a great success and this is reinforced by the positive and enthusiastic feedback we are getting from the local and wider community.

b) Key Issues

All aspects of the project that were detailed in the original application have been achieved. Support for the various elements has come willingly without having to cajole or chase. The enthusiasm for the project is inspiring us to continue and build on this success.

c) What went well?

The enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers. The quality of the local purchases and services we received and the help and sponsorship of local businesses. Most of all the positive feedback from the members of our community who are visiting the project regularly and caring for it.

d) What didn't go well?

The relationship with the Forestry Section of NRW has not been helpful or supportive. Although the Community Council has taken out additional insurance to cover our activities in the Forest NRW are insisting that we fill in online request forms every time we wish to arrange a walk **12 weeks in advance**. This lack of flexibility is why only 3 walks were arranged during the project. We have had only one Teams meeting with our contact officer 8 months ago and have had no response to the questions we raised such as whether the Crynant East Forest could be put forward as part of the National Forest for Wales, or whether we could be involved in the future design of the Forest. When we asked if they were happy with what we'd put in place in the forest they said they'd let us know if anything was not up to standard. We haven't heard any more. So disappointing!

e) What could have been done differently?

Ideally we would have liked a longer time frame to carry out the project elements. There have been delays due to covid affecting key individuals in the project and spells of bad weather. A longer timeframe would have eased the pressure.

8. TO BE COMPLETED BY LEAD BODY:

Project Performance – Financial & Indicator Achievements: (detailed performance against approved timescales and budget expectation, including reasons for all variances)

a) Performance indicator achievement against targets approved: Final position:

PI Reference	Approved Target	Total Achieved	Justification for underachievement	How has achievement been evidenced
LD.CL.006	Number of Information dissemination actions/promotional and/or marketing activities to raise awareness of the LDS			
	8	9		Social media postings and maps
LD.CL.007	Number of stakeholders engaged			
	8	8		Emails, Walks, Meetings
LD.C.L008	Number of Participants supported			

	60	53		walk attendees and registered volunteers
NPT01	Number of communities engaged			
	3	3		Signing sheets, groups, stakeholders
NPT02	Number of groups engaged			
	3	3		Attendance sheets, Emails, stakeholders
NPT03	Number of children and young people participating in the project			
	20	17		Attendance sheets
NPT04	Number of Women participating in the project			
	30	25		Attendance sheets
NPT05	Number of Welsh speakers participating in the project			
	10	23		Attendance sheets
NPT06	Number of older people participating in the project			
	30	22		Attendance sheets
NPT07	Number of individuals with disabilities participating in the project			
	2	0	Did not obtain evidence	
NPT08	Number of projects aimed at environmental enhancement/sustainability			
	3	3		Statement: 1. Install Bird Feeding Station to engage Volunteers and users of the forest to observe and record bird life species in the forest. 2. Provide environmental chainsaw art sculptures of indigenous animals at strategic points along the forest walk for residents. 3. Use environmentally sustainable products, with forest benches comprised of recycled silage bags.
b) Pilot Activities/Projects: Outlining all of the stages and activities, including the timelines. To promote externally and link to the Wales Rural Network Website. Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable for this project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X				
c) Feasibility Studies: To promote externally and link to the Wales Rural Network Website. Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable for this project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X				

d) Project Closure Financial Position against original approved: (following final claim)

Timescales	Original Approved		Adjusted Approved	Final Closure Date
	From	To	31.01.2022	31.01.2022
	01.06.2021	31.12.2021		

e) Summary of Financial Performance

		Original Approved	Adjusted Approved	Final Claim
Total Project Costs		£9,394.50		£9,634.00
RDP Funding		£7,091.00		£7,707.00
Levered Funding		£2,303.50		£1,927.00
Intervention Rates	% RDP	75%		80%
	% Match	25%		20%
		Cost Heading	Justification for under/overspend	
Under/overspend				

9. Handover contact details: For post project monitoring and evaluation activities, Welsh Government will require contact details of staff who may be able to provide assistance.

Name: _____ **Designation:** _____
Email: _____ **Telephone:** _____
Website address: _____
Facebook page: _____

Document Retention Procedures: Documents (which includes all evidence relating to your project) must be retained in a suitable format for a period of 10 years following the end of the current LEADER programme – this means at least until 2031.

Signed: Suzanne Waldron
 (Project Lead)

Date: Feb 24th 2022

Signed: N.S.Bray
 (RDP Manager – Lead Body)

Date: 28th February 2022

Post Project Activities by the Local Partnerships and Local Action Group:
Define what activities need to be undertaken by the Lead Body after the project has been closed
include any post project follow up actions which may need to be undertaken following project
closure:

Completed PCR to be forwarded to LAG & WRN