

Where the Wild Things Are

Project Title:	RDP013: Where the Wild Things Are		
Delivered by	Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust		
Start date:	22/08/2016	End Date:	31/03/2020
LEADER Theme:	1 - Adding Value to Local Identity and Natural and Cultural Resources		

Total Expenditure:	£67,189.83
RDP Funding:	£51,352.88
Match funding:	£15,836.95

1. Introduction

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are sites of substantive nature conservation value. They are the most important places for wildlife outside statutory designated sites and the linkages they provide in a local context, are of vital importance to the whole biodiversity resource within a given area. The origins of biological Local Sites systems stretch back to the 1970s, when wildlife trusts in the UK wished to protect and encourage the management of the whole biodiversity resource within a given local government area. The idea behind this was to provide an inclusive system of sites to support and re-enforce the features of statutory designated sites.

There has been a LWS system in Powys since 1999, although many sites of value for wildlife were identified and listed on a register as early as the mid-1980s. As the criteria approached their 20th anniversary, it was time they were reviewed, to be brought in line with modern policy and strategy. Following the production of the 1999 system, the amount of work done on LWS varied across Powys; as the system relied almost primarily on the wildlife trusts for implementation, this was impacted by resources and capacity. Some minor reviews of the criteria were completed in some vice counties, but not others. Despite being part of the Powys planning system for 20 years, a lack of resources and awareness has often resulted in the statutory protection policies required to ensure long term resilience of the LWS network being inconsistently and inadequately applied. It was time to bring it all together, across Powys once again.

Being privately owned, the LWS system has always focussed on simply identifying and selecting sites and working with their owners/managers to ensure good habitat management. Given the increasing challenges from climate change, development, agricultural intensification and so on, leading to continued biodiversity losses and ecosystem collapses, it is time for new ways of thinking to increase ecological resilience. People are the problem, but they are also the solution. It was time to engage with and inform the people of Powys about these special, often unnoticed wild places which surround them, giving them a reason to leave their living rooms and step into a whole new world often just round the corner or down the street; the 'Where the Wild Things Are' project was born.

2. Challenge

The Local Wildlife Sites network has been a part of the Powys planning system for over 20 years, but a lack of resources and awareness has often resulted in the statutory protection policies required to ensure long term resilience of this network being inconsistently and inadequately applied.

Despite statutory protections and the importance of this network to the people and wildlife of Powys, LWS are under threat like never before. The long term pattern of mismanagement threatens the future of this vital natural asset for people and wildlife.

This is a pattern reflected across the whole of the UK. The State of Nature reports have revealed that more than one in ten of all the species assessed are under threat of disappearing altogether.

The wealth of Wales is based in the natural environment which when robust and resilient supports the delivery of a range of natural services upon which the local community depends (e.g. access, tourism, health and well-being). The valuation of these 'ecosystem services (ESS)' from both an intrinsic and monetary perspective is emerging as fundamental to the future of the rural economy.

3. Solution

The Where the Wild Things Are project aimed start to address these challenges, through the following objectives:

- Overhauling the existing system by which LWS are assessed and selected to ensure that this process is easily workable and fully embedded within the planning system into the future
- Building a legacy of supportive community ownership and engagement with Powys' LWS by providing people with volunteering opportunities which will improve their local area for the benefit of people and wildlife
- Developing and implementing LWS survey and sustainable land management methodologies suitable for landowners, farmers, and volunteers
- Supporting enhanced access to existing and future LWS to ensure maximum health and well-being gains for local people
- 'Valuing' the role that the LWS network plays in the health and well-being of our social and ecological communities
- Utilize existing and novel digital media platforms to expand community awareness of and access to the LWS network

4. Benefit

The previous Powys LWS criteria is now 20 years old and has failed to protect against the loss of LWS in the past. Reviewing the criteria was the most critical step for addressing the policy and planning challenges for LWS. By making a system which is easy to use and fully embedded within the planning system into the future, the level of protection LWS receive would be strengthened. The project Steering Group network was a key element to ensuring the review was undertaken in an efficient and robust manner.



People are the problem, but there are also the solution. The Where the Wild Things Are project sought to work with a broad range of people to address the challenges. Volunteers were key to the delivery of the project and also key stakeholders. Throughout the project, we sought opportunities to work with a range of communities.

Sites cannot be assessed as LWS without recent biological data, details of habitats and species present. Surveys must be carried out and these involved volunteers and landowners wherever possible, providing training opportunities, access to otherwise inaccessible sites and free advice. Building on this initial contact was the development of landowner networks, for individuals to meet like-minded people, share ideas and help each other out.

LWS are usually privately owned and their status does not confer any additional access rights. The Where the Wild Things Are project sought to test whether enhanced access could be facilitated and we identified two pilot activities on this theme.

In order to value LWS for the ecosystem services they provide, we made use of the most up to date, recognised tool - 'Enabling a Natural Capital Approach' (ENCA). To promote that value, we sought opportunities to engage with policy makers and Local Authority.

The Where the Wild Things Are project made use of the three Powys wildlife trusts existing websites and social media platforms to raise awareness of LWS and the project.

5. Result

Against the project objectives, the following was achieved:

- The production of a new Powys LWS criteria, completed in January 2020 – designed to be easy to use, but still working on embedding in the Powys planning system;
- 69 individual volunteers, contributed over 1,000 hours of their time, valued at nearly £15,000;
- 25 events run;
- 199 surveys completed;
- Data collated on 300 sites;
- Responded to 5 consultations, promoting LWS;
- Undertaken an 'Enabling a Natural Capital Approach' (ENCA) assessment on LWS;
- Reached an average of 652 people per post on Facebook and 1,454 per tweet on Twitter, raising awareness of LWS.

Networks Established:

1. Steering Group
2. Montgomeryshire landowner group
3. Brecon local group

Pilot activities:

1. Local Wildlife Sites: a material consideration in Local Authority planning process - investigated whether a site could be protected from potentially harmful development in this way. Initial results were positive, although the case we followed is currently under appeal.
2. Burial grounds as Local Wildlife Sites - Given the location of burial grounds, usually in the heart of the community, as well as their value for wildlife, they represent the perfect opportunity for achieving enhanced access for health and well-being. Despite the challenges of working with a broad range of interests, our initial results have been very positive. It is likely that, to really make a lasting impact, we would need to work with each burial ground



over a number of years, to help develop new relationships, policies and processes, for managing these sites optimally for nature and engaging local people with those sites.

3. Local Wildlife Sites as a venue for educational delivery - Having initially identified a suitable site and owner in which to test the educational opportunities pilot activity quite easily, it has proven much harder to link them with one or more educational establishments. Communication has proven to be the main barrier, with the majority remaining unresponsive to our communication attempts. Even where we had a warm contact who was broadly positive, it was very difficult to communicate with the individual. By working with a neighbour of our site owner, who had a child in the scout group, we were able to move things forward, but by then had run out of time to arrange a meeting. We are broadly optimistic that, given more time, a link could have been made.

Stakeholders engaged: 95, comprising Steering Group members, volunteers, landowners/managers.

Participants supported: 239, at events and talks.

Jobs created: 1FTE Project Coordinator post.

Communities benefitting:

1. Newtown community
2. Hyssington Church community
3. Biological recording community
4. Volunteering community
5. Smallholding community

Benefits to these communities identified as:

- Opportunity to visit private sites not otherwise accessible
- Meeting like-minded people
- Sharing skills with others
- Enthused to start their own projects
- Improve computer skills
- Free access to information, including habitat management advice
- Greater understanding of the breadth of biodiversity on land
- Support for events
- Information on the importance of welsh wildlife & sites
- Increased knowledge of the distribution of flora & fauna in Powys
- Support with working with less engaged members of the community
- Reinforced messages provided by others

Businesses benefitting:

The original target for businesses benefitting were farm businesses, but we were unable to obtain evidence from any farm businesses to prove this engagement.



6. Project Outputs/Outcomes

Output (Case Level Indicator)	Agreed	Achieved
No. of feasibility studies	0	
No. of networks established	3	3
No. of jobs safeguarded	0	
No. Of pilot activities undertaken / supported	3	3
No. of community hubs created	0	
No. of stakeholders engaged	500	19
No. of participants supported (awareness raising events only)	60	256
Outcomes		
No. of jobs created	1 FTE	1
No. of communities benefitting	6	6
No. of businesses benefitting	12	3

7. Project Contact Details

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8. Partners/Match Funders Logos



Sir Faesyfed
Radnorshire



South and West Wales
De a Goglewin Cymru
Brecknock

Date Case Study Completed:	31/03/2020
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