

Blaen Bran Community Woodland

Well-being goal



Ways of working



Blaen Bran Community Woodland spans over 100 acres in Torfaen and is managed by the Blaen Bran Community Woodland Trust (BBCWT). The woodland connects to Mynydd Maen common land and walking trails linking Twmbarlum Mountain, Cwmcarn Forest Drive and Pontymoile.

Under a number of private ownerships, the land had been planted with a mix of Japanese Larch and Scots Pine, providing little biodiversity value, with pathways and tracks lined with Beech. The area had also long suffered from the impacts of anti-social behaviour, with deliberate fire damage, littering and damage from motorbikes.

In 2003, as a response to strong, local desire to see the woodlands restored, the Trust took over the existing 999-year lease with the responsibility for maintaining access, improving footpaths and signage, and engaging with the community.

An environmental survey was undertaken in 2005 to understand the existing biodiversity of the woodland and the issues it faced. As a result of this, the Trust undertook a series of projects to remove diseased and dying trees and replant the woodland with a mix of native species, including oak, cherry and alder.

The Trust agreed to reduce vandalism though a sense of ownership with the local community by engaging with young people, encouraging group membership and holding community events such as history walks, wildflower walks, foraging events and picnics.

The Community Woodlands grant funding awarded by NLHF, via TfW, was instrumental in further improving the accessibility and safety of the woodland paths. The project was split into three phases:

Phase 1 saw the restoration of the track and stairs to the arboretum. The existing stairs had worn down and become unsafe, so the treads were dug out, replaced and backfilled to improve the accessibility. The side paths were also reinstated, and drainage channels dug to prevent waterlogging, whilst also channelling run-off into the arboretum, maintaining a wet environment to support the native willow trees.

“

It was the desire of the group to have Blaen Bran as an attractive woodland area free from degradation that would draw many to become involved and for local people in Upper Cwmbran to view the wood as ‘their’ space.

”

Key words: Community Woodlands, grant funded projects, National Lottery Heritage Fund, woodland management and restoration, accessible green space, community engagement, future generations, partnerships, sustainable impact



Phase 2 comprised extensive drainage work and the reinstatement of paths throughout the woodland, ensuring better connectivity to the hiking routes in the hills beyond. A bridge was built across the stream using woodland materials where possible, and collection ponds were excavated to prevent future flooding.



Phase 3 restored the main track through the woodland with hardcore which allows full access to mobility aided visitors and emergency services, from the lower carpark to the highest point of the site.



The funding was also used to future-proof the works undertaken by providing equipment and training to eight volunteers to continue the care of the woodland.

Engagement with the local community is also vital to the health of the woodland by raising awareness of the importance of environmental stewardship.



“
The project has improved community access and involvement, increased the skill base of volunteers and provided additional equipment for woodland management and development
”