

Friends of Parc Nant-y-Waun Blaenau Gwent, South Wales

Woodland and greenspace regeneration by community group on 22 ha of former iron works in Local Authority ownership

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

This case study is one of a set written as part of a Forest Research project. Some case studies are written by the community group, others by researchers who visited and interviewed group members, but they have all been validated and endorsed by the community groups.

Forest Research developed a standard method for describing the case studies, outlined in Lawrence and Ambrose-Oji, 2013 “A framework for sharing experiences of community woodland groups” Forestry Commission Research Note 15 (available from www.forestry.gov.uk/publications).

The case study comprises three parts:

1. The **Group Profile** provides essential information about the form and function of the community woodland group. Profiles were prepared following the methodology
2. The **Change Narrative** which documents key moments in the evolution of the community woodland group with a particular focus on the evolution of engagement and empowerment
3. The **Engagement and Impacts Timeline** documents milestones in the development of the community woodland group, its woodland and any assumed or evidenced impacts.

The case studies collectively provide a resource which documents the diversity and evolution of community woodland groups across Scotland, Wales and England. The method ensures that the case studies are consistent and can be compared with each other. We welcome further case studies to add to this growing resource.

For further information, and for the detailed case study method, please contact:

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1. Group profile

Woodland: Parc Nant-Y-Waun, Nantyglo, Beaufort and Brynmawr, Blaenau Gwent

Map ref: SO 180 114

Webpage: <http://parcnantywaun.org.uk/#/home/4569147753>

Date of profile: 4th December 2012

Resources: Forestry Commission Wales case study 2010, site visit, interviews, forest management plan

1. Institutional context (in December 2012)

1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)	<p>The area that has been planted up to woodland and is managed by the group is on land owned by the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. Friends of Parc Nant-y-Waun (FoPNYW) has a formal management agreement with the LA outlining the scope of their involvement.</p> <p>The Beaufort Woodlands are a separate holding close by Parc Nant-y-Waun. They are a 'sister group'.</p> <p>Classification of tenure: Formal agreement (public)</p>
1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)	<p>The general public have access rights to the area, and FoPNYW encourage access by the public. There is a disused reservoir which has been stocked with fish, and the local angling club hold the rights to fish here as well as a set of keys to the gates around the park and the car park next to the 'lake'.</p> <p>The issue of access to woodland resources is not likely to emerge on this urban regeneration site.</p>
1.3 Regulations/responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)	<p>Terms of the various grants provided for works, most particularly the Cydcoed grant management plan. These place obligations on FoPNYW in terms of on-going maintenance and replanting in the case of failed trees. There are also H&S issues around the infrastructure such as footbridges. FoPNYW is responsible for these and uses a contractor to</p>

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

	<p>undertake these works and maintenance tasks.</p> <p>The local authority (LA) as the landowner retains some public liability responsibilities. As such, the LA takes on some of the on-going maintenance tasks on behalf of the group, not only on the land surrounding the Parc but also alongside footpaths in the Parc (e.g., bramble bashing).</p>
<p>2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise</p>	
<p>2.1 Group members, representation and decision making</p>	<p>Anybody in the local area with an interest in the Parc is encouraged to join. Membership has reached around 100 members. The members are drawn from the 3 communities (Brynmawr, Nantyglo & Beaufort) which surround the Parc, and it is felt that whilst most members are fairly dormant, the Directors who make decisions do represent a wide cross section of users and potential users of the Parc including older people, interest groups, and people with professional interests. The 'community' in this case is made up of those people who live around, or close to, the Parc and have an interest in using it. The anglers are a group who may have one or two members who come from further afield. By and large this community group sees itself as a community of place.</p> <p>Members can bring forward issues for consideration at the annual general meeting, the bimonthly meetings and by contacting any of the Directors to raise concerns about issues that require attention. The mechanisms to influence decision-making are therefore mainly through meeting attendance and direct contact with the Directors or company officials</p> <p>FoPNYW has been meeting on a monthly basis, but this has recently been changed to bi-monthly in line with a general reduction in the amount of activity in the Parc. The purpose of meetings is to track progress on the various projects, assign task and finish groups, and to consider which new ideas for projects to take forward. In general, the 15 active Directors take part in these meetings. There is an annual general meeting where all members are invited and encouraged to attend. The annual general meeting is conducted to provide the annual report, elect Directors and company positions, and to trawl for ideas about the coming year's objectives, as well as prioritise financial and management issues to be tackled. Decision making is through majority vote.</p> <p>There is some concern amongst the Directors that the membership is not as active as they could be and some concern that perhaps younger members should be coming forward to represent the views of the next generation as well as to provide for sustainable succession.</p>

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

	<p>The initial planning of the Parc for the Cydcoed grant went out to community consultation so there was some wider involvement of the local community, and since that time other issues raised by Parc users and FoPNYW members have been recorded and debated at group meetings. These would concern, for example, footpath improvement, the need for H&S structures such as lifebuoys, and how best to manage anti-social behaviour (ASB).</p>
<p>2.2 Communication and learning processes</p>	<p>Communication is a key task of the group, and there are regular newsletter and flyer campaigns for events. The group hope to move to email and other forms of communication to widen engagement and make it more efficient.</p> <p>There was no in depth discussion about group learning, but no organised group learning processes were mentioned beyond what is normally discussed at the regular group meetings.</p>
<p>2.3 Structure and legal status</p>	<p>The Friends Of Parc Nant-y-Waun group was constituted as a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) in 2005 (no. 05505852) and is managed on behalf of the members by the Board of Directors.</p> <p>The Articles of Association list the objectives of the group:</p> <p>The aims and objectives of the Company are to promote and environmentally enhance the area on behalf of the surrounding communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote nature conservation, bio-diversity and accessibility to green spaces through active participation. • To advance the education of the public in subjects related to sustainable development and the protection, enhancement and rehabilitation of the environment. • To reduce feelings of exclusion by providing opportunities for education, social and recreational activities and fostering well-being and social cohesion regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, disability or ethnicity. • To conserve and promote the local heritage and encourage tourism to the area. <p>These aims govern the working of the group and are felt to be broad enough to accommodate future development of the Parc and of the Group. The CLG formulation was set up as the best legal form for applying to grants and spreading the risk to the Directors and volunteers.</p> <p>Membership is by a nominal one time membership fee of £1. Since this does not generate any form of annual income, the Directors, of which there are currently 15, pay an annual subscription of £15. This money is used to</p>

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

	<p>pay for the running costs of the group and the purchase of insurance through Keep Wales Tidy (£50 p.a.) and items such as venue hire for group meetings.</p> <p>Classification of legal form: Company Limited by Guarantee</p>
<p>2.4 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the group/ enterprise</p>	<p>Otherwise Company and Charity Law and the reporting and accounting rules are the main responsibilities, along with H&S legislation.</p>
<p>2.5 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</p>	<p>There is a formal management plan that was a condition of the Cydcoed grant. The plan is still used on a regular basis as a means to keep the group on track with respect to maintenance and management tasks. The plan was prepared using the services of a professional planner/landscape architect, after public consultation about the overall objectives of the plan and the scope of planting and works to be undertaken had taken place.</p> <p>The group use the plan to guide their activities, as do the LA and other grant awarding partners.</p> <p>The original objectives of the plan are to provide a mix of open space and woodlands, which enhances environmental quality, increases biodiversity and encourages local use and access. These objectives are still valid. There is an increasing consideration of the need to provide a balance between managing for “a wild space” and providing “a safe space for children and the public”. The aim is not to produce an over-manicured greenspace.</p> <p>Overall aim of plan: Quality of Life</p>
<p>2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan</p>	<p>Most of the work required through the management plan is undertaken by contractors and part of the funding comes through from the local authority. The current maintenance work is contracted out directly by FoPNYW to local businesses. Previously the Cydcoed establishment work was contracted out through the Forestry Commission (FC) to a large landscape/forestry firm.</p> <p>Volunteers from the group undertake small works such as beating up tree planting work, building of floating islands, pond clearance and cleaning, litter picking and so-on on an informal basis, or as events organised through the group meetings.</p>

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability	<p>Overall sources of income for the group in FY12/13. Total income and assets were around £3,500, which was somewhat lower than in previous years.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Membership 10-20% of total</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Grant aid and matched funding 80-90% of total</p> <p>The group have a low level of ambition for the CLG and future working. They believe that the main revenue stream will continue to be from grants for small projects. They have plans to seek funding for the building of a toilet block and the purchase of an adapted container to enhance the potential for the outdoor classroom area of the woodland.</p> <p>The group have realised that their operating model (grants only) is unlikely to cover the costs of on-going maintenance work in the long run. Therefore, they have started to think about forming a regular volunteer workforce, perhaps in partnership with organisations working with young people classified as Not in education, employment or training NEETs, as well as other more organised volunteer working groups drawn from the membership and local community, to meet the labour demands of maintenance work. However, this would require a strategy to generate the revenue required for maintenance and for supporting the supervision and involvement of volunteers.</p> <p>There are very limited opportunities for income generation from woodland products as this is a newly planted woodland and green space area rather than a productive resource.</p>
2.8 Benefit distribution rules	<p>In this example the tangible benefits provided by the group and the woodland/green space relate to public access and the enjoyment/wellbeing generated. Furthermore, the anglers get access to a fishing resource and the fish and the local schools and Forest School have an educational resource.</p> <p>The only other tangible benefit mentioned in the conversation was the improved/enhanced property values, with houses now overlooking an environmental asset versus a post industrial wasteland. There are plans from a local developer to extend a housing estate on the Parc boundary as this is now <i>"an area people like to live in"</i>.</p>
3. External linkages	
3.1 Partnerships and agreements	<p>During implementation of the Cydcoed funded period of the project and early group establishment partners included Communities First, Keep Wales Tidy, TCV, Environment Wales, the Probation Service, SORTED (a project working</p>

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

	<p>with excluded young people), and local schools.</p> <p>Continuing partnerships and relationships have been established with the Ebbw Fach trail, the Rotary club, the Angling club, local schools and Forest Schools.</p> <p>The Ebbw Fach Trail (EFT) is linking a whole series of sites down the valley to provide a medium-distance footpath and cycle trail. Linking green spaces in this way raises the profile of PNYW, increases visitor numbers, and provides benefits such as a PNYW website, which is part of the EFT web pages. Other advantages are improved path maintenance and provision of Parc infrastructure such as the interpretation structures, as well as an additional route to funding.</p> <p>The Rotary club is a source of funding for additional tree planting and takes an interest in the Parc with respect to commemorative trees and support for environmental improvements.</p> <p>The Angling club manages the lakes and provides additional volunteers. Schools and Forest School contribute to the educational aims of the group.</p>
3.2 Associations	There is a close link with a similar community group at nearby Beaufort Woods.
4. Resources	
4.1 Forest/woodland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The area is post-industrial regeneration, urban greenspace with tree planting. It consists of 22 Ha of ponds, unimproved grassland, and mixed woodland planting of native species including birch, alder, hawthorn, Scots pine, ash, larch and willow. • Classification of woodland type: Mixed mainly broadleaved (young trees) • Soil is industrial spoil, free draining in places and waterlogged in others. No detailed soil description available. Site potential appeared fairly poor. • The main woodland management interventions have been: 2005-2007 site clearance, fencing, tree planting, and silvicultural attention to 20+ year old alder trees already present; 2010 filling in tree planting gaps and replacing dead trees (i.e. "beating up") • This is not a productive woodland, and the majority of trees are 6-8 years old, so no more description is

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

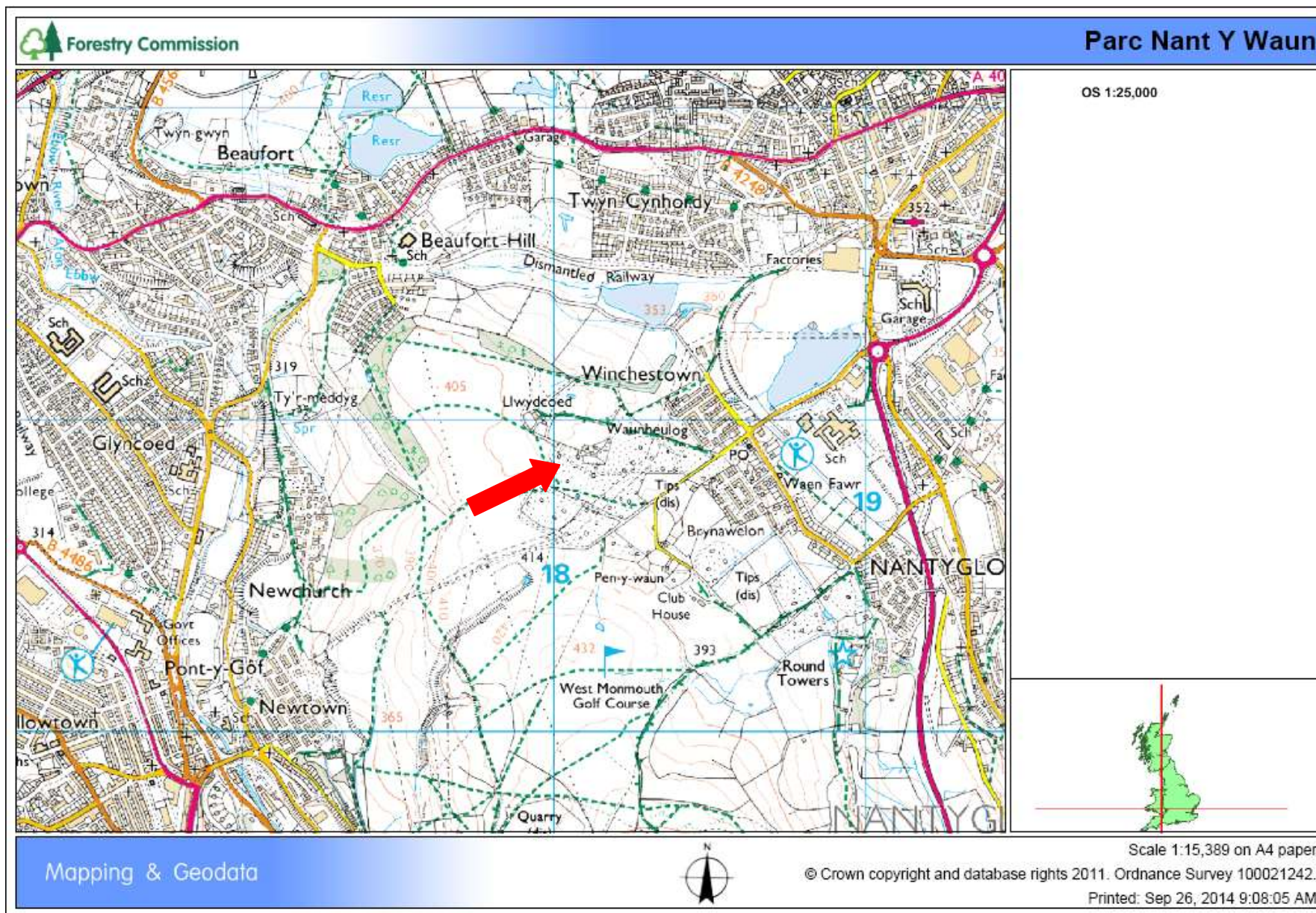
	<p>provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no biodiversity checklist of plant and animal species present on the site although a variety of woodland and wetland birds were observed during the site visit. The group was not aware of any important species present.
<p>4.2 Woodland and group funding sources</p>	<p>More or less 100% of this group's revenue is from grants as shown in Qu.2.7. The only other revenue comes from the Directors' annual membership of £15 (subscription total = £225-255).</p> <p>As such the grants are allocated to capital expenditure on projects within the Parc. Sums secured range from £5,000 for the footpath grading and tarmacking to the initial Cydcoed grant of £172,000. Grants have come from Keep Wales Tidy, Environment Wales and the Lottery.</p> <p>The on-going maintenance costs and the costs of running the group are a concern. The group estimated £500 – 1,000 p.a. would cover group management and development costs. Additional maintenance costs run to about £1,000.</p>
<p>4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital</p>	<p>Group members do not have a background in forestry and environmental management; they learn by doing and finding out about things when they need to know. Sources of information come through different routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group management – from the experience of group members • Available grants – this is researched by Directors on an almost constant basis and relies on their use of the internet and personal contacts with other Charities and volunteer groups. • Woodland management – this is done by the Cydcoed officer but now more likely to be Gwent Wildlife Trust and the LA environmental officer, as well as research on the internet • Environmental management – this is undertaken by the Wildlife Trust and based on research on the internet, with the angling club members sitting on the group's Board having wetland management knowledge. <p>Events such as Earth Day organised by the group as a fun day/educational day, are managed using both knowledgeable volunteers and professionals.</p> <p>There are no formal surveys conducted or planned for the site so monitoring for site changes is limited. However,</p>

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

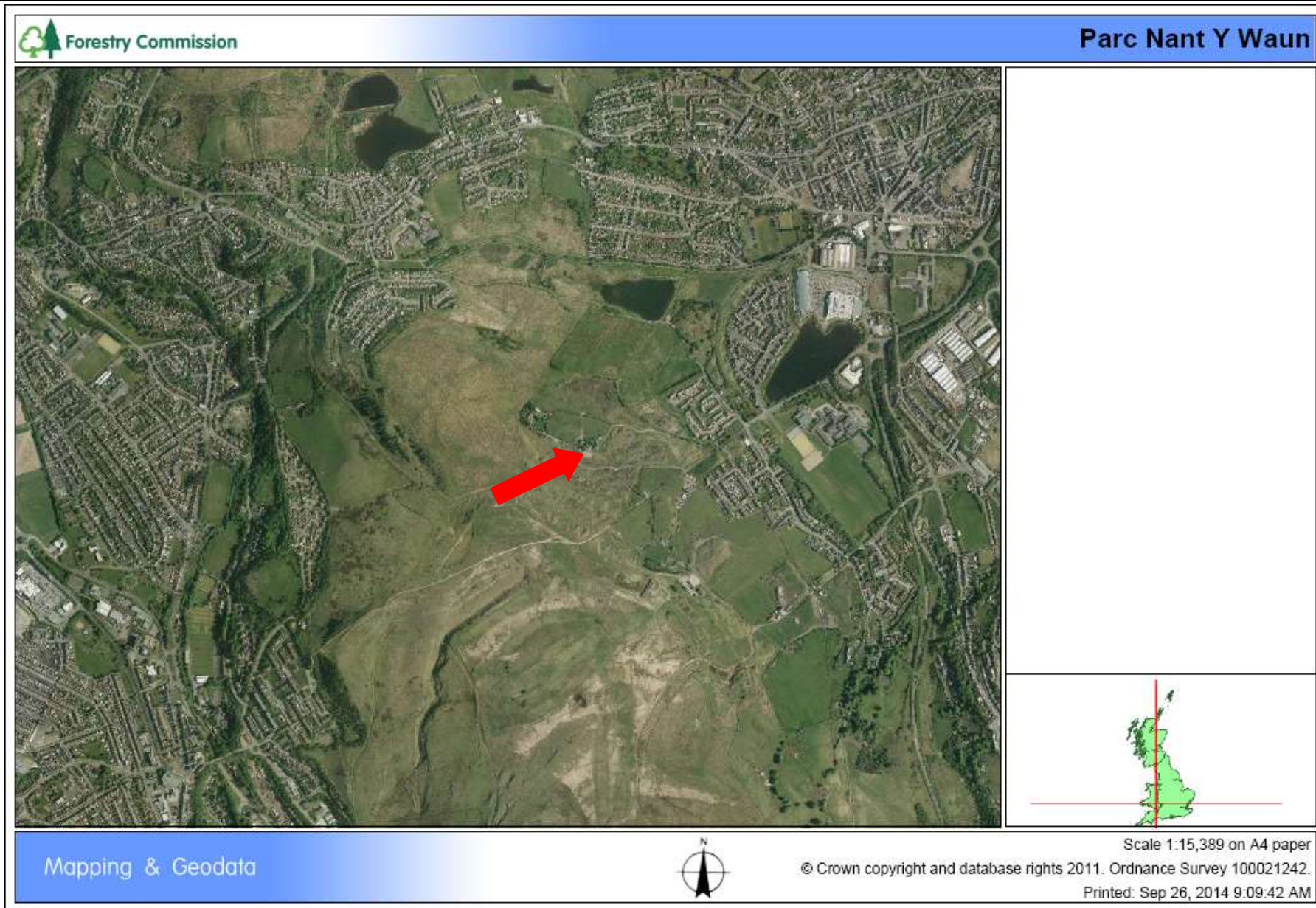
	<p>the group is looking to collect photographs to provide a visual evidence base for group impact. They also have a footfall counter which has tracked an increase in visitor numbers over time to current levels of about 55,000 p.a. These records can be made available if required.</p>
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	<p>Recording of attendance and evaluation of events is not undertaken.</p>
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FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN



FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN



2. Change Narrative

1. Group History. Moments of change, motivations and engagement

Although the area of the Parc had relatively high levels of **informal use**, the area was not particularly attractive and there were perceptions that some parts of the Parc suffered from anti-social behaviour (ASB). A series of public meetings, leaflet campaigns and **consultation** exercises showed that improving the quality of the post-industrial land at the centre of the residential area was a particular priority for local people. Supported by Nantyglo Communities First, Friends of Parc Nant-y-Waun was established (**group formation**) as a Company Limited by Guarantee and formed by members of the communities of Beaufort, Brynmawr and Nantyglo in 2005. The founder members decided moving forward with an organised group that could own assets and take action on the site was the best way to approach making changes. A number of the founder members had a deal of experience in other local groups including a local history interest group, the community council, and a cooperative society, so they felt very well able to take on the Parc improvements. A general vision of what they wanted to achieve was agreed with the local community through consultation.

In 2005 a £172,000 grant from Cydcoed enabled them to improve the 22 hectares of the Parc - a series of reservoirs, surrounded by marshland and grassland, which formerly fed the Nantyglo ironworks were all improved and areas of woodland planted up. Specifically, the group carried out surveys and developed a detailed management plan; created accessible pathways, a picnic area and outdoor classroom; installed gates with designs by local school children; and planted 3 hectares of trees. This was all achieved through the negotiation of a licence for **active management** of the land from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council the landowner. Help in developing the management plan came from FC Wales staff, since members of the group started with only minimal knowledge of forestry and ecology. The management plan was a key factor in being able to take on a fully management role in the Parc in agreement with the LA landowner. As time has passed **volunteers** have continued to maintain the Parc, as well as identify additional projects and improvements. One of the challenges has been to identify ways of developing the Parc without detracting from the “natural” aspects of the site the local community value and enjoy.

2. Challenges, barriers and opportunities for change: Key issues in evolution

Facilitating factors:

- **Supportive Local Authority**
- **Local people from the civic core** who were willing to invest time and effort on a voluntary basis
- **Skills and capacity** of the community group to take on fund raising and networking which enabled the greenspace improvements
- The introduction of **Cydcoed funding** programme
- Preparation of the **Forest Management Plan** as part of the Cydcoed grant application

Barriers and Challenges

- Increasingly **heavy time demands** being placed upon Directors from the onset and through the early years of the initiative because of the variety of projects that FoPNW sought to undertake. For some Directors this amounted to several days each week. However, the last year has seen a decrease in workload.
- **Maintaining membership** numbers to include an active base of volunteers prepared to take part in improving and ongoing management.
- The **on-going financial costs** associated with group management have also exposed the issue of a one-off membership fee not being adequate to support the costs of running the group. Solutions to this are being discussed, and there is an aspiration to establish a more formal system of volunteer work parties to keep up maintenance of the Parc.

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

3. Evolution of income streams

The income stream generated by FoPNW varies from year to year depending on grant capture. The generation of funds from membership and donations is relatively small. There are savings (assets) of around £3000 held in reserve. The strategy of the group continues to be the identification of individual projects on the site and looking for grants and similar finds to service those projects.

4. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts before group involvement

FoPNYW operates on a post-industrial site that has no woodland history. The industrial history of the ironworks has been recorded on the site in a series of informative boards and sound recordings as part of the Ebbw Vale Trail. The Ebbw Fach Trail links together fourteen community Green Spaces that offer a variety of amenities from Beaufort Hill Woodlands in the North to Llanhilleth in the south - a total of almost 16 kilometres. Parc Nat Y Waun existed as 22 hectares of rough grassland, mires and the old reservoirs that once fed the now demolished Nantyglo Ironworks. Two of the main pathways through the site follow the routes of tram roads built between 1793 and 1833, that carried coal, iron ore and other materials from the Ironworks at Nantyglo and Beaufort to the quarries above Llangattock and the canal at Gilwern. Warwick Road follows the route of the Abergavenny to Merthyr railway built in 1862 and closed in 1953.

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
1800-2004	Various ownerships	Mining and extraction of ores for economic benefit		None

5. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts since group involvement

The next table summarises the key benefits since FoPNW took over management of the Parc. Active management through volunteers has created the woodland stretching over three hectares. The trees planted are native to ensure they match the site

FRIENDS OF PARC NANT-Y-WAUN

conditions and benefit wildlife. A number of memorial trees, sponsored by members of the local community have also been planted. There are three ponds in the Park: the large pond, known locally as the Machine Pond, and the Horsetail Pond are of ecological and archaeological importance. They date between 1796 and 1820 and were once part of a series of five ponds that ran into the ironworks at Nantyglo. The site also supports other smaller ponds, which support amphibians and dragonflies.

A few years ago the silted up Horsetail Pond was partly scraped to create an open area of water. Around the Machine Pond, a level pathway has been created with wheelchair friendly links to Warwick Road. A small car park has been created at the southern end of the lake from which there is a wheelchair friendly link to the pond. To encourage more wildfowl to breed on the Pond, an artificial nesting island has been built. More islands, including one aimed at encouraging terns to nest, are currently being constructed. Funding is being sought to install some wheelchair friendly fishing bays and also to restock the pond with suitable fish. An Angling club has been formed to manage the water and some bailiffs have been appointed. The Machine Pond flows into a small pond called the Mustard Pond, which was recently improved to allow for more wildlife. Biodiversity values have been improved by these actions.

In addition many individuals have benefited from the regeneration of the site and involvement in the activities and events organised by FoPNW.

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
2005	Managed by FoPNW	<p>Green space regeneration management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodland ecosystem services • Biodiversity • Public access (footfall counters) • Local employment (contractors) <p>Open days and social events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and skills • Building community (event evaluations) 	Fencing, planting, habitat improvements to water features, paths and bridge design/installation	Public Right of Way Open access

5. Future plans

FoPNW has a very clear vision of the future. The group wishes to maintain the Parc in good condition, and also to explore the potential for a small additional improvement projects such as the building of a small indoor classroom or similar building including toilets.

3. Engagement and impacts timeline

Year	Event	ENGAGEMENT	Reasons	Changes/ Impacts and outcomes Social (evidence)	Changes/ Impacts and outcomes Woodland (evidence)	Changes/ Impacts and outcomes Financial/ Economic (evidence)
2000 - 2004	The community received support from Nantyglo Communities First to scope environmental improvements	INFORMAL ENJOYMENT to CONSULTATION	To address poor environmental quality of the area	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
2004-2005	FoPNW constituted	CONSULTATION to GROUP FORMATION	To create entity that can hold assets and apply for funding	Community involvement in group		
2005 onwards	Obtaining a Cycoed grant for management activities and preparation of management plan	GROUP FORMATION to ACTIVE MANAGEMENT	To improve quality of the Parc according to local priorities	Community involvement in habitat improvement, tree planting and infrastructure projects (records of volunteer time)	Improved quality of ponds, meadows and new woodland creation	Funding from charities, fund raising and donations (accounts)