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Evaluation of the Community Land Advisory Service Cymru

Final Report
October 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

BRO Partnership (BRO) were appointed to undertake an evaluation of the Community Land Advisory Service Cymru (CLAS Cymru) by Social Farms & Gardens (SF&G) in April 2024. The purpose of this evaluation was to review the delivery of the service during the current funding period April 2022 - March 2025, with a focus on a qualitative assessment of delivery and outputs.

Fieldwork was undertaken during the summer of 2024 and included:

- Completing a Logic Model for the service;
- A desktop review of policy alignment and input;
- Interviews with members of the CLAS Cymru team and other SF&G staff;
- Interviews with key stakeholders and service users.

This report sets out how the service delivers against Welsh Government Policy and Priorities, provides case studies highlighting the importance of CLAS Cymru in the journey of three community groups, and assesses the value for money the service provides.

2. CLAS CYMRU WITHIN SOCIAL FARMS AND GARDENS

2.1 Background

The CLAS Cymru Service was initially established in 2013, thanks to a five year National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) grant. The £60K funding set out to provide support to 250 community groups and 100 landowners, with the aim of making more land available for use by community food growing groups. The funding also allowed for the appointment of a Senior Wales Community Land Advisor and two part-time Community Land Advisors.

The project acknowledged the difficulty experienced by community groups in identifying and accessing land in the local area to meet their aspirations of creating a community garden or growing space. By appointing Community Land Advisors they wanted to help communities navigate the often labyrinthine maze of land ownership records and local authority departments to provide advice and guidance, as well as practical interventions, to ensure groups could reach their full potential and increase the number of local growing spaces across Wales.

Since 2018, the Service has been funded by the Landscape, Nature and Forestry - Division of the Welsh Government and now provides help and assistance to a wider range of green space groups across Wales. As part of this new funding agreement the CLAS Cymru Awards were established to recognise the work of volunteers in starting up and managing community green spaces. Gaining a CLAS Cymru Award is seen as a step towards gaining a Green Flag Community Award, a scheme managed by Keep Wales Tidy.

The current funding runs for 3 years from April 2022 until March 2025.

2.2 Current Delivery

CLAS Cymru has quickly become a core element of delivery for SF&G. It provides the 'go-to' advice service for community groups across Wales, with groups signposted to the team by SF&G staff across the country, and by other organisations, where they feel help is needed. They help groups to navigate land ownership, lease arrangements with landowners, planning permission, governance, funding, community and profile raising and much, much more.

The money received from Welsh Government funds the key CLAS Cymru team comprising Lucie Taylor (full time) and Katie Trent (part time), as well as two development workers who also work one day per week for the CLAS Cymru Service. As a result, the team are able to provide a bilingual, pan Wales, one-to-one service for community groups, tailoring their advice to meet the specific needs of the group in question.

In addition to this bespoke service, the team have developed a number of factsheets that can be accessed freely by anyone via their website and these cover a variety of topics, such as negotiating with potential landlords, planning requirements and lease agreements.

As well as proving advice, the team also run the CLAS Cymru Awards. These awards recognise community projects that are working to set up new community green spaces such as orchards, woodlands and community gardens, and the time committed by volunteers to make them work. The awards are also seen as a stepping stone to groups going on to apply for a Green Flag Community Award, run by Keep Wales Tidy. However, whilst a valuable part of the CLAS Cymru package, the awards are time consuming to deliver and take the team away from the core elements of the Service, namely providing advice to community groups. In order to try and minimise the impact of delivering the awards, they have now moved to an on-line recorded, awards ceremony as a more resource effective approach.

Since July 2024, the CLAS Cymru team have also been responsible for coordinating the [Allotment Forum](#). Previously organised through a different SF&G funded programme, the forum hosts quarterly on-line sessions looking at different topics suggested by its participants.

As with most third sector organisations, security of funding is the biggest issue faced by CLAS Cymru and SF&G. When the Service was first established the initial funding period was five years. This allowed SF&G to recruit Lucie, an experienced planner with specialist knowledge. However, since this time, as funding periods have decreased and SF&G have found it difficult to recruit an assistant, as professional staff are reluctant to give up a permanent post for a short, fixed term post. Whilst current staff are happy in their roles, should they leave, it would be

difficult for SF&G to recruit similarly qualified and experienced staff to replace them.

Despite this, SF&G remain in a unique position to deliver CLAS Cymru. There may be other third sector organisations that might be able to deliver elements of the service, such as Planning Aid Wales regarding planning advice, but there is no one single organisation with the mix of skills and contacts contained within SF&G to deliver the service in its entirety.

Some elements could be perhaps provided commercially, but again this would be piecemeal and at a far greater cost. In addition, commercial delivery could not help to unlock the barriers groups meet, which is reliant heavily upon the long-term experience of SF&G and their ability to negotiate with landowners for the benefit of communities.

SF&G have a network of officers working in the field across Wales working with communities, member groups, landowners and local authorities. This network, combined with the specialist skills of the core CLAS Cymru team and others within SF&G, has helped to develop the respected and reputable Service they are known to deliver.

3. LOGIC MODEL

One of the first steps in the evaluation in order to understand how the service operates and whether it does so to its maximum potential was the development of a Logic Model. This sets out the relationship between the aims / desired impacts of the service and the activities it delivers.

A copy of the Logic Model is included in Annex 1. From the Model it is evident that the service is well thought out with a clear correlation between activities and impacts. No improvements to delivery could be identified.

4. ACHIEVEMENT OF TARGETS

As part of their grant offer letter from Welsh Government CLAS Cymru have four key targets for delivery each year:

| Target | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25* | |
|---|---------|---------|----------|------|
| 65 Groups receiving noteworthy support each year | 66 | 69 | | 104% |
| 15 Case studies / resilience plans produced within the year | 15 | 14 | | 96% |
| 15 Community Management Certificates awarded in the year | 15 | 16 | | 103% |
| 5 Supported sites go on to achieve Green Flag Awards | 0 | 14 | | 140% |

* To be completed following the end of the current financial year

As can be seen from the table above, the service is delivering very well against its targets. The only area that hasn't reached its 100% target over the last 2 years is the development of 15 case studies or resilience plans in 2023/24. However, 14 were still completed within the year, with the remaining plan curtailed due to volunteer illness, something beyond the control of the CLAS Cymru team. However, in addition to the specific case studies / resilience plans, CLAS Cymru also create 90 second films for each CLAS Cymru Award recipient based on the footage and photos they submit. 15 of these have been produced per year since 2022. These films are a great insight into the projects and are promoted by SF&G and the groups on social media. They are available via the Social Farms & Gardens YouTube [channel](#).

Whilst it is important to ensure that the grant is being used in the manner intended by Welsh Government, this quantitative assessment of the impact of the service is only a small marker of its success. As a result, this report aims to focus on the more qualitative aspects of the service, how it aligns with Welsh Government Policies and Priorities, the value for money it provides and where it adds value to work being undertaken by others.

5. VALUE FOR MONEY

Value for money can often be hard to define for a service such as CLAS Cymru. Whilst all involved know that the team provide a professional and efficient service, there is little assessment given to what it would cost to provide similar advice and guidance on a commercial basis, or how delivery of CLAS Cymru benefits upon the work undertaken by others.

5.1 Monetary Value

The table below shows the money allocated to CLAS Cymru by WG over the last three financial years.

| Year | Amount |
|---------|----------|
| 2022/23 | £97,982 |
| 2023/24 | £99,942 |
| 2024/25 | £101,940 |
| Average | £99,955 |

The average amount received over the three years is £99,995. During this same time period CLAS Cymru were required to provide meaningful support to 65 groups per year. This results in a figure of £1,538 per group. The support provided is multi-disciplinary and can range from:

- initial referral;
- general advice;
- helping to identify suitable land;
- planning advice and support;
- advice on leases and heads of terms agreements;
- advising on governance for newly established groups;
- negotiation with local authorities and private land owners to allow a group to manage a plot of land;
- signposting to other help and assistance, especially grant funding;
- advice on how to achieve and maintain Green Flag status, including using the Site Resilience Plan template.

It is unlikely that this eclectic mix of specialisms and support would be available from one commercial provider. Just considering one aspect of the advice about, planning, a quick internet search reveals that the cost of a planning consultant to assist with a planning application can cost between approximately £500 for basic services to £1500 for a more comprehensive service. Given that these costs are likely to relate to the more ‘bread and butter’ residential applications that the smaller and more affordable practices are experienced in delivering, any costs

incurred by a small community group in engaging planning advice would be likely to fall towards the higher end of these costs rather than the lower.

One issue highlighted by Welcome To Our Woods is that, even if a group can afford professional advice, they don't always know what questions they need answered! This makes it very difficult to frame a brief for consultants and ensure that the advice you get is targeted, accurate, timely and cost effective.

So, on the basis of £1,538.00 per group, this money is excellent value, even before taking into account the other range of services CLAS Cymru provides to these 65 groups, or the other outputs they are required to achieve, such as developing resilience plans and delivering the CLAS Cymru Awards.

In addition to the known 65+ groups that receive direct support there is an unknown number of groups who participate in the freely available on-line presentations, forums and who are signposted from other networks that will access the free online resources and guidance documents.

5.2 Added Value

Value Added to Other WG Funded Projects

Lucy Prisk, Green Flag Co-ordinator at Keep Wales Tidy identifies CLAS Cymru as one of the main reasons they saw a record number of Community Green Flag Awards in Wales in 2024. A total of 199 such awards were received by community run green spaces in Wales, the most of any country in the world! This is a resounding success for KWT and Welsh Government, who fund the Community Green Flag Award. Whilst the Full Award aimed at more traditional public parks or university campuses, for example, attracts a fee for entry, the Community Award is free and is open to any freely accessible well managed green space that is predominately managed by the community.

Gaining a CLAS Cymru Community Management Award is seen as a stepping stone to achieving Green Flag status, and CLAS Cymru encourages, and provides support to, all awardees to apply for a Green Flag Community Award. All these things help to publicise the awards and invite groups to apply. With their wide network of community green spaces, this is instrumental in opening up the Green Flag Awards to groups across Wales, and for many is seen as their ultimate journey in creating and managing their community space.

CLAS Cymru also encourage groups to get involved with another KWT run and WG funded programme, the Local Places for Nature Packages, part of the WG wider Local Places for Nature Programme committed to creating, restoring and enhancing nature 'on your doorstep'. The programme provides resources ranging from starter packs for small areas, to supersized packages for more ambitious projects. Packages include plants as well as tools and any other resources required to start developing a community garden. The programme dovetails well with CLAS Cymru

and is often used by CLAS Cymru groups to get their new green space up and running. Many require support to finish getting land agreements in place in time to get the awards and CLAS Cymru also oversees the 'what needs planning permission' area of their delivery. Indeed, CLAS Cymru is currently supporting 4 groups to obtain planning permission for the supersize packages.

Value Added to the Work of Local Authorities

Whilst the approach taken by local authorities can vary in their engagement with CLAS Cymru and local community groups wanting to access land, some can find the world of working with communities a challenge. CLAS Cymru can help to negotiate the many pitfalls and help communities to communicate effectively and vice versa. 'Different languages' are spoken - and this is where CLAS Cymru can really support local authorities.

Some local authorities choose to go it alone, often with unsuccessful consequences. However, CLAS Cymru continues to consider how best to ensure local authorities can understand the value in using their Service which is, of course, free of charge to them as well as community groups.

In contrast, other local authorities look upon CLAS Cymru as an invaluable service that can help and assist groups to identify what they want to achieve and the best way of doing so. For example, Debra Hanney, Senior Community Development Officer at Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council says that she regularly recommends groups contact CLAS Cymru when they approach the Council regarding land-based proposal, such as lease or management of Council owned land. She knows that CLAS Cymru will provide the group with high quality independent advice on their plans and will help to guide them through the system, ultimately resulting in less work for her and ensuring that groups have all of the support they need to get established.

In addition, Debra has found that working with CLAS Cymru improved other areas of the Council's work. For example, they used to use an old out of date business plan template when working with community groups. Katie helped to develop a new template that showed how groups would deliver against the Council's Corporate Plan and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act more clearly, and this is the version they now use for all of the groups they engage with.

Along with this specific example, Debra has also found the webinars and training provided by CLAS Cymru and SF&G to be useful and informative, along with their numerous factsheets.

Added Value Through Access to Affordable Legal Advice

CLAS Cymru have worked closely with Simon Ackland at Ackland and Co Solicitors to develop advice for community groups in relation to the legal aspects of negotiating a lease with a landowner. Whilst for some groups, on-line advice in the

form of factsheets and one to one CLAS Cymru support might be sufficient, CLAS Cymru are also able to negotiate with Ackland and Co to achieve affordable legal advice should groups need it. This is generally much below normal commercial rates and is a resource groups would not be able to access without the work undertaken by CLAS Cymru.

Value Added Through On-line Resources

As mentioned above, the CLAS Cymru team have developed a range of online resources that can be accessed by anyone. These include webinars, which are recorded and are available online, online training events and a series of online fact sheets ranging from advice on finding land for a green community project, negotiating with landowners, land leases, to updates on small scale agricultural planning rights.

These factsheets have evolved from the years of advice and guidance CLAS Cymru have provided over the years and the knowledge they have gained. By making it freely accessible to any group online, this helps to expand the number of community groups that can be helped by their service.

Infographic showing the pivotal role played by CLAS Cymru



6. CASE STUDIES

The evaluation looked at 3 case studies: Welcome To our Woods in Treherbert, Talgarth Community Allotments near Bangor and Railway Gardens in Cardiff.

As well as using online material, the case studies were informed through interviews with volunteers and other stakeholders.

6.1 Welcome To Our Woods, Treherbert

Welcome To Our Woods Ltd (WTOW) is a Community Partnership in the Upper Rhondda Fawr, in the South Wales Valleys.

They have been supported by CLAS Cymru on three separate projects:

Orchard Project

WTOW wanted to develop an orchard and horticultural area on land owned by Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Council. They have a long-standing relationship RCT and have been active in the area since 2009. From WTOW's perspective, taking over this land provided an opportunity to establish a community farm for fresh fruit & vegetable production, as well as providing education and recreational/volunteering opportunities. They planned to erect polytunnels and raised beds and/or terracing to grow vegetables.



The produce would be sold via their own food hub, which was initially set up under with Resilient Green Spaces project funding (managed by Social Farms & Gardens) but has temporarily closed after struggling to source sufficient local fruit & veg supplies. By having a route to market already established, the team have already addressed one of the challenges that new farms face when starting out.

For the growing itself, WTOW are now working in partnership with Black Mountain College (BMC) in the delivery of their NVQ in Regenerative Horticulture.

CLAS Cymru Involvement

CLAS Cymru supported them in securing a 25-year lease on around 3 acres of land owned by Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council via a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) in May 2023. It complimented some of the other projects managed by WTOW.

For CATs involving Local Authorities multiple departments are often involved and due diligence checks are needed. These can take around at least 2-3 months and community groups often find the process frustrating, as they are generally keen to commence with plans.

To address some of these challenges, WTOW and RCT received support from CLAS Cymru, who provided a concise land business plan template. This covered meeting the obligations of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act; and RCT's Community Development Team have now embedded this within their CAT process.

Another challenge is that multiple council departments are interested in land for different priorities and obligations, including housing, renewable energy, allotments and more. Councils will likely get more economic gains from projects such as housing and solar farms than they will for community farms. However, the biodiversity, carbon sequestration, health and social benefits of community farms can also be factored in.

“CLAS Cymru also helped with the 25 year lease through the CAT process for the Orchard site. Lucie championed our discussions on this and when it got really complicated, we would have backed off because we didn't know the answers to the questions we were being asked. Lucie was able to speak their language and understand what was needed.

They provided friendly advice and helped us pull everything together in a format the Council would accept. The calibre of their team, and Lucie in particular, is excellent.”

Ian Thomas, WTOW Ltd

Crop Cycle

The CLAS Cymru team gave WTOW the confidence to push through and provide a more aspirational project, which involved securing the former Tappers Garage on the High Street and setting up a food hub and growing area. This idea came from extensive community consultation with local residents.



“The Crop Cycle project came up against some serious planning barriers and we wouldn’t have been able to overcome them without the help of the CLAS Cymru team...getting the sort of advice they provided would have cost a lot of money and taken time, but we were able to pick up the phone and get advice from Lucie straight away.”

Ian Thomas, WTOW Ltd

Brewery Site

This site has now been developed as a tree nursery and wood working area, with WTOW working with Down To Earth and BMC.

“On the Brewery Site CLAS Cymru helped with planning advice and consent for permissive development and this was crucial. In the end, the project got through on a technicality, because the Council didn’t reply to something in 28 days and Lucie held them to account for it”

Matt Reardon, WTOW



CLAS Cymru's general support for WTOW and their Skyline development project was summarised by Chris Blake:

"CLAS Cymru helped us when we were looking at land ownership and land stewardship issues for the Skyline project back in 2019/20. They were incredibly useful because to have a planning perspective, and a land rights perspective, which is not normally something the group have. The problem is you don't know what you don't know! It's hard to get professional advice when you don't know what question you should be asking. Professional advice is very expensive and even if you have the money to get it, it is difficult to write a brief for the work. CLAS Cymru provides all of this help for free, and they know what you need to navigate the system."

Chris Blake, The Green Valleys

6.2 Tregarth Community Allotment

Established over 7 years ago Tregarth Community Allotments Community Interest Company (CIC) in Gwynedd has over 64 plots stretched over 2 fields, which makes them one of the biggest allotment sites in North Wales. The site has an additional 8 microplots containing raised beds, ensuring the site is accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

Over the years, the CIC has continuously improved the site. They expanded the car park, moved and reskinned the polytunnel and put up fences for individual plots to prevent damage from rabbits. They also bought a strimmer and lawnmower for communal use and built a tool shed.

Tregarth share the wider site - Ffarm Moelyci - with 10 other organisations which includes a café, farm shop, the Community Barn and kitchen.

Challenges

When Ffarm Moelyci community farm was put on sale in 2017, the CIC successfully raised money to buy one of the fields. At the time they were paying a 25 year lease on their second field and the rent went towards purchasing it; this was a very slow process of buying the field. Trying to raise funds from other funders was proving difficult because at the beginning their organisation wasn't established enough and there was little clarity over private or community ownership of the land.



Support from CLAS Cymru

CLAS Cymru helped Tregarth Community Association to establish their CIC and this was the starting point to receive further financial support of £16,700 from the Resilient Green Spaces programme (run by Social Farms & Gardens), which allowed them to purchase a second field with a further 56 plots.

“We were able to reach our target much quicker. Months instead of 20 years! If some of the Directors [of the CIC] were to leave now.... it [the land] is still there for everybody to rent. Social Farms & Gardens, including CLAS Cymru have been incredibly helpful to us. Sarah came down gave us loads of

information and explained what options were open to us. It was through a grant that they awarded to us that we were able to buy the second field. Since then we've gone from strength to strength - we now have a waiting list of 17 people wishing to have an allotment."

Andy Crabb, Tregarth Community Association CIC

Securing the land and not having to pay rent through the lease has enabled them to decrease the plot rents, making food growing even more accessible.

Their next step is exploring how to improve water management on their site, potentially using solar pumps to pump their 10,000l water tank from a nearby river and provide water butts for individual plots.

6.3 Railway Gardens, Splott Cardiff

Railway Gardens is a community resilience hub which was built on the derelict site of a former playground. Railway Gardens, which is run by Green Squirrel CIC, opened its gates in June 2022 after almost eight years of community visioning, planning and fundraising.

They aim to offer a welcoming green space for community action that serves Splott, Adamsdown and Tremorfa, as well as the wider Cardiff area.



The site provides:

- Community growing space, a seed library and a 'crop swap' for sharing plants, produce, and pots.
- A community room and kitchen, and a cosy outdoor learning space.

- Space for nature: a pond, mini meadows, log piles and other homes for wildlife.
- Independent businesses and organisations, including: a cafe, bike workshop, ceramicist and jeweller.
- A 'Library of Things' where you can borrow stuff you need instead of buying, and a mini Green Library for books about growing, mending, climate action etc.
- A cargo bike for hire.
- A programme of regular meet-ups, groups and special events.
- Accessible pathing and an accessible toilet, with baby changing facilities.



The development of the project

The project began back in 2014, when the Edible Adamsdown group wanted some extra space to grow fruit and vegetables. They initially approached Cardiff Council with a potential site, and they agreed they could clear the area. Then, the Council changed their mind and said they didn't want to offer them that piece of land.

Despite this setback, the group continued to look for a suitable site and eventually found an area that was fenced off and in a derelict state. They did not know who owned the site and had little idea how to proceed.

Support from CLAS Cymru

This was the point at which they first contacted CLAS Cymru, who were able to confirm that the Council also owned this site - it was a former children's play area.

This led to a site visit with local councillors and Lucie from CLAS Cymru. Her involvement at this stage was very important in persuading the councillors and officers that the group's proposals were viable.

The Council initially agreed to start negotiating a lease for the land and the group embarked on community consultation. As this was progressing, the Council said that they had changed their mind and wanted the land to be sold to a developer. CLAS Cymru was again involved and played a crucial role in persuading the Council that housing was not possible on the site and in asking them to reverse this decision and stick to their original intention of leasing the land to the community group.

“this was a pivotal moment and without CLAS Cymru, and in particular Lucie’s involvement at this stage, the whole thing would have folded. She really swung it for us!”

Hannah Garcia, Green Squirrels

Securing the lease allowed the group to proceed and again they received crucial and invaluable support from CLAS Cymru, including: securing planning permission for containers and other structures on the site; advice on PR; insurance through Social Farms & Gardens and training.

The site has been opened for just over two years and the group are providing a range of services for the local community. They have been able to generate about £20,000 of their own income and received funding from various other sources, including the National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF).

The group now have 4 paid staff, with 3 supported through TNLCF and 1 through Natural Resources Wales (NRW). These grants are coming to an end, but they are optimistic that they can secure further funds to continue.

Railway Gardens and the continued efforts of the Green Squirrels CIC has drawn a lot of attention and praise. For instance, they now receive further support from the Building Communities Trust, and other funders and supporters continue to offer praise and look upon them favourably.

As Hannah and the team would testify, CLAS Cymru’s support, advice and expertise was absolutely vital at several points along their journey.

7. ALIGNMENT WITH WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT 2015 (WFGA)

7.1 WFGA Wellbeing Goals

As set out in the Annex 2 (reproduced directly from their 2022-5 grant application), CLAS Cymru has the seven goals firmly embedded in their programme. They are developing infographics to demonstrate the connections more graphically and concisely.

7.2 WFGA 5 ways of working

CLAS Cymru has also embedded the key concepts of all five ways of working set out in the Act. They are particularly strong on **Collaboration**, consistently working with a range of partners, on both strategic policy development and practical implementation, e.g., local authorities, Welsh Government, Future Generations Commissioner's office, other statutory and voluntary sector agencies, private landowners and community groups.

Examples of these various partners include:

Shared Assets, Land Workers Alliance, Food Policy Cymru, Lantra, Our Food 1200, Food Sense Wales, Powys Council, Carmarthenshire Council, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Rhondda Cynon Taff County Council, Bannau Brychieniog National Park Authority, Ackland and Co Solicitors, Keep Wales Tidy, Cultivate, Welcome to Our Woods, Wildlife Trusts Wales, BCT, Cwmpass, One Voice Wales, Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Skyline, DTA, Tir Pontypridd and many of the Voluntary Service Councils across Wales.

In addition to **Collaboration**, other ways the service contributes to the five ways of working include:

- **Integration** - by enabling community groups to establish and maintain well managed community green space, CLAS Cymru are helping local authorities and other public bodies to integrate their work within communities.
- **Involvement** - CLAS Cymru helps to ensure public bodies such as local authorities and health boards are able to involve local communities in delivering their wellbeing goals through negotiating land leases and management agreements.
- **Long term** - by helping community groups to assume management responsibilities for plots of publicly owned land, CLAS Cymru is ensuring the long term security of this land for community benefit.
- **Prevention** - by securing land leases, management agreements and planning consents for community groups, CLAS Cymru are helping to prevent the deterioration of land, loss of biodiversity or even sale of land, thus helping public bodies to meet their wellbeing objectives.

7.3 Resilience plans (CLAS Cymru site template)

One quite insightful method of implementing the WFGA at a practical level has been the design and deployment of the “Site Resilience Plan” template. Created in 2021, CLAS Cymru has been supporting organisations to use the template to measure how resilient their project really is. Basically, the form to be completed helps communities to develop and manage their sites more effectively, in line with the WBFG Act, and contributing to the Net Zero Wales target.

Community projects are guided on effective solutions to challenges such as: integrating biodiversity features, sustainable materials use, sustainable drainage methods and waste reuse and recycling.

The Site Resilience Plans are integral to CLAS Cymru support for the Green Flag Community Awards. Completing such a plan demonstrates that a green space is high quality and helps local authorities and other public bodies to meet their goals under the WFGA. It describes a project in considerable detail.

Looking briefly at three Resilience Plans from CLAS Cymru files (Forgeside RFC Community Garden, Grow Well and Sirhowy Hill Woodlands), it is clear that the template does provide evidence of concordance with the Act, and involves the site owners/managers thinking about issues of resilience in a way that is not particularly common, as yet, at a community level (beyond statutory organisations).

CLAS Cymru are currently considering a more concise version of the template, to make it easier for groups to complete, whilst retaining its hallmark thoroughness. Work is also progressing on designing an info poster that community groups could be provided with, once they complete their resilience plans. This is with the aim of concisely highlighting their wellbeing credentials for public bodies and other decision-makers.

7.4 Continuing discussions

The new Future Generations Commissioner has been recasting and reprioritising the work of the Commission. Their new strategy, Cymru Can, was published at the end of 2023, and runs until 2030. In 2024, the Commissioner’s staff are working to develop the detail and the implementation of the new strategy. There is a strong emphasis on supporting more resilient, local Welsh food supply chains. Their May 2024 CAN newsletter leads on food issues and has been a major theme in subsequent monthly newsletters.

CLAS Cymru / S&FG work directly and collaboratively with the staff in the Commissioner’s office who are responsible for the “food issues” section of the 2023-30 strategy.

The Commission are currently starting their new 5 year reporting cycle, and there is an opportunity for SF&G and CLAS Cymru to influence the criteria with which public bodies are assessed for their delivery against the WFGA goals and ways of working, in particular in relation to how local authorities engage with community groups and those wanting to take on new land leases.

8. ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER WELSH GOVERNMENT POLICIES

There are quite a large number of policies and strategies to which CLAS Cymru/SF&G make some useful contribution. What follows is a sample of those where they are, perhaps, most engaged, where the Government and CLAS Cymru agendas coincide most strongly.

8.1 Agriculture Act (Wales) 2023

This Act is fundamental to the future of all levels and types of Welsh agriculture. And particularly in that it will inform actual Government subsidies to the farming industry - The “Sustainable Farming Scheme”, which is replacing previous EU payments under the Common Agricultural Policy. It is worth quoting what the Act sets out to achieve:

“Strategic in scope, setting a support framework which can accommodate the development of agriculture and forestry within Wales for the next fifteen to twenty years.

The proposals within it must support the delivery of Sustainable Land Management (SLM). This policy framework is our response to the legislative framework established by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

In future, the implementation and continued delivery of SLM will be the principle goal of agricultural policy and future support for farming in Wales”

CLAS Cymru/SF&G offered various suggestions when the Act was a Bill in consultation. In particular, they were able to present the perspective of community scale food production, especially in horticulture. Production of fruit and veg remains woefully low in Wales, which is a genuine threat to the resilience of our food supply.

8.2 Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)

The implementation of the new payments scheme has been deferred into 2025. The principal reason is conflict between farmers, environmental NGOs and the Welsh Government on the targets for incorporating biodiversity, nature recovery and other aims, thereby recasting land use - tree planting has been the most

public example. This, in turn, will be reflected in the actual subsidies available to producers.

CLAS Cymru/SF&G have been useful to the Welsh Government in discussing practicalities around community-scale food production, designed and delivered in a sustainable way. The scale of community food production is on a par with the whole of current commercial horticulture production in Wales. They have been able to point out changes to the payments scheme which would help the Welsh Government improve food security, by mobilising local communities.

In particular, the original proposal was that no farm would qualify for subsidy if it was under 5 hectares. This has now been varied and lowered to 3, partly due to evidence from CLAS Cymru.

The current Welsh Horticultural Development scheme for capital investment has had quite low take-up, mainly due to the large amounts of match funding required, a high minimum amount to apply for, or the fact for the ‘start-up’ support it is only applicable to new growers, and overall has a cumbersome application process.

Other issues CLAS Cymru highlighted to the Horticulture & Policy leads in WG were that originally all equipment had to be new, this was amended through pressure allowing equipment purchases where they were less than 5 years old. CLAS Cymru and SF&G advice on the practical impacts has been adopted, and the scheme varied. The whole scheme is now under review.

8.3 Community Food Strategy

The Welsh Government’s Programme for Government 2021 to 2026 (and the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru when that was in force), committed to developing a Wales Community Food Strategy (CFS) to encourage the production and supply of locally-sourced food in Wales. This is the only ‘food policy’ in the whole of the current programme for government (with other, more minor initiatives coming from Ministers and their Departments, such as allotment or orchard creation).

As of August 2024, there is little available publicly about timescales or progress, but we understand it is due for ministerial sign-off before the end of 2024.

SF&G, in partnership with Cardiff University were involved in helping develop and shape the original Welsh Government community food strategy way back in 2010. This strategy directly led to the sector being better funded and resourced in Wales, leading to an exponential expansion and support to community growing right across Wales.

CLAS Cymru/SF&G have been a key consultee on the new, forthcoming CFS, working with the Welsh Government Food Division team and external consultants who are shaping the strategy. Indeed, SF&G are a specific case study, as are some

of their members (Cae Tan, Mach Maethlon, Food Cardiff and Clynfyw Care Farm) in the published documents on the Community Food Strategy [webpages](#).

SF&G have also worked with a number of partners to call on Welsh Government to align and join up food related policy through the call for a wider food system strategy and a Food Commissioner. They actively supported the development of the Food (Wales) Bill, one of only a small number of private members Bills to work their way through the Senedd.

In a recent development in 2024, Gary Mitchell, a senior manager within SF&G and working on the CLAS Cymru service, has been co-opted onto the Food & Drink Wales Industry Board to specifically represent the community sector and it is understood the long awaited CFS will work its way through this board before being published.

8.4 Community Rights and Empowerment

Helping communities to become more resilient, and more able to take decisions and actions for themselves has been a key theme for the Welsh Government for the last 25 years. Their community programmes are currently being overhauled, and three of their key themes seem particularly relevant to CLAS Cymru work, areas of activity where CLAS Cymru continues to demonstrate its effectiveness:

- Developing a Wales Community Food Strategy to encourage the production and supply of locally sourced food in Wales.
- Developing a positive narrative around tackling climate change and supporting renewable energy, especially in deprived communities.
- Supporting co-operative housing, community-led initiatives, and community land trusts.

CLAS Cymru have been working with the Wales Horticultural Alliance to research and lobby for changes to planning legislation to support smaller / community scale horticulture production. On the back of this -Welsh Government Food Division have produced a '[Barriers to Planning Report](#)' - CLAS Cymru involvement has been strong and will continue. A response to this report has been written for, and welcomed by, the Welsh Government Lead officers. It is likely this will lead to a ministerial statement on updated national planning policy before the end of 2024 with policy updates in Planning Policy Wales to follow.

CLAS Cymru principally supports community empowerment by helping communities and groups as follows:

- Look for, and securely access land to start a community growing or nature project.
- Transfer a green space from a public body, local authority or private landowner into community management or ownership.

- Provide planning advice and get permissions to use land for nature based or green space projects.
- Advocating for increased community access to land across Wales, playing a key role on the Wales wide Community Ownership Group which represents a number of national voluntary organisations who advocate for more community ownership of land and buildings across Wales.

The Welsh Government has moved more towards “Place-Based Approaches”, and supporting local communities to use local land and facilities is CLAS Cymru’s “core business”.

The community sites eligible for advice are very broad, covering many possible types of community-led initiatives: community gardens, wildlife areas, therapeutic gardens, orchards, woodlands, community supported agriculture, care farms, play spaces, memorial gardens, parts of parklands and local heritage sites.

In particular, the Welsh Government and many local authorities are actively engaged in Community Asset Transfers. The Welsh Government has *“made a firm commitment to supporting Community Asset Transfers and community led developments by providing a support framework that delivers advice, guidance and finance”*.

CLAS Cymru clearly offers valuable support to communities negotiating the details of such transfers. These can be very complex and require communities to have experienced advice - which they may not be able to pay for, so a subsidised service is much needed from the Government if its policy aims are to be achieved. As demonstrated elsewhere in this report, the current CLAS Cymru service represents excellent value for money in this regard, as in so many others.

CLAS Cymru also works with Public Service Boards to consider use of local spaces across many themes. SF&G takes a key lead in Food Development in Carmarthenshire as it employs a Sustainable Food Places Coordinator for Bwyd Sir Gar Food (Carmarthenshire's sustainable food partnership), working closely with the Public Service Board to help shape food related work.

8.5 National Framework for Social Prescribing

Following on from that, SF&G /CLAS Cymru have also been working with the Welsh Government & NHS / Public Health Wales on developing this national framework, particularly around Green Social Prescribing (Nature Based Therapy). In January 2024, The Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing introduced the latest version of the National Framework, including statements with which CLAS Cymru are strongly aligned:

“The principles of social prescribing are woven into the very fabric of what Welsh Government does in terms of empowering people and communities.

Social prescribing is an umbrella term that describes a person-centred approach to connecting people to local community assets. Community assets include community groups, interventions and services which could be delivered online or in person, as well as buildings, land or even a person within a community”.

CLAS Cymru / SFG have an active position within the WG Task and Finish group looking at applicable standards around the new National Framework.

Access to Green Spaces and Nature

The health & wellbeing benefits of outdoor exercise were brought into sharp focus during the Covid Lockdowns. Indeed, ‘Expanding arrangement to create or significantly enhance green spaces’ is one of the priorities within the ‘Embed our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do’ section of the current [Programme for Government](#) set out by Welsh Ministers.

SF&G majors in supporting Social (and Care) farming, with all the health and wellbeing benefits accruing from this, at many community gardens and other green space sites. In practice, CLAS Cymru enables community use of facilities and other physical assets essential to successful “people projects.” Many of these have received CLAS Cymru Awards, and increasing numbers go on to receive the Green Flag Community Award.

This is particularly true of CLAS Cymru work in urban areas, where there is often a particular lack of accessible green spaces. It is clear that CLAS Cymru has supported many community green spaces to become established, and thrive, in areas of multiple deprivation.

CLAS Cymru is fully aligned with nature-based policies such as NRW’s Accessible Green Spaces standard (2022 version). Having accessible green space within 300 metres of residence is clearly beneficial to the concept of ‘Green Exercise’. The fact that such spaces are of particularly high quality and well used is another contributing factor.

This means engaging with both NHS Trusts, and local Public Service Boards. Due to insufficient resources, CLAS Cymru /SF&G have to work on a “pilot” or ad hoc basis and seek to share good practice developed as best they can - they do not have anything like the staff needed to engage with every NHS Trust or PSB right across Wales.

8.6 National Planning Policy

The Planning Act currently in force is a key framework which enables (or constrains) the work of the projects CLAS Cymru supports. That legislation is also now informed by the Wales Environment Act 2016 (and to a much lesser degree, the UK Environment Act 2021). CLAS Cymru has worked for a number of years to

gain more interaction with Welsh Government Planning Division around Technical Advice Notes, e.g., TAN 6. Some of that hard work is now starting to pay off with the help of Welsh Government Food Division.

The purpose of this TAN is to provide practical guidance on the role of the planning system in supporting the delivery of sustainable rural communities. It provides advice to planning authorities (e.g. Unitary Authorities, National Parks) and to people (or their agents) seeking planning permission on topics like sustainable rural communities, economies, housing, services and agriculture.

This TAN has not been revised since 2010, and a great deal has changed in Wales (and the wider world) in the last 14 years. For a number of years, CLAS Cymru has been canvassing the Welsh Government Planning Division to update its planning policies for sustainable rural communities. Through the Food Division of the Welsh Government, it has had some success recently. That Division commissioned a study on the planning barriers to small-scale horticulture in Wales. This report enabled focussed discussions on some possible solutions to the issues raised and discussions have been much more fruitful in recent months. A Ministerial Statement is likely before the end of 2024 and updates to Planning Policy Wales will follow. TAN 6 may not be updated very soon but planning division have offered the opportunity to input into another TAN which could cover some these issues.

CLAS Cymru had previously played a role in persuading Welsh Government to provide some [permitted development rights for small structures on allotments and community growing sites](#) which were published in December 2020.

CLAS Cymru & SF&G also wrote [guidance for allotments and community gardens](#) for the Welsh Government.

CLAS Cymru continues to be in discussion with relevant Welsh Government civil servants on useful updates. The focus continues to be on measures which will recognise the need, and support the development of, smaller and more sustainable forms of growing food in a community or agricultural setting.

Engagement with Local Authorities

CLAS Cymru also works with Local Authorities to interpret Planning law in practice, in the most beneficial way for green space work and community food growing. Powys Council is one where there is very positive dialogue underway concurrently. This includes working with them on using Council-owned farms as exemplars for new sustainable horticultural ventures.

Alongside now managing the Allotment Forum, CLAS Cymru continues to provide useful guidance and advice to (for) Local Authorities, Community/Town Councils and Allotment Associations on how to manage allotments. This is in the context of

increasing demand for allotments, and therefore the wider, and continuing, campaign to increase the availability of public land for community food growing

The current Allotment Acts in force are quite outdated now. CLAS Cymru helps to interpret them in ways which make it easier for allotment use to reflect current and anticipated needs, and in a more sustainable manner.

8.7 National Forest and Tiny Forests

Overall, the CLAS Cymru service works in support of, and following the principles of, the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The Service is informed by the Nature Recovery Action Plan, and the work of the Wales Biodiversity Partnership. One of the ways this is demonstrated is support for implementing the National Forest.

The National Forest for Wales is a Welsh Government initiative which continues to have a relatively high profile. So much so that the implementation on farmland has been controversial in terms of how farmers will be supported to change some land use through Sustainable Farming Scheme payments. Relevant aims of the policy are:

- Create woodlands throughout Wales, accessible to everyone.
- Be a real community venture with new woodland being planted by communities, farmers and landowners across Wales.
- Create new areas of woodland as well as restoring and maintaining Wales' unique and irreplaceable existing woodlands.
- Protect nature and address biodiversity loss, also supporting the health and wellbeing of communities.

“Tiny Forests” are an approach where a dense, native woodland (possibly no bigger than a tennis court) is planted, incorporating hundreds of native trees. The Welsh Government supports the scheme through Coetiroedd Bach Grants. This £2.62 million scheme, administered for the Government by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, is aiming to create 100 ‘Tiny Forests’ between April 2023 and the end of March 2025.

CLAS Cymru have been active in supporting small woodland creation and community management of woodlands. The concept of Tiny Forests works well in urban green/open spaces, and CLAS Cymru/SF&G has expertise in enhancing this through “Edible Forests”/Forest gardening. Orchard planting is a more familiar route to combining tree cover with food, and one where CLAS Cymru/SF&G have been very prominent. Advocating for increasing access to land for community-managed woodland is a key service, which enables the National Forest policy to develop.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Conclusions

CLAS Cymru continues to enhance the delivery of Welsh Government policies and programmes. Within the overall framework of SF&G, its role in supporting green spaces management/enhancement and local community food growing as regards ownership, management or related planning issues is **unique and measurable**.

It also offers valuable, evidence-based opinions on how (or whether) Welsh Government policies and legislation are being applied in practice by statutory agencies; and gives the community perspective on barriers and successes. This also means that CLAS Cymru offers suggestions for next steps, interpretations and revisions to guidance or legislation. There are clear examples above of where CLAS Cymru / SF&G have been consulted, and their suggestions subsequently adopted, in whole or in part.

The Wales-wide scale of the work to be done, particularly the number of statutory, voluntary and community organisations to work with, has been and continues to be **very considerable**. Staffing and other resources available to CLAS Cymru to meet demand for the service are very constrained.

The Welsh Government financial, and other support, is essential for a unique service of this kind. There are no other obvious ways in which this work could continue, without statutory support. **The CLAS Cymru service, managed by Social Farms & Gardens, continues to provide excellent value for money.**

9.2 Recommendations

Recommendations for WG

- Multi-year funding is essential in planning for delivery of CLAS Cymru and to ensure it continues to achieve the outputs set by Welsh Government, as well as continuing to meet the goals and ways of working of the WFGA.
- Whilst some local authorities engage well with CLAS Cymru and communities, others are less invested. Local authorities should be encouraged to have a more consistent approach to dealing with community green space initiatives. This would help to reduce the time it takes for CLAS Cymru officers to support some community groups.
- WG officers should continue to explore the policy links between CLAS Cymru, SF&G and the developing Community Food Strategy.

Recommendations for SF&G

- Relying on a small team has risks. These risks should be managed to ensure that information and skills are retained if staff leave. Work should explore whether more factsheets for groups or briefing notes for colleagues could be developed to ensure knowledge and skills are embedded in the organisation.
- Increased effort should be made to share information between communities and public bodies, building on the awards and developing a network of CLAS

Cymru aided projects. To increase the level of service beyond the current base-line SF&G could explore the potential for sponsorship. However, there is no guarantee this would be successful, and would take some time to negotiate.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: LOGIC MODEL

| Community Land Advisory Service Logic Model | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To make more land available for use as community led green spaces | | | | |
| RESOURCES | ACTIVITIES | OUTPUTS | OUTCOMES | IMPACT |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ WG funding ➤ SF&G staff ➤ Partner organisations ➤ Community Groups ➤ Interested community members | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identifying groups that need assistance and sign posting to CLAS Cymru ➤ Identifying needs of individual groups ➤ Providing tailored assistance to individual groups ➤ Liaising with land owners to secure access to suitable land for groups ➤ Helping groups to navigate any permissions required ➤ Working with partners to provide specialised knowledge such as legal advice ➤ Managing the CLAS Cymru Awards ➤ Working with Local Authority departments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 65 groups receiving noteworthy support each year ➤ 15 case studies / resilience plans/films produced within the year. ➤ 15 Community Management Certificates awarded in the year ➤ 5 supported sites go on to achieve Green Flag Awards ➤ Allotment forum? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More community groups have access to suitable growing sites ➤ More communities have access to community managed gardens for leisure and recreation ➤ More people have access to locally grown food ➤ More people have improved health and wellbeing ➤ Helping public bodies achieve their wellbeing goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Wales has a sustainable network of high quality locally managed community green spaces, gardens and growing sites and communities can expect to have access to suitable land to establish new sites. ➤ A network of community led green spaces is contributing towards achievement of the national Accessible Green Space standards |
| Cross Cutting Themes: | | Assumptions | External Factors | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sustainable Development ➤ Wellbeing of Future Generations ➤ Welsh Language | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Commitment of the partner organisations and land owners ➤ Willingness and ability of the public sector to engage ➤ Availability of suitable land | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Further Covid outbreak ➤ Changes in legislation ➤ Change in partner staff ➤ Increased pressure on LA budgets to make savings | |

ANNEX 2: WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015 - EXCERPT FROM CLAS CYMRU GRANT APPLICATION 2022-25

The seven Wellbeing goals

1. A prosperous Wales - CLAS Cymru is actively supporting communities to recognise the limits of the environment and use the resources we have as efficiently as possible. We support communities to act on climate change by managing and taking ownership of the green spaces around them. This helps develop a skilled and well educated population.

2. A Resilient Wales - The CLAS Cymru Service helps the nation of Wales maintain and enhance a biodiverse natural environment with healthy and functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change. Green Space community projects intrinsically carry out these activities and help raise awareness of the natural environment.

3. A more Equal Wales Community - green space projects that are acquired by a group of likeminded people help people to fulfil their potential regardless of their background or circumstances. Such projects often celebrate diversity and support people with disabilities or those that are or feel socially excluded. Access to quality, publicly accessible green space in urban and rural areas, regardless of their demographic, is an equality issue.

4. A Healthier Wales - There is significant evidence that shows time spent on green spaces outdoors improve people's physical and mental health. If we can support community to come together to do make effective use of green spaces this further enhances the potential of people to spend time outdoors in a green environment.

The impact of green spaces on the health of communities is affirmed by Fields in Trust at the launch of their research 'Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces' in 2018; "Our research confirms that any decision by a public body to remove a park or green space is completely short-sighted - and will in fact likely cost more money than is saved. In health alone parks and green spaces save the NHS at least £111 million per year through prevented GP visits - enough to pay for more than 3,500 nurses. The evidence is now clear: green spaces are good, they do good and they need to be protected for good." Helen Griffiths, Chief Executive, Fields in Trust

5. A Wales of Cohesive Communities - CLAS Cymru helps connect communities by bringing them together to maintain and take ownership of the green spaces around them. Bringing in development worker expertise to the CLAS Cymru service will further enable communities to come together and to galvanise volunteers. It's a truly inclusive and multi generational activity. "Access to green spaces has broader health, economic and social benefits; it's not just good for the environment...

community asset transfer presents opportunities for the community to own and manage green spaces”. Hannah Blythyn AM, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government. Plenary 14.02.2018

6. A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Language - The projects that CLAS Cymru supports are based in diverse settings across Wales in urban and rural areas, many of which are first language Welsh. This bid, in particular, seeks to improve our Welsh language capabilities and will support even more people across Wales to participate in outdoor recreation. Many of the projects we support bring Welsh speakers and learners together and provide opportunities for learners to practise and develop their spoken Welsh.

7. A Globally Responsible Wales - Community Green Space projects are always looking for ways to reduce their carbon footprint and prevent climate change. Being able to have legal responsibility for a green space enables these activities to be carried out more effectively.

The 5 ways of working

1. Long term - Funding to CLAS Cymru will help Wales balance its short-term needs with those of the longer term as our communities look to reduce their carbon footprint, increase biodiversity, think of ways to recycle materials and make the best use of land.

2. Prevention - Community green space are very effective at preventing biodiversity loss and strengthening community cohesion preventing social problems and isolation. They also reuse, recycle and compost the materials they use or generate. By owning or renting their sites and building essential structures communities create more opportunities to do these things as well as reusing water and reducing the burden on our public sewers.

3. Integration - Funding CLAS Cymru Welsh Government is supporting strong integration between the third sector and public bodies particularly estate management departments of local authorities who are less used to integrating with communities.

4. Involvement - The CLAS Cymru service will look to support and advise communities from all backgrounds including those in deprived locations and minority backgrounds as well as individuals with learning difficulties and those suffering from social exclusion.

5. Collaboration - CLAS Cymru will continue to work with other bodies and programmes within the third sector to support community groups in their activities and needs to acquire land. They also help Welsh Government Landscapes, Nature and Forestry Division work with other areas of Welsh Government such as Planning

and Water Divisions. The Wales Team is looking to collaborate even further with development workers from within Social Farms and Gardens and with Keep Wales Tidy.